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RAIL, ROAD STAMPEDES CRUSH PILGRIMS' PROGRESS TO KUMBH

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/PRAYAGRAJ

As the mega congregation at Maha Kumbh is on its last leg, yet another tragedy on Saturday night stuck the pilgrims at New Delhi Railway Station, where 18 people bound for the holy dip at Triveni Sangam lost their lives in a horrific manner. Amidst the religious fervour lasting almost two months, the loss of lives has touched almost 100 including 39 dead (official toll) during stampede at Maha Kumbh Nagar and about 40 lives fatality on the roads bound to Prayagraj. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union ministers condoled the loss of lives in the stampede. "Deeply anguished to know about the loss of lives in a stampede at New Delhi railway station. I extend my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and pray for speedy recovery of those injured," President Murmu said in a social media post. The prime minister said he was distressed by the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station.



Heavy rush of passengers to catch a train for Mahakumbh, at the New Delhi railway station on Saturday, February 15. A stampede occurred at the station killing 18 and injuring many others

As conflicting details continued to emerge around stampede from the railways, police, general public and political parties, Home Minister Amit Shah "summoned" Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Chairman Railway Board Satish Kumar. Following the meeting, sources said that Shah directed the Railways to conduct probe. The Delhi Police has been doing its own investigation into the stampede. The railways committee instituted commenced inquiry and secured all video footage of the New Delhi Railway Station. Some blamed authorities' mismanagement and a sudden change in platform, while many

faulted India's population, lack of travel etiquette and misunderstanding railway announcements for the New Delhi station stampede. Delhi Police has put out a list of the 18 deceased and launched an investigation into the stampede, which happened due to confusion because of the announcement of the trains having the same initial name starting with 'Prayagraj'. "Our target is to investigate the main cause, which caused the stampede. We will collect all data of CCTV footage and announcements done during that time," a police source said. Sources said delays in train departures and the sale of around

8,000 general tickets created a chaotic situation at the station and for worst an announcement about change of platforms of certain trains led to confusion amongst travellers in the over-crowded platforms, leading to the stampede. A compensation of ₹10 lakh each was granted by the railways for the next of kin of those killed in the stampede. Those seriously injured will get ₹2.5 lakh and those with minor injuries 1 lakh, the railway said. The stampede occurred around 9:55 pm on Saturday night when thousands of passengers, mostly Maha Kumbh pilgrims, crowded the station to board trains to

Prayagraj. The Prayagraj Express was stationed at platform 14, while the Swatantrata Senani Express and Bhubaneswar Rajdhani Express were delayed, causing an overwhelming surge of people on platforms 12, 13, and 14. The situation worsened when a last-minute platform change was announced. Confused and panicked, passengers rushed towards platform 16, where an escalator became a deadly choke point, according to sources. Security personnel tried to intervene, but the crowd was too large to control. Some passengers attempted to climb the railings to escape, while others were crushed underfoot, the sources said. When

TRAGIC STAMPEDES

- January 29, 2025: 30 killed at Maha Kumbh
- March 2023: 36 died during a Ram Navmi 'havan'
- July 2, 2022: 121 killed on Hathras 'satsang'
- January 1, 2022: 12 died at Vaishno Devi shrine on
- September 29, 2017: 23 lost their lives at Elphinstone Road station Mumbai on
- July 14, 2015: 27 pilgrims died at 'Pushkaram' festival in Andhra Pradesh
- October 3, 2014: 32 killed at Gandhi Maidan Patna after Dussehra celebrations
- October 13, 2013: 115 killed during Navratri near Ratanagar temple in Madhya Pradesh
- November 19, 2012: 20 killed at Chhath Puja stampede in Patna
- November 8, 2011: 20 killed in Har-ki-Pauri ghat Haridwar
- January 14, 2011: 104 Sabarimala devotees killed in Kerala's Idukki district
- March 4, 2010: 63 killed at Ram Janki Temple of Kripalu Maharaj in Pratapgarh UP
- 2008: 250 killed at Rajasthan's Chamunda Devi temple.
- 2008: 162 killed at Naina Devi temple
- 2005: 340 killed at Maharashtra's Mandhardevi
- August 27, 2003: 39 killed at Naishik Kumbh

the chaos subsided, 18 people including 11 women and five children, had lost their lives. More than a dozen people were also injured in the stampede on Saturday night at the railway station which witnessed a surge of passengers waiting to board trains for Prayagraj - where the Maha Kumbh is underway - on platform number 14 and 15 of the station.

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Devotees in a large number during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, in Prayagraj

Holy towns witness swathes of humanity

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

After the tragic stampede at Delhi railway station, railway stations across Uttar Pradesh are witnessing an unprecedented surge in passengers as devotees head to the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. With trains packed beyond capacity and platforms overflowing, railway authorities have deployed additional security personnel and launched special train services to manage the swelling crowd. From Delhi to Varanasi, Gorakhpur, and Prayagraj, railway stations are packed with pilgrims determined to take a holy dip at the Sangam. However, the journey has become an ordeal for many. "I have been standing at the station for more than six hours, but every train that arrives is already full," said Ram Prasad, a devotee from Bihar. "We are forced to sit on the

floor of overcrowded general compartments. Even the washrooms are packed with people." Sunita Devi, who travelled from Lucknow with her family, described her struggle: "We could not find seats, so we had to stand throughout the journey. The children were crying, but there was no space to even stretch our legs." Despite the hardships, many devotees remain resolute. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Kamal Verma from Jhansi. "Even if we have to suffer, we will reach Prayagraj for the holy dip." Heavy Rush at Prayagraj railway stations Prayagraj's Jhansi and Cantonment railway stations have turned into sea of humanity, with lakhs of pilgrims arriving. Authorities have enforced strict entry and exit protocols to prevent chaos.

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Passengers surged forward, chaos and stampede ensued



Relatives of victims wait outside the mortuary at the LNJP Hospital in New Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Survivors and eyewitnesses of the tragic stampede at New Delhi Railway Station have described scenes of chaos and devastation, as a massive crowd surged on platforms 14 and 15 late Saturday night. According to official sources, a wrong announcement about change of platforms may have created a confusion that led to the stampede, something that some eyewitnesses also claimed. The incident, which left at least 18 people dead and several others injured, unfolded as passengers attempted to board trains bound for Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh Mela. Ved Gupta, a passenger who managed to escape unhurt, recounted the terrifying moments. "I was going to Prayagraj to take a holy dip. There was a huge crowd

at platform number 14. We were two of us, and we somehow escaped unhurt. It was a very bad scene," he said. Geeta, a worker at Lok Nayak Jai Prakash (LNJP) Hospital, where the victims were taken, said, "Injured and dead bodies started arriving around 10 pm. We received 15 dead bodies and 10-12 injured patients. Three of the deceased were children." As soon as the announcement was made, people surged forward by pushing each other. Those who fell were trampled in the rush, Ravi Kumar, a vendor running a shop at the railway station for the past 12 years, said. The crowd was unlike anything seen before, he said. At the railway station, porters who witnessed the tragedy described unprecedented crowd levels. Describing the situation, Krishna Kumar Jogi, a porter at the station, said the crowd swelled when a train bound for Prayagraj arrived. "A massive crowd gathered on the (footover) bridge. People were packed so tightly that many suffocated. Around 10-15 people lost their lives right there," he claimed. "I witnessed the entire incident. We carried dead bodies from platform numbers 14 and 15 to the ambulance," he added. Children and women were among those crushed in the crowd, struggling to breathe amid the suffocation, he said. Recalling the distressing scene, Balram, a porter, said, "We carried dead bodies on handcarts, the same ones we use for luggage. In my 15 years as a porter, I have never seen such a massive crowd."

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Officials at the incident spot on Platform number 14 at the New Delhi Railway Station on Sunday

Police suspect miscommunication

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police's initial investigation into the stampede at the New Delhi railway station on Saturday points to a major miscommunication as the root cause of the tragedy—two trains with nearly identical names, both bound for Prayagraj, led to chaos among thousands of Maha Kumbh devotees. The Delhi police found in its initial investigation the deadly stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station happened as passengers got confused between Prayagraj Express and Prayagraj Special, and thought they might miss their train. According to preliminary investigation, the confusion happened because of the announcement of the trains having the same initial name 'Prayagraj'. A narrow stairway with 42 steps leading to a 25-

foot-wide foot over bridge at the New Delhi railway station turned into a scene of panic and chaos when a stampede left 18 people dead and more than a dozen injured. The Delhi police probe team are also scanning the CCTV footages to get a significant lead connecting the dots of the tragic incident before the chaos erupted. "The announcement of the 'Prayagraj Special' arriving at Platform 16 led to confusion among the waiting passengers because the Prayagraj Express was already at Platform 14. Passengers who couldn't reach their train at platform 14 thought it was arriving at platform 16. The last-minute panic and movement of the people burdened with heavy luggage from one platform to another led to the stampede, police said.

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Opposition demands Rail Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's resignation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition parties on Sunday blamed the government for "gross mismanagement" at New Delhi railway station that led to a stampede in which 18 people died and demanded Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw resign taking moral responsibility. Several opposition parties, including the Congress, the Left, Trinamool Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, accused the government of failing to make elaborate arrangements and "covering up" the actual number of deaths. The BJP leaders, however, sought to defend the government by posting pictures on social media that showed the situation at the New Delhi railway station had turned normal. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said it was extremely shameful and condemnable that the Narendra Modi government was attempting to "hide the truth" about the deaths. In a social media post, the party said, "The railway minister should resign, apologise to the country." Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said better arrangements should have been made at the station in view of the large number of devotees going to Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh. "This incident once again highlights the failure of the Railways and the insensitivity of the government," he said in a social media post. Former Railway minister and senior Congress leader Pawan Kumar Bansal said the ultimate responsibility of the tragedy lies with the minister and he cannot escape it.



Acting Chief Minister of Delhi, Atishi visits injured victims of the New Delhi Railway Station stampede at the LNJP Hospital in New Delhi

The former Railway minister said the government has "utterly failed" to anticipate the rush of pilgrims and make arrangements accordingly. RJD supreme and former Railway minister Lalu Prasad said the stampede episode is very disturbing and it has exposed the inadequate arrangements made by the Central government. "The railway minister must resign after this incident. It is a complete failure on part of the Railways," he asserted. The Aam Aadmi Party accused the government of trying to cover up the incident. Its Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, citing witnesses, alleged an announcement of platform change for trains was the reason behind the stampede.

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New Delhi CM on Thursday

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The wait for the new chief minister of Delhi is likely to end on Thursday. The BJP legislative party meeting will be held on Thursday at the party's office to elect the leader of the legislative party, who will be the Chief Minister of Delhi. The delay was owing to the France and US tour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who returned to Delhi on Saturday. According to BJP sources, the party has informed all the MLAs about the meeting. The meeting will be held at the party's Delhi state office.

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Yamuna and Delhi awaken to a cleaner future

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As promised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the run up to the just concluded Assembly elections, the process of rejuvenating the Yamuna River has commenced. The Delhi government's Flood and Irrigation department has started cleaning of Yamuna with trash skimmers, weed harvesters and a dredge utility craft already starting cleaning operations in the river on Sunday. This comes after Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena's meeting with Delhi Chief Secretary Dharmendra and Additional Chief Secretary (Flood and Irrigations) Navin Kumar Choudhary on the cleaning of Yamuna river. At the meeting, it was decided to start work immediately. As a result large-scale cleaning operations began on Sunday, with deployment of trash skimmers, weed harvesters, and a



dredge utility craft to remove debris and pollutants from the river. Notably, the new government in Delhi is yet to be formed by the BJP. In the run-up to the Delhi Assembly elections, cleaning Yamuna was among one of the biggest poll promises mentioned in its

poll manifesto. During the election campaign, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had promised to clean the river.

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Capital temperature set to rise

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Residents of Delhi on Sunday experienced a warm day with maximum temperature being recorded at 28.6 degrees Celsius, a departure of 4.2 degrees Celsius from normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Cloud cover through the day further contributed to the warm weather. Meanwhile, the minimum temperature at Safdarjung was recorded at 9.9 degrees Celsius, a drop of 1.1 degrees Celsius from the normal. Temperatures across most of north India have increased by 3-6 degrees Celsius above normal in recent days. The Capital is expected to



WEATHER

AQI	294
MAX	28.6°C(+4.2)
MIN	9.9°C(-1.1)

experience 30 degrees Celsius towards the end of February. The national Capital has experienced no rainfall. Relative humidity on Sunday was recorded at 45 per cent till 1730 hrs. The weather department expects western disturbances to cause a fresh spell of rain in Delhi in the coming days. They are expected to influence the weather in western Himalayan, with light rain expected in the Capital on February 19 and 20. The weather department has issued an alert for rain on Wednesday and Thursday. Meanwhile, Delhi's air quality has dropped to Poor category. On Sunday, the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi was 294.

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Indians share harrowing deportation journey

PTI ■ HOSHIARPUR

Daljit Singh left his native village in Punjab for the US last year in a desperate bid to provide a better future for his family. On Saturday night, he landed in Amritsar in a US military aircraft, his hands cuffed and legs chained. A native of Kurala Kalan village in Punjab's Hoshiarpur district, Daljit was among 116 illegal Indian immigrants who were brought back in a US aircraft that landed at the Amritsar airport late on Saturday night. "Our legs were chained and hands were also cuffed throughout the journey. There were three women and three children on board who were not cuffed," Daljit told reporters after reaching his hometown, adding that the shackles were removed before

the aircraft landed at Amritsar. Of the fresh batch of deportees, 65 were from Punjab, 33 from Haryana, eight from Gujarat, two each from Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and one each from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. The deportees were provided Indian food upon reaching Amritsar, much to their relief after the exhausting journey. Sharing his ordeal with reporters, Daljit said he was taken to the US through the 'donkey route' -- an illegal and risky pathway used by migrants to enter the US. Daljit embarked on the uncertain journey in a desperate bid to provide a better future for his family, only to be deported back to India. His experience highlights the

grim reality of illegal migration through the donkey route, where vulnerable individuals fall prey to fraudulent travel agents and endure unimaginable hardships in pursuit of a better life. Talking to PTI, Daljit said a man from his village introduced him to a travel agent in 2022 who assured to take him to the US through legal channel in exchange for Rs 65 lakh. As a guarantee, Daljit signed a deal and handed over an advance agreement for one acre of his land to the agent. Singh was earlier engaged in farming but struggled to earn enough to secure quality education and a good life for his children. Hoping to alter his fortunes, he agreed to take the risk and leave India. Daljit's journey began in

November 2022 when he was first sent to Dubai. However, after spending nearly 18 months there, he returned to India. A few months later, the agent sent him to South Africa, where he remained for about four-and-a-half months, he said. On August 26 last year, he was sent to Brazil from Mumbai to begin the treacherous journey to the US through the donkey route. After spending about a month each in Brazil and another country, he navigated difficult terrains on foot and by taxi. It took him three days to cross Panama. Throughout the

route, he was made to cross rivers, streams and mountains, Daljit said. Some parts of the journey were completed by ship before he finally reached Mexico, he said. Food was scarce, and at times, he survived only on rice. The group he was part of comprised nearly 100 people, including eight Indians, Daljit said. Singh was forced to stay in Mexico for about a month. During this time, the travel agent and the man from his village allegedly pressured him to transfer the ownership of his four-and-a-half acres of land to them.

Holy towns witness swathes of humanity

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Dr. Amit Malviya, Senior PRO of North Central Railway, assured that operations remain under control: "127 special trains have been deployed so far, with more being added as needed. Regular train schedules are also being maintained." However, crowd management remains a challenge. RPF and GRP personnel are struggling to control the sea of passengers. Many elderly and children are finding it difficult to navigate through the jam-packed platforms.

VARANASI AND GORAKHPUR RAILWAY STATION S OVERFLOWING: In Varanasi, the situation is no different. The Varanasi Cantt railway station is bursting at the seams as returning pilgrims pack trains heading back home. Passengers jostle for space, clinging to doors and windows just to get on board. In Gorakhpur, authorities were forced to deploy emergency special trains to clear the congestion. Around 1:45 AM, a Chauri Chaura Special train was dispatched to ferry stranded passengers.

Shashikant Tripathi, CPRO of North Central Railway, explained the ongoing efforts: "We have implemented a structured protocol for eight major stations in and around Prayagraj. Dedicated entry and exit points have been set up, and additional trains are being run on demand." He said: "With the Maha Kumbh drawing record-breaking crowds, railway officials are on high alert to prevent any further mishaps. While special trains and enhanced security measures are in place, the sheer volume of devotees continues to test the system."

Rail, road stampedes crush...

From page 1

Northern Railway's Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Himanshu Upadhyay said that at the time of incident the Patna-bound Magadh Express was standing at platform number 14 and the New Delhi-Jammu Uttar Sampark Kranti Express was stationed at platform number 15. "Some people who were coming down from the footover bridge towards platform numbers 14 and 15 using stairs slipped and fell on others," he said, citing the cause of the stampede. A railway staffer, who had spent hours clearing the

personal belongings of passengers caught in the stampede, described the scene as "one of the worst" he had witnessed. Two other trains, the Swatantrata Senani Express and the Bhubaneswar Rajdhani Express, were already delayed, leaving platforms 13, 14, and 15 packed with restless travellers. Then came an announcement that a special train to Prayagraj would depart from platform 16. "A train to Prayagraj (Prayagraj Express) was already at platform 14. When the announcement about the special train was made, many

passengers assumed it was their regular train and rushed towards platform 16," said an eyewitness. The only way to platform 16 was via the 42-step stairway leading to a 25-foot-wide foot over bridge. As thousands surged forward, the stairway became dangerously overcrowded. Those climbing up were blocked by those trying to descend, creating a human bottleneck. The force of the crowd was unbearable. People were trapped, unable to move. Some lost their footing and fell, dragging others down with them, an eyewitness said.

Capital temperature set to rise

From page 1

Air quality in the Capital declined after three days of being in the Moderate category. On Friday, Delhi experienced the cleanest air in four months when the AQI was recorded at 131. AQI of 132 was last recorded in Delhi in October last year. The air quality is likely to be in the very poor category on Monday. Air quality is expected to worsen in the coming days, according to CPCB. On Monday, Delhi is expected to

witness warm weather, with a misty morning and a clear sky later in the day. The minimum temperature is likely to be around 13 degrees Celsius, while the maximum could reach 29 degrees Celsius. This shift in weather is expected to offer relief from the recent cold conditions. The Capital is set to witness a minimum temperature of 11 degrees Celsius with shallow fog on February 17 (Monday). The locals will witness strong surface winds during day time on February 18 (Tuesday).

Opposition demands Rail Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's resignation

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"They are trying to deny that such an incident happened. How long will the government's tendency of dilly-dallying and insensitivity will continue? When will the government and the Railway minister's responsibility be fixed," asked Singh, citing various rail-related accidents. AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha said the stampede shook all, and called it a glaring example of "gross mismanagement" and lack of crowd control

measures. He demanded that those responsible for the stampede be held accountable. Expressing condolences over the deaths, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi demanded an independent, judicially-monitored special investigation team to investigate the tragedy. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed grief over the loss of lives in a stampede at New Delhi railway station and stressed the need for careful planning and management for the safety of people. The CPI(M),

in a social media post said, "Make the government accountable." "The Railways have ordered an inquiry. Prima facie, it points to the utter mismanagement by central and state authorities," it said. The CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, claimed the stampede at the New Delhi station was triggered by delays in multiple train services during the Maha Kumbh rush and is a "direct indictment of the Central government's callous mismanagement of India's Railways".

New Delhi CM on Thursday

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The oath-taking ceremony is likely to take place on February 20, and 15 MLAs have been shortlisted for key ministerial posts. The BJP won 48 out of 70 seats in Delhi, ending the rule of Aam Aadmi Party in the capital. Sources said the observer for the process could be named tonight or early tomorrow morning who will hold talks with the newly elected party MLAs. The observers will be responsible to represent the central leadership of the party and mediate between them and the 48 MLAs. Though party officials have yet to make an official announcement but confirmed that 14 names of probable have been sent to the central leadership. Among them, Bansuri Swaraj, Virendra Sachdeva, Pravesh Verma, Vijender Gupta, Manoj Tiwari, Satish Upadhyay and Manjinder Singh Sirsa, Rekha Gupta. Parvesh Verma has emerged as a prominent contender after defeating Arvind Kejriwal in the New Delhi constituency. The son of former chief minister Saheb Singh Verma, Parvesh has previously won the West Delhi Lok Sabha seat twice and is viewed as a key representative of the Jat community, which played a pivotal role in the BJP's electoral victory. Bansuri Swaraj, daughter of late Sushma Swaraj, is Member of Parliament from New Delhi. She is a vocal face who has a strong reputation in state as well as central leadership in the BJP. Swaraj, a lawyer by profession, could

be a probable choice as her mother was also CM of Delhi in 1998 after Sahib Singh Verma resigned. Virendra Sachdeva is currently serving as Delhi BJP President who enjoys support of central leadership. Sachdeva was first promoted as acting chief after MCD elections and later his appointment was made permanent. In his leadership, the party has succeeded to win Delhi assembly elections after a gap of 27 years. In 2024 General Elections, the BJP had won all seven seats of Delhi defeating INDIA bloc's candidates under his leadership. Though he has not contested, the party may show its faith in him. The announcement will put an end to widespread discussions about potential candidates, as party members and the public eagerly await the official confirmation. More than 200 MPs and former MPs of the party, Chief Ministers and Deputy Chief Ministers of all NDA-ruled states will be present and all the state leaders and workers will be present. The party has set its eye on is Delhi's Ramlila Maidan, sources said. Multiple names for the top post are doing the rounds since the results made a thumping BJP victory clear last week. The AAP, which ruled Delhi for more than 10 years, ended up winning just 22 seats in the hotly contested elections, the results of which were declared on February 8.

Additionally, there were four trains heading to Prayagraj, out of which three were delayed, causing an unexpected overcrowding, said the police source. Following the tragedy, Delhi Police launched an inquiry into the incident, with a Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP)-rank officer leading the inquiry. To manage the situation, six additional police companies were deployed by the Police Headquarters (PHQ). On Sunday, Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora held a meeting at the office of DCP Railways at New Delhi Railway Station. Among other things, the officials investigated the loopholes in the public address system at

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the railway station. The meeting was also attended by Special Commissioners Robin Hibbu and Ravindra Yadav. A witness also said "There was confusion among the passengers regarding the train names and the change of platforms of the trains, which ultimately led to the tragedy." The Delhi Police's statement came after the Northern Railways said no platforms were changed, and a passenger fell on the foot over bridge between platforms 14 and 15, causing others behind him to stumble, leading to the tragic incident. According to the fire department, distress calls about a stampede on platforms 14 and 15 were received around 9:55 pm. Four fire tenders were rushed to the scene. The injured were

taken to Lok Nayak Hospital. Two other trains, the Swatantrata Senani Express and the Bhubaneswar Rajdhani Express, were already delayed, leaving platforms 13, 14, and 15 packed with restless travellers. Then came an announcement that a special train to Prayagraj would depart from platform 16. The only way to platform 16 was via the 42-step stairway leading to a 25-foot-wide foot over bridge. As thousands surged forward, the stairway became dangerously overcrowded. Those climbing up were blocked by those trying to descend, creating a human bottleneck. The stampede on Saturday night left 18 people dead. It was preceded by a swell in crowd of passengers waiting to board trains for Prayagraj

— where the Maha Kumbh is underway — on platform number 14 and 15 of the station. The deceased were identified as Asha Devi (79), a resident of Buxure, Pinky Devi (41), a resident of Delhi's Sangam Vihar Delhi, Sheela Devi (50), a resident of city's Sarita Vihar, Vyom (25), a resident of Bawana, Poonam Devi (40), a native of Saran in Bihar, Lalita Devi (35) of Parna, Bihar, Suruchi (11), a resident of Muzaffarpur, Krishna Devi (40) and Vijay (15), both natives of Samastipur of Bihar, Neeraj (12), a child hailing from Vaishali in Bihar, Shanti Devi (40) and Pooja Kumar (8), both from Nawada in Bihar, Sangeeta Malik (34) from Bhiwani in Haryana, Poonam (34), Mamta Jha (40), Riya Singh (7), Baby Kumari (24)

and Manoj (47), all residents of Delhi. Northern Railway's Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Himanshu Upadhyay said that at the time of incident the Patna-bound Magadh Express was standing at platform number 14 and the New Delhi-Jammu Uttar Sampark Kranti Express was stationed at platform number 15. "Some people who were coming down from the foot over bridge towards platform numbers 14 and 15 using stairs slipped and fell on others," he said, citing the cause of the stampede. Sources said delays in train departures and the sale of 1,500 general tickets every hour may also have created a chaotic situation at the New Delhi Railway station.

Passengers surged forward, chaos and stampede ensued

From page 1

Another porter described how there was a swell in crowd around 9:30 pm on Saturday when the Prayagraj-bound train was at the platform. "People's shoes, slippers, and other belongings were scattered everywhere. We pulled out many children and elderly individuals from the chaos," he said. A railway porter who was assisting during the rescue efforts revealed the grim aftermath of the stampede. "People started gathering at around 8:30 pm. We have recovered at least 15 bodies. Women and children have lost their lives in the stampede," he said. Ravi Kanojia a railway vendor

present during the tragedy, noted the overwhelming rush of passengers across multiple platforms. "There was a huge crowd on platforms 12, 14, 15, and 16, where trains for Prayagraj were stationed. It's a small bridge, and people in large numbers gathered here yesterday. I had never witnessed such a crowd before," he recounted. Meanwhile, an Indian Air Force (IAF) sergeant, who was present at the scene, said, "The administration was working hard to prevent a mishap, but no one was listening. Even the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel struggled as the crowd exceeded all limits." At LNJP Hospital, a grieving man, Sanjay, who lost his

sister, said, "We were 12 people traveling to Maha Kumbh. We were still at the stairs when we got stuck in the crowd. We searched for my sister for half an hour, but by then, she had died." "We were 12 people going to Maha Kumbh. We hadn't even reached the platform but were at the stairs. My family, including my sister were stuck in the crowd. We found her after half an hour and by the time she was dead," said Sanjay, who lost his sister in the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station on Saturday night. Satinder, a resident of Badarpur, planned to travel to Prayagraj with his wife but decided to return home after witnessing the huge swell in crowd. "Even inside the train,

there was no space to stand. I stepped out and chose to go back," he said. The family member of one of the deceased on Sunday reached the LNJP Hospital to collect the body of Poonam Devi, who was heading home to Bihar on Saturday night. "There was an overwhelming crowd at the station, and her train was supposed to arrive at platform number 12. However, after an announcement was made, people started rushing, and those who fell were crushed," the relative said. Among the victims was a woman travelling with her family to Chhapra in Bihar. Her son, struggling to hold back his tears, recounted the devastating loss. "We were travelling home in a large

group and my mother lost her life in the chaos. People were pushing each other, and she got caught in the rush," he said. One of the passengers, Dharmendra Singh, said, "I was going to Prayagraj but many trains were running late or were cancelled. The station was overcrowded. There were far more people than I have ever seen at this station. In front of me, six or seven women were taken away on stretchers." "The stampede broke out around 9:30 pm. When people on Platform 13 saw trains on Platforms 14 and 15, they surged forward. The crowd was too large to control," he further added during his interaction with the press.

Yamuna and Delhi awaken to a cleaner future

From page 1

The BJP had promised to develop a Yamuna Riverfront and set up a Yamuna Kosh to revitalise the river, if voted to power in Delhi. According to officials, state-of-the-art machines are being used which include four skimmer machines, two weed harvesting machines, a DTU machine to remove hyacinth patera, elephant grass, floating grass, materials and other solid waste from the river Yamuna. Overall, the work of cleaning the Yamuna has been started with seven machines. This work has been started from TIO and Vasudev Ghat in Delhi. "In the first phase, all solid waste will be removed," they said. Raj Niwas official said to begin with the trash, garbage and silt in the Yamuna river stream will be removed. "Simultaneously cleaning operations in the Najafgarh Drain, Supplementary Drain

and all other major drains will start. At the same time, a daily watch on the existing STPs in terms of their capacity and output will be maintained, and a time bound plan in terms of construction of new STPs/DSTPs etc to meet the actual shortfall of treating about 400 MGD of sewer will be put in place and operationalised," he said. Flowing 52 kilometres through Delhi and passing through 15 constituencies, the Yamuna river has long been a symbol of Delhi's environmental struggles, with its pollution levels worsening over the years. Official said the execution of this ambitious plan, which targets at cleaning the river in about three years, will require seamless coordination between various agencies and departments that include Delhi Jal Board, Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Environment Department, Public Works Department and

Delhi Development Authority (DDA). "Monitoring of the abovementioned works will be done at the highest level on a weekly basis. In addition to this, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has been directed to keep strict vigil on discharge of untreated effluent into the drains by industrial units in the city," he said. The mission to revive the Yamuna River initially gained momentum in January 2023 when the National Green Tribunal (NGT) established a High-Level Committee (HLC) under the chairmanship of LG Saxena. However, after five meetings of the HLC, the then Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, led by Arvind Kejriwal, moved the Supreme Court, securing a stay on the NGT's directives from then Chief Justice DY Chandrachud on July 10, 2023. Thereafter, works of Yamuna rejuvenation had again been

stalled and CoD/BoD levels that had started improving slightly on a month on month basis, became worse with pollution reaching record levels early this year," official added. AAP chief and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had promised ahead of the Delhi elections in 2020 that he would clean Yamuna. The AAP's failure to meet its 2025 deadline for cleaning the Yamuna was one of the central themes of the election campaign with BJP leaders accusing Arvind Kejriwal's government of neglecting the critical issue. In the crucial assembly election, described as a do-or-die battle for both parties and his party, the AAP leader faced consistent criticism for failing to deliver on his party's promise to clean the river. Yamuna's pollution was a significant issue during the polls, particularly for large groups of migrants from Bihar

and eastern UP, who traditionally supported AAP. BJP candidate Parvesh Verma, who defeated Kejriwal in the tough New Delhi seat contest, even made a public protest by dipping Kejriwal's cutout in the polluted river. Meanwhile Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took a job at the AAP government, challenging Delhi's cabinet to take a dip in the Yamuna, much like his own cabinet did at the Maha Kumbh. The Yamuna originates from the Yamunotri glacier in Uttarakhand at an altitude of 6,387 metres in the Himalayas. In its upper reaches, the river is clean. It flows through Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and Uttarakhand before entering Delhi. While the Yamuna flows for about 1,376 km, a mere 22-km stretch in Delhi contributes nearly 76% of its total pollution load. In some stretches, the dissolved oxygen

levels - necessary for aquatic life - drop to near-zero. The water turns black, frothy and stinky. The primary culprit is the huge discharge of untreated sewage and domestic wastewater into the Yamuna. Delhi generates about 792 million gallons per day (MGD) of sewage, yet its treatment plants process can process only around 667 MGD. The rest directly flows into the Yamuna. More than 20 major drains, including those at Najafgarh and Shahdara, carry vast amounts of domestic waste, fecal matter, and industrial effluents into the river. Many sewage treatment plants either do not operate at full capacity or fail to meet pollution norms, allowing contaminants to flow unchecked into the river. Raw industrial discharge worsens the river's condition further. The Yamuna absorbs hazardous chemicals and

toxins from industries such as dyeing, electroplating, chemical manufacturing and paper production. Delhi is home to over 1,500 unauthorised industrial units, many of which illegally release waste into the river. It includes heavy metals such as arsenic, mercury and lead, which are a health hazard. Another major issue is the rampant dumping of solid waste. Large amounts of plastic, polythene bags and construction debris are regularly discarded into the Yamuna. Despite a ban on single-use plastic, enforcement remains weak. The problem is exacerbated by religious and ritual offerings when people immerse idols, flowers, and other materials into the river. Many of them contain toxic dyes and chemicals. The National Green Tribunal (NGT), on February 6, 2025, lambasted the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and other agencies for

failing to remove encroachments along Delhi's stretch of the river. The DDA sought a three-week extension to submit a fresh report detailing its compliance with court orders. Over five years ago, the NGT had ruled that river floodplains must remain free from occupation due to their ecological significance. It had ordered the DDA, Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), and the forest department to take legal action against the squatters. The order remained unimplemented. "The truth is that the water flowing from the Yamunotri glacier vanishes even before it has descended from the mountains. Most of the water that reaches Delhi comes from small rivers in Haryana and the waste discharged by factories. So, what can you expect from the Yamuna in Delhi?," said a former chief secretary of Delhi.

Relatives of stampede victims turned away in Delhi hospitals

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The distraught family members of those missing since the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station frantically searched for their loved ones, running from one hospital to another, carrying their photos and not knowing what to do. Many said the hospitals did not allow them to search for their missing family members among the patients admitted there, turning their hopes into despair. The stampede at the railway station on Saturday evening killed 18, according to officials. The injured persons were admitted to the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narain Hospital (LNJP) and the Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital in Central Delhi. Authorities at the hospital are showing the families the lists of the injured admitted there, and

turning them away if they don't find the name of their kin. The families also said they have not been able to file even missing persons' complaint. Outside the LNJP hospital, Bhola Sah showed a photo of his wife, Meena, on his mobile phone. She has been untraceable since the stampede. "She is missing since yesterday evening after she went to the railway station to board a train to Prayagraj to attend the Maha Kumbh. She did not have any ticket. Her 4-5 companions are also untraceable and their mobile numbers are not connecting," Sah said. "Hospital officials told me there are no bodies of the stampede victims as all bodies have been taken away by their relatives," he said. Moazzam, accompanied by his



Relatives of stampede victims outside the the LNJP Hospital

Ranjan Dimri

friends, was enquiring about his missing brother Nadim at the LNJP Hospital. "He was going back to home in Darbhanga by the Swatantrata Senani Express. I have no clue of him as he carries no mobile phone. His train was scheduled to depart from platform no 13 on Saturday night. I am afraid that something might have happened to him," said Moazzam. "Hospital officials told me the bodies were not there and did not let me look for my brother among the injured admitted there," he said, preparing to go to the other hospital in search of his missing brother. Archana Suman, a resident of New Delhi, said she found her brother admitted at the LNJP Hospital. "Yesterday, my brother had gone to catch a train. Shortly after he left, we heard the news of the stampede at the railway station. We got

scared and immediately rushed there, but we couldn't find him," she said. Hours later, she received a call informing her that her brother had been taken to LNJP Hospital. Upon reaching the hospital, she found him injured, with wounds on his legs, she added. The access to the LNJP hospital was heavily restricted, with only attendants of the patients allow to go inside. For Anu Kumari, the Saturday night turned into a nightmare when she learned that her sister-in-law, Sneha, might be in trouble. Sneha, who had come from Uttar Pradesh to visit Anu's family, was at the railway station on way to her home, Kumari said. "We learnt of the stampede in the middle of the night and rushed to the hospital. When we arrived, we saw that Sneha was lying injured and unconscious."

MCD orders night sweeping for Delhi markets

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to maintain cleanliness and hygiene in Delhi's markets, Commissioner of Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Ashwani Kumar has directed all Zonal Deputy Commissioners to ensure daily night sweeping and cleaning of 312 identified markets including Chandni Chowk, Krishna Nagar Lal Quarter, New Friends Colony Market, Srinivaspuri Markets and others prominent markets on a sustained basis. The initiative aims to ensure that the city's markets are free from litter and garbage, providing a clean and pleasant experience for citizens and visitors alike. According to a press statement issued by the MCD, Deputy Commissioners have been instructed to assign a senior officer, at least an Executive Engineer (EE) or above from the Engineering side, and an Administrative Officer (AO) or above from the administration side, to oversee the night sweeping operations in each zone.

Congress, AAP seek accountability for deaths

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Promising to offer all possible help to the railway stampede victims and their kin, Delhi BJP on Sunday called off all scheduled engagements for the day as a mark of respect for those who lost their lives while AAP leaders said the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station was a glaring example of "gross mismanagement" and lack of crowd control measures. Delhi Congress also called for a detailed investigation into the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station that claimed 18 lives and said the government should announce aid for the victims' families. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva and other senior leaders have cancelled all their political programmes for the day in view of the incident, a party statement said. Earlier, Sachdeva visited New Delhi Railway Station and LNJP Hospital, where he met the people injured while boarding the train, said a Delhi BJP spokesman. He said Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda has spoken to doctors and officials and has given appropriate instructions. Sachdeva also informed that while the Chief

Secretary of the Delhi Government has deployed a large medical team on duty at various hospitals, the Railways has arranged three special trains for Prayagraj. Several BJP leaders, including national vice president and Delhi unit incharge Baijayant Panda, MLA Kailash Gahlot, MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, former Union minister Harsh Vardhan also condoled the loss of lives and prayed for speedy recovery of the injured. Condoning the loss of lives, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said the death of the devotees headed to Mahakumbh was extremely sad and painful. Hitting back at the BJP, senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia wrote on X "Aapda Sarkar...". The word 'Aapda' (disaster) was used by BJP leaders ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls to describe the Aam Aadmi Party's alleged corruption and failures. The BJP ousted AAP from power in Delhi after 10 years winning 48 of 70 seats. AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha said the stampede shook all, and called it a glaring example of "gross mismanagement" and lack of crowd control measures.

Security tightened at LNJP Hospital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Hundreds of paramilitary personnel were deployed and the entry and exit gates sealed, denying access to everyone except medical staff at the LNJP hospital, where victims were brought hours after a deadly stampede at the New Delhi railway station late on Saturday evening that left at least 18 people dead and more than a dozen injured. Chaos erupted at the station when a massive crowd rushed to board trains to Prayagraj, where the Maha Kumbh is being held, triggering the stampede. There was a heavy deployment of paramilitary forces outside the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narain (LNJP) Hospital and the gates to the facility were barricaded with police ropes, preventing entry. All the entry and exit gates were sealed, with security personnel enforcing strict access control. Visitors were thoroughly checked and only those with official reports were allowed inside the Delhi government-run hospital. Even media personnel were denied access, with strict orders in place to restrict

movement within the hospital premises. Some distraught family members were not allowed to enter the casualty and orthopaedic departments, where the injured were being treated. Desperate to locate their missing loved ones among the admitted patients, they were turned away after officials merely checked the lists in their possession. Many of them complained that none of the hospitals, where the victims were taken, allowed them to search for their relatives and denied them the opportunity to file missing complaints. At the LNJP Hospital, which received the highest number of victims, the atmosphere was tense. A walk through the campus revealed an unusually low number of people compared to a normal day. Security checks were being conducted at every ward, allowing only one person to enter at a time. Inside, everyone was being questioned and no one was allowed near the ward where the stampede victims were admitted. Each injured patient was



Security personnel stand guard outside the LNJP hospital

Ranjan Dimri

accompanied by three to four police personnel or medical staff to prevent unauthorised contact. Even as the patients were taken for MRI scans and other tests, they remained

under strict police supervision. These wards had no regular patients and even the family members of the victims were not allowed to meet them. The mortuary was locked. By 9:30 am, all the formalities related to post-mortem were completed. The bodies of the deceased were handed over to their families, who then left for their respective places.

Railway workers clean up after stampede

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Hours after a stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station claimed at least 18 lives, railway staff worked through the night to clear the horrific remains of the tragic incident. Shoes, torn bags, scattered clothes, and abandoned food lay across platforms 14 and 15 -- serving as grim reminder of the chaos that unfolded just hours earlier.



NDRF personnel deployed at the New Delhi Railway Station

PTI

By Sunday morning, workers were seen sweeping away the debris, collecting personal belongings, to restore normalcy at the busy station, but the tragedy left scars that could not be so easily erased. A railway staffer, who spent hours clearing the wreckage, described the scene as "one of the worst" he ever witnessed. "There were belongings everywhere" -- slippers without their pairs, half-eaten food, and even a child's school bag. People had no time to pick up their things; they just ran for their lives," he said. The eerie sight of personal items scattered across the platforms was a painful reminder of the lives lost and the ones disrupted. The

stampede occurred around 9:55 pm on Saturday night when thousands of passengers, mostly Maha Kumbh pilgrims, crowded the station to board trains to Prayagraj. The Prayagraj Express was stationed at platform 14, while the Swatantrata Senani Express and Bhubaneswar Rajdhani Express were delayed, causing an overwhelming surge of people on platforms 12, 13, and 14. The situation worsened when a last-minute platform change was announced. Confused and panicked, the passengers rushed towards platform 16, where an escalator became a choking

point. Security personnel tried to intervene, but the crowd was too large to control. Some passengers attempted to climb railings to escape, while others were crushed underfoot. When the chaos subsided, 18 people including 11 women and five children lost their lives, while more than a dozen others suffered injuries. As dawn broke, railway staff began the grim task of cleaning up. Videos shared by news agency PTI showed workers sweeping debris off the platform roof and clearing the tracks. Bags and clothing were collected in piles, while officials searched for any

remaining personal belongings. At the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash (LNJP) Hospital, grieving families gathered to identify their loved ones. A father, searching desperately for his missing son, broke down upon seeing a familiar blue backpack among the items recovered from the station. "He was just 12. He was supposed to board the train with me," he sobbed. The government has announced Rs 10 lakh compensation for the families of the deceased. Expressing his condolences on X, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Distressed by the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station. My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that the injured have a speedy recovery." Railway authorities have admitted that overcrowding was a major factor for the disaster. Every hour, 1,500 general tickets were being sold, leading to a surge in passengers that became impossible to manage. Security measures have now been tightened, and officials have launched an investigation into what went wrong.

Personal belongings lie scattered after New Delhi station stampede



Heavy rush of passengers to catch a train for Mahakumbh, at the New Delhi railway station Saturday

PTI

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The aftermath of the deadly stampede at New Delhi Railway Station late Saturday night left a grim scene-footwear, clothes and personal belongings lay scattered across platforms, escalators and the railway over-bridge as authorities worked to restore order. Several videos of the aftermath of the incident show a sea of crowd at the station. Visuals showed abandoned shoes, bags and water bottles strewn across the station, with staff deployed to collect and dispose of them. At least 18

people, including 11 women and five children, lost their lives in the incident, while more than a dozen others sustained injuries and are undergoing treatment at nearby hospitals. After the stampede and rescue efforts at the station, visuals showed piles of clothes, shoes, water bottles, bags and other belongings of people scattered along the station premises. Staff was pressed into gathering them into bags and disposing them. A clip showed several pairs of slippers and shoes and other belongings strewn on an

escalator and a staircase connecting to the footover bridge. Another video showed hundreds of people, some carrying children on their shoulders, rushing through the railway station while others struggle with their luggage amid the chaos and no police personnel are seen at the site. However, in one video, a policeman is seen interacting with some people in the crowd. The stampede was preceded by a swell in the crowd of passengers waiting to board trains to Prayagraj where the Maha Kumbh is underway on

platform numbers 14 and 15 of the station. The stampede occurred around 10 pm as thousands of passengers jostled to board trains bound for Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh. The chaos intensified due to delays in two scheduled trains and the rush for a special express service, leading to overcrowding on multiple platforms. According to Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Railway, KPS Malhotra, several people were present on platform number 14 when the Prayagraj Express train stood on the platform.

Husband seeks missing wife after stampede

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a tragic turn of events, 58-year-old Guptaeshwar Yadav clutches his mobile phone, displaying a photo of his missing wife to media personnel, his face etched with despair. He wanted any clue from anywhere that would help him find his wife. He lost her Saturday evening during the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station that, according to officials, left 18 dead and several injured. "I came to Delhi with my elder brother and wife from Uttar Pradesh. We were waiting at platform number 13 for the Prayagraj train when a sudden announcement informed us it would now depart from platform 14. The chaos that

followed left us in a panic," he said. Yadav recalled holding his wife's (56) hand as they struggled to make their way toward platform 14. "The first thing we saw was a sea of heads, endless people trying to move towards platform 14. As we got closer, we got pushed from behind. In the commotion, I lost my wife's hand. And since then, I have been searching for her," he said. Yadav visited the LNJP Hospital, RML Hospital, and the Lady Hardinge Medical College and Hospital trying to find out if she was there among the injured. But no one provided him any piece of information about his wife. Yadav's younger brother, Cheteshwar Yadav, claimed

that not a single railway official was present to help people during the initial chaos. "No one stepped forward to assist the injured, who were screaming for help. Instead, many people from nearby platforms pulled out their mobile phones and started recording videos. It was the young passengers at the station who tried to manage the crowd on their own," he added. According to police, two major trains -- the Swatantrata Senani Express and the Bhubaneswar Rajdhani Express -- were already delayed, leaving platforms 13, 14, and 15 packed with restless travellers. Then came an announcement that a special train to Prayagraj would depart from platform 16.

"A train to Prayagraj was already at platform 14, where the Prayagraj Express usually departs. When the announcement about the special train came, many passengers assumed it was their regular train and rushed toward platform 16," police sources said. A day after a deadly stampede, the station remained overcrowded on Sunday, with thousands of passengers struggling to board trains amid heavy rush. Despite additional measures, the influx of passengers -- several of them Maha Kumbh pilgrims travelling to Prayagraj -- has continued with the sheer volume of travellers making the situation difficult to handle for authorities.

BJP targets Congress over US-funded programme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■
NEW DELHI/NEW YORK

The BJP on Sunday said a US-funded programme, now cancelled, linked to voter turnout in India is a pointer to the previous Congress-led UPA government allegedly enabling infiltration of Indian institutions by forces opposed to the country's interests. This assertion came in the backdrop of Elon Musk-headed Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which has been constituted by US President Donald Trump, has announced that it has cancelled many programmes costing hundreds of millions of taxpayers dollars. The programmes cited by it included USD 486 million to the "Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening", including USD 21 million for "voter turnout" in India. BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya said in a social



media post, "It is becoming increasingly evident that the Congress-led UPA systematically enabled the infiltration of India's institutions by forces opposed to the nation's interests - those who seek to weaken India at every opportunity." Once again, he alleged, it is the billionaire US-based investor George Soros, a "known associate" of the Congress party and the Gandhis, whose shadow looms over our electoral

process. Malviya said the Election Commission in 2012 had signed an MoU with The International Foundation for Electoral Systems' an organisation linked to Soros' Open Society Foundation, which is primarily funded by USAID. In a swipe at the Congress, he said those questioning the "transparent and inclusive" process of appointing India's Election Commissioner had no hesitation in handing over

the entire Election Commission of India to "foreign operators". Malviya said, "\$21M for voter turnout? This definitely is external interference in India's electoral process. Who gains from this? Not the ruling party for sure!" PTI reported from New York, the US Department of Government Efficiency led by billionaire Elon Musk has announced a series of expenditure cuts, including USD 21 million allocated for "voter turnout in India." US President Donald Trump chose Musk to head the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) last month. Tasked with improving governance and curbing wasteful expenditures, the DOGE in a social media post late Saturday announced cancelling many programmes costing hundreds of millions of taxpayers dollars. The department said, "US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent on the following

items, all (of) which have been cancelled..." The list included USD 486 million in grants to the "Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening" including USD 21 million for "voter turnout in India" and USD 22 million for "inclusive and participatory political process" in Moldova. No further details on the funding were given in the post. This comes days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official visit to the US, during which he held talks with President Trump, as well as Musk. The SpaceX CEO met Modi with his family, including three children. The two discussed opportunities in space, mobility, technology, and energy and exchanged notes on efforts at good governance in India and the US. In its post, the DOGE also cancelled USD 29 million allocated to "strengthening political landscape in

Bangladesh", as well as USD 20 million for "fiscal federalism" in Nepal and USD 19 million for "biodiversity conversation" in the Himalayan nation. It also announced cutting a USD 10 million grant for "Mozambique voluntary medical male circumcision", USD 2.3 million for "strengthening independent voices in Cambodia", USD 32 million to the Prague Civil Society Centre, USD 40 million for "gender equality and women empowerment hub" and USD 14 million for "improving public procurement" in Serbia, among other expenditure cuts. It also included USD 47 million for "improving learning outcomes in Asia". The DOGE has been put in charge of overseeing workforce reduction across the government, and as part of that, Musk announced that he would shut down USAID, which is responsible for humanitarian efforts around the globe.



President Droupadi Murmu addresses during the inauguration of the National Tribal Festival 'Aadi Mahotsav', in New Delhi

President Murmu inaugurates National Tribal Festival

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday here inaugurated the National Tribal Festival 'Aadi Mahotsav' and said it is a key event to highlight and promote tribal heritage. Such festivals provide a great opportunity for the entrepreneurs, artisans, and artists of the tribal society to connect with the market. The President said the crafts, food, dress and jewellery, medical practices, household equipment, and sports of the tribal society are the precious heritage of our country. At the same time, they are also modern and scientific because they show a natural harmony with nature and the ideals of a sustainable lifestyle. She said during the last 10 years, many effective steps have been taken for the overall development of the tribal society. The Tribal Development Budget has increased five times to about one lakh twenty-five thousand crore rupees. Apart from this, the Tribal Welfare Budget Allocation has increased three times to about 15 thousand crore rupees. The idea behind paying special attention to the development of tribal society is that only when the tribal society progresses, our

country will also progress in the true sense. That is why, along with increasing the sense of pride toward tribal identity, multi-dimensional efforts are being made to develop the tribal society at a fast pace, President Murmu said. The President was happy to note that a lot of progress is being made towards the economic empowerment and employment of the tribal society. She highlighted that education plays the most important role in the development of any society. She said it is a matter of happiness that about 1.25 lakh tribal children are getting school education through more than 470 Eklavya Model Residential Schools in the country. In the last 10 years, 30 new medical colleges have been started in tribal-dominated areas. A national mission has been launched to solve a specific problem related to the health of the tribal society. Under this mission, the target has been set to eradicate sickle cell anemia by the year 2047. Aadi Mahotsav is being organised by Ministry of Tribal Affairs from February 16 to 24 at Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium. This festival aims to provide a glimpse into the rich and diverse traditional culture of the tribal communities of our country.

President Murmu attends Change Of Guard Ceremony held in new format

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The change of guard ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan will now be held in a new format, featuring an elaborate visual and musical performance against the backdrop of the presidential palace, an official statement said on Sunday. The new format includes military drills by troops and horses of the President's Bodyguard, along with personnel from the Ceremonial Guard Battalion and the Ceremonial Military Brass Band. The display will be spread over a larger area, the statement added. President Droupadi Murmu witnessed the inaugural ceremony in its new format on Sunday at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan, according to the statement issued by her office.



President Droupadi Murmu witnesses the inaugural show of the Change of Guard Ceremony in a new format at the Forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi

The ceremony will be open to a larger number of visitors from February 22, the statement said. Visitors can reserve their slots at <https://visit.Rashtrapatibhavan.Gov.In> Change of guard, a time-honoured military tradition, was introduced as a

ceremonial event in 2007 at Rashtrapati Bhavan allowing a fresh group of the President's Bodyguard to take charge. In 2012 the ceremony was made a public event giving citizens an opportunity to attend the event, officials said. Previously held between Jaipur Column and gate number 1, it

has now been shifted to the forecourt, expanding the capacity to over a thousand spectators, they said. Conducted weekly, this ceremony marks formal handover of duties between the outgoing and incoming guards. The ceremony attended by President Murmu on Sunday showcased synchronised movements by the Ceremonial Band, reflecting the discipline, heritage, and pride of the Indian armed forces. Raised in 1773, the President's Bodyguard (PBG) is the senior-most regiment of the Indian Army, tasked with ceremonial duties for the president. PBG personnel are skilled horsemen, tank operators, and paratroopers.

Indian Navy Warship to participate in International Fleet Review 25

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indian Navy warship and P 8 I long range maritime reconnaissance aircraft are in Bali, Indonesia to participate in the Indonesian Navy International Fleet Review 25, and the Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo, navy said here on Sunday. Giving details, officials said Indian Navy's INS Shardul and Long Range Maritime Surveillance P8I aircraft will participate in the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2025, scheduled from February 15 to 22 Feb 25. The IFR, a prestigious multinational naval event, will be reviewed by President of Indonesia and will witness participation of naval forces from various countries. During this period, the Indian Navy will also take part in various high-level engagements including International Maritime Security Symposium,

and tactical floor games. Additionally, the crew will join in multinational activities such as a city parade, baby turtle release, coral and mangrove plantation and beach cleaning underscoring commitment towards environmental conservation and maritime cooperation. Following IFR 25, both INS Shardul and the P8I will participate in Exercise Komodo, a multilateral naval exercise aimed at enhancing maritime interoperability and regional security cooperation. This follows the participation of INS Mumbai and the P8I aircraft in the LA PEROUSE exercises in Indonesia in January 2025 and visit of Admiral Muhammad Ali, Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Navy, to India, as part of the high-level delegation accompanying Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, the Chief Guest for the Republic Day Parade 2025.

Majority community wanted Kashmiri Pandits to return to society: Mirwaiz

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
SRINAGAR

Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq Sunday stressed the need for building an intra-community consensus between Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits on their dignified return to the Valley. The Mirwaiz said the majority community wanted Kashmiri Pandits to return to the inclusive society that existed here. "There are some voices which want a separate cluster in south Kashmir for themselves... That is not acceptable. There is a significant section of Kashmiri Pandits who want to be part of an inclusive society. So there is a need for consensus", he said. After an interfaith conference at Budgam, the Hurriyat leader said, "We believe that the issue of Kashmiri Pandits is a humanitarian matter. Kashmiri Muslims, irrespective of their sect, want them to return to their homes and live in harmony and peace like before."

Ministry of Ayush announces opening of nominations for PM's Yoga Awards

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Ministry of Ayush announces the opening of nominations for the prestigious Prime Minister's Yoga Awards for the 2025 edition of the International Day of Yoga (IDY2025). These awards recognise individuals and organisations that have made significant and sustained contributions to the promotion and development of Yoga, both nationally and internationally, an official statement said here on Sunday. Established to honor the profound impact of Yoga on society, the Prime Minister's Yoga Awards aim to celebrate exemplary contributions to the field, reinforcing Yoga's role in disease prevention, health promotion, and the management of lifestyle-related disorders, Ministry of Ayush statement said. These awards, personally endorsed by the Prime

Minister, serve as a testament to the Government's commitment to recognizing and celebrating the invaluable contributions to the growth and propagation of Yoga. The awards will be conferred in the National Individual, National Organisation, International Individual, and International Organisation categories, with each winner receiving a Trophy, Certificate, and a Cash Award of Rs. 25 lakh. Individuals applying must be 40 years or older and should have at least 20 years of dedicated service in Yoga promotion. Applications and nominations can be submitted via the MyGov platform (<https://innovateindia.mygov.in/pm-yoga-awards-2025/>) on or before March 31, 2025. The link will also be available on the Ministry of Ayush's website and the websites of its autonomous bodies. Entities can apply

directly or be nominated by a prominent Yoga organization. Each applicant/nominee can apply for only one category (National or International) per year. A Screening Committee constituted by the Ministry of Ayush will review all applications and recommend a maximum of 50 names per award category to the Evaluation Jury. The Jury, comprising eminent personalities from various fields, will be the apex decision-making body. The Ministry of Ayush is dedicated to developing and promoting our traditional systems of medicine and wellness, including Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-rigpa and Homeopathy. The Ministry strives to integrate these systems into the healthcare landscape, enhancing the well-being of individuals and communities holistically.

Rana visited North, South India before 26/11, his extradition will help join the dots: Officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Tahawwur Hussain Rana's possible extradition from the US in connection with the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks could provide important leads into his travels in parts of north and south India days before the carnage in 2008, officials have said. The 64-year-old Rana, a Pakistan-born Canadian national and a close associate of Pakistani-American terrorist and one of the main conspirators David Coleman Headley, is serving supervised detention at a metropolitan detention centre in Los Angeles after completing a 14-year sentence in 2023. US President Donald Trump announced on Thursday that his administration has approved Rana's extradition to India, referring to him as "one of the plotters and very evil people of the world." Once extradited, Rana would be the third person to be sent on trial in India in the case after Ajmal Kasab and

Zabiuddin Ansari alias Abu Jundal. In November 2012, Kasab, the lone surviving Pakistan terrorist, was hanged to death in Pune's Yerawada Jail. Arrested by the FBI on October 27, 2009, Rana was chargesheeted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2011 under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and Section 6(2) of the SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism. While tracking Headley's footsteps in India, the central security officials had found that Rana had visited Hapur, Delhi, Agra, Kochi, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai with his wife Samraz Rana Akhtar between November 13 and November 21, 2008. Rana had submitted business sponsor letters from 'Immigrant Law Center' and property Tax payment notice from the Cook County as his address proof. The officials said once Rana is brought to India, the purpose of these visits would be established.

After being arrested in 2009, Rana was convicted in 2011 and sentenced to 14 years. Rana was convicted in the US of one count of conspiracy to provide material support to the terrorism plot in Denmark and one count of providing material support to terrorist organisation Lashker-e-Taiba. The trial evidence also included transcripts of recorded conversations, including those in September 2009, when Headley and Rana spoke about reports that a co-defendant and an alleged Pakistani terrorist leader, Ilyas Kashmiri, had been killed. In other conversations, Rana told Headley that the attackers involved in the Mumbai carnage should receive Pakistan's highest posthumous military honours. In the late summer of 2009, Rana and Headley agreed that funds that had been provided to Rana could be used to facilitate Headley's work in Denmark, and the evidence showed that Rana pretended to be Headley in sending an email to a Danish newspaper for

establishing an immigration office in the European nation. The NIA had chargesheeted Rana as a "co-conspirator" who provided logistic financial and other assistance to Headly and other co-conspirators towards the criminal conspiracy to organise terrorist attacks in India. Rana's First Word International firm was used as a cover for executing the terror strike Lashker-e-Taiba group assigned to Rana. It was through his company that Headley applied for multiple entry business visa to India for the purpose of establishing a branch office of the Immigrant Law Centre in Mumbai. Rana also facilitated his visa extension for 10 years in July 2007. On November 26, 2008, a group of 10 Pakistani terrorists went on a rampage, carrying out a coordinated attack on a railway station, two luxury hotels and a Jewish centre, after they sneaked into India's financial capital Mumbai using the sea route in the Arabian sea.

Vikrant, Bhumi interact with students during Pariksha Pe Charcha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Study to pass in life, not just Examinations, and identify your strengths during challenging times, actors Vikrant Massey and Bhumi Pednekar told school students during an interaction on PM's Pariksha Pe Charcha aired on Sunday. The actors shared their school experiences, tackling exam stress, parental expectations and the importance of resilience at a special session of Pariksha Pe Charcha (PPC), an annual event in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with students appearing for board examinations. In a shift from the traditional town hall format, this time the prime minister preferred a

more informal setting and took the students to Delhi's iconic Sunder Nursery for his annual interaction with them ahead of board exams. Massey, who saw a career turnaround with the 2023 film "12th Fail", asked students to practice the "power of visualisation". "We all know how to subconsciously visualise. You can take out 10 minutes a day to write about your feelings and what you wish to achieve in a journal... It's a kind of manifestation", he said. "Never feel arrogant about getting good marks. Keep your eyes low and your thinking high. That's very important. Study to pass in life, not just exams. Be kind to yourself and if you do not meet your expectations, restart," he added. Recalling the time she lost her father, Pednekar said she was very young when she realised she had to focus on her strengths. "At that age you don't realise that such a big unfortunate event has happened to you. I just knew I had to play by my strengths. Identify your strengths during challenging times... Explore new ways to learn... Like whenever I am given a scene, I try doing it in different ways," the "Dum Laga Ke Haisha" actor said during the eighth edition of PPC. During his school days, Massey said he was "an above average student" who was more into sports. "I used to pick up books days before exams. We had cable TV at

the time so that used to be disconnected during exams... I'm a bit sad to see today's generation. Our playtime was all about the playground. For today's generation, it's mobile. Cricket, which is our



country's most favourite sport, requires one to be present in the moment. Even the prime minister says 'The present is God's favourite present', he added. Pednekar too said she was never a frontbencher and

used to enjoy participating in extracurricular activities. "I was a very obedient student and I still am. I was mischievous but I shared a beautiful relationship with my teachers... I realised early on that I want to be an actor. I wanted my parents to be happy and proud so I used to work very hard in studies." Children are unable to grow when the expectations of parents start to feel like a burden, added Massey. "Express yourself. If your parents want you to become an engineer but you want to become a photographer, you should tell them what you feel. They will get convinced over a period of time because all they want for you is to be happy," he told students. Pednekar emphasised the

importance of having a good sleep routine. "I used to take an hour-long break in a day during exams. I would go out and play, I loved dancing, playing badminton. All that was important for me was to give my brain a break..." "When I was young, I just didn't want to sleep. Now when I'm shooting, I quickly finish my lunch in 15 minutes and sleep for half an hour. That half an hour of sleep will give me a very focused eight hours at work," she added. Massey shared his three hacks on how to be an 'Exam Warrior'. "Eat well, rest well; keep improving; and go, play, unplug," he said. Asked to give her go-to tips to handle stress, Pednekar said: "Be a warrior, not a worrier.

Being spiritual keeps you grounded and focused." Previously, eminent personalities like boxer MC Mary Kom, spiritual leader Sadhguru, and Bollywood star Deepika Padukone also shared their experiences and knowledge with students on key aspects of life and learning in different episodes of Pariksha Pe Charcha this year. The first edition of the prime minister's interactive programme with school and college students was held at the Talkatora Stadium in February 2018. Its seventh edition was held in a town hall format at the Bharat Mandapam in Pragati Maidan, engaging participants from across the country and overseas.

Chief ministers, politicians condole deaths in New Delhi stampede

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief ministers of several states and political figures have condole the deaths in the stampede at the New Delhi railway station on Saturday. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed grief over the loss of lives terming the mishap as "heartbreaking". In a social media post in Hindi late Saturday night, he said, "The loss of lives in the accident at New Delhi Railway Station is extremely sad and heart-breaking. My condolences are with the bereaved families." "Prayers to Lord Shri Ram to grant salvation to the departed souls, strength to the bereaved families to bear this immense sorrow and speedy recovery to the injured," he said. Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya also termed the incident as sad. In a social media post in Hindi, Maurya said, "Very sad news has been received about the casualties of many people in the accident at New Delhi Railway Station. Prayers to God to provide speedy recovery to those injured in the accident and give place to the departed souls in his feet. Om Shanti."

Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Congress slammed the government over the stampede incident, saying it raises serious questions on the role of the government. "It is very sad to hear about many people being killed and injured in a stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station due to the huge crowd of devotees going to the Maha Kumbh. We pray for the peace of the souls of the deceased and speedy recovery of the injured," the UP Congress said in a social media post. "Such incidents happening from Prayagraj to Delhi are raising serious questions on the role of the government and administration. Despite so many accidents, neither are their eyes opening, nor is accountability being fixed," it said. The Samajwadi Party too condole the loss of lives in the tragedy. In a social media post, the SP said, "Very sad! Heartbreaking news of people getting injured in the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station during the rush to catch a train going to Prayagraj." "May the souls of the deceased rest in peace. Wishing the injured a speedy recovery. Deep condolences to the bereaved families," it said. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday condole the loss of lives in the stampede at New Delhi railway station, and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured. "I am extremely anguished by the terrible news coming in from New Delhi Railway Station. On behalf of the people of Assam, we offer our



Heavy rush of passengers to catch a train for Mahakumbh, at the New Delhi railway station

PTI

deepest condolences to those who have lost their loved ones in the stampede," Sarma said in a social media post. "Our thoughts and prayers are with those who have been injured," he added. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis expressed grief over the loss of lives and said authorities will take steps to ensure such incidents do not recur. "It was an unfortunate incident.

Authorities will take steps to ensure such incidents don't happen in future," Fadnis told reporters in Nagpur while responding to a question on the stampede. Shiv Sena spokesperson Sanjay Nirupam said the New Delhi Railway Station on Saturday possibly had the largest crowd ever and it was "historic and unexpected". The railway administration should have anticipated this, he said in a social

media post. On the contrary, the platform of the special train going to Prayagraj was suddenly changed. Passengers ran towards the platform which resulted in a stampede, Nirupam said. "The only person responsible for this accident is the railway official who decided to change the platform number. He must be punished," he said. Meanwhile, opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray

targeted Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw over the deaths due to the stampede, claiming he "simply refuses to take any responsibility". "They might as well officially change the name to Reel Mantri," Thackeray said in a social media post. "Be it the railway management, railway infrastructure or even the number of the accidents faced by the railways. Never has the @RailMinIndia so directionless and ineffective before," he claimed in the post. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut claimed that "more than 100 persons" died in the New Delhi Railway Station stampede, but did not substantiate his comments. Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday condole the deaths. "Deeply saddened by the loss of lives in the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station. My thoughts are with the bereaved families. Praying for the early recovery of the injured," the Lt Governor said in a social media post. In a separate post by the office of chief minister, Abdullah said "I am deeply saddened by the tragic stampede that occurred at New Delhi Railway Station today, resulting in the loss of at least 18 lives and leaving many others injured. My deepest condolences to the families who lost their loved ones. Praying for early recovery of the injured," he said. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar expressed grief and announced ex gratia for the kin of the deceased

hailing from the eastern state. "The CM has expressed condolences over the casualties in the stampede at the New Delhi railway station. He is deeply saddened by the deaths of Bihar natives in the incident, and announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to the immediate family members of the deceased, and Rs 50,000 for those who are injured," a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said. Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, in a social media post said "The incident at New Delhi railway station is heart-wrenching. My deepest condolences to the families of those who lost their lives. I pray to God to grant peace to the departed souls and for the speedy recovery of the injured." Meanwhile, RJD supreme Lalu Prasad slammed the BJP-led government at the Centre over the incident, and demanded resignation of the railway minister. "The stampede episode is very disturbing... it has exposed the inadequate arrangements made by the central government. The railway minister must resign after this incident," Prasad told reporters in Patna. Expressing condolences over the deaths, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi on Sunday demanded an independent, judicially-monitored SIT to investigate the tragedy. In a social media post, the Hyderabad Lok Sabha MP also sought an independent inquiry into the "systemic failures" of the Indian Railways.

Nitin Gadkari takes holy dip at Sangam

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The spiritual grandeur of Mahakumbh 2025 in Teerthraj Prayagraj continues to draw dignitaries from across the nation, with many considering it a divine blessing to bathe in the sacred waters of the Triveni Sangam. On Sunday, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, joined the revered tradition, expressing his deep sense of fulfillment after taking a ritual dip alongside his wife and family. Upon his arrival at Prayagraj Airport, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath extended a warm welcome, presenting him with a shawl as a mark of respect. Gadkari then proceeded to the Sangam, where he performed the holy bath and offered prayers. His joy was evident, as he described the experience as spiritually uplifting. Impressed by the



Union minister Nitin Gadkari takes a holy dip at Sangam

Pioneer Photo

elaborate arrangements for Mahakumbh 2025, Gadkari praised the efforts of the Yogi government and local administration, acknowledging the scale and complexity of organizing such a massive event. "The Uttar Pradesh government and local authorities have put in tremendous effort, ensuring flawless arrangements. This is why people from across the

country are eager to witness this grand spiritual gathering," said Gadkari. He emphasized Mahakumbh's significance as a festival that embodies the faith of the entire nation. Highlighting the event's spiritual magnetism, he noted that thousands of devotees from his hometown, Nagpur, had traveled to Prayagraj in their vehicles to participate in the festivities.

"I pray for Maa Ganga's blessings upon everyone. May there be universal prosperity and well-being," he said, sipping the holy Ganga water and greeting the vast crowd gathered at the ghats. Accompanying Gadkari on this sacred journey were Industrial Development Minister Nand Gopal Gupta Nandi and Transport Minister Dayashankar Singh. To share his experience, Gadkari posted photos and videos of his prayers and holy dip on Instagram, Facebook, and X. "Prayagraj... Har Har Gange! Today, I had the privilege of taking a sacred bath and offering prayers at the holy Sangam during Mahakumbh in Prayagraj. I received the blessings of Maa Ganga," he wrote on social media, also sharing a video of his meeting with CM Yogi Adityanath, expressing gratitude for the warm reception.

CRPF opens new base in Chhattisgarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RAIPUR/NEW DELHI

The CRPF has opened a new operations base in the heart of a strong Maoist corridor in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar region as part of its expanding footprint into core Left Wing Extremism-affected areas of the state. The forward operating base at 'Pujari Kanker' in the Bijapur district was established on February 13 by the 196th and 205th CoBRA battalion of the force along with assistance from various other units of the paramilitary force deployed in and around the area, officials said. The remote area where the forward operating base (FOB) has been established is surrounded by hills and houses training camps, weapons and ammunition dump and rations units of the Maoists from the south and west Bastar divisions, the officials said.



Security personnel after their encounter with Naxals at Farsagarh Jungle in Bijapur, Chhattisgarh

PTI

A commando of the CoBRA unit of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was injured in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast when this FOB was being created. This is a challenging area as it serves as the operations centre of the 1st battalion of the armed Maoist cadres, a senior officer operating in the area said. A tall red-coloured memorial

erected by the Maoists in memory of their killed cadres was demolished by the CRPF by deploying a heavy earth-moving machine, he said. This base is the 13th FOB in the latest series of these centres being created as part of the Union government's declaration of ending the menace of left-wing extremism from the country by March 2026, the officer said.

This base will follow a few more before the annual tactical counter-offensive campaign (TCOC) of the Maoists kicks off, he said. The TCOC is undertaken by Naxals in summer to attack security forces as forests go dry and trees shed leaves allowing a long range view. A second officer said the CRPF unit that established the base has begun its job of engaging with the locals as it conducted a medical camp where 70 locals were treated. In Chhattisgarh, the CRPF is opening more and more FOBs to expand the reach of the security forces and administration so that the influence of Maoists in remote areas weans away. It has created more than 40 FOBs in Chhattisgarh over the past three-four years as the toughest anti-Naxal operations combat remains concentrated in the southern region of the state called Bastar, which borders Odisha and Telangana.

Proper management of crowds made at railway stations across Bihar: ECR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

The East Central Railway (ECR) on Sunday said adequate arrangements had been made to ensure proper management of crowds at railway stations across Bihar, which have been witnessing an 'unprecedented rush' on account of Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj. The unprecedented Kumbh Mela rush has created havoc at several railway stations across Bihar including Patna, Danapur, Ara, Gaya, Sasaram, Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, and Darbhanga, with a sudden spike in passenger footfall creating a challenge for the railways.

Talking to PTI, Chief Public Relation Officer (CPRO) of East Central Railway (ECR) Sharswati Chandra, said, "Adequate arrangements to ensure proper management of crowds at railway stations under the jurisdiction of ECR have been made with additional staff deployed at certain railway stations for the purpose. Several Kumbh Mela special trains are already running from Patna Junction daily to handle the rush. Senior railway officials are already managing the affairs very effectively." Senior railway officials in Patna maintained that the increase in passengers has certainly put pressure on the infrastructure and

operational capacities. Strict surveillance is being maintained through CCTV cameras at the Patna and other junctions by the officials concerned, said the CPRO. Recently railway properties were vandalised by angry passengers at Sasaram railway station. Police resorted to lathi charge also to disperse a mob of students, which had laid a siege to the Sasaram railway station on Friday. "At least four-five individuals were arrested by security personnel at Sasaram railway station for vandalising trains travelling to Prayagraj. Damage to railway properties will not be tolerated at any cost," said the CPRO.

WB Governor dismisses Assembly speech criticism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose on Sunday dismissed criticism over his speech in the assembly on the first day of the budget session, asserting that his address was a reflection of the state's government's policies and not a Raj Bhavan policy statement. Soon after Bose's address on February 10, Leader of Opposition in the assembly Suvendu Adhikari had said the speech was a revised version of what the state government had initially provided to him. "The governor's address is not the governor's policy statement, but that of the state government. As such the government's policy statement is to be delivered based on the advice of the council of



West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose

File Photo

ministers. Whatever they pass is the policy of the government, which is to be aired in the House by the governor as head of the state," Bose told PTI at the Raj Bhavan here. The governor will speak what is written by the council of ministers, not "whatever is written", he asserted.

"Certain avoidable references could be removed, I thought, could be deleted. But, instead of imposing my views on them, I pointed out to the government these are the changes that can be made. They readily accepted those. So, there was a consensus. A governor's role is not to encourage confrontation

but to build consensus," Bose said. "As a former bureaucrat, I have prepared so many governors' speeches. And in none of those, any controversial innuendos or barbs were included," he said. Sources in the state government told PTI that the cabinet in its meeting held on February 4 had approved Bose's speech, as per Article 163(1) of the Constitution and sent it to Raj Bhavan. "Upon receipt, the governor had indicated certain changes. The state incorporated those in the speech," one of the sources said. Referring to certain objections raised by the opposition in the assembly during his address, Bose said he had "paused twice and listened to them." "When the opposition objected to certain references made

during the address, I listened to them patiently, then I proceeded. "Twice, I paused and listened to their views. And, now I understand from the media that it's very rare that a governor's address ends without a boycott or a walkout by the opposition. Therefore, it means the opposition also imbibes the spirit of consensus," he said. Asked why there was no mention of the RG Kar rape and murder case in his speech, Bose said the council of ministers in their wisdom decided not to include the incident in the address. "But, the opposition raised it. I listened to them before proceeding. That means the opposition's resentment about this is also in the records of the House," he said.

'Didi Ki Rasoi' an initiative that is changing rural women's lives in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA/MUZAFFARPUR

In the crowded corridors of Patna Medical College and Hospital (PMCH), Poonam Devi, 40, moves with purpose. Each day, she travels several kilometres from her village near Patna to work in the hospital canteen. But it is not any other canteen, she has its own ownership. "I used to work in my fields and earn nothing, but now I bring home money. My husband and in-laws were not happy with my decision to be part of a self-help group and go out of the house but once they saw the inflow of money, things changed," she said, adding that now she earns more than her husband and enjoys an autonomy which she didn't think was possible

before. Poonam is among the 3,952 women involved with 'Didi Ki Rasoi' (DKR), an initiative which began as a modest canteen in Bihar's Vaishali in 2018 but has now expanded into a network of 216 canteens throughout the state, with the aim to provide hygienic food at places like hospitals, government offices, and other institutions. These canteens are run entirely by rural women who are part of self-help groups (SHGs) in Bihar. The DKR initiative is now actively running across Bihar, covering 36 district hospitals, 49 sub-division hospitals, 10 medical colleges and hospitals, 30 government offices and 91 SC/ST residential schools. It has generated a total business of ₹119 Crore till

now. Vimal Kumar, the block development manager for Didi Ki Rasoi in Patna, explained its distinctive model. "Here, all didis are the owners and this sense of ownership really helps as it becomes not just a job for people here but a partnership. Not just that, the canteens have also helped curb corruption which was earlier seen in contractor-run canteens," he said. The Covid-19 pandemic proved to be a testing time for these women when they continued to deliver food to hospitals and quarantine centres to ensure that patients and frontline workers had access to quality meals. "It was a difficult time but it was also a time we knew we were needed the most. The food had to be of good quality and nutritious that could help



A member of the Didi Ki Rasoi self help group takes care of the canteen at the Patna Medical College and Hospital in Patna

PTI

patients fight the disease, so we continued to work," Kanchan Devi, one of the cooks at a canteen in Vaishali, said. For many, Didi Ki Rasoi has

opened doors to not just financial independence but also self-respect. Like Rekha Kumari, 22, who works as a cashier at a canteen in Muzaffarpur's Sadar hospital.

Even though her family's financial struggles forced her to leave school after Class 12 and marry young, she was committed to find a way to study and find work. "I had to revolt against my family to join Didi Ki Rasoi so much so that my husband used to follow me to work because he was suspicious. But once I started bringing home money, they all had to accept my job," she said. Now, Rekha is saving money to continue her education and pursue her dream to become a chartered accountant. Parvati Kumari, a cook at the Sardar Patel Bhawan canteen, shared similar struggles. Married at 14, she had to drop out of school. But after two decades, she has finally managed to earn independence through her

job. "I earn ₹10,000 every month. My husband is a driver, and together we make ₹40,000. Now my next focus is my children's education. I tell them that 'you can be anything you want. I will make sure of that,'" she said. But while the initiative has led to significant changes, challenges still exist. Shobha Devi, a woman involved with the initiative, pointed out, "With inflation, we are still struggling to make ends meet. Now we want to grow our business by further expanding and supplying food at more stations, like we started very recently, supplying food to night shelters." The initiative has also broadened its services to include roles such as safai

karamcharis (sanitation workers), cloth stitching of patients, laundry services, and even helpdesks in hospitals to assist patients and visitors. Despite challenges like inflation and plans for further expansion, these women remain determined to grow their enterprise and inspire others. "The respect we did not get at home we get here. Even if we are unwell or the weather is adverse, we still come here because the appreciation we have yearned for all our life we get here," Poonam said. Her words were echoed by nearly all the women at the collectives - a movement which they said has empowered them, one meal at a time. And as Poonam aptly put it, "This is just the beginning."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Charting new course

Prime Minister Modi's recent US visit was an ice breaker and promising despite Trump's insistence on raising tariff walls

Since Donald Trump assumed the presidency of the United States, he has made a significant global impact. Through his "Make America Great Again" initiative, he has repositioned the US on the world stage, aiming to reshape the existing global order. By imposing tariff barriers and taking direct action when necessary, his policies have put several economies, including India's—which heavily depends on exports to the US—at risk. However, some relief appears to be on the horizon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the United States has been lauded as a significant milestone in strengthening Indo-US relations. Meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House, both leaders engaged in comprehensive discussions that culminated in agreements spanning trade, defence, energy and technology. Despite previous tensions over tariffs, with President Trump labeling India as a "tariff king," the summit showcased a collaborative spirit. Both nations committed to more than



doubling bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030. This ambitious goal is set to be achieved through a forthcoming bilateral trade agreement aimed at reducing duties and enhancing market access. Additionally, the US expressed interest in increasing investments in India's nuclear energy sector, signalling a deepening of economic ties.

A cornerstone of the discussions was defence cooperation. The US offered India the advanced F-35 stealth fighter jets, marking a significant step in military collaboration. This proposal aligns with the ten-year defence cooperation plan, emphasising the US's intent to bolster India's defence capabilities. Such initiatives

are indicative of a strategic partnership aimed at ensuring regional stability and countering emerging threats. Technological and Innovation Partnerships Prime Minister Modi's engagement extended beyond political leaders to influential figures in the technology sector. His meeting with SpaceX CEO Elon Musk underscored a mutual interest in space exploration and technological innovation. Discussions encompassed potential collaborations in space technology, mobility solutions and the introduction of services like Starlink satellite internet in India. These dialogues reflect a shared vision of leveraging technology for economic growth and societal benefit. The visit also highlighted India's nuanced position on global issues. While strengthening ties with the US, India maintains its strategic autonomy, especially concerning relations with Russia and its stance on conflicts like the Ukraine war. This balanced approach allows India to navigate complex international landscapes, ensuring its national interests are prioritised. Prime Minister Modi's visit to the United States has set a positive trajectory for Indo-US relations. The agreements and discussions held promise a future of enhanced cooperation across various sectors, reflecting a robust partnership poised to address both nations' strategic and economic objectives.

PICTALK



A pair of Asiatic lions inside their enclosure at Van Vihar National Park in Bhopal

The legacy of leadership: What truly endures



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Greatness in leadership is not merely about personal glory—it is about creating a legacy that endures across time, geographies and generations



Anyone who has attempted to perpetuate his memory in any institution or community has believed himself to be an institution builder. To be an institution builder, as the words themselves will show, one has to build a purpose, establish a process, gather resources, and pull them together in pursuit of an objective. This pursuit cannot be the pursuit of self-glorification. Usually, a successor tries to outdo his predecessor; this can be by upscaling, ignoring, or finding flaws in the predecessor's efforts. Sooner or later, this destroys everyone involved because everyone must necessarily end up with a successor. That successor, sooner or later, becomes a competitor to the predecessor. This may be an obvious truth, but not many people seem to have recognised it. Hence, if one is seeking glorification, perhaps the most important pursuit should be the search for a successive successor who is not only in sympathy with one's approach but will carry the mission forward. The great leaders of the world have recognised this instinctively, and the epithet 'Great' has come their way. Martin Luther was a good example, as was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Nelson Mandela could also be a good

illustration. The examples are many. In each case, the conclusion is the same. Each so-called great leader needed a succession of people generously following them who proclaimed their greatness from the treetops. This may be easy to propound but difficult to action. One reason for this is that it needs a succession of people after one's own life who would concur with the approach, and indeed have been beneficiaries of that person's influence. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi has been widely celebrated for his theories of agitation against foreign rule. There is evidence of his having worked together in tandem, where the situation so demanded, with the rulers. This has since been noted and at times overlooked. There is a hypothesis which has done the rounds in certain quarters that the title of "Mahatma" was conferred upon him because of his request by the foreign rulers. Such observations are difficult to critically appraise decades or centuries later. However, one approach remains. Recognition of one's leadership and contributions is a complex process that has yet to be fully understood. One's greatness is therefore a matter of consen-



USUALLY, A SUCCESSOR TRIES TO OUTDO HIS PREDECESSOR; THIS CAN BE BY UPSCALING, IGNORING, OR FINDING FLAWS IN THE PREDECESSOR'S EFFORTS. SOONER OR LATER, THIS DESTROYS EVERYONE INVOLVED BECAUSE EVERYONE MUST NECESSARILY END UP WITH A SUCCESSOR

sus building which is always difficult in its fullness. The bottom line is there must be something enduring in the actions of an individual to receive kudos across communities generations and geographies. That something must include what is noble in human existence. The succeeding leaders may be helpful but they cannot determine the full range of perceptions. The long and short of it is that petty pursuits of petty objectives for limited periods rarely have given enduring recognition for one's greatness. Sooner or later, for most aspiring leaders, some process of a counterpoint emerges as other contenders for the spot of greatness arise. Very often, these people, as alternate leaders, are from a different vantage point of perception, and debate is generated. Few have claimed eminence for greatness without having survived the crucial test of times and acceptance across generations. History is a telltale testament as to how the pre-eminence of one's contribution or the significance of one's contribution can change with the changing cultures of the times. One may not be so well recognised in one's lifetime, but subse-

quent generations awoken to that greatness as per their vision and their own needs. The case of Birsa Munda is an interesting example. Not so long ago, he was one of the freedom fighters who was remembered in certain parts of India only by certain people. But times changed, and now he is being celebrated with the glory of a true visionary leader who fought for the independence. Times change, and so does the vision. However, if one thing remains constant, it is that few have attained leadership across generations and geographies without having a sound streak of spiritual vision. One may be celebrated for martial glories or administrative contributions, and there is nothing wrong with that. However, for loftiness beyond the constraints of time and space, some elevated spiritual insights valid across people and generations seem a common need. It is obvious that the subject matter of the greatness of leaders and what constitutes the same needs continuing depths of research, iteration and honest conviction. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EXTRADITION OF TAHAWWUR RANA

Madam — The agony of the horrific 26/11 terrorist attack still lingers in India's heart. Hundreds of innocent civilians lost their lives in this massacre. This dreadful chapter of terrorism saw the involvement of Tahawwur Rana, a Pakistani-origin US citizen and an aide of Lashkar-e-Taiba. Now, with the US administration approving Rana's extradition to India, a significant path toward justice has been paved. Rana's extradition is not just about punishing a criminal; it symbolises India's unwavering stance against terrorism and the growing global support for this cause. This decision will not only expedite the judicial process but also bring a ray of hope to the victims' families, who have been waiting for justice for years. Although legal hurdles may arise in the extradition process, if it succeeds, it will send a strong message to terrorists that no matter where they hide, they cannot escape the clutches of justice. This diplomatic victory underscores India's firm resolve and international backing. Now is the time to bring Rana before the Indian judicial system and deliver justice to the innocent martyrs of 26/11.

R K Jain | Barwani

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These public personalities hold a greater responsibility of representing the social values and aspirations in good sense. Millions of people follow them to learn something good and inspirational from them, not such a shit mentality. The dwindling following of Ranveer on social media platforms is welcoming. We all must not follow such a person who holds such shit senses about the people in his surroundings, especially the vulgarity about the parental relationship. Society shapes from the morals of a few leaders. If public figures fail to do their job in a manner they should, it is better to boycott such personalities holistically with adequate punishment to them. This will act as a lesson for other social media fig-

RANVEER SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam — The controversy around the "India's Got Latent" episode with YouTube content creator Ranveer Allahabadi making mockery of his parents too in the name of dark comedy depicts his actual senses and mindset on camera. Despite Ranveer being honoured with the National Digital Creators Award by the Prime Minister himself just last year, he didn't give a thought before speaking on camera, which will be telecasted on public platforms. It is sheerly surprising that his comedy flow can be so senseless that he could not even think about how he could be so vulgar while commenting on his parents. Now that he is deleting all the episodes already seen by the audience or presenting his public apology, it does-

President's rule in Manipur



The Centre has imposed President's Rule in ethnic strife-torn Manipur after the ruling BJP's failure to have a consensus on the name of the successor to N Biren Singh. Primarily, the governance failure of the N Biren Singh government may be held responsible for the current situation of the state. But many geo-social factors have also played a big role in an increase in ethnic discord among various communities of the state. Demographic changes and shrinking of

their traditional areas due to the unchecked influx of Kukis from Myanmar over the decades have led to discontent in Meiteis. Intelligence reports suggest that these illegal settlers are indulging in smuggling of drugs and weapons. N Biren Singh's government's tough action against the drug menace and illegal occupation of forest land in hilly districts, particularly Churachandpur, irked Kukis. On the other hand, his government's failure to implement the Manipur High Court's April 2023 direction to consider the request of Meiteis to include them in the ST list led to the loss of trust of his own Meitei community. Fierce opposition of tribal groups to the High Court's direction kept his govt on the back foot. Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

n't make any sense. Every action taken by Mumbai police to probe him and the action by the National Commission of Women were the worthy punishments that Ranveer, aka Beer Biceps, must face. The action will message every such public figure to stop believing that not every one of their public comments is always right.

ures to be wary of well before speaking in public. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

BUMRAH'S ABSENCE HURTS INDIA

Madam — The absence of Jasprit Bumrah from the Champions Trophy matches is a shock and not in favour of the Indian team. He was a key bowler in Australia, and his absence will be felt very much. Bumrah is a crisis man, making fast bowling look effortless. He rises to the occasion and delivers exceptional spells across formats. He was overburdened in Australia and as a result found unfit now. The selectors, instead of using him in tandem with number one spinner Ashwin, neglect the latter and now pay a heavy price. Bumrah's importance to the team is undeniable, whenever in trouble. With both the star bowlers unavailable, the chances of reaching the Champions Trophy final appear rather bleak. C K Subramaniam | Sanpada

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

A reluctant pilgrim's awakening: Discovering faith at the Kumbh

What began as a journey of reluctant exploration turned into an experience that reshaped my understanding of faith, devotion and purpose



SANJAY CHANDRA

Triveni is where the three sacred rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, and the now-extinct mythical Sarasvati, merge. It is believed that bathing in the holy waters of Sangam, particularly during certain auspicious days, brings blessings. I am not too fond of visiting religious places. I am used to a certain level of comfort. I have, probably mistakenly, come to associate spirituality and religion with a minimalistic way of living. Standing in serpentine queues for a microsecond glimpse does not appeal to me. I remember a visit to Tirupati during my railway probation with two other friends. A look at the painfully slow-moving long queue was enough for us to wait outside as the third friend went in to also pray on our behalf. I believe that my God resides within me. Thus, the idea of visiting the Kumbh was not even remotely in my thoughts. An article on the biggest religious and spiritual fair in the world made me realise that this was the Mahakumbh, an event that would repeat 144 years later. It was this novelty that I could not resist. My wife



decreed that we should also visit Varanasi. A premium tent was reserved in one of the luxury camps. We booked waitlisted train tickets without any hopes of confirmation. My younger brother working in the railways assured us to try to get us the seats. I was hoping he might not be able to help, till we boarded the train early in the morning, much apprehensive about the next three days. We had read and heard enough about the stampede and the long walks due to the barricades. The experience in Prayagraj was nothing like my apprehensions. The camp by the banks of the river Ganges, away from the crowded centre, was more of a luxury resort. The roads were crowded,

which resulted in traffic jams. But we managed to take a dip at the confluence and then visit the Akharas, the religious order of Sadhus, the monks. We did not have to walk long distances. The next day was slightly more chaotic. The cab for Varanasi arrived late and we had to take an e-rickshaw to reach the parking lot. The evening saw us jostling with the massive crowd, all walking towards the riverbank for the customary Ganga Aarti, a daily ritual performed at dusk to honour the sacred river. We even managed to brave the humongous crowd the next day to pray at the Kashi Vishwanath temple. I realised that the two cities are more than a confluence of the rivers or a visit to the temple.

It is a Sangam of diverse people, united through a single objective. The majority are poor people, who are content in their devotion and belief in a supreme power. They have not seen Him, but have an unshakable belief that their God will not forsake them, come what may. It is this faith that sees them bear the drudgery of living and eking out a livelihood. Many from the upper strata of society do not have to struggle each day, but they also have this absolute faith. A few like me are curious and visit for the novelty. It was more than a different experience. There I was, moving in the vast sea of humanity, looking around me with awe. It dawned upon me that like the multitude, I too needed this visit. I learned that I must perform actions with the same single-minded devotion. This is the reason that I was born a human in the vast universe. I was transformed. I had found my goal. (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

FIRST COLUMN

RESTRAINT IS A DIVINE QUALITY

Many of us give in to fleeting desires, leading to personal degradation



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Swami Vivekananda was approached by a young Western woman wanting to marry him. He asked her reason. Then, he gave a very witty answer and excused himself. Similarly, a young and pretty woman approached a famous scientist. She wanted a child with his intelligence and her looks. He excused himself by stating that there is a possibility that the child may be born with his looks and her intelligence. We remember them because showing such restraint is very uncommon. Rather, it is common that people seek opportunities to cheat on their spouses; they make many efforts, never mind being offered on a platter.

The result is punishment beginning with the degradation of the person. We have ten senses. There are five knowledge-gathering senses, which are eyes, ears, nose, skin and tongue. Then, there are five working senses, which are speech, hands, legs, genital and anus. I will detail how and why restraint should be practiced. Beginning with the eyes, what do our eyes wish to see most? Something very beautiful. This is fine as long as it is something like a beautiful flower, lake or mountain. When it degrades like seeing nudity, it must be avoided. Unfortunately, the mind is very unhelpful in this regard; it pulls us down.

Tongue is another offending sense; it leans towards tastier foods, which may harm. How do you explain eating too much salt or sugar, which benefits little and harms plenty? What is the explanation for eating harmful meat preparations, except for their taste when plenty of choices are available in vegetarian dishes? Here again, the mind is the culprit. Additionally, material intelligence justifies. Restraint is considered foolish. What we do wish to listen to most is? Sorry, dirty jokes.



Then, people love to have friendships with those who will appreciate the moon for some pecuniary benefit. Even in songs, some people strangely prefer to hear sad songs, or which titillate. People do realise that habituated thus we condemn ourselves to the next life also.

Long Krishna warns, "The ear, the eye, the touch sense, the tongue and the nose go to the next body with the mind." (15.7) We are more restrained in the matter of the nose: foul smell repels. But some people eat stale foods; they are under the mode of darkness. (18.10) Skin is generally a friend of all; we like cool comforts in the summer and warm surroundings in the winter.

Turning to the working senses, speech is the worst offender of all. What do you think causes the maximum harm? It is very easy to guess; it is something spoken inappropriately or in anger.

What is the explanation for abusing when the reaction is bound to be severe? But people do not control themselves. Even the best of men have weak moments when they slip up. Lord Krishna has counselled, "One who is not agitated by others and who doesn't get agitated by others, he is dear to Me." (12.15) Genitals give the maximum trouble unless controlled from an early age.

It is so easy to abuse oneself, but it is so harmful. Restraint is required, which is why 'brahmacharya' (celibacy) is highly recommended. God has allowed sex enjoyment, which is not against 'dharma' (within moral principles). (7.11) Why not be restrained and enjoy a superior feeling!

(The writer is a spiritual leader; views expressed are personal)

Addressing the crisis in Sikh leadership and religious identity



IQBAL SINGH LALPURA

The revival of Sikhism requires a collective effort from the Sikh community and its leaders to adapt, evolve and work together towards this holy mission

It is humanly impossible to accept the threat of extinction to Sikhism. Without delving into the glorious history and angelic principles of the Sikh religion, the present position is that after leaving Nankana Sahib, Punjab Sahib, and most religious places, including the capital of Khalsa Raj Lahore, Sikh leaders decided to join India without a written agreement from the then Congress leadership. This decision was made despite being part of the Congress leadership, which suffered millions of deaths and loss of property. The Sikhs believed Congress leaders only to be betrayed even after the amalgamation of Shiromani Akali Dal twice in 1948 and 1956 respectively. The majority of Sikh leadership was power-hungry and remained with Congress.

The remaining Sikh leaders started political agitations, from language to statehood, seeking more power for states under the Anandpur Sahib resolution and even advocating for an independent state of Khalistan, using Gurdwara funds and premises under various leaders. To gain within the Sikh community, they did not hesitate to blame and marginalise others. These agitations resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent people and the loss of property and kept Punjab in a state of turmoil.

The Sikh leadership, known as Akali, eventually gained political power in Punjab from 1967 onwards many times and also became partners in the central government on multiple occasions. However, the loser in these agitations was peace and prosperity in Punjab, coupled with the loss of the image of Sikhs as angels of Guru Nanak, who were perceived as extremists, anti-national, or atankwadi or terrorist or extremist not only in India but abroad also. Every Sikh living in India suffers from this stigma without any fault of their own. Sikh Guru Sahiban organized preaching and propagation through Manjis, Masands, Nirmale, and Udisis. This took Sikhism to every part of the country and abroad. However, after the demise of Maharaja Runjeet Singh, Britishers took over the control of Gurdwaras.

What to talk of propagation, they started converting Sikhs to Christianity beginning with Maharaja Duleep Singh. The 1920 to 1925 Gurdwara Sudhar lehar after sacrificing several Sikhs and loss of property gave chance to Sikh to manage their religious places and use donations for community causes. The research, education, and propagation of Sikhism should have been the agenda, but leaders decided differently and joined Congress for politics and freedom struggle. The preaching of the Sikh tenets to even Sikhs was ignored. Gurdwaras, the concept of a community meeting, service, and preaching centres were converted into mere places of ritual (banned by Guru Sahib) or platforms for leadership within the community or politics.

Instead of being places of learning, equality, meditation, and service. In the absence of any guidance or unity, the Gurdwaras at the village level also failed to promote the values of making villagers one family as preached by the Guru. The Gurdwara Parbandhak committees lacked plans to take the Sikh religion to every part of their respective states, other parts of the country, and the universe. They even divided Sikhs on political lines instead of uniting them as being Sikh brotherhoods.

While comparing one religion to another is impossible, one can learn from others. It is possible to criticise other religions, but one should also acknowledge the dedication of



SIKH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT AMONG THE BEST AND ARE NOT WIDESPREAD IN PUNJAB AND OTHER PLACES. WITHOUT STANDARD EDUCATION, SIKHS ARE EXCLUDED FROM BUREAUCRACY AND THE JUDICIARY, THE TWO ESSENTIAL PILLARS OF DEMOCRACY, EVEN IN PUNJAB, BUT TO TALK OF OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY

their preachers, their lifestyle, knowledge, discipline, and humility. In Sikhism, every religious service, from Pathi to Akhand Path, kirtan, Ardas, Dhadi, Katha, and even marriage and cremation ceremonies, has become a means of earning money. Having lost the golden principles of the Nirmal Path, Sikhs are now respected only for their free kitchen and service to society, which is ingrained in their blood and DNA by Gurus.

Sikh educational institutions are not among the best and are not widespread in Punjab and other places. Without standard education, Sikhs are excluded from bureaucracy and the judiciary, the two essential pillars of democracy, even in Punjab, but to talk of other parts of the country.

Due to mismanagement and loss of reputation, even the Sikh community has lost interest in these educational institutions. A review of voting patterns from 1951-52 to 1972, and even 1977, reveals that the Sikh Akali party was unable to form a government in Punjab state or establish itself as a recognized power in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. However, after Operation Blue Star, Wood Rose, Black Thunder, and the killing of thousands of Sikhs, as well as the insult and discrimination they faced, Sikhs joined hands to defeat the Congress in Punjab decisively and bring the Akalis to power. Nevertheless, after giving them a chance under different leaders, the majority of Sikhs have distanced themselves from the Akalis, as they failed to heal the wounds inflicted by being part of politically motivated agitations or simply being Sikh. Due to their failure to resolve community issues and allegedly joining anti-Sikh forces in 2017, the Akalis are no longer the leading opposition party in Punjab.

The latest Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak committee elections

have made it clear that in a state with over 15 lakh Sikhs, only about 3.50 lakh voters registered, and about 2.46 lakh voted. The leadership, who were in charge under various governments, were wiped out due to disenchantment. Cases of misuse of Gurdwara funds for personal gain have been reported in social media and papers. In Punjab, the situation is no better, with a state having a 1.60 crore Sikh population, but only less than 30 lakh voters registered. The leadership of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak committee must explain what happened to the remaining 1.30 crore plus Sikhs. Have they converted to other religions, or are they not interested in Gurdwaras?

They have been in control of Gurdwara funds for over 100 years and now owe an explanation to the new generation. The state of affairs in Delhi, with regards to the Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, is concerning. A significant majority of Sikhs show little interest in becoming voters, which is alarming. These committees, which oversee historical Gurdwaras numbering around 500 in India, don't represent the thousands of other Gurdwaras across the country. Interestingly, the proposal for an All India Gurdwara Act, which was first introduced in 1956, was put on hold in 1998-99 by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government.

The reason behind this decision was the potential influence of Sikhs from outside Punjab on Gurdwara management, which could have threatened the control of Punjab's Sikh leadership. Moreover, those who left Punjab between 1982 onwards for greener pastures abroad, using political asylum as a pretext, have not contributed to spreading the Sikh religion. Instead, their primary objective has been to blame the Indian government and promote hatred. No person would be attracted to this kind of projection of a reli-

gion of Angels.

Their contribution to Punjab's development is also not visible. The failure of Sikh religious and political leadership after 1839 AD, when Shere Punjab breathed his last, is responsible for the present situation. The intelligentsia and capable Sikhs have lost interest and are not even contacted or consulted. The situation demands that Sikh achievers come forward to save the religion from further damage. In this situation, the first effort should be to save the Sikh religion. This can be achieved by promoting education, distancing oneself from avoidable agitations, and improving relations with the government of India and the majority community to seek their help in reviving the Sikh religion before it is too late.

Furthermore, to achieve this, it is essential to establish a unified platform for Sikh organisations and institutions to collaborate and work towards a common goal. This platform should have Sikh brotherhood much away from politics. They can facilitate dialogue, coordination, and collective action among Sikh groups, enabling them to pool their resources, expertise, and influence to promote the Sikh religion and address the challenges facing the community.

Additionally, there is a need to revitalise Sikh educational institutions, promote standard education, and encourage Sikhs to participate in bureaucracy and the judiciary. This can help restore the community's reputation and rebuild trust in its institutions. Ultimately, the revival of Sikhism requires a collective effort from the Sikh community, its leaders, and organisations. It demands a willingness to adapt, evolve and work together towards this holy mission.

(The writer is Chairman - National Commission for Minorities Government of India; views are personal)

Cooperative commodity zones: A farmer-led revolution for economic empowerment

These zones present a groundbreaking solution, empowering farmers through cooperative-led trade, storage infrastructure and digital platforms

Indian farmers have long struggled with price instability, distress sales and financial insecurity. While the Minimum Support Price (MSP) provides some relief, its limitations and inefficiencies leave many farmers vulnerable. A transformative approach, the Cooperative Commodity Zone (CCZ) model, offers a more sustainable solution by enhancing price security, market access, and financial resilience. As global agriculture shifts toward sustainability and resilient supply chains, India must adopt a farmer-centric model that ensures fair earnings and economic empowerment.



BINOD ANAND

Cooperation), promoting cooperative strength, local enterprise, and self-sufficiency. This model enables farmers to become key stakeholders in commodity trade rather than remaining dependent on middlemen and speculative traders. India's commodity market structure currently favours traders and speculators, lim-

iting farmer participation. Mandis (APMC markets) are often controlled by cartels that suppress prices, preventing farmers from receiving fair compensation.

While platforms like NCDEX and MCX exist for commodity trading, they remain inaccessible to small farmers due to a lack of financial literacy and a proper warehouse receipt system. This forces many into distress sales at low prices, exacerbating their vulnerability.

International institutions such as the World Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) have criticised India's MSP system as an economic distortion. Their market-driven recommendations benefit large

agribusiness corporations while ignoring India's agrarian realities, such as fragmented landholdings, inadequate storage, and climate uncertainties. The MSP debate, shaped by these institutions, serves multinational trading firms rather than Indian farmers. The CCZ model offers a paradigm shift toward farmer-led economic hubs.

These zones integrate cooperatives, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), storage units, processing centres, and digital platforms to ensure stable prices, fair trade, and better incomes. Instead of relying solely on MSP, CCZs provide an "MSP Plus" model where farmers receive either MSP or a higher market-driven price. CCZs establish



cooperative-led procurement and storage facilities, allowing farmers to sell at optimal prices. By participating in commodity trading through cooperatives, farmers can hedge risks and benefit from price appreciation. Digital platforms and cooperative aggregation enable direct trading on national and global markets, reducing

reliance on intermediaries. Storage infrastructure within CCZs stabilises prices and minimises post-harvest losses. Farmers can avoid immediate distress sales through cooperative warehouses and cold storage facilities. Integrating value addition and processing centres ensures that raw produce is transformed into higher-value products, increasing farmer profitability.

Through e-commerce and direct sales channels, CCZs create a transparent, farmer-centric market where farmers dictate prices. Technology plays a crucial role, with AI-based price forecasting, blockchain-enabled transparency and mobile trading platforms providing real-time pricing and secure transac-

tions. Financial literacy programs will equip farmers with knowledge of credit, crop insurance and hedging mechanisms. Successful global models highlight the potential of cooperative-driven commodity management.

The Netherlands, Canada, and India's Amul Dairy Model exemplify how cooperatives can drive agricultural prosperity. Extending this approach to grains, pulses and horticultural products can create a national network of farmer-owned enterprises. CCZs will enhance farmer earnings, reduce post-harvest losses and generate employment in storage, processing and marketing. This system reduces reliance on government procurement,

empowering farmers to control their economic destinies. With the right policies and cooperative leadership, CCZs can make Indian agriculture self-sufficient, prosperous, and globally competitive. The time has come for farmers to transition from survival to prosperity. CCZs provide the roadmap for this transformation, countering misleading narratives from international financial institutions. The CCZ model is more than an idea—it is a movement poised to redefine India's agricultural landscape and place farmers at the center of economic progress.

(The writer was a member of the high-level MSP committee, Ministry of Agriculture; views are personal)

Hamas must be eradicated: Rubio

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Sunday fully endorsed Israel's war aims in the Gaza Strip, saying Hamas "must be eradicated" and throwing the future of the shaky ceasefire into further doubt. Rubio met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem at the start of a regional tour, where he is likely to face pushback from Arab leaders over President Donald Trump's proposal to transfer the Palestinian population out of the Gaza Strip and redevelop it under US ownership. Netanyahu has welcomed the plan, and said he and Trump have a "common strategy" for Gaza's future. Echoing Trump, he said "the gates of hell would be open" if Hamas does not release dozens of remaining hostages abducted in its Oct 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war. Their remarks came just two weeks before the first phase of the ceasefire is set to end. The second phase, in which Hamas is to release dozens of remaining hostages in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a lasting truce and the withdrawal of Israeli forces, has yet to be negotiated. Rubio said Hamas "cannot continue as a military or government force." "As long as it stands as a force that can govern or as a force that can administer or as a force that can threaten by use of violence, peace becomes impossible," Rubio said. "It must be eradicated."

Such language could complicate efforts to continue talks with Hamas, which, despite suffering heavy losses in the war, remains intact and in control of Gaza. The Israeli military meanwhile said it carried out an airstrike early Sunday on people who approached its forces in southern Gaza. The Hamas-run Interior Ministry said the strike killed three of its policemen while they were securing the entry of aid trucks near Rafah, on the Egyptian border. Hamas said that attack was a "serious violation" of the ceasefire and accused Netanyahu of trying to sabotage the deal. Resuming the war could be a death sentence for the remaining hostages and may not succeed in annihilating Hamas, which survived a 15-month Israeli onslaught and quickly reasserted control over Gaza when the ceasefire took hold last month. Netanyahu has signalled readiness to resume the war after the current stage and has offered Hamas a chance to surrender and send its top leaders into exile. Hamas has rejected such a scenario. Netanyahu also has yet to approve the entry of mobile homes and heavy machinery into the Gaza Strip, as required by the ceasefire agreement. Hamas had threatened to hold up the release of hostages last week over the issue, raising fears the ceasefire could unravel, before proceeding with the release of three captives based on what it said were assurances from Arab mediators. An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the issue would be discussed in the coming days and that Israel was coordinating with the United States. In another sign of the two allies closing ranks, Israel's Defense Ministry said it received a shipment of 2,000-pound (900-kg) MK-84 munitions from the United States. The Biden administration had paused a shipment of such bombs last year over concerns about civilian casualties in Gaza. In a radio interview last week, Rubio indicated that Trump's proposal was in part aimed at pressuring Arab states to come up with their own postwar plan that would be acceptable to Israel, which says Hamas can have no role in Gaza. He also appeared to suggest that Arab countries send in troops to combat Hamas. "If someone has a better plan, and we hope they do, if the Arab countries have a better plan, then that's great," Rubio said Thursday on the "Clay and Buck Show." But "Hamas has guns," he added. "Someone has to confront those guys. It's not going to be American soldiers. And if the countries in the region can't figure that piece out, then Israel is going to have to do it and then we're back to where we've been." For Arab leaders, facilitating the mass expulsion of Palestinians or battling Palestinian militants on behalf of Israel are both nightmare scenarios. Either would open them up to fierce domestic criticism and potentially destabilise an already volatile region. Egypt says it will host an Arab summit on Feb 27 and is working with other countries on a counterproposal that would allow for Gaza to be rebuilt without removing its population. Human rights groups say the expulsion of Palestinians would likely violate international law. Egypt has warned that any mass influx of Palestinians from Gaza would undermine its nearly half-century-old peace treaty with Israel, a cornerstone of American influence in the region. Arab and Muslim countries have until now conditioned any support for postwar Gaza on a return to Palestinian governance with a pathway to statehood in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war. The Biden administration spent months rallying regional powers behind such plans, but they fizzled as Israel ruled out not only a Palestinian state but also any role in Gaza for the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, whose forces were driven out when Hamas seized power there in 2007. Hamas has said it is willing to relinquish power in Gaza but insists on Palestinian rule.

Rubio is also set to visit the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, regional heavyweights that have rejected any mass displacement of Palestinians and would be key to any regional response. The United Arab Emirates was the driving force behind the 2020 Abraham Accords in which four Arab states normalised relations with Israel during Trump's previous term. Trump hopes to expand the accords to include Saudi Arabia, potentially offering closer US defence ties, but the kingdom has said it will not normalise relations with Israel without a pathway to a Palestinian state. Rubio will not be visiting Egypt or Jordan, close US allies at peace with Israel that have refused to accept any influx of Palestinian refugees. Trump has at times suggested he might slash US aid to the two countries, which could be devastating for their economies, if they don't comply. He is also skipping Qatar, which along with Egypt had served as a key mediator with Hamas in brokering the ceasefire. Trump took credit for the ceasefire, which was reached in the closing days of the Biden administration after his Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, joined the talks. But more recently, Trump has suggested that Israel resume the war if the remaining dozens of hostages are not released sooner than planned.

Official: Suspect in Austria stabbing case had 'Islamic terror motive'

PTI ■ VIENNA

Austrian authorities said the stabbing of six passersby that left a 14-year-old boy dead was carried out by a man with possible connections to the Islamic State group who appeared to have acted alone. The suspect, a 23-year-old Syrian, was arrested after the attack in the southern city of Villach on Saturday. Five others were wounded, two of them seriously. "This is an Islamist attack with an IS connection by an attacker who radicalized himself within a very short time via the internet online," said Interior Minister Gerhard Karner told reporters in Villach Sunday. As the focus shifted to migration and asylum-seekers, Karner said that it will ultimately be necessary to "carry out a mass screening without cause because this assassin was not conspicuous." He did not elaborate, but Austria's far-right leader Herbert Kickl, whose party won a national election four months ago, called for "a rigorous crackdown on asylum" in the wake of the attack. State Gov. Peter Kaiser thanked a 42-year-old man, also a Syrian working for a food delivery company who drove toward the suspect and helped prevent the situation from getting worse. "This shows how closely terrorist evil but also human good can be united in one and the same nationality." The mayor of Villach, Gunther Albel, said the attack was a "stab in the heart of the city." According to state police director Michaela Kohlweiss, police searched the suspect's apartment with sniffer dogs and found IS flags on the walls. No weapons or dangerous objects were found, she added but police seized mobile telephones. Police were investigating whether the suspect had any accomplices. "The current picture is that of a lone perpetrator," Kohlweiss said. It is assumed that the suspect, who was not known to police, was quickly radicalised online, she said. Police presence will be increased in the streets of Villach and at events in the weeks ahead, Kohlweiss added. The attacker used a folding knife, Kohlweiss said. Those wounded include two 15-year-old boys, a 28-year-old man, and a 36-year-old man. Four of them are receiving hospital treatment and one is being treated for minor injuries. This marks the second deadly jihadi attack in Austria in recent years. In November 2020, a man who had previously attempted to join the Islamic State group carried out a rampage in Vienna, armed with an automatic rifle and a fake explosive vest, killing four people before being fatally shot by police. Residents began placing candles at the site of the attack in the city of about 60,000 inhabitants. A group of young people, who knew the boy who died in attack, gathered at the crime scene on Sunday morning to mourn and tearfully light candles, local media reported. Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen called the attack "horrific." "No words can undo the suffering, the horror, the fear. My thoughts are with the family of the deceased victim and the injured," he posted on X. The Free Syrian Community of Austria issued a statement on Facebook distancing itself from the attack and expressing its deepest condolences to the victims' families. "We all had to flee Syria, our home country, because we were no longer safe there — no one left their country voluntarily. We are grateful to have found asylum and protection in Austria," the association said. "Finally, we would like to emphasize: Anyone who causes strife and disturbs the peace of society does not represent the Syrians who have sought and received protection here," the statement concluded. Carnival procession cancelled as police gather evidence Villach, a popular tourist destination near the borders of Italy and Slovenia, is known for its laid-back atmosphere, which blends Mediterranean and Alpine traditions.

Finnish leader urges Europe to firm up Ukraine's hand for US-sought talks with Russia to end war

PTI ■ MUNICH

Finland's president on Sunday urged the rearming of Ukraine and putting "maximum pressure on Russia" through sanctions and asset freezes in the run-up to possible negotiations sought by the US on ending the war. France was set to host a meeting to help firm up Europe's answer to assertive American diplomacy. Alexander Stubb and other European leaders at the final day of the Munich Security Conference on Sunday sought to firm up how the European Union can move from talk to more action and stay relevant as Washington pushes to stop the fighting. He laid out three phases: "pre-negotiation", ceasefire and long-term peace negotiation. "The first phase is the pre-negotiation, and this is a moment when we need to rearm Ukraine and put maximum pressure on Russia, which means sanctions, which means frozen assets, so that Ukraine begins these negotiations from a position of strength," he said.

There were early signs of efforts for a quick reaction from EU leaders. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot confirmed Sunday that French President Emmanuel Macron will convene leading European countries for an emergency "working meeting" on Monday in Paris to discuss next steps for Ukraine after the US announcements last week. Barrot spoke on public broadcaster France-Info. "The president of the Republic will bring together the main European nations tomorrow for discussions on European security," Barrot said, adding, "These meetings are very frequent." He emphasised that European leaders remain in "constant contact". News reports said Prime Ministers Keir Starmer of Britain, Mette Frederiksen of Denmark, and Donald Tusk of Poland were among those set to attend. "A wind of unity is blowing over Europe, as we perhaps have not felt since the COVID period," Barrot added, underscoring the growing sense of cohesion among European allies. US President Donald Trump's push for a quick way out of the Ukraine war has stirred concern and uncertainty in Munich. After a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week, Trump said he and Putin would likely meet soon to negotiate a peace deal over Ukraine. Trump later assured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy he also would have a seat at the table. US officials have indicated that European nations, however, would not be involved. "Don't underestimate Trump as a negotiator, I genuinely believe that Putin is baffled and afraid what might be coming from there," Stubb said. "Right now, the ball is in our court here in Europe. We need to convince the Americans where's the value added, and then get back into the table." "I think in Europe we need to talk less and do more," he added later. President Edgars Rinkevics of Latvia, which like Finland borders Russia, agreed that "if we are strong, if we have something to offer ... then we are going to



Protesters demanding the immediate release of hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Saturday

'US offers Ukraine access to minerals, with little in return'

PTI ■ MUNICH

administration has indicated it is interested in accessing them to reduce dependence on China but Zelenskyy said any exploitation would need to be tied to security guarantees for Ukraine that would deter future Russian aggression. "For me is very important the connection between some kind of security guarantees and some kind of investment," the Ukrainian president said. Zelenskyy did not go into details about why he instructed his officials not to sign the document, which was given to Ukrainian officials on Wednesday by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bassett on a visit to Kyiv. "It's a colonial agreement and Zelenskyy cannot sign it," the former senior official said. White House National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes did not explicitly confirm the offer, but said in a statement that "President Zelenskyy is being short-sighted about the excellent opportunity the Trump administration has presented to Ukraine." The Trump administration has grown weary of sending additional US aid to Ukraine and Hughes said a minerals deal would allow American taxpayers to "recoup" money sent to Kyiv, while growing Ukraine's economy. Hughes added that the White House believes "binding economic ties with the United States will be the best guarantee against

future aggression and an integral part of lasting peace." He added: "The US recognises this, the Russians recognise this, and the Ukrainians must recognise this." US officials in discussions with their Ukrainian counterparts in Munich were commercially minded and largely concentrated on the specifics of exploring the minerals and how to form a possible partnership to do that with Ukraine, the senior official said. The potential value of the deposits in Ukraine has not yet been discussed, with much unexplored or close to the front line. The US proposal apparently did not take into account how the deposits would be secured in the event of continuing Russian aggression. The official suggested the US did not have "ready answers", to that question and that one of their takeaways from discussions in Munich will be how to secure any mineral extraction operation in Ukraine involving people and infrastructure. Any deal must be in accordance with Ukrainian law and acceptable to the Ukrainian people, the senior Ukrainian official said. "Subsoil belongs to Ukrainians under the Constitution," Kseniia Orynychak, founder of the National Association of Mining Industry of Ukraine, previously told the AP, suggesting a deal would need popular support.

Rwanda-backed rebels reach Congo's second largest city

PTI ■ BUKAVU

Rwanda-backed rebels wrenched the centre of east Congo's second largest city, Bukavu, on Sunday morning and took control of the South Kivu province administrative office after little resistance from government forces, many of whom fled the rebels' advance. Associated Press journalists witnessed scores of residents cheering on the M23 rebels in central Bukavu on Sunday morning as they walked and drove around the city centre after a dayslong march from the region's major city of Goma 63 miles (101 kilometres) away, which they captured late last month. Several parts of the city, however, remained deserted with residents indoors. The M23 rebels are the most prominent of more than 100 armed groups vying for control of Congo's mineral-rich east, and are supported by some 4,000 troops from neighbouring Rwanda, according to the UN. It was not clear if the rebels had taken decisive control of the city of about 1.3 million people. Their presence in central Bukavu is an unprecedented expansion of the rebels' reach in their yearslong fighting with Congolese forces. Unlike in 2012 when they only seized Goma in the fighting connected to ethnic tension,

Next BRICS summit in Rio de Janeiro

Sao Paulo (PTI): The Brazilian government announced Saturday that the next BRICS summit will take place in Rio de Janeiro on July 6-7. Brazil will chair the bloc of developing economies through 2025 and said it will focus on promoting global governance reform and cooperation among Global South countries, according to a statement from the federal government. BRICS was established in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with South Africa joining in 2010 as a counterbalance to the Group of Seven leading industrialised nations. Last year, the bloc expanded by adding Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Saudi Arabia has also been invited to join. Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Malaysia have formally applied for membership, and several other countries have expressed interest. Recently, the bloc welcomed Indonesia as one of its 11 members and Nigeria as a "partner country," a designation introduced at the 2024 summit in Kazan. Brazil said the partner countries are also invited to participate in the summit and may attend other meetings if there is consensus among members. "We will make crucial decisions for development, cooperation, and improving the lives of all the inhabitants of these countries," said Mauro Vieira, Brazil's foreign minister.

Pope enjoys breakfast after second night in hospital

Rome (PTI): Pope Francis read the newspapers and had breakfast on Sunday after a second night sleeping well at the hospital where the 88-year-old pope is being treated for a respiratory tract infection, the Vatican said. Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said he expected to provide a further update later in the day. He noted that substantially new detailed medical information may not be forthcoming given it's a Sunday. The Argentine pope, a known workaholic who keeps up a gruelling pace despite his many ailments, was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital on Friday after a week-long bout of bronchitis worsened. It was his fourth hospitalization since his 2013 election and raised questions about his increasingly precarious health. Doctors confirmed a respira-

toxy tract infection and prescribed "absolute rest" alongside unspecified drug therapies. Francis skipped his traditional Sunday noon blessing, declining to even come to his hospital window to wave to a small crowd below that had gathered in hopes of cheering him on. The @Pontifex social media account, which is not written by the pope himself, thanked people for their prayers on Sunday. "Thank you for the affection, prayer and closeness with which you are accompanying me in these days," the post read. Francis had part of one lung removed after a lung infection when he was a young man and is prone to respiratory infections. In 2023, he spent three days at Gemelli to be treated for what he later revealed was an acute case of pneumonia. Despite his February 6 bronchi-

tis diagnosis, Francis had kept up a frenetic pace of late, packing his days with private and public audiences while taking on the added obligations of steering the Catholic Church through its Holy Year. The Vatican has cancelled his events through Monday at least. On Sunday, a Holy Year Mass he was supposed to preside over for visiting artists was instead celebrated by the Vatican culture minister. The Vatican hasn't specified what type of respiratory tract infection the pope has. Sometimes bronchitis can lead to pneumonia, a deeper and far more serious infection of the lungs' air sacs. Treatment varies by severity but can include providing oxygen through a nasal tube or mask, intravenous fluids — and treatment of the underlying cause of the infection.

Russian opp struggles a year after Navalny's death

PTI ■ MOSCOW

The stunning news came in a terse statement from the Russian penitentiary service a year ago: Opposition leader Alexei Navalny had died in the Arctic Circle penal colony where he was serving a prison sentence.



Navalny's death was a "point of no return" and left an impossible void to fill, said Oleg Ivanov, a supporter who left Russia after it invaded Ukraine in 2022 and lives in Los Angeles.

In the year since the death of Navalny at age 47, the Russian opposition has struggled to find its footing against President Vladimir Putin. Outlawed at home and operating from exile abroad without Putin's fiercest foe, it has failed to form a united front and a clear plan of action against the Kremlin. Instead, rival groups have traded accusations that some see as efforts to discredit each other and vie for influence.

Navalny's death was a "point of no return" and left an impossible void to fill, said Oleg Ivanov, a supporter who left Russia after it invaded Ukraine in 2022 and lives in Los Angeles. "Alexei was the only hope that Russia has, at least potentially and hypothetically, some kind of a meaningful leader who could unite all the people willing to change something in our country, in our lives," Ivanov said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Ivanov, who joined the mass protests that erupted across Russia in 2017, said that since Navalny's death, "I'm afraid that there is no one left who could somehow resist" the Kremlin.

Navalny is the second opposition leader whose sudden death shocked Russia and the world. In February 2015, prominent politician Boris Nemtsov was gunned down on a bridge near the Kremlin just days before he, Navalny and others were expected to lead a mass anti-Putin rally.

Navalny's vision of a "beautiful Russia of the future," where leaders are freely and fairly elected, corruption is tamed, and democratic institutions work, earned him widespread support in the vast country. His charisma and sardonic humour drew young, energetic activists to his side — a team that resembled "a fancy startup" rather than a clandestine revo-

lutionary operation, according to his memoir, "Patriot," released eight months after his death. Together they created colourful, professionally produced videos exposing corruption by government officials. Millions viewed them on YouTube and tens of thousands attended rallies even as authorities cracked down harder on dissent.

As Navalny aspired to public office, authorities responded by bringing multiple criminal charges against him, his allies and even relatives. Regularly jailed, he was physically attacked by Kremlin supporters, one of whom threw green dye in his face that nearly cost him the vision in one eye. He finished second in the race for Moscow mayor in 2013 amid allegations of vote rigging. In 2017, he announced plans to run for president and set up a sprawling network of regional offices across the country, recruiting local activists. When he was eventually barred from running, he kept those offices open, extending his reach across Russia's 11 time zones.

In 2020, Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent attack he blamed on the Kremlin, which always denied involvement. His family and allies fought to have him flown to Germany for treatment and recovery. Five months later, he returned to Russia, where he was immediately arrested and imprisoned for the last three years of his life. But even behind bars, in incredibly harsh conditions of constant pressure and surveillance, Navalny found a way to relay messages. His popular social media accounts were regularly updated with sarcastic vignettes about prison life and political statements. Authorities blamed Navalny's

death, announced Feb. 16, 2024, on natural causes — a sudden spike in blood pressure and chronic diseases. His family and allies reject that and insist he was killed on orders from the Kremlin — accusations its officials deny. Tens of thousands of people attended his funeral in Moscow on March 1 in a rare show of defiance in a country where any street rally or even single pickets often result in immediate arrest. For days afterward, people brought flowers to his grave. Longtime ally Vladimir Ashurkov described Navalny as "a political figure that basically defined the generation of Russians over the last 15 years."

"While he was alive, even from prison, he was raising his voice against the war and against Putin's tyranny," Ashurkov told AP in London. His widow, Yulia Navalnaya, has vowed to continue his fight. She has recorded regular video addresses to her supporters and has met Western leaders and top officials, advocating for Russians who oppose Putin and his war in Ukraine. Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation continues to expose corruption in Russia in colourful videos and organizes occasional protests abroad, condemning Putin and the war in Ukraine. A landmark East-West prisoner swap in August freed other key dissidents like Ilya Yashin and Vladimir Kara-Murza, promising to reinvigorate the opposition movement unmoored by Navalny's death. So far, however, they haven't gone beyond meetings with Western officials and supporters in exile, or a few rallies — actions unlikely to dent Putin's war effort or his ever-growing crackdowns that sweep up remaining dissidents and ordinary Russians alike. Ashurkov describes the situation in Russia and Ukraine now as "dark times" and "difficult times."

Turkish delegation meets Kurdish leader in Iraq for PKK peace talks

Baghdad (PTI): A Turkish opposition party delegation arrived in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region Sunday against the backdrop of peace efforts between Ankara and a banned Kurdish separatist movement in Turkey.

The delegation led by Sirri Sureyya Onder and Pervin Buldan, two senior officials with the pro-Kurdish People's Equality and Democracy Party, or DEM, in Turkey, met with Masoud Barzani, the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party — the dominant Kurdish party in Iraq — in Irbil Sunday. Barzani's office said in a statement they discussed "the peace process in Turkey" and that the Turkish delegation conveyed a message from Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of Turkey's banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. Barzani "stressed the need for all parties to intensify their efforts and endeavors to enable the peace process to

achieve the desired results" and reiterated "his full readiness to provide assistance and support to the peace process in Turkey and make it a success," the statement said. The DEM party has long pressed for greater democracy in Turkey and rights for the country's Kurdish population, and also to improve conditions for the imprisoned Ocalan. Ocalan, 75, founded the PKK, in 1978, which began an armed insurrection for an autonomous Kurdish state in Turkey's southeast in 1984, costing tens of thousands of lives. The group is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey and its Western allies. The central Iraqi government in Baghdad announced a ban on the group, which maintains bases in northern Iraq, last year. Captured in 1999 and convicted of treason, Ocalan has been serving a life sentence on Imrali island in the Marmara Sea. The government of Turkish President

Recep Tayyip Erdogan has traditionally had an antagonistic relationship with the left-wing DEM party, frequently ousting its elected officials on charges of ties to the PKK and replacing them with state appointed officials. However, this icy relationship began thawing last October, when Erdogan's coalition partner, far-right nationalist politician Devlet Bahçeli suggested that Ocalan could be granted parole, if his group renounces violence and disbands. The peace effort comes at a time when Erdogan may need support from the DEM party in parliament to enact a new constitution that could allow him to stay in power for unlimited terms. The Turkish Constitution doesn't allow Erdogan, who has been in power since 2003 as prime minister and later as president, to run for office again unless an early election is called — something that would also require the support of the pro-Kurdish party. Even as the latest peace efforts

are underway, Erdogan's government has widened a crackdown on the opposition, arresting journalists and politicians. Several elected Kurdish mayors have been ousted from office and replaced with state appointed officials, the latest this Saturday, when the mayor of Van municipality in eastern Turkey was removed from his post and replaced with the state-appointed governor. Meanwhile, conflict is ongoing between Turkish-backed armed groups and Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria. Turkey views the Syrian Democratic Forces, a US-backed military Kurdish alliance in Syria, as an extension of the PKK. The SDF is in negotiations with the new government in Damascus following the ouster of then Syrian President Bashar Assad in a rebel offensive. While most former insurgent groups have agreed to dissolve and integrate into the new Syrian army, the SDF has refused so far.

Woman killed as Israeli forces fire on returnees to Lebanon

Beirut (PTI): A woman was killed and several other people wounded Sunday when Israeli forces opened fire on a group of residents attempting to return to the village of Houla in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese state-run news agency reported.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military on the incident, which comes two days before the deadline for implementation of a ceasefire agreement that ended the latest war between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah in late November, including a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. The original deadline was in late January but Israel and Lebanon agreed to extend it to Feb 18. Hours before they agreed to the extension on Jan 27, hundreds of protesters attempted to enter villages still occupied by the Israeli army to demand its withdrawal, and Israeli forces opened fire in several locations, killing more than 20 people.

Federal cuts weaken election security against foreign interference

New York (PTI): When a suspicious video of ballots being ripped up in Pennsylvania gained attention on social media last October, federal agencies responded quickly and called it out as Russian disinformation.

On Election Day in November, bomb threats to polling places in numerous states caused relatively few disruptions to voting. It's one of the many scenarios covered by the nation's cybersecurity agency in its outreach to state and local officials. The Trump administration's downsizing and disbanding of federal agencies has hit efforts that improve election security and monitor foreign influence. That could create gaps for America's enemies to exploit the next time the country holds a major election. "Our adversaries are upping their game every day," said former Department of Homeland Security cyber chief Suzanne Spaulding. "I'm worried that we are, at the same time, tearing down our

defences." Last week, new Attorney General Pam Bondi disbanded an FBI task force focused on investigating foreign influence operations, including those that target US elections. She also limited the scope of enforcement actions on people who do not disclose lobbying on behalf of foreign governments. She wrote that the changes would "free resources to address more pressing priorities, and end risks of further weaponization and abuses of prosecutorial discretion." The Trump administration also has made sweeping cuts at the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, which oversees the nation's critical infrastructure, including election systems. On Saturday, a senior DHS official said mass firings of federal employees in probationary status had resulted in cuts of more than 130 employees at CISA. It was not immediately clear whether those included 17 employees who had worked

on election security who were placed on leave last week. The DHS official on Saturday also said CISA was pausing all election security activities pending a review of their funding, activities and personnel. The agency was ending its involvement in a voluntary program that shared information about cyber defences with state and local election officials. The actions send a message that securing US elections against interference from countries such as Russia, China and Iran is no longer a federal government priority, said Larry Norden, an election expert with the Brennan Center for Justice. "I think we would be naive to think that the bad guys don't get that message, too, that there's going to be less of a cop on the beat to protect our elections," he said. State and local governments run elections in the US, but federal support in recent years has helped them protect against escalating threats, coordinate with other

election offices on security and expose foreign influence campaigns designed to undermine voter confidence. Los Angeles County Registrar Dean Logan recalled two times when the federal government was the first to be aware of a threat toward his office. In 2023, federal officials warned of a suspicious envelope heading to its election facilities early enough that it could be intercepted. In 2024, the federal government notified him of an emailed bomb threat to his office before he was aware of it. "We can't be the eyes and ears to see everything," Logan said. "We're focused on administering the election." There are certain elements of that work that only the FBI can do, said Darren Linvill, co-director of the Media Forensics Hub at Clemson University, which investigated malign influence campaigns in 2024. He said the FBI's task force "will be missed in 2026 and beyond". The top Democrats on the Senate and House com-

mittees overseeing election legislation wrote a letter last week to CISA's top leaders to express "grave concern" over the changes and request more information about how those changes will affect election security.

Trump has sought to stop the government's tracking of online misinformation, something he has likened to censorship targeting conservatives. Though Trump signed the bill to create CISA in 2018, he fired its director, Christopher Krebs, following the 2020 election that Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

Krebs had vouched for the security of the vote as Trump continued to claim it was rigged. Biden's administration embraced government monitoring of foreign influence and frequently alerted the public to such operations in 2024. An FBI investigation also led to the indictment of three Iranian operatives for hacking into Trump's campaign.

Dangerous flooding hits US Southeast

Snow, frigid cold forecast for Northeast, Plains

PTI ■ LOUISVILLE

Heavy rains and dangerous flooding struck the Southeast US as much of the East endured a renewed round of harsh, soggy weather on Saturday, with at least one fatality reported in Kentucky. A man was found dead in floodwaters in Clay County, Kentucky, WKYT-TV reported. Clay County Emergency Management officials did not immediately respond to a message from The Associated Press seeking additional information.



This photo provided by the Warren County, Kentucky, Sheriff's Office shows a partially submerged car outside of Bowling Green, Kentucky, on Saturday

Water submerged cars and buildings in Kentucky and mudslides blocked roads in Virginia. Both of the states were under flood warnings, along with Tennessee and Arkansas. The National Weather Service warned residents to stay off the roads. Forecasters also predicted weekend snowstorms in the Northeast and the threat of tornadoes for the Mississippi Valley. West Virginia Gov Patrick Morrisey issued a state of emergency in 10 southern counties Saturday night due to heavy rains and flooding, allowing the state to use its resources to help local authorities. Kentucky Gov Andy Beshear preemptively declared a state of emergency in Kentucky, where flash flooding was expected into Sunday. Flash flooding hit some roads in Bowling Green and parts of western Kentucky could face up to 8 inches (20.3 centimeters) of rain.

Beshear said in a post late Saturday that he had written to the White House requesting an emergency disaster declaration and federal funds for impacted areas. The Kentucky River Medical Center in the city of Jackson said closed its emergency department and was transferring all patients to two other hospitals in the region. The hospital said it would re-evaluate conditions Sunday morning to determine when it can safely reopen. The north fork of the Kentucky River was forecast to crest nearly 14 feet (4.3 meters) above flood stage that afternoon, the weather service said. Photos posted by authorities and residents on social media showed cars and buildings underwater in south-central and eastern Kentucky. In Buchanan County, Virginia, the sheriff's office said multiple roads were blocked by mudslides. The Simpson County Office of Emergency Management in Kentucky said authorities performed several rescues from stalled-out vehicles in floodwaters. "Stay home if you can," the office said on Facebook. Flash flooding was possible in the Mississippi, Tennessee and Ohio valleys, the weather service said. In Tennessee, flash flood warnings were issued for much of the middle of the

state through the evening. The National Weather Service called the expected rain a "major, potentially historic, flash flood event." Meanwhile heavy snow was expected to blanket much of New England and then transition to sleet, making travel nearly impossible. The heaviest accumulations, possibly a foot (30.5 centimeters) or more, were expected in upstate New York and portions of northern New England. "Ice accumulations up to a quarter inch are forecast for some areas, making driving conditions dangerous. Heavy icing in some locations may result in downed trees and power outages," the weather service warned. Snow and arctic temperatures swept much of the Midwest and Upper Plains, covering roads in eastern Nebraska, northern Iowa and much of Wisconsin. Winter weather advisories were issued for parts of those states and Michigan, with up to 4 inches (10.6 centimeters) of snow predicted throughout Iowa, southern Wisconsin and most of Michigan by Sunday evening. Meteorologists said the US was about to get its 10th and coldest polar vortex stretching event this season, with the northern Rockies and northern Plains first in line. Weather forces in the Arctic are combining to

push the chilly air that usually stays near the North Pole into the US and Europe. In Denver, where temperatures were expected to dip as low as 14 degrees (minus 10 degrees Celsius) over the weekend, the city opened shelters for those living on the streets. Forecasters reported an inch (2.5 centimeters) of snow falling every hour just north of Denver. In Boulder County, an unoccupied vehicle that was stuck in the snow after attempting to cross railroad tracks was struck Saturday afternoon and mangled by a train. There were no injuries, but authorities warned drivers about slick roads.

The weather service also warned of extreme cold in the Upper Plains over the coming days, with wind chills ranging from minus 30 degrees (minus 34 degree Celsius) to as low as minus 60 (minus 51 degrees Celsius) in parts of western Montana, North Dakota, northern South Dakota and western Minnesota. People in those areas were urged to stay indoors and make provisions to shelter livestock and other animals. Dry weather returned to Southern California after the strongest storm of the year. But the risk of rock and mudslides on wildfire-scarred hillsides continued because dangerous slides can strike even after rain stops, particularly in areas where vegetation that helps keep soil anchored has burned away. Water, debris and boulders rushed down the mountain in the city of Sierra Madre on Thursday night, trapping at least one car in the mud and damaging several home garages with mud and debris. Bulldozers cleaned up mud-covered streets in the city of 10,000 people. A storm in the Sierra Nevada dumped 6 feet (1.8 meters) of snow over 36 hours. Two Mammoth Mountain ski patrol workers were caught in an avalanche during avalanche mitigation work Friday morning, the resort said in a Facebook post. One was extracted and was responsive, while the other was taken to a hospital with serious injuries.

Gold mine collapse kills 42 in Mali

PTI ■ BAMAKO (MALI)

A gold mine collapsed in eastern Mali, killing dozens of people and injuring many more, according to Malian television and officials in the Kenieba district where the accident occurred. It is the second major accident this year in the French-speaking West African country, which is one of Africa's top three gold producers. Late on Saturday, Malian television announced the collapse of the site at Bilali Koto in the commune of Dabia, with a provisional death toll of 42 and many injured. The prefect of Kenieba, who represents the government in the locality, confirmed the incident. "The death toll of 42 should be definitive," Mohamed Dicko told The Associated Press on Sunday. "The accident happened yesterday, Saturday. It was a landslide at a site run by Chinese nationals," said community leader Falaye Sissoko. Dicko said authorities were still trying to establish whether the mine was oper-

ating legally. This is the second time in less than a month that such an accident has occurred in Mali. On January 29, a landslide killed several gold miners, mostly women, in the Koulikoro region in the south of the country. In January last year, an unregulated gold mine collapsed near the capital, Bamako, killing more than 70 people. In recent years, there have been concerns that profits from unregulated mining in northern Mali could benefit extremists active in that part

of the country. "Gold is by far Mali's most important export, comprising more than 80 per cent of total exports in 2021," according to the International Trade Administration of the US Department of Commerce. It says more than 2 million people, or more than 10 per cent of Mali's population, depend on the mining sector for income. Artisanal gold mining is estimated to produce around 30 tonnes of gold a year and represents 6 per cent of Mali's annual gold production.

Will press Egypt to release your son: Starmer tells woman on hunger strike

London (PTI): British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has told a mother who has been on hunger strike for 140 days that he will press the Egyptian government to release her son.

In a statement Sunday, Starmer confirmed that he met Laila Soueif and said he will do "all that I can" to secure the release of Alaa Abd el-Fattah, a British-Egyptian dual national who has who has spent more than five years in an Egyptian prison, accused of "spreading false news" on social media. "We will continue to raise his case at the highest levels of the Egyptian government and press for his release," Starmer said. A representative of the family said the meeting took place on Friday morning inside the prime minister's offices at 10 Downing Street and that it was the first time the pair had met. Soueif, 68, has been on hunger strike since Sep 29, the day her son was supposed to be released, consuming nothing but herbal tea, black coffee and rehydration salts. After more than four months, Soueif has lost around 25 kg (55 pounds). She took her campaign directly to the Foreign Office in December, camping out in front of it every weekday to make sure officials notice her. When that yielded no results,

she switched in mid-January to the gates of Starmer's office — the famous black door of 10 Downing Street. "The great majority of mothers are prepared to die for their children; it just takes different forms," she said earlier this month. "Most mothers, if their children are in actual danger, you're prepared to die." One of Egypt's most prominent pro-democracy activists, the 43-year-old Abd el-Fattah has spent most of the past 14 years behind bars since taking part in the 2011 uprising that toppled former President Hosni Mubarak. His most recent crime was "liking" a Facebook post describing torture in Egyptian prisons. Abd el-Fattah has been in custody since September 2019, and was sentenced to five years in prison after a trial before an emergency security court. But when his release date came up last September, Egyptian authorities refused to count the more than two years he had spent in pre-trial detention and ordered him held until January 3, 2027. Thousands of critics of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi have been locked up under dire conditions after unjust trials, human rights groups say.

16 dead in 2 road mishaps in Pak

Islamabad (PTI): Sixteen people were killed and 45 others injured in two separate road accidents in Pakistan's Sindh province, according to police. In the first accident, five people were killed and 10 others were injured when the van they were travelling in collided with a trailer near Qazi Ahmed town of Sindh's Shaheed Benazirabad District on Saturday. Qazi Ahmed Station House Officer (SHO) Waseem Mirza

said the van was heading to Lal Shabbaz Qalandar's shrine in Jamshoro District's Sehwan city. "The speedy van initially hit a donkey cart followed by a major collision with a trailer coming from the opposite side," the Dawn newspaper quoted the police official as saying.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that Ramesh Kumar Sagar son of San Chand Sagar resident of village Kiba Rajpur Ludhiana Punjab, original allottee of Flat No. N-300 Jalvayu Vihar, Sector 25, Noida. Gautam Buddha Nagar has made GPA of the said flat No. N-300, Jalvayu Vihar, Sector 25, Noida to Mrs. Minati Sen wife of Praloy Kumar Sen resident N-300, Jalvayu Vihar, Sector 25, Noida 201301 whereas the registered Special Power of Attorney was made in favour of Sunjay Kumar Sen alias Sunderrajy Sen son of Praloy Kumar Sen resident of N-300, Jalvayu Vihar, Sector 25, Noida it was in the name of GPA No. 201301. After the death of GPA holder Minati Sen, now Sunderrajy Sen alias Sunderrajy Sen wants to transfer the said flat in the name of his daughter Genelia Sen through registered special power of attorney. If anyone has any objection in this regard, then within 30 days of publication of this notice, register your objection with all the evidence in the Group Housing Department, Noida Development Authority, Sector 5. No objection will be accepted later.

PUBLIC NOTICE

My Client, Parveen Kumar resident of H. No. 36, S/F Road No. 64, West Punjabi Bagh, West Delhi, Delhi-110026, hereby declare that I and my family have severed all ties from our daughter namely Neha Verma due to her actions. Despite our love and guidance, she chose to leave our home without consent and marry against our wishes. As a result, I state that I have no relation with Neha Verma from this day forward. She shall not be entitled to any claims, financial support, or rights concerning me, my family, or my assets in any manner whatsoever. This declaration is made with a heavy heart but is necessary due to her actions. The public is advised not to entertain any claims she may make in my name. Akash Swami (Advocate) Ch. No. 234, M.C. setalwad Lawyers Chamber Supreme Court of India, New Delhi-110001

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Prakshi Garg D/o Rajendra Garg and W/o Utkarsh Raizada R/o Flat A-412, Nav Nirman CGHS, Plot 6A, Sector-2, Dwarka, Delhi-110075 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Prakshi Raizada. PD(1521)C

India-US TRUST to enhance economic cooperation, infrastructure collaboration

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



President Donald Trump meets India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the White House in Washington PTI

India-United States (US) Transforming Relationship Utilising Strategic Technology (TRUST) will pave the way for economic and technological cooperation between the two countries, while focus on the IMEC framework will deepen collaboration in infrastructure and economic corridors, according to industry experts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump have agreed on the TRUST initiative, to emphasise on creating strong supply chains of critical minerals, advanced materials, and pharmaceuticals. As per a joint statement issued after the Trump-Modi meeting in Washington, both countries have decided to launch a recovery and processing initiative for strategic minerals such as lithium and rare earth. The two sides will also work together on economic corridors and connectivity infrastructure under the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and I2U2 frameworks. "TRUST initiative on critical minerals and advanced materials marks a significant

step toward economic and technological cooperation. PM's focus on the IMEC and the I2U2 Group reflects a strategic push for global connectivity, fostering economic integration across regions," said Naveen Jindal, the President of apex body Indian of Indian Steel Association (ISA) and Chairman Jindal Steel and Power Limited (JSPL). The emphasis on creating strong supply chains for

critical minerals, advanced materials, and pharmaceuticals is a significant step towards securing India's industrial future, particularly in sectors such as stainless steel, specialty alloys, and clean energy, Rajamani Krishnamurti, President, Indian Stainless Steel Development Association (ISSDA). Indrajit Mookerjee, Vice Chairman and Executive

Director, Texmaco Rail & Engineering, said, "The focus on building resilient supply chains for critical minerals like lithium and rare earth elements is significant, given their central role in the green energy transition and the growth of electric vehicle technologies. As a key player in infrastructure and railways, Texmaco sees immense potential in this collaboration for creating new opportunities in manufacturing and

processing technologies.' Gaurav Moda, Partner and Leader, Energy Sector, EY-Parthenon on India, said, "The establishment of these strategic partnerships could pave the way for significant advancements in sectors like defence, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, pharma and biotechnology. However, challenges such as ensuring the equitable distribution of these resources, maintaining global competitiveness, and addressing environmental concerns related to resource extraction will need to be carefully managed." Debasish Mishra, Chief Growth Officer, Deloitte South Asia, said, "The focus is on developing a robust, self-reliant industry, technological capabilities, and resilient critical minerals supply chain capable of meeting emerging needs of new age technologies. The country needs to build long-term mineral supply sources, embrace cutting-edge technologies and sustainable practices across exploration, extraction, processing, and recycling. The collaboration between India and the US will be a significant milestone in this regard."

Power producers urge Centre to extend renewable transmission charge waiver

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Power producers have asked the government to keep the waiver on inter-state transmission charges for renewable energy until 2030 to help clean energy take root more deeply in India's economy. A consultative meeting chaired by Minister for New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi was held on February 5, where Wind Independent Power Producers Association (WIPPA) and other associations shared their concerns and suggestions. A key demand from the players was to extend the waiver on inter-state transmission system (ISTS) charges, which is otherwise due to end on June 30 this year, sources aware of the matter said. Renewable energy players requested MNRE to extend the ISTS waiver till 2030 to promote investments in the sector and aid India's ambitious energy transition goals. Currently, charges are waived for 25 years for green power projects such as solar, wind, and hybrid projects, and battery energy and pump storage projects commissioned before June 30, 2025. The current ISTS waiver helps renewable energy developers avoid ₹0.4-1.8 per unit in

charges that would have incurred on moving electricity from producing state to consumption centres. This, sources said, is a substantial chunk of the total tariff. If ISTS waiver is not extended, it will lead to significant increase in tariff and make power generated from renewable sources uncompetitive vs other sources like coal, sources said adding this will also lead to an increase in procurement costs of electricity distribution companies. Many LOAs (letter of awards) would not convert to power purchase agreements (PPAs) if the waiver is rescinded in June 2025, industry players felt. On other hand, the cost of extending the waiver is nominal while the benefits are huge. It will help DISCOMs sign the pending 40 GW of PPAs as they would save 60-90 paise per unit. Further, industries will be motivated to decarbonise and opt for renewable energy projects. Both will help the country move towards the 500 GW mission. According to official data, transmission charges (without waiver) are approximately ₹52,691 Crore per year while the quantum of ISTS waiver is only around seven per cent at ₹3,602 Crore. For any extension of ISTS

waiver, heads of both Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and Ministry of Power are expected to meet soon to decide on the future course of action, sources added. India faces transmission constraints in its endeavour to meet renewable energy targets. Only Madhya Pradesh will have spare capacity in the future, while Rajasthan and Gujarat will not. States need to plan renewable and other power procurement as per the resource adequacy framework. At the meeting, concerns were raised about delays in closing letters of award (LOA) with power purchase agreements (PPA), leading to developer liabilities. New guidelines will aim to close LOA with PPA within a year. Additionally, it was pointed out at the meeting that transmission charges for developers were reduced to address such delays. There's a need to extend ISTS transmission charge waivers for renewable energy to keep distribution companies power procurement costs low. A phased reduction of these waivers could be considered to address the problem of socialisation of costs. However, this could lead to PPAs not materialising owing to increase in RE procurement cost, they said.

FPIs withdraw ₹21,272 Crore from equities



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The exodus of FPIs from the Indian equity markets continues as they pulled out ₹21,272 Crore in the first two weeks of this month, driven by global tensions after the US imposed tariffs on imports. This came following a net outflow of ₹78,027 Crore in January. With these, the total outflow by FPIs has reached ₹99,299 Crore - near ₹1 Lakh Crore - in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed. Going forward, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial

Services, believes that reversal of FPI strategy will happen when the dollar index moves down. According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth ₹21,272 Crore from Indian equities so far this month (till February 14). Market concerns heightened as United States (US) President Donald Trump imposed new tariffs on steel and aluminum imports and announced plans for reciprocal tariffs on several countries, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director-Research,

Morningstar Investment Research India, said. These developments reignited fears of a potential global trade war, prompting FPIs to re-evaluate their exposure to emerging markets, including India, he added. Also, Vipul Bhowar, Senior Director - Listed Investments, Waterfield Advisors, said, "shifts in global policies, especially those emerging from the US, are invoking a sense of uncertainty among FPIs, which in turn is reshaping their investment strategies in dynamic markets like India". On the domestic front, lackluster corporate earnings and persistent depreciation of the Indian rupee, which breached multi-year lows, further diminished the appeal of Indian assets, Srivastava said. On the other hand, FPIs were buyers in the debt market during the period. They put in ₹1,296 Crore into debt general limit and ₹206 Crore in debt voluntary retention route. The overall trend indicates a cautious approach by foreign investors, who scaled back investments in Indian equities significantly in 2024, with net inflows of just ₹427 Crore.

Japanese firms eye India in 'China Plus One' strategy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Post the Covid-19 pandemic, Japanese companies are eyeing India as a base as they adopt the 'China Plus One' strategy to diversify their manufacturing and supply chains to reduce dependence on China, experts from Deloitte said. The strategy involves establishing production facilities in alternative countries, with India emerging as a significant beneficiary. "Post-Covid, Japanese companies have been actively exploring China-plus supply chain strategies, with India emerging as a key destination. While some companies returned to Japan, others are looking at India not just as a manufacturing hub, but as a gateway to high-growth markets like the Middle East and Africa," Deloitte Japan CEO Kenichi Kimura said. While the sheer scale of India's domestic market is a major draw, what makes India even more compelling is its well-established business and talent networks across these regions. "While Japanese businesses have yet to fully tap into this potential, we see India as not

just a market, but a critical supply chain hub that can drive regional and global success," Kimura said. The Japanese government has actively supported this shift by allocating substantial funds to encourage companies to relocate production either domestically or to Southeast Asia. Japanese corporations are forming strategic partnerships and expanding operations in India to tap into its large domestic market and competitive labour costs. Deloitte South Asia CEO Romal Shetty said the 'China Plus One' strategy has prompted Japanese companies to explore and invest in India, aiming to diversify their supply chains and leverage the country's economic potential. "India has overtaken China as the biggest destination of Japanese FDI," he said, quoting data from Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO). Foreign direct investment (FDI) Balance of Payments Basis from Japan to China has declined significantly, from \$13 Billion in 2012 to around \$3 Billion in 2023. In contrast, India has experienced a steady rise in Japanese FDI, reaching \$6 Billion in 2023 - marking the

first time India has overtaken China in FDI inflows from Japan. Japanese investment in ASEAN nations has also been tapering off, as these markets have already absorbed substantial capital from Japanese corporations over the years. India is poised to attract a significant portion of the capital being redirected from China - a potential 'Wall of Capital' that could reshape the region's investment landscape. Throughout the period from 2000 to 2024, Japan has maintained its position as a premier source of foreign capital for India, channelling approximately \$44 Billion into the Indian economy over two decades. Among nations investing in India, Japan holds the fifth position in terms of cumulative FDI inflows, he said. India ranks number one, significantly ahead of other countries in the JIBC Report on Overseas Business Operations by Japanese Companies - indicating a shift away from being seen as a "promising" market to one with concrete business prospects. Shetty said M and A deals are also rising as Japanese

companies see merits in acquisitions to scale up operations. Over the past 10 years, over 200 inbound deals have taken place (20 plus deals a year between the Japan-India corridor). This shift has driven Japanese companies to enter growth markets and acquire businesses with innovative business models, he said. Shetty said not just manufacturing but Japanese companies are betting big on Indian startups that offer technology-driven innovative solutions. The Japanese interest in the startup ecosystem is something not seen before. "Japanese companies are showing a growing interest in India's dynamic startup ecosystem, recognising its immense potential for innovation and scalability. With strengths in deep tech, fintech, and digital solutions, Indian startups present valuable opportunities for collaboration. Our weekly 'Morning Pitch' events have attracted significant interest from large Japanese corporations and venture capitalists keen on exploring innovations from India," said Kimura.

Additionally, Japan's Deloitte Venture Support has sent an expatriate to Bengaluru, to leverage the potential in India. "We intend to work closely with local organisations to help Japanese corporations partner with startups in India and expand into local markets. "By investing in these cutting-edge technologies, Japanese firms are not only driving their own growth but also contributing to India's thriving entrepreneurial landscape," Kimura said. Shetty said India's digital ecosystem and fintech sector is a big success story. Digital payment adoption in India is bigger than Japan. Kimura said M and A-driven FDI is playing an increasingly significant role in Japan-India economic ties, with over 200 inbound deals in the past decade and a notable shift toward strategic majority transactions. As Japanese companies adapt to changing global dynamics, including reduced cross-shareholdings, and rising foreign ownership, they are actively seeking growth markets like India and investing in businesses with innovative models.

India registers over 29,500 drones



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than 29,500 drones are registered in India, with the national capital having the maximum number at 4,882, according to official data. After the national capital, the highest numbers of registered drones are in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra at 4,588 and 4,132, respectively. The data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) updated till January 29 showed that there were 29,501 registered drones. Other states that have a high number of registered drones include Haryana (3,689), Karnataka (2,516), Telangana (1,928), Gujarat (1,338) and Kerala (1,318), as per the data shared by the civil aviation ministry with the Rajya Sabha this week. So far, the regulator has issued 96 Type Certificates to different Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) models or drones, and out of them, 65 models are for agriculture purpose. Each registered drone is issued a Unique Identification Number (UIN) from the Digital Sky

Platform, which is operated by the DGCA. DGCA-authorized Remote Pilot Training Organisations (RPTOs) have issued 22,466 Remote Pilot Certificates (RPCs). Sharing the data as part of a written reply, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol also said the central government has taken various steps to increase the usage of drone technology across various sectors. Among other measures, the ministry amended norms in August last year whereby the requirement of passport for the registration and de-registration/transfer of a drone was scrapped. Since then, voter ID, ration card or driving licence can be used for registration and de-registration or transfer of drones. There is a drone airspace map, which is divided into three zones - green, yellow and red. There is no need for prior permission to operate drones in the green zone while the Air Traffic Control (ATC) concerned has to approve operations of drones in the yellow zone.

HFCL sets ₹10,000 Crore revenue target

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic telecom gear maker Himachal Futuristic Communications Limited (HFCL) is betting big on growth from overseas sales and uptake of defence supplies as the company looks to become a ₹10,000 Crore revenue enterprise, a top company official said. Mahendra Nahata Managing Director HFCL during the company's recent investor call said the firm had an order book of ₹10,000 Crore as on December 31, 2024. "We are increasing our presence by appointing our own employees, distributors, and dealers in key global markets. Our goal is to achieve a substantial rise in export

revenue from our optic fibre segment, with a significant portion of revenue coming from international markets in the coming years. Additionally, we aim for a considerable share of our telecom segment revenue to be export-driven," Nahata said. He said the company's board has granted approval for a strategic expansion into Europe by way of setting up an optical fibre cable manufacturing facility in Poland. "The European Commission on December 16, 2024 announced the imposition of definitive anti-dumping duty on all other Indian OFC manufacturers, reaffirming HFCL's exemption," he said. The company has posted revenue of around ₹1,012 Crore

in the December 2024 quarter. Nahata said HFCL is likely to add a revenue of ₹350-400 Crore in the current quarter but may not achieve the target of ₹2,000 Crore set for the fiscal year due to shortfall in supply of some equipment on account of delay in customer readiness, trials, etc. In the December quarter, the company bagged an advance work order worth about ₹2,501.30 Crore for the design, supply, construction, installation, upgrade, operation, and maintenance of the middle-mile network of BharatNet Phase III in the Punjab Telecom Circle. In addition, the company has also secured advance purchase orders worth ₹2,167.65 Crore from Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd for the supply and maintenance of

optical fibre cables, telecom gears for BharatNet Phase III in Uttar Pradesh (East) Telecom Circle, and Uttar Pradesh (West) Telecom Circle. The company during the quarter inaugurated a defence manufacturing unit in Hosur. Nahata said the company expects to receive a "reasonable size of orders" for defence gears and revenue should also start flowing in from the next financial year but also mentioned that approval for defence orders takes a lot of time. He added that the company has received a letter of intent for defence orders worth ₹800 Crore that has been delayed due to the approval process and is making efforts to complete it by April or May this year.

Global trends, FIIs trading activity to drive market trends

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stock markets are expected to be driven by global trends and Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) trading activity this week after the conclusion of the earnings season, analysts said. Unabated foreign fund outflows, lower-than-expected quarterly earnings and global trade war fears hit market sentiments last week, where the benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty extended their downward trend to the eighth day in a row on Friday. "With the conclusion of the Q3 earnings season, now focus will be on global developments amid a turbulent market environment

on account of Donald Trump's trade policies," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. Moreover, the rupee-dollar trend and movement of Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, will also be tracked by investors. "With the earnings season behind us, market focus will shift to trends in Foreign Institutional Investors (FII) flows and currency movements for further cues. Additionally, speculation regarding US tariffs and their impact on global trade will remain a key factor to watch," Ajit Mishra - SVP, research, Religare Broking Limited, said.

Reliance, BP lose decade-old gas migration dispute

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a setback for Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Limited and its partner BP Plc, the Delhi High Court has overturned an international arbitration tribunal's ruling that held the duo not responsible for paying any compensation for the gas they produced and sold, which had allegedly migrated from adjoining fields. **Fields in question:** Block or area KG-DWN-98/3, known as KG-D6, was awarded to a consortium of Reliance Industries Ltd and Niko Resources of Canada in the first bid round under New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) in 2000 by the Atal

Bihari Vajpayee government. (BP bought a 30 per cent stake in the block more than a decade later). In the same round, block KG-DWN-98/2 (KG-D5) was awarded to Cairn Energy India Ltd, which was subsequently acquired by state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) in two phases. An adjacent Godavari block was awarded to ONGC on nomination basis in 1997. Reliance started output from KG-D6 in 2009 while ONGC started output in January 2024. **Dispute:** The dispute began in July 2013 when, suspecting reservoir connectivity of its KG-D5 and G-4 blocks with

that of Reliance's KG-D6, ONGC on July 22, 2023 wrote to the DGH stating a detailed geological & geophysical (G&G) interpretation of the available data on the Godavari and KG-DWN-98/2 blocks shows "evidence of lateral continuity of gas pools" into KG-D6. Simply put, it meant that subsurface gas pools of the Reliance block and the ONGC blocks appeared to be connected with possible migration of gas between the two. And since Reliance started producing first, it might have drained out ONGC's resources as well. ONGC requested the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), an

upstream regulatory arm of the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, to provide it with G&G data, along with the production and well data of the contiguous area of block KG-DWN-98/3. **Media Leak:** The issue got leaked to the media and a small news item appeared in one of the dailies. As was the practice of any material event, this was presented to the board of ONGC in April 2014. The board asked the management to review the matter and report back. **Election day petition:** As directed by the board, the company management reverted with a detailed report. The board asked the management to take legal

steps to protect its interest. The options before ONGC was to either file an FIR for "theft" of its gas by Reliance or file a civil suit claiming damages. While a criminal case (FIR) was ruled out, the board felt a civil case could drag on for decades. A way out was to file a writ petition, which are promptly taken note of by the high courts. But a writ can be filed only against the state. Since DGH as a custodian of the resources and supposed to have known of the connectivity issue when it approved detailed development plans of Reliance, ONGC decided to file the writ against the DGH and the ministry. Reliance was

the third respondent. The petition was filed before the Delhi High Court a day before counting of the general elections on May 15, 2014. On September 10, 2014, the Delhi High Court disposed of ONGC's petition and directed the government to take a decision, after it received a report from an independent panel set up by ONGC and RIL. **Eyebrows raised:** ONGC's petition did raise a few eyebrows then. The petroleum ministry ordered an enquiry into whether ONGC had consulted the ministry before filing the writ petition against its largest stakeholder the Union of India and upstream regulator DGH.



Post-Natal

Yoga

Benefits



Motherhood is a beautiful yet challenging journey that brings immense joy and significant changes to a woman's body and mind. After childbirth, new moms need care and support to recover physically and emotionally. *Postnatal yoga* offers a holistic approach to healing, helping mothers regain strength, reduce stress, and find balance as they adjust to life with a newborn.

Physical Recovery after Birth:

Pregnancy and childbirth can weaken muscles, cause tension, and lead to discomfort. Postnatal yoga helps restore core strength, particularly in the abdominal muscles, improving posture and stability while reducing back pain.

It also supports pelvic floor health, strengthening muscles that may have weakened during childbirth, which helps with bladder control and prevents prolapse.

New moms often experience tension in the neck, shoulders, and lower back from breastfeeding and carrying their baby. Yoga relieves this tightness through gentle stretches, reducing discomfort.

Embracing Postnatal Recovery with Yoga
Postnatal yoga is not just about physical recovery, it's a holistic approach to healing that nurtures the body, mind and spirit. Through breathwork and mindfulness, it empowers new moms to embrace the changes of motherhood while prioritising their well-being.

Encouraging a Positive Mind-Body Connection

Yoga serves as an essential self-care practice, reminding new moms to take time for themselves. It helps them reconnect with their bodies and embrace postpartum changes with compassion.

The practice also fosters empowerment, allowing mothers to regain strength and confidence. As they rebuild their physical capabilities, they feel more in control of their recovery and overall well-being.

Building a Supportive Community

Motherhood can sometimes feel isolating, but postnatal yoga offers an opportunity to connect with other moms who are going through similar experiences. Many classes provide a supportive space where moms can share advice, encouragement, and emotional support.



PRECAUTION

Although core strength is essential, strenuous core exercises such as boat pose or intense abdominal crunches should be avoided postpartum.

The abdominal muscles require time to heal, and these exercises may slow down the recovery process.

The postpartum yoga techniques improve calmness, reduce irritability and anger, increase energy, lower blood pressure, reduce muscle tension, and aids in relaxation.

Recommended Yoga Poses for New Moms

While each mother's recovery is unique, the following yoga poses can be especially beneficial:

- Cat-Cow Pose (Marjaryasana-Bitilasana) – Stretches the spine and relieves back pain.
- Child's Pose (Balasana) – Promotes relaxation and stress relief.
- Bridge Pose (Setu Bandhasana) – Strengthens the pelvic floor and core.
- Seated Forward Fold (Paschimottasana) – Stretches the hamstrings and encourages relaxation.
- Warrior II (Virabhadrasana II) – Builds strength, balance, and stability.



Mental Well-Being and Emotional Balance

The postpartum period can bring emotional highs and lows. Yoga is a powerful tool for stress relief, as deep breathing and mindful movement promote relaxation and calm. It also encourages mental clarity, helping moms feel more present and grounded amid the challenges of early motherhood.

Yoga has been shown to help reduce postpartum depression and anxiety by lowering cortical levels and promoting emotional stability. Additionally, it can improve sleep quality, which is crucial for new moms dealing with interrupted sleep patterns.

BENEFITS

Postnatal yoga is excellent for regaining strength in the abdominal muscles. Yoga improves flexibility, making everyday movements easier as moms adapt to the physical demands of caring for a newborn. You can relieve the stress and tension

THE POSTPARTUM PERIOD CAN BRING EMOTIONAL HIGHS AND LOWS.

Strengthening the Mother-Child Bond

Welcoming a child into your life brings profound changes and can take time to adjust to.

Postnatal yoga nurtures the connection between mother and child, helping new mothers conserve the immense energy needed to care for a newborn. Through breathing exercises, meditation, and gentle postures, it promotes relaxation, making it easier to care for your baby while also benefiting from the practice. It encourages mindfulness, helping mothers stay present and enjoy precious moments with their little ones. The gentle movements also aid in postpartum recovery.

POSTNATAL YOGA IS NOT JUST ABOUT RECOVERING YOUR BODY, BUT ABOUT REDISCOVERING YOUR POWER AS A MOTHER

Strengthening the Mother-Baby Bond

Postnatal yoga not only benefits moms but also enhances their connection with their babies. Many classes include mom-and-baby yoga, incorporating gentle movements that encourage bonding through touch and eye contact. Yoga can also aid in breastfeeding support, improving posture and chest openness, making feeding more comfortable.



Adaptable and Energy-Boosting

One of the best aspects of postnatal yoga is its adaptability. Whether a mother had a vaginal or cesarean birth, the practice can be modified to ensure safety and effectiveness.

Additionally, yoga helps boost energy levels. Gentle movements, deep breathing, and mindfulness techniques improve circulation and reduce fatigue, leaving new moms feeling more refreshed and ready for the day.

— Inputs by Swati Sharma, Senior Yoga Therapist at Bio Resurge Wellness

Ultimate Winter Super Fruit

TEAM VIVA

Known for their vibrant red colour, unmatched sweetness, and juiciness, cherries, particularly *Chilean cherries*, are the ultimate fruit for the festive and winter months. But beyond their delightful flavour and visual appeal, cherries boast a wealth of health benefits that make them a winter super fruit you can't afford to miss. The winter season aligns perfectly with the availability of *Chilean cherries*, known for their superior quality and freshness. These cherries are packed with antioxidants, such as anthocyanins and vitamin C, which help combat oxidative stress and inflammation, especially helpful during the festive season's indulgences.

According to Ms. Priyanka Bhuraria, clinical Dietitian, "not

Festive Fruit for the Winter Season

Cherries add a touch of elegance and indulgence to any dish, making them the perfect centrepiece for festive meals and gatherings. Their vibrant red colour symbolises prosperity and celebration, aligning perfectly with the holiday spirit.

So this winter, make cherries your go-to super fruit. Whether you're looking for a healthy snack, a dessert ingredient, or a festive table highlight, Chilean cherries deliver on all fronts including taste, nutrition, and versatility.

only do cherries taste great, they contain many vitamins, minerals, and plant compounds which can be enormously beneficial for our health. The best thing is that they're in season now, so you can buy yours today and benefit from all their delicious goodness. Cherries are a nutritional powerhouse packed with benefits. They contain fiber, which helps you feel fuller, aids digestion, and promotes bowel regularity. Rich in vitamin C, cherries support your immune system and improve skin health."

Incorporate Cherries into Your Diet

- **As a Snack:** Enjoy them fresh for a guilt-free sweet treat.
- **In Desserts:** Add them to pies, tarts, or holiday cakes for a burst of flavour and colour.
- **In Salads:** Toss cherries into a winter salad with greens, nuts, and cheese for a festive dish.
- **In Smoothies:** Blend cherries with yogurt, almond milk, and a dash of honey for a refreshing drink.

Health Benefits of Cherries

- **Boosts Immunity:** The high vitamin C content strengthens your body's defence against common winter illnesses like colds and flu.
- **Promotes Heart Health:** Cherries are rich in potassium, which helps regulate blood pressure and maintain a healthy heart.
- **Improves Sleep Quality:** Cherries are a natural source of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep. Enjoying cherries before bed could help you achieve better rest during the long winter nights.
- **Supports Digestion:** The fibre in cherries keeps your digestive system running smoothly, balancing the effects of holiday indulgences.



Quick tips to reconnect with yourself

Self-love is something that is quite neglected these days due to juggling between work and personal life, completing deadlines etc. What we forget is to pause and take care of ourselves. *Self-love* is choosing small activities that are great for your mental, physical and emotional health.

Prioritising *self-love* with simple gestures helps you handle stress better, improves your focus, and brings a sense of balance amidst the chaos. However, many people believe *self-love* requires time they don't have. The good news? Just five minutes a day is enough to reset your mind, recharge your energy, and reconnect with yourself.

As a life coach, my goal is to help people integrate *self-love* into their daily routines in a way that feels effortless and meaningful. These simple yet powerful practices don't require major effort, just a willingness to pause and check in with yourself.

Self-love isn't about finding extra time, rather it's about making small, intentional choices. Even on the busiest days, these five-minute practices can boost your confidence, shift your mindset, and remind you of your worth.

Five Simple Self-Love Practices

Start Your Day with Affirmations - Stand in front of the mirror and speak positivity into existence. Say aloud "I am capable of achieving my goals.", "I am strong, resilient, and worthy of success.", "I choose to love and accept myself as I am." Affirmations shape your mindset for the day, boost self-confidence, and set the tone for positivity and self-acceptance.

Reset with Deep Breathing

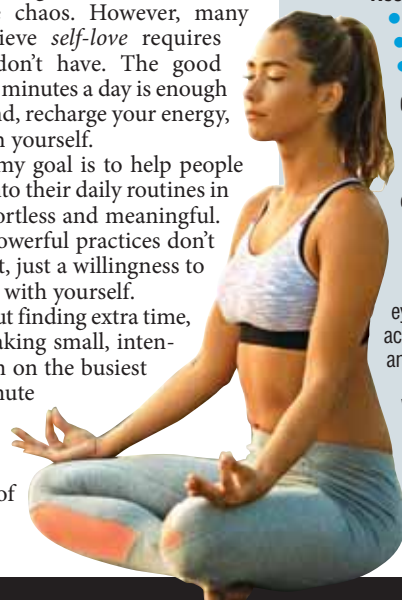
- Inhale for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds
- Exhale for 6 seconds

Cultivate Gratitude in a Journal - Take a moment to jot down three things you're grateful for, no matter how small. Whether it's your morning coffee, a kind conversation, or simply the ability to take a deep breath, gratitude shifts your perspective and fosters contentment.

Visualise Your Best Self - Close your eyes and picture yourself thriving such as achieving your goals, radiating confidence, and living with joy.

Give Yourself a One-Minute Hug - Wrap your arms around yourself and whisper words of encouragement. Physical touch releases oxytocin, the feel-good hormone, instantly providing comfort.

— Inputs by Amish Dhingra, ICF- PCC Certified Life Coach



Yashasvi Jaiswal set to miss Ranji semis

PTI ■ NAGPUR

It is unlikely that Mumbai will have an injured Yashasvi Jaiswal in their ranks, but the resilient defending champions are firm favourites against Vidarbha in the Ranji Trophy semifinal, beginning here on Monday. It is understood that Jaiswal might travel to the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru for further assessment of his unspecified injury soon, as he has been named as a "non-travelling reserve" in India's Champions Trophy squad. But the possible absence of Jaiswal in no way reduces the firepower of Mumbai in a match that is the repeat of last year's final.



Mumbai have a host of stars in their line-up such as skipper Ajinkya Rahane, Suryakumar Yadav, Shivam Dube and Shardul Thakur who can alter the course of the game on their own. But more than the presence of some acclaimed and accomplished players, their determination makes the 42-time champions a team cut from different cloth. On several occasions this season, Mumbai's top-order

malfunctioned but their lower-order batters like Thakur and Tanush Kotian have bailed them out with gritty efforts. Even in the quarterfinal against Haryana, they were tottering at 113 for seven before Shams Mulani and Kotian milked 183 runs for the eighth wicket to rescue Mumbai. Mumbai would hope that the big guns will return to run-making ways on the Nagpur pitch that often sides with

batters. While the stories of such late-order resistance are heart-warming, Mumbai would like a more polished effort from their top-order against Vidarbha, who are in red-hot form this season. They don't have big names in their bowling line-up, but Harsh Dubey, Yash Thakur, Aditya Thakare and Nachiket Bhut have consistently struck for Vidarbha. In fact, left-arm spinner Dubey is the highest wicket-taker this Ranji season with 59 victims in his bag. Hence, Vidarbha will be eager to exploit that slightly wobbly nature of Mumbai top-order and put them under pressure early. None of the Mumbai batters figure among the top 20 of the highest run-makers this season. Siddesh Lad (565 runs) is their top run-aggregator and he is

22nd on the run-maker's list. In contrast, Vidarbha's frontline has been in much better shape this season as Yash Rathod (728 runs) is the fourth-highest run-getter in the chart. Karun Nair (591) and skipper Akshay Wadkar (588) too have chipped in with important runs. However, they would like some better outings from openers Atharva Taide and Dhruv Shorey. Teams (from): Mumbai: Ajinkya Rahane (c), Ayush Mhatre, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Amogh Bhatkal, Suryakumar Yadav, Yashasvi Jaiswal (injured), Siddesh Lad, Shivam Dube, Akash Anand (wk), Hardik Tamore (wk), Suryansh Shedge, Shardul Thakur, Shams Mulani, Tanush Kotian, Mohit Avasthi, Sylvester D'Souza, Royston Dias, Atharva Ankolekar, Harsh Tanna. Vidarbha: Akshay Wadkar (c & wk), Atharva Taide, Aman Mokhade, Yash Rathod, Harsh Dubey, Akshay Karnewar, Yash Kadam, Akshay Wakhare, Aditya Thakare, Darshan Nalkande, Nachiket Bhute, Siddhesh Wath (wk), Yash Thakur, Danish Malewar, Parth Rekhade, Karun Nair, Dhruv Shorey.

10-man Real Madrid draws at Osasuna after red card

PTI ■ BARCELONA

Jude Bellingham's use of an English expletive to curse at the referee left Real Madrid a man down and unable to defend a lead as the La Liga leaders drew at Osasuna 1-1 on Saturday. Kylian Mbappé put Madrid ahead in the 15th minute with his 11th goal in as many league games. But Madrid was outnumbered after Bellingham's red card for using an expletive while protesting the refereeing five minutes before halftime. Osasuna pulled level after the referee awarded a penalty after a video review and booked Eduardo Camavinga for stomping the foot of Ante Budimir in the box. Budimir slotted the 58th-minute equalizer past Thibaut Courtois to unleash celebrations at El Sadar Stadium. The draw in Pamplona put Madrid's league lead in jeopardy. While Atletico Madrid failed to take advantage of the slip and stayed one point behind the frontrunners, Barcelona can pull level with its top rival if it beats Rayo Vallecano on Monday. Next up for Madrid is a home game against Manchester City on Wednesday when it will try to make good on its 3-2 win in their first meeting of the Champions League knockout rounds playoff. "English translation error" In what seemed to be a stretch of linguistic analysis, coach Carlo Ancelotti tried to defend his player by claiming that referee José Luis Munuera made a translation error of Bellingham's use of an English expletive. "Bellingham didn't do anything that deserved a sending off," Ancelotti said. "He said (expletive) off," not '(expletive) you.' I don't think that was meant to be offensive," Munuera wrote in his refereeing report that Bellingham told him "from just a few meters away, (expletive) you." Bellingham said "I don't want to go into details of what was said" but insisted he was unfairly treated, saying the referee made a translation



error and that there was indeed a degree of difference between the expletive when combined with "off" or "you." "It is clear that he made a mistake and there was a miscommunication," said the England midfielder, who got a two-game ban last season after receiving a red card for using an expletive in English protesting a ref's call. More fuel for the fire Ancelotti was also shown a yellow card early after he complained excessively for what he thought was a handball by an Osasuna player in the host's area. Following its loss at Espanyol, the powerhouse sent a scathing letter to Spain's soccer federation to decry what it considered "adulterated" refereeing that favored other teams. The league president responded by saying that the 36-time champion had "lost its mind." The decisions by Munuera aggravated Madrid's sense of grievance regarding the refereeing in La Liga. "Things have happened in the last three games that everyone has seen," Ancelotti said. "The VAR has reviewed plays in our area and not in the opponent's area. ... We just have to keep fighting. We played a good game today and we will try to do so again on Wednesday and in the next La Liga game." Mbappé remains hot Mbappé had an up and down first few months while adapting to Madrid, but he has been

scoring at ease in recent weeks and has 17 league goals, second only to the 19 by Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski. Mbappé had an opportunity to bag an injury-time winner but Osasuna goalkeeper Sergio Herrera blocked his shot from an angle. Osasuna, which beat Barcelona 4-2 in September when the Catalan club was leading the league, moved into seventh place. Budimir's goal let the Croatia striker equal an Osasuna club record of 57 career goals in La Liga, a mark set by Sabino Anderson. "It is always very special to enter the history of a club that is over 100 years old. I am very proud," Budimir said. Atletico gladiators' fail to retake lead Atletico Madrid remained a point behind Madrid after it was also reduced to 10 men and needed a late goal from substitute Alexander Sorloth to draw at home with Celta Vigo 1-1. Pablo Barrios hurt Atletico's chances when he saw a direct red card for a studs-first slide into the lower leg of Pablo Durán just seven minutes into the match. Borja Iglesias earned a penalty when fouled by Robin Le Normand in the area, sending substitute Iago Aspas to the spot to put Celta ahead in the 68th. Sorloth salvaged a point for the hosts when the Norway striker won a long ball and rifled it home in the 81st.

LIV Tour commits to Adelaide tournament until 2031

PTI ■ ADELAIDE

LIV Golf has secured its foothold in Australia, with Adelaide retaining hosting rights for its tournament until 2031, despite increasing speculation of a reunification of the PGA and LIV tours and what that could mean for the sport's landscape. Sunday's announcement signals LIV's ambitions to remain a prominent player in world golf despite increasing efforts to reunify the PGA and LIV Golf tours, which included PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan meeting with President Donald Trump last week. "There's no place we'd rather be than right here in Adelaide," new LIV Golf CEO Scott O'Neil said ahead of Sunday's final round at The Grange Golf Club - the most successful stop in the fledgling golf league's short

history. Adelaide's hosting contract with LIV Golf had been due to end after its fourth event in 2026, but with around 100,000 fans attending in each of the past two years it prompted the South Australian state government to bid for an extension. Government officials also unveiled plans Sunday to shift the event from The Grange to a newly redeveloped city course designed by former LIV Golf chief Greg Norman. Norman a central figure in establishing the breakthrough tour will oversee the redesign of the North Adelaide Golf Course, located in the city's central business district. "As a golf course designer, you very seldom get the opportunity to be involved with a project downtown," he said. "North Adelaide Golf Club is basically a diamond in the rough and we're going to unpick it."

Jannik Sinner's three-month ban slammed by tennis pros

PTI ■ LONDON

Top-ranked Jannik Sinner accepting a three-month doping ban deal was slammed by his fellow tennis professionals on Saturday. Sinner and the World Anti-Doping Agency settled on the suspension that means he can play again from May 5, will not lose his number one ranking, will not miss any Grand Slams, and will not lose titles or prize money he earned after testing positive for a banned anabolic steroid last March. Three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka wrote on X, "I don't believe in a clean sport anymore." "Fairness in tennis does not exist," Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios said on X. "Obviously Sinner's team have done everything in their power to just go ahead and take a three

month ban, no titles lost, no prize money lost. Guilty or not? Sad day for tennis." World number eight Daniil Medvedev, speaking after losing in the Open 13 semifinals in Marseille, said, "I hope everyone can discuss with WADA and defend themselves like Jannik Sinner from now on." Former British number one Tim Henman told Sky Sport, "When I read the statement this morning it just seems a little bit too convenient. "Obviously having just won the Australian Open, to miss three months of the tour and therefore to be eligible to play at Roland Garros, the timing couldn't have been any better for Sinner, but I still think it leaves a pretty sour taste for the sport." The Professional Tennis Players Association, founded by Novak

Djokovic and Vasek Pospisil, also weighed in on X, posting a statement criticising the parties involved in the decision-making process: The ATP, WTA, Grand Slams, WADA and International Tennis Integrity Agency. "The system is not a system. It's a club. Supposed case-by-case discretion is, in fact, merely cover for tailored deals, unfair treatment, and inconsistent rulings. It's not just the different results for different players. It's the lack of transparency. The lack of process. The lack of consistency. The lack of credibility in the alphabet soup of agencies charged with regulating our sports and athletes," the PTPA wrote. It accused the agencies of unacceptable bias "for all athletes and shows a deep disrespect for every sport and its fans.

Champions Trophy: Arshdeep poised to start ahead of Harshit



PTI ■ DUBAI

Harshit Rana has been the flavour of the season as far as India's emerging crop of fast bowlers is concerned but one of head coach Gautam Gambhir's finds is unlikely to start in India's playing eleven in the Champions Trophy with Arshdeep Singh still considered way ahead in terms of talent and quality. The Indian team management gave Harshit all three ODIs against England, and if one is absolutely fair to the burly 6-foot-2-inch tall Delhi speedster, he has not looked out of place. While Arshdeep enjoys a better economy rate of 5.17 compared to Harshit's 6.95 per over, it is the former's ability to bring the ball back into the right-handers during the Powerplay overs that will tilt the scales in his favour in the tournament starting February 19. Arshdeep, who also has only nine ODIs since he made his debut in a short ODI series in New Zealand in 2022, will be

ahead on most counts when one looks at the parameters that would be taken into account based on the conditions available at the Dubai International Stadium. "Harshit has improved by leaps and bounds in terms of reducing his weight and has become sharper in terms of speed. But if I had to choose one among the two as Mohammed Shami's partner, it has to be Arshdeep as he can swing the ball both ways and is a left-arm. "I would be a trifle surprised if Harshit starts ahead of Arshdeep," former national selector Devang Gandhi, who has also seen Rana from close quarters as Delhi Ranji coach said. India will start with a clash against Bangladesh on February 20 here. It is understood that Harshit started in all three games against England because the team management, currently helmed by Gautam Gambhir, wanted to check out if his protege could be considered as

Jasprit Bumrah's replacement, and also this was the only series where Shami's fitness could also have been tested in real terms. Hence, Arshdeep was rested in the first two games and only got a chance when the think-tank decided to rest Shami, who had played back to back ODIs. Former India opener WV Raman, one of the most respected coaches in the country, feels experience will be a key factor which should go in favour of the Punjab pacer. "Arshdeep, due to his relative experience and the left arm being a different dimension, has an advantage. The Dubai track will be decent for the pacers," Raman observed. He also raised a key point about playing multi-nation event compared to bilateral series. "A bit more experience always helps in ICC events, which is a different ball game from bilaterals. In ICC event, you will play different opposition every day and accordingly an experienced bowler changes his plans," said Raman, who has also been India U-19 batting coach and head coach of the national women's team. Gandhi, on his part, also pointed out the options Arshdeep brings to the table in various phases of the match. "Harshit hits deck and gets it to move a bit both ways after pitching along with those effective occasional heavy balls in the range of mid 140s. But when you have Arshdeep, he can swing the new ball and also use angles of the crease effectively when he comes round the wicket during death overs," he explained.

Aditi Ashok slips to tied 53 in Saudi Ladies International

PTI ■ RIYADH

Aditi Ashok played a disappointing round of three-over 75 and slipped to tied-53rd at the Saudi Ladies International here on Sunday. Aditi with rounds of 69-72-75 totalled even par 216 for three days. This was her first event of 2025 on the Ladies European Tour. It was a tough day with two birdies, three bogeys and a double bogey in the 75 at the Par-72 Riyadh Golf Club. The other three Indians, Pranavi Urs, Diksha Dagar and Ivesa Malik had missed the cut earlier on. Thailand's Jeeno Thitikul secured her fifth Ladies European Tour (LET) title after storming to a four-stroke victory. The Thai star, who is number four in the Women's World Golf Rankings, began the day with a three-shot lead. A round of 69 (-3) on the final day to end the week with a score of 16-under-par was



more than enough to ensure Thitikul began her 2025 season in the best way. Korea's Somi Lee finished the week in second place in the Individual competition with a score of 12-under-par after she captained her Team to victory on Saturday. England's Annabell Fuller recorded her best-ever finish on the LET with solo third place on 11-under-par. Four players finished in a

share of fourth place with Japan's Chisato Iwai, Korea's Ina Yoon, Denmark's Nanna Koerstz Madsen, and Thailand's Ariya Jutanugarn all on 10-under-par. One shot back, five players rounded out the top 10 with England's Charley Hull, Australia's Hira Naveed, China's Muni He, Austria's Emma Spitz, and Switzerland's Chiara Tamburlini on nine-under-par.

In the LET Order of Merit, England's Cara Gainer continued to lead the standings with 505.18 points to her name, Thailand's Thitikul is now in second place with 500 points. The LET season has a two-week break before a trip to Australia with the first of three events - the Australian WPGA Championship - taking place from March 6-9 at Sanctuary Cove Golf and Country Club.

Rauf recovers from injury, set for CT opener

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan fast bowler Haris Rauf has recovered from his injury and will be available for his side's ICC Champions Trophy (CT) opening match against New Zealand on Wednesday, according to sources. A source close to the Pakistan team confirmed on Sunday that Haris, who sustained a muscular strain in his lower chest wall during the recent tri-series tournament, has recovered and will play in the Champions Trophy opener in Karachi. "Haris is okay now and the rest given to him after the first match of the Tri-Series has helped him recover well," the source said, adding that Pakistan have no fitness issues with any other player. Haris, one of Pakistan's key bowlers with his express pace and ability to take wickets in the middle overs, has remained with the squad despite the selectors calling up uncapped Akif Javed as a backup for him. Haris has a haul of 83 wickets in 46 one-day internationals and another 110 wickets in 79 T20 internationals as he has built a reputation as a specialist white-ball bowler. Former Pakistan left-arm pacer Muhammad Amir had on Saturday expressed his concerns on a TV channel about Haris' fitness for the Champions Trophy. Amir claimed that if the pacer had suffered a side strain it would take five to six weeks to heal completely.

Batting depth gives Royal Challengers slight edge over Delhi Capitals

PTI ■ VADODARA

After starting from the blocks with contrasting wins, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) and Delhi Capitals (DC) will look to consolidate their position when they meet in WPL 2025 here on Monday. Defending champions Royal Challengers brushed aside Gujarat Giants (GG) by six wickets in the opening game, while the Capitals had to go through a last-ball thriller before notching a win over Mumbai Indians (MI). But the overall balance, especially in batting, and bowling gives RCB a slight

edge over Delhi. Their batting strength was on full display when the Smriti Mandhana-led side chased down a 200-plus target without much ado. They have been bolstered by the addition of young talents like Raghavi Bist, Kanika Ahuja, who have seamlessly blended with seniors Mandhana, Ellyse Perry, Richa Ghosh and Danny Wyatt. Both Kanika and Bist had played excellent roles too in the team's win over GG. However, they might just hope for a tidier effort from their bowlers, and Perry abstaining from bowling has reduced

their efficiency a bit in that department. The Aussie star is recovering from a hip injury that she sustained during the recent Women's Ashes, and will not be bowling at least in the initial stages of the WPL. So, RCB will need a heftier contribution from experienced Kim Garth and Georgia Wareham, as both leaked plenty of runs against Gujarat. They would also like to see youngsters VJ Joshi and Prema Rawat too step up and support seasoned Renuka Singh. It is imperative because Delhi has a fiery batting unit

consisting of skipper Meg Lanning, Annabel Sutherland, Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Alice Caspey and Sarah Bryce. They did not deliver as desired in a middling chase against Mumbai, but they will be looking to atone for that blip against a relatively more inexperienced bowling lineup of RCB. The Bengaluru outfit will have their task cut out against Delhi bowlers, led by veteran pacer Shikha Pandey, as they did well to restrict Mumbai to 164 in the previous match. However, the RCB batting line-up could offer them a vastly different challenge.