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VIRAT VICTORY FOR INDIA

PTI ■ DUBAI

Virat Kohli showcased his penchant to lord over Pakistan in ICC tournaments once more as the batting icon's glittering unbeaten 100 helped India claim an authoritative six-wicket win over their traditional rivals and all but seal a semifinal spot in the Champions Trophy here on Sunday.

The victory should be enough for India, who are now on top of Group A with four points, to make the last four. However, Pakistan are staring at early elimination from the eight-team event after their second successive loss. Chasing a tricky 242, India rode on Kohli's 51st ODI ton, Shreyas Iyer's classy 67-ball 56 and Shubman Gill's brilliant start of 46 off 52 balls to overhaul the target with more than seven overs to spare.

Kohli rebelled against his own modest recent form and a dangerous opposition to peel off a memorable knock that took 111 balls and was punctuated with seven fours. Pakistan, on the other hand, are on their way out of the tournament of which they are the hosts.

Once again, they ran into their old nemesis - Kohli. The 36-year-old had several demons of his own to tame - a lean run, recurring form of dismissals and struggles against spin.

But he slayed each one of them, in a manner befitting a batter who also became the quickest to 14,000 ODI runs during the course of the knock. Pakistan might have hoped to hustle him a bit through pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf.

But Kohli drove them on the up with elan or pulled them with audacity as Pakistan's premier pacers transformed into dejected figures after the early high of Afridi casting Rohit Sharma (20 off 15 balls) with a peach of a yorker.

Perhaps, the biggest hope Pakistan harboured against Kohli would have been leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed, considering the Indian's recent



Virat Kohli celebrates his century with Axar Patel after scoring the winning runs during the ICC Champions Trophy between India and Pakistan, at Dubai International Cricket Stadium

travails against England's Adil Rashid. Kohli did have a couple of tough moments against Ahmed but none big enough to put him in distress. He largely dealt with him in singles, cutting down risks.

But the Pakistan quicks offered him enough chances to free his arms. At the other end, Iyer flowed with a variety of shots but a 103 metre six off spinner Salman Agha was the standout hit during his tenure, in which he assisted Kohli to raise 114 runs for the third wicket.

Iyer had to walk back to the hut after Imam-ul-Haq pulled off a stunner at covers off spinner Khushdil Shah although replays suggested that the ball might have been grounded. But by then, India had already shut the door on Pakistan.

A large chunk of credit for this win can also be rightfully claimed by Indian bowlers, who were stunningly accurate while limiting Pakistan to 241.

That total was made possible by Saud Shakeel's polished fifty and Khushdil's cameo. Shakeel (62, 76b, 5x4) was largely untroubled and added 104 runs for the third wicket with skipper Mohammad Rizwan (46), but Pakistan never really managed to break the shackles after opting to bat.

The pitch expectedly grew slow once the match entered the middle passage, and the precision of Indian bowlers made run-making a laboured task with left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav leading the way (3/40).

There was a period in Pakistan innings when both Rizwan and Shakeel failed to find the boundary rope for 55 consecutive deliveries. They were forced to traverse a cautious path because of the early departure of Babar Azam (23) and Imam (10).

Azam looked million dollars while playing those trademark cover drives for a few boundaries off Harshit Rana and Hardik Pandya.

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US military aircraft carrying Indian deportees upon its landing at the Shri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport in Amritsar, on February 5

Deportees continue to arrive in Capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A passenger plane carrying 12 Indians deported from the United States landed at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport on Sunday, marking the fourth such arrival in a month amid Trump administration's crackdown on illegal immigrants. They were deported in a Turkish Airline flight. They flew back to India via Panama, officials said. Of the 12, four were from Punjab - two from Gurdaspur, one from Patiala, and one from Jalandhar. Others are from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. This is the first group of Indians repatriated from Panama after the United States deported nearly 299 illegal immigrants attempting to enter the country over the last month. Panama and Costa Rica are

collaborating with the US to manage the repatriation of deported migrants. As part of this initiative, the US is relocating undocumented migrants from various Asian nations—those unwilling to return or whose home countries have refused to accept them—to these Central American nations.

The first round of deportation took place on February 5, when a US military plane transported 104 Indians to Amritsar. The second and the third round of deportation were also in US military planes, which landed in Amritsar. The deportees were shackled and restrained throughout the flight, only to be freed upon arrival in India—a move that triggered a political storm in the country and led to an uproar in both Houses of Parliament during the then-ongoing Budget session.

Telangana tunnel collapse: Rescue inches closer

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD

As eight persons got trapped around 14 km inside the tunnel of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal project after part of its roof collapsed on Saturday, a rescue team made headway and reached the spot where a tunnel boring machine was working during the incident. However, silt poses a challenge to move further to reach the spot where the people are believed to have been trapped, he added.

Nagarkurnool District Collector B Santhosh who is supervising the rescue operation, on Sunday said four NDRF teams — one from Hyderabad and three from Vijayawada, comprising 138 members, 24 personnel of the army, personnel of SDRF, 23 members from SCCL with equipment besides members of the infra firm are engaged in the rescue operations. The rescuers have reached the point where the tunnel boring machine is there. As there is silt after that point, the NDRF team is making plans to go forward. Oxygen and power supply has been made available in the tunnel and dewatering and the desilting operation is also underway.

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WEATHER

AQI 144
MAX 26.7°C(+1.2)
MIN 10.3°C(-1.5)

Delhi government sets up CAG trap for AAP



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta and Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva address a press conference

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the three-day session of the Eighth Delhi Legislative Assembly beginning on Monday, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Sunday that all 14 pending Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports would be tabled in the House. Gupta accused the previous AAP government of leaving an "empty public exchequer" before the BJP took over and assured that the Rs 2,500 monthly payment scheme for women would be implemented with detailed planning. Gupta

attended a meeting along with other BJP MLAs at the state party office ahead of the first session of the newly constituted 8th Delhi Assembly scheduled on Monday. Addressing her first press conference after the BJP legislature party meeting along with Delhi state president Virendra Sachdeva, the newly appointed chief minister said, "the most important thing is going to come. The government will put the 14 pending CAG reports on the House table in the first session."

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Atishi to face off Gupta in Assembly



Senior AAP Leader and Former Delhi CM Atishi with MCD Mayor Mahesh Khinchi during a press conference at party headquarters

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi Chief Minister and Kalkaji MLA Atishi has been appointed as the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Delhi Assembly. The decision was made during a meeting of AAP MLAs on Sunday. This is the first time in history that a woman has been chosen for the role of Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly. The upcoming session of the Delhi Assembly will be the only one in the country where a woman Leader of Opposition will face a woman Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta for the first time in history.

Atishi was unanimously chosen by the AAP MLAs to be the Leader of Opposition during AAP's legislative party meeting. Her name was proposed as a strong female face to take on Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. Atishi's elevation as the Leader of Opposition is significant given the fact that top AAP leaders, including Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Saurabh Bharadwaj lost from their respective seats in the recently-held election.

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USAID row deepens as Congress attack Centre, BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the USAID funding row, the Congress on Sunday accused the BJP of indulging in "anti-national work" by spreading "fake news from America" and demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer as to why the government is silent when US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk are "insulting" India repeatedly. Countering the attack from Congress, the BJP has rejected all allegations and called Rahul Gandhi a "traitor", accusing him of colluding with foreign forces in his bid to weaken India.

Congress general secretary in-charge Jairam Ramesh said, "BJP is a procession of liars and illiterates. The news about USD 21 million, on which the BJP and their bootlickers were jumping on, turned out to be fake. The USD 21 million in 2022 was not for 'voter turnout' in India, but for Bangladesh." "Elon Musk made a fake claim, Trump got confused between Dhaka and Delhi, Amit Malviya spread the lie further, then the rest of BJP's bootlickers seized on it," he charged.

Ever since the Trump administration's DOGE said on February 16 that USAID has cancelled the USD 21 million funding for "voting in India", the BJP has been making fabricated allegations against the Congress,



Ramesh said in his post in Hindi on X. "But now it is coming to light that this entire news is fake. When the money has not even reached India, then what would be the cancellation?" he said.

The controversy is actually about two USAID grants on DOGE's list that were given through the Washington-based Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), the Congress leader said. The CEPPS was supposed to receive a total of USD 486 million from USAID, he said, adding that according to DOGE, the funds included USD 22 million for Moldova and USD 21 million for "voter turnout in India", he said.

"The first fund USAID gave to CEPPS for Moldova was in 2016 with the ID AID117LA1600001. But the USAID USD 21 million grant for India marked by DOGE is completely fake. Because it was for Bangladesh, not India," he

claimed. And the reality is that of the USD 21 million earmarked for Bangladesh, USD 13.4 million has already been disbursed before the January 2024 elections, Ramesh said.

"Every federal grant specifies the country in which it is to be used. According to US federal spending, there have been no USAID-funded CEPPS projects in India since 2008. The only ongoing USD 21 million USAID grant to CEPPS, ID 72038822LA00001, was approved in July 2022 for Bangladesh's 'Amar Vote Amar' (My Vote Is Mine)," he pointed out. "In November 2022, the purpose of the grant was changed to 'USAID's Nagorik Programme'. A USAID official in Dhaka also confirmed this on social media during his US visit in December 2024: 'I manage the USD 21 million CEPPS/Nagorik project funded by USAID,'" Ramesh said.

"Now the BJP should just answer this: Why did the BJP spread fake news about India's democracy? Why did the BJP did anti-national work by spreading fake news from America? If BJP's accusing India's opposition party over fake news from America is not treason, then what is it?" he said. Ramesh said "Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer, Donald Trump and Elon Musk are insulting India again and again, and why is our government silent on this?"

The Congress leader said "Is it the case that the country's self-respect has been compromised in the process of begging for mercy for Adani?" Trump for the fourth time in recent days has claimed that the Biden administration allocated USD 21 million funding to India for voter turnout, evoking a sharp response from the Congress which urged Prime Minister Modi to talk to his friend and strongly refute the allegation.

The opposition party has demanded a white paper on the funds received in India from developmental agencies, aid mechanisms and multilateral forums. It also sought legal action against the RSS-BJP and their ecosystem for making wild allegations against credible civil society members, NGOs and political parties.

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Rural women in Bihar are fighting changing climate

PTI ■ MUZAFFARPUR

In the heart of rural Bihar, where groundwater depletion, extreme heat and erratic weather have caused havoc for farmers, a quiet transformation is underway. A group of women, once confined to their homes despite their education, have emerged as agri-entrepreneurs, transforming not only their own lives but also helping their communities adapt to the growing threats of climate change.

Each agri-entrepreneur (AE) works with at least 150-200 small and marginal farmers, who are hit the most by these worsening climate challenges. They provide solutions to farmers on irrigation, provide climate-resilient seeds, help out with crop diversification, and act as a helpdesk for digital work—essentially a one-stop centre for all problems they may encounter. Their remuneration is proportional to



Soni Kumari, an agri-entrepreneur, demonstrates drone irrigation facilities she supplies to farmers, in Hajipur, Bihar

the range of services they provide farmers within a panchayat. Soni Kumari from Hajipur, for instance, began her journey as an agri-entrepreneur last year by registering a farmer for a farmer card. She then prepared a detailed business proposal based on the farmer's profile—his social indicators, finances and cropping patterns. She then entered the farmer's requirements into a Management Information System, creating a database of her customers to understand demand and create a business plan for her enterprise.

Once a homemaker, Soni who is a science graduate said she never imagined she would one day be at the forefront of promoting sustainable farming practices. "I opened a shop with a micro-financing loan, where I stock everything from climate-resilient seeds to organic manure and fertilisers. We even have a drone for irrigation," Soni said.

The drone technology Soni uses has been a game-changer for her, she added. It sprays water evenly across fields, ensuring efficient water use and reducing labour costs.

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Accent unfairly impacts English language test score, Indians believe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Over 62 per cent of English test-takers in India believe that their Indian accent would negatively impact their speaking test outcomes while over 74 per cent feel that their appearance might impact their test score when a human examiner is involved, according to a Pearson survey.

The report revealed insights from a social perception survey conducted by the Pearson Test of English for study, work and migration visas. Revealing stark insights about test-takers' perceptions of biases — particularly those

related to looks, accents and appearances — the report highlights the need for fairer systems that focus solely on learners' knowledge and abilities. The results are based on a survey of 1,000 respondents who have taken or are planning to take an English proficiency test for work, study or migration purposes. Ninety-six per cent of the respondents had experienced an English language test with a human examiner. According to the survey, 59 per cent of the respondents believe that they will be treated differently based on their skin colour, calling out their fear of unconscious favouritism extended

towards people with lighter skin. Almost 64 per cent of the respondents believe that they can create a wrong impression based on how they dress. These perceptions are especially strong among test-takers in Maharashtra, where 67 per cent carry this belief. Job roles and educational background are also feared to impact how people are treated, with seven in ten respondents, especially those in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, believing they will be treated with more respect if they have a prestigious job or a strong educational background.

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USAID funded projects worth \$750 Million in India in FY24

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a raging political controversy over USAID's alleged role in influencing Indian elections, the latest annual report of the finance ministry has disclosed that the agency funded seven projects worth USD 750 million in 2023-24. "Currently, seven projects worth a total budget of USD 750 million (approx.) are being implemented by USAID in partnership with Government of India," as per the Finance Ministry annual report for 2023-24. For the financial year 2023-24, an obligation of a total of USD 97 million (about Rs 825 crore) has been made by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) under the seven projects, it said. The Department of Economic Affairs under the Finance Ministry which is the nodal department for bilateral funding arrangements has also shared the details of projects funded in 2023-24 in the report.

During the year, no funding was made for enhancing voter turnout but to projects related to agriculture & food security programme; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); Renewable Energy; disaster management and health. Besides, it said, funds were committed for Sustainable Forests and Climate Adaptation Program and Energy Efficiency Technology Commercialization and Innovation Project. The United States of America's bilateral development assistance to India started in 1951 and it is mainly administered through USAID. Since its commencement, USAID has provided economic assistance of over USD 17 billion to India in various sectors for over 555 projects. Political controversy erupted in the country earlier this month after the Elon Musk-led DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) claimed that it had cancelled a USD 21 million grant to India to boost "voter

turnout". US President Donald Trump also repeatedly claimed that USAID under the previous administration led by Joe Biden allocated USD 21 million in funding to India for 'voter turnout'. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday said the information put out by the Trump administration is "concerning" and that the government is looking into it. The USAID was allowed in India "in good faith, to do good faith activities", and suggestions are being made out of America that "there are activities which are in bad faith," Jaishankar had said. On the other hand, the Congress party on Sunday accused the BJP of indulging in "anti-national work" by spreading "fake news from America" and asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer as to why the government is silent when US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk are "insulting" India repeatedly.

Activists blacken Hindi in TN railway nameboards

PTI ■ POLLACHI (TAMIL NADU)

Amid the language row in Tamil Nadu where the ruling DMK has been alleging Hindi imposition by the Centre, pro-Tamil activists blackened the Hindi words painted in the nameboard at two railway stations in the state on Sunday. In a viral video, the activists were seen painting black paint on "Pollachi Junction" written in Hindi, but officials later rectified it. "RPF Pollachi identified the defaulters and registered a case under relevant provisions of the Railways Act and they will be prosecuted. The same was rectified immediately," the Palghat Division of the Southern Railway said in a social media update. Meanwhile, DMK activists painted black the Hindi name on the nameboard in Palayanakottai railway station in Tirunelveli district. Six party workers were booked by the RPF under the relevant sections of the Railways Act, officials said. The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu has been engaged in a war of words with the BJP and the party-led Central government, alleging Hindi imposition through the National Education Policy (NEP 2020), a charge denied by the Centre.

Bangladesh artists at Kumbh bridge diplomacy gap after Hasina

PTI ■ PRAYAGRAJ

While politics and diplomacy struggled to mend the bridge, faith seems to have pulled off the job with elan. In what looked to be the first official cultural exchange between India and Bangladesh since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government in August last year and the subsequent unrest in the neighbouring nation where minority Hindus were allegedly targeted, a group of Bangladeshi artistes were partly sponsored by the Muhammad Yunus regime to perform at the Maha Kumbh. A six-member dance troupe from Bangladesh performed at the Kumbh's 13,000-seater Ganga Pandal, the makeshift central cultural hub, on Saturday evening at the inaugural session of the 10th India International Dance and Music Festival. The event was hosted jointly by the UP government and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), which works under the Ministry of External Affairs. The participation followed Bangladesh's absence from key cultural events in India, such as the recently concluded International Kolkata Book Fair 2025 and the 30th

Kolkata International Film Festival in December last year. Bangladesh had been a consistent participant in these events until recently. The troupe, part of a 107-member delegation of foreign artistes representing 10 nations, was led by Rachel Priyanka Persis, an assistant professor at Dhaka University's dance department. The troupe showcased the Gaudiya dance, a Vaishnava form based on religious stories, poetry and music. Following their two-day performance at the Mahakumbh on February 22 and 23, the delegation is scheduled to perform in Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam and Meghalaya before their final show in Delhi later this month. "I feel fortunate to be able to perform amid this sea of humanity. The Maha Kumbh carries a spiritual legacy of 144 years. I would thank the Indian High Commission for its invitation. We had no problems in obtaining our visas," Priyanka said and introduced the other members of her team -- Mousumi, Laboni, Rini, Raisa and Pinki. Participating alongside India and Bangladesh were artistes from Russia, Mongolia,

Rwanda, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Vietnam, Malaysia, South Africa and Fiji, officials said. The event was part of the Cultural Exchange Programme Agreement (CEPA) between India and several nations, aimed at promoting Indian culture abroad and exposing local artistes to international art and culture, they said. "According to CEPA, the ICCR shoulders the financial burden of the visiting artistes in terms of their accommodation, local transport and visa arrangements. The respective foreign government, on the other hand, pays for their airfare. The arrangement was honoured by the Bangladeshi government like all the other foreign nations," said ICCR Director General K Nandini Singla. She highlighted the role of culture and spirituality in building bonds between people where relations have strained on account of changing politics. "Culture never stops to connect," she said, "Governments may come and go, politics and leaders may change but the heart-to-heart bonds don't fade because they are built on emotions. No political leader may come and change the way you look at

another country or a different culture. That's why our connections with countries have endured for millennia." The DG built on the theme of the evening's performance, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the Upanishadic phrase meaning 'the world is one family', to elaborate her point. "The theme reflects the 'sangam' of culture. Performing at the Maha Kumbh, where the confluence of three rivers creates divinity, would entail the core message that we are one. The Kumbh is a great equaliser. True, one could be a Bangladeshi and face political difficulties, but at the end of the day, we are all humans with the same aspirations, needs and fears. Those emotions of the heart always overpower the thought processes of the brain," she said. A joint performance of all artistes has been choreographed by renowned Kathak exponent Rani Khanum to form the evening's crescendo on stage following the showcasing of individual cultures by the nations, officials said. "This is the first time that ICCR is holding the inauguration of the international dance festival outside Delhi," ICCR's Deputy Director General Anju Ranjan.

Accent unfairly impacts English language test score, Indians believe

From page 1

According to the survey, over three out of five (63 per cent) test-takers, especially in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, believe that removing their Indian accents while speaking English will positively impact test scores. One's external appearance is also believed to impact outcomes. Punjab feels this most strongly, with 77 per cent of respondents from the state believing appearance can impact the outcomes of their speaking test. "For many years in India, people's insecurities with their accents and appearances have determined the opportunities available to them, ultimately impacting their earning potential. We have seen this play out even in the most critical situations where people's futures are often at stake. "The English language testing and the broader global mobility space are not

immune to these challenges. However, at Pearson, we are transforming this landscape," said Prabhu Ravindran, director of English Language Learning, Pearson India. "Our evaluation system leverages responsible AI (Artificial Intelligence) and language experts and to focus solely on assessing language proficiency, free from face-to-face interviews with technology that recognises more than 125 accents. By designing a test that eliminates biases and emphasises English skills, we aim to foster a positive and inclusive environment where everyone has a fair opportunity to chase their dreams," Ravindran added. Nearly two in three (64 per cent) respondents think that having a certain accent can help them get a better score in the speaking test. Thirty-five per cent of the respondents, including those in Tamil Nadu, believe an American accent contributes to better

test scores, while 21 per cent, especially those in Uttar Pradesh, say a British accent will play to their advantage. Over three in four (76 per cent) also believe that they can create a "professional" experience by dressing up formally, leading to higher scores. Versant by Pearson is an English Language assessment tool that accurately and efficiently evaluates candidates' English language proficiency, assisting businesses in hiring the best talent suited for their needs. According to the Global English Proficiency Report by Pearson launched last month, India ranks above the global average in speaking English with Delhi leading the chart followed by Rajasthan. The report cited that while India's average English skills score (52) is lower than the global average (57), the country's English speaking score (57) is higher (54) than the global average.

Virat Victory for India

From page 1

But that desire to drive brought his doom as well. Pandya immediately pulled the length back after getting driven for a four and Azam's full-throttle shot took an edge to KL Rahul's big gloves. Soon, Imam took off for a non-existent single and Axar Patel at mid-on just had to hit the stumps, which he did. At 47 for two, Pakistan had their task cut out in a high-pressure match but Rizwan and Shakeel brought some stability to their innings with composed knocks. India also had a couple of worrying points at this stage as veteran pacer Mohammed Shami and skipper Rohit Sharma had to stay off the field for some time. Shami had to tend to his shin while Rohit looked in some

discomfort primarily because of the heat here. However, both of them returned to the field to allay the concerns. Rizwan's adventurous shimmy down the track against Axar saw him losing the stumps, and from thereon Pakistan went on a downward spiral. Shakeel, who played the pull with some conviction, perished to the same shot against Pandya, skying a simple catch to Axar in the deep. Salman, Afridi and Naseem Shah fell to Kuldeep's guile as India tightened their grip. Khushdil (38, 39 balls) played a couple of big shots, including the first six of Pakistan innings, that helped his side reach a healthy total but Kohli's brilliance was too high to match on the night.

USAID row deepens as Congress attack Centre, BJP

From page 1

In Washington, speaking at a 'Governors Working Session,' Trump had said: Twenty-one million dollars going to my friend Prime Minister Modi in India for voter turnout. We're giving 21 million for voter turnout in India. What about us? I want voter turnout too. A video clipping from the event was posted on social media by the White House on Friday. Trump also said that money went to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh to a firm that nobody ever heard of.

Telangana tunnel collapse: Rescue inches closer

From page 1

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called up Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to inquire about the incident and assured all possible assistance from the Centre for the ongoing rescue operation. Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Varma spoke to Nagarkurnool District Collector B Santhosh for an update on the ongoing rescue operations following the tunnel collapse in the district. Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi also called Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy over the ongoing rescue operations.

PM to visit Assam

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive here on a two-day visit to Assam on Monday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. During the visit, the PM will inaugurate the 'Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit' on Tuesday, Sarma said. Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Sarma said that the prime minister will attend a mega Jhumar dance performance at Sarusajai stadium on Monday evening. "The dance performance by artists from our tea gardens will commence at 5.30 pm. The prime minister will greet the artists and spectators," he added.

Atishi to face off Gupta in Assembly

From page 1

The party MLAs and senior leaders met at the party office at around 1 pm, days after the party was voted out of power in the Capital. Atishi was chosen as the Leader of Opposition at AAP's legislative meeting on Sunday where MLA Sanjeev Jha proposed her name for the key post, and seconded by Kondli MLA Kuldeep Kumar and Tilak Nagar MLA Jarnail Singh. During the meeting, newly elected AAP MLAs also discuss the agenda they will raise in the first session of the Assembly. AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal and the party's 22 attended the meeting. In a press conference, AAP's Delhi unit convenor Gopal Rai said by consensus all AAP MLAs have chosen Atishi as the leader of the House... In challenging times, Atishi has served the people of Delhi as the CM... AAP will fulfil the responsibility of a healthy

opposition... Rai said. AAP Rajya Sabha MP and the party's national general secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak was the observer at the meeting. Speaking at the press conference after being chosen as LoP, Atishi said, "I thank the convenor Arvind Kejriwal and the MLAs for reposing faith in me. The people of Delhi have decided that we will sit in the Opposition this time. As the opposition there are two main things we will focus on. First is to ensure that the promises made by the BJP are fulfilled, especially its promise to give Rs 2,500 per month to the women of Delhi... The second is to ensure that the work that the AAP government did is not stopped or discontinued. Only a few days ago, the new health minister said Mohalla Clinics will be shut... We will make sure that the people of Delhi do not suffer and we will fight for them," she said. Asked about the BJP's second

cabinet decision to table 14 pending CAG reports in the first Assembly session, Atishi accused the BJP of "spreading misconception," saying she had sent the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) reports to Delhi assembly speaker before the election. "As chief minister, I sent the CAG reports to the Speaker before the elections, in a sealed envelope. They would have been presented in the first session of the new House in any case. The BJP is spreading the misconception that they have decided to present the report, which is completely false. We firmly believe that whatever is in the CAG report should be presented before the people of Delhi," she added. Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and national convenor Arvind Kejriwal Sunday congratulated the newly-elected Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Atishi. "I congratulate Atishi ji for

being elected as Leader of AAP in the House. AAP will play the role of constructive opposition in the interest of people of Delhi," he wrote over a post on X. The Delhi Assembly session will begin on Monday. The newly-elected Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) will take oath on February 25, while the 14 pending CAG reports will be tabled the next day. The nod to table the CAG reports, which were pending since the tenure of the previous AAP government, was given by Rekha Gupta in the first Cabinet meeting she chaired after taking oath as the Delhi Chief Minister. Returning to power after 27 years, the BJP defeated major AAP bigwigs including Arvind Kejriwal in New Delhi, Manish Sisodia in Jangpura, and Saurabh Bhardwaj in Greater Kailash. The BJP ousted AAP from power in Delhi, winning 48 of the 70 seats in the assembly polls held on February 5.

Delhi government sets up CAG trap for AAP

From page 1

"The most important thing is putting the pending CAG report on the House table in the first session. The last government, which misused the hard-earned money of the people of Delhi, will have to account for every penny spent". The pending audit reports will be tabled on the second day of the Assembly session on February 25 after Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena's address to the House, said a bulletin issued by the House secretariat. The pending CAG reports are Performance Audit on Liquor Supply in Delhi, State Finances Audit Report for the year ended March 2021, Revenue, Economic, Social and General Sectors & PSUs and Performance Audit of the Department of H&FW and Compliance Audit report 2022. The BJP has long demanded the tabling of the CAG reports, a stance they upheld during their time in opposition. Last year, the BJP even moved the Delhi High Court, seeking an order directing the then-Atishi government to present the

Care and Protection for the year ended 31 March 2021, State Finances Audit Report for the year ended March 2022, State Finances Audit Report for the year ended March 2023, Performance Audit on Public Health Infrastructure and Management of Health services, Performance Audit Report of CAG on Functioning of Delhi Transport Corporation, Performance Audit Report of CAG for the year 31 March 2022, State Finances Audit Report CAG for the year 31 March 2023 and Revenue, Economic, Social and General Sectors & PSUs and Performance Audit of the Department of H&FW and Compliance Audit report 2022. The BJP has long demanded the tabling of the CAG reports, a stance they upheld during their time in opposition. Last year, the BJP even moved the Delhi High Court, seeking an order directing the then-Atishi government to present the

At the press conference, Gupta highlighted the poor financial health of the Delhi government, saying several phases of meetings have been held with the officers over the implementation of the Mahila Samridhi Yojna under which Rs 2,500 per month is to be paid to the eligible women in Delhi. "The condition which the (previous) government has left for us... When we sat with officers to review the financial status of the current government, we found that the government exchequer empty," she said on a question about the preparation to implement the scheme. Gupta said that the people of Delhi have seen what they (AAP) are doing, what is their working style? What is their vision in the last 12 years? She said that the BJP government's focus is on the people of Delhi. About the Delhi Assembly session, she said, "All 70 MLAs will take oath in the first session and both the Speaker

and Deputy Speaker will be elected. The pro tem speaker will be sworn in the morning by the Lieutenant Governor and this is a three-day session which we have started." Gupta added that the three-day assembly session will focus on discussions about development projects, with no room for negativity. The party also announced the names of Vijender Gupta, a three-time-MLA from Rohini, and Mohan Singh Bisht, a six-time MLA from Karawal Nagar and Mustafabad, as Speaker and Deputy Speaker. Gupta, however, assured that the scheme will surely be implemented with detailed planning. State BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the BJP government's only agenda was ensuring a developed Delhi and solving the problems of the people. Media head Spraveen Shankar Kapoor and media co-incharge Vikram Mittal were also present at the press conference.

Rural women in Bihar are fighting changing climate

From page 1

"We can irrigate one acre of land in just 5-7 minutes at Rs 300-500. Without the drone, this task would take 3-4 hours and labour costs would have been much higher," she said. But drones are a big investment for the community as the battery lasts only 10-15 minutes per charge and replacing a battery would cost around Rs 90,000, she added. Soni's journey is part of a larger movement supported by JEEVIKA, a state-level women's socioeconomic empowerment programme, that provided her with the initial training. So far, 5,178 AEs are

providing services to more than 8 lakh farmers and covering 2,21,000 acres of land, according to official data. They provide seeds, pesticides, fertilisers, farm equipment and offer services on nursery management, collective marketing and digital banking. The overall profit generated by the AEs to date is Rs 1.54 crore, said Abhishek Kumar, Programme Officer for Women's Economic Empowerment at Project Concern International India. Kumar who works closely with them said they serve a key function in spreading awareness about climate-resilient farming techniques.

Chanchal Devi from Mushari, for instance, encourages farmers to grow water-efficient crops like palak, lal saag and cucumber. "Given the water shortage, we need crops that thrive with less water. I also teach farmers how to grow multiple crops together, like planting creepers alongside soil-intensive plants to save water and resources," Chanchal said. Sarita Kumari, a farmer who buys seeds and fertilisers from Chanchal's shop, explained that uncertain weather conditions have made farming a very unpredictable business so the presence of agri-entrepreneurs helps.

"We earlier had to travel to the nearest town to buy seeds and there also we would get traditional seeds, not the climate-resilient ones. So it definitely helps. We have not used the drone irrigation a lot but it is becoming popular here," the farmer said. Most agri-entrepreneurs source their seeds from Dr Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University in Samastipur in Bihar. By diversifying crops and adopting water-saving techniques, farmers can reduce their vulnerability to climate shocks, said Avantika, a member of Syngenta Foundation India, which works with the women entrepreneurs.

To help farmers cope with the economic impacts of climate change, the women are also promoting the planting of high-value cash crops, she said. Crops such as capsicum, cauliflower, broccoli, and chillies are grown using high-yielding seeds, enabling farmers to fetch better prices in the market. The use of polyhouses has also been encouraged, allowing farmers to grow crops in controlled environments and increase yields, she added. Every agri-entrepreneur has her own set of specialties. Like Shoba Devi from Motipur who has been advocating for the use of

organic fertilisers. "We've started using organic fertilisers and are slowly educating others about their benefits," she said. Organic farming not only reduces reliance on chemical inputs but also improves soil health, making it more resilient to climate change. Shoba said her efforts have inspired many in her community to shift towards organic practices. "It's a slow process but effective, especially as the effects of climate change become more apparent. Farmers are willing to learn," she said. "We're earning extra income, up to Rs 1-1.5 lakh per year," Shoba said. The impact of their work is

evident in their communities. Soni, for instance, now serves over 500 farmers in her area. The JEEVIKA programme is being executed in 13 districts of Bihar- Nalanda, Patna, Bhojpur, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, East Champaran, Saharsa, Purnia, Kishanganj, Katihar, Khatwar, and Begusarai-and is solely managed by the agri-entrepreneurs themselves. Bihar, like many parts of India, has increasingly become vulnerable to the impact of climate change with erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and unpredictable weather patterns making farming more challenging than ever, particularly for small and marginal farmers

whose livelihoods and food security are at risk. However, some challenges remain-the high cost of technology such as drone batteries and the need for more widespread awareness about sustainable practices. Women who spoke said they are planning to expand their business further and involve more women with them. "I never thought I'd be doing something like this-helping farmers, using drones, running a shop. But now, when I see how much easier it is for farmers to irrigate their fields or grow better crops, I feel proud. I now plan to involve more women to be part of this," said Chanchal.

MCD to regularise 12,000 workers: Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Big boost for thousands of Contractual Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) employees as the AAP's MCD government has decided to regularise 12,000 workers in one go, with final approval set for the MCD House meeting on February 25. Senior AAP leader Atishi said the party is delivering on its election promise, having already regularised 4,500 sanitation workers under Arvind Kejriwal's leadership. She called it an unprecedented move in the country's history.

Meanwhile Leader of Opposition in the MCD, Sardar Raja Iqbal Singh, and Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor stated that despite being in power in both the Delhi government and the municipal corporation, Atishi Marlena and AAP leaders have betrayed the employees of the MCD. They stated that both temporary and regular municipal employees are well aware that AAP leaders only mislead them. Even a few months ago, the announcement of regularising substitute employees was made, but no benefits have reached them to date. BJP leaders said AAP's announcement of regularising



LoP in Delhi Assembly Atishi and senior AAP leader Gopal Rai during a press conference

12,000 temporary municipal employees is pure deception. During a press conference alongside MCD Mayor Mahesh Khinchi, Deputy Mayor Ravinder Bharadwaj, and Leader of the House Mukesh Goel, former Delhi chief minister Atishi announced the decision, stating the AAP is committed to regularising temporary workers in the party-led MCD. "In the last two years, we have made 4,500 (contractual) workers permanent. Now, in the MCD House meeting on February 25, we are set to

regularise 12,000 more employees across all departments, including sanitation workers, junior engineers, senior engineers, gardeners, and other contractual staff," she said. Announcing a major decision, Atishi highlighted an upcoming milestone for contractual employees in the MCD. "Today, I am delighted to share that in the MCD House meeting on the 25th, 12,000 contractual employees will be regularised. This will be the biggest decision in MCD's history, where such a large number of employees

across various departments—sanitation workers, gardeners, beldars, teachers, junior engineers, and domestic breeding checkers—will be made permanent in a single decision. The 25th will be a landmark day in MCD's history." AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal took to his X handle (erstwhile Twitter), stating: "Best wishes to all the 12,000 temporary employees of MCD. Aam Aadmi Party has kept its promise and taken a historic decision to make these temporary employees of the corporation permanent.

This proposal will be passed in the MCD House meeting on 25 February."

Atishi also drew a parallel with AAP's governance in Punjab, where temporary teachers are being made permanent, reinforcing the party's commitment to workers' rights. "AAP delivers on its promises. This decision will be the biggest of its kind in the city's history," she added. Atishi also took a dig at the BJP, claiming that the saffron party often makes excuses to avoid fulfilling its commitments. "I knew the BJP would try to escape from its promises. That's why, before the new chief minister was appointed, we ensured that the Delhi government presented its financial status clearly," she said. She highlighted Delhi's economic growth under the AAP, stating that when the party first formed the government in 2015, the city's budget stood at Rs 30,000 crore.

"Despite receiving no financial support from the central government, we strengthened Delhi's economy. Today, the budget for 2024-25 has reached Rs 77,000 crore, marking a 2.5-time increase in the last decade," she claimed.



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta meets Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi

CAG storm awaits AAP in Delhi Assembly session

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The first session of the newly elected 70-member Delhi Assembly, beginning Monday, is expected to be stormy as the BJP government is set to table long-pending 14 CAG reports, which examine the financial and administrative performance of the previous AAP government in the national capital. The CAG reports, which are to be tabled in the House on February 25, have been at the centre of a fierce battle between the BJP and the AAP, with the former accusing the previous administration of delaying their release to hide alleged corruption.

During the AAP's tenure, Rohini MLA Vijender Gupta, who is all set to be elected as the Speaker of the new Assembly, along with six other BJP legislators had filed a petition in Delhi high court last year, seeking its direction to the speaker to call a session of the assembly for tabling the CAG reports. Gupta had also accused the AAP government of deliberately withholding the reports out of fear that those would expose the corruption within the administration.

Some BJP MLA are likely to raise the issue related to the renovation of 6, Flag Staff Road bungalow, which was the residence of Arvind Kejriwal during his tenure as the chief minister and was dubbed the "Sheesh Mahal" by the saffron party to highlight alleged corruption in the run-up to the Delhi elections. The bungalow was allotted to Kejriwal in 2015 and is owned by the Delhi government's Public Works Department.

On October 14, 2024, Mr Gupta, who was the Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Legislative Assembly then, had filed a complaint with the Central Vigilance Commission alleging illegal construction at 6, Flagstaff Road bungalow, following which the CPWD was asked to conduct an inquiry into the allegations of irregularities in the construction of the bungalow. Of the CAG reports, which are likely to raise a storm in the House relate to the excise department, mohalla clinics and the Delhi Transport Corporation. A few CAG reports had been sent to the Delhi government way back in August 2023.

The nod to table the CAG reports, which were pending since the tenure of the previous AAP government, was given by Rekha Gupta in the first cabinet meeting she chaired after taking oath as the Delhi chief minister. The newly chief minister has also hinted that the CAG reports could bring uncomfortable revelations for the opposition. "They are worried that once the CAG reports are tabled, many records will be exposed," she remarked.

As per the legislative assembly bulletin, the first session of the eighth Delhi Assembly will begin on Monday, with newly elected MLAs taking oath at about 11 am, followed by the Speaker's election at 2 pm. Four-time MLA Arvinder Singh will perform the duties of the pro-tem Speaker till the new Speaker is elected. The new members of the House will take oath before the pro-tem speaker. Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena will address the House on Tuesday before the CAG reports are tabled. The session will resume on February 27 for discussions on the motion of thanks and the election of deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht.

PWD shortlists three bungalows for CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The hunt for new government residential accommodation for the newly sworn-in Chief Minister of Delhi, Rekha Gupta, and her council of ministers has begun as she would not stay at 6 Flagstaff Road bungalow, the residence of the former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

The Public Works Department has reportedly shortlisted three residential accommodation options for Delhi's chief minister. After the 6 Flagstaff Road bungalow was taken back by PWD, two bungalows that were offered to former Chief Minister Atishi - Bungalow no. 2 at Raj Niwas Lane and Bungalow no. 115 at Ansari Road, Daryaganj - are also on the list. Atishi, who was occupying a bungalow on Mathura Road, is not part of the list as it belongs to Centre. Officials said all of these have

been shortlisted after undertaking repairs. "These bungalows have been shortlisted from our residential pool but are not finalised yet. These will be offered to the new Chief Minister and she may visit the houses to finalise the one she seems fit. The finalised house will then be approved and allocated through the General Administration Department (GAD). We are not sure when the Chief Minister will finalise the house," a PWD official said.

As far as the new official residence of Gupta is concerned, officials said that the three options are compliant with security measures under the Z-category cover that has been provided to the Chief Minister. A senior official said there is a specific criteria that needs to be followed while selecting the Chief Minister residence. "For

instance, we have to see the number of entries and exits, an open congregation area for events (like a lawn), segregated residential and office space and segregated servant quarters etc."

As of now, there is no permanent official government residence designated for the Chief Minister and Ministers to live in. In such a situation, whenever there is a change of power, the allocation of government accommodation becomes a big issue. All the ministers in the Aam Aadmi Party government were living in the government bungalow of the Public Works Department located at Raj Niwas Road, as it is closer to the Delhi Assembly. When Kejriwal became the CM for the first time in 2013, he was living in the government residence located at Tilak Marg.

The bungalow labelled as "Sheesh Mahal" by the BJP for alleged corruption was occupied by Kejriwal as the chief minister of Delhi from 2015 till the first week of October last year.

In Delhi, unlike other states, there is no permanent government residence designated for the Chief Minister and Ministers to live in. In such a situation, whenever there is a change of power, the allocation of government accommodation becomes a big issue. All the ministers in the Aam Aadmi Party government were living in the government bungalow of the Public Works Department located at Raj Niwas Road, as it is closer to the Delhi Assembly. When Kejriwal became the CM for the first time in 2013, he was living in the government residence located at Tilak Marg.

Man dies after bike falls off flyover

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 27-year-old man died after a flyover in Delhi's Shahdara area on Sunday, police said. His relative suffered serious injuries in the accident, they added.

A PCR call was received at 3:02 pm about a motorcycle plunging off the Geeta Colony flyover. The two injured men had been admitted to a hospital by locals. The police found the damaged motorcycle at the site, an officer said. Sarita Vihar resident Sonu (27) and his relative, also named Sonu (30), from Bhagirathi Vihar, were taken to Dr Hedgewar Aarogya Sansthan.

BJP organises booth level hearing of Mann Ki Baat



BJP National President JP Nadda Delhi, Delhi CM Rekha Gupta Delhi and others during the PM's Mann Ki Baat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP on Sunday organised 5,018 booth-level events across the state where BJP workers listened to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Mann Ki Baat" program. As part of this series, BJP National President Jagat Prakash Nadda attended a booth-level event in Naraina Vihar, where he listened to the Prime Minister's "Mann Ki Baat" program.

Baijyant Jay Panda listened to the "Mann Ki Baat" program in Kirti Nagar and urged workers to take the Prime Minister's message to every household. Delhi BJP President Sachdeva praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his appreciation of Indian scientists, calling it memorable. He highlighted that the entire nation witnessed ISRO's 100th rocket launch, which is not just a number but a testament to India's strength and commitment. Sachdeva also remarked on the global recognition India is receiving due to its rapid advancements in AI technology. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta emphasised the Prime Minister's focus on the respect for daughters in Indian culture, which plays a vital role in building strong values. The Chief Minister affirmed that, following the Prime Minister's vision, the government would work towards increasing women's participation in society and governance.

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NGT directs desilting of 24 Capital drains

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To prevent flooding during monsoon, the National Green Tribunal has directed the Irrigation and Flood Control Department of the Delhi government to submit an undertaking that the desilting works of 24 drains in the national capital will be completed by May 31. The green body was hearing the issue of desilting of the 24 drains, which fall in the Yamuna. The tribunal directed the additional chief secretary to appear virtually on the next date of hearing to inform the tribunal about adhering to the timeline and ensuring there was no flooding during the monsoon. The matter has been posted for further proceedings on February 27.

In a recent order, the bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava noted that the I&FCD had submitted a report dated February 20 about the status of desilting the drains along with details regarding the timeline for completion of the work. According to the report, the timeline for completing the desilting work across all drains is May 31.

BJP holds meet to discuss Assembly conduct

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP legislature party in a meeting on Sunday discussed do's, don'ts and agenda for the first session of the newly constituted eighth Delhi Assembly scheduled to commence on Monday. Leader of the House and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, the members of her cabinet and party MLAs attended the meeting at Delhi BJP office.

The party MLAs were given tips about the session as many of them are first time MLAs. The coordination with the government and the party organisation in coming days was also discussed in the meeting, the BJP legislators said. The party may form a coordination committee for the purpose in future, they said.

BJP MLA Raj Kumar Bhatia said the state president and general secretary (organisation) Pavan Rana briefed the legislators about their parliamentary conduct in the House. He thanked Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and said that it is his responsibility to meet the expectations of the public. He also mentioned that the Aam Aadmi Party's attempts to defame the BJP by spreading



Delhi Minister Parvesh Verma and other leaders during a meeting at the BJP office

lies will be countered by the work of their legislators. In today's meeting of legislators, everyone resolved to work together to advance their constituencies and address the concerns of the people. Completing the pending development projects in Delhi is their shared responsibility.

The only agenda of the BJP government is to ensure 'Viksit Delhi' and alleviating the pains and problems of people, said Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva in a press conference

with Gupta. The chief minister said the first session of the new Assembly will begin with oath of the new members on Monday and a protem speaker will be sworn-in by Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena. BJP MLA Arvinder Singh Lovely has been appointed as protem speaker to conduct the session till a new speaker is elected by the House. The BJP has nominated Vijender Gupta and Mohan Singh Bisht as candidates for the posts of speaker and deputy speaker, respectively. "Every single

rupee of the hard earned money of the public that was misused by the previous governments will be accounted for," Gupta said. The chief minister asserted that the commitments of the BJP government are "absolutely genuine" and will be fulfilled cent per cent. She said the BJP government is focused on its job at hand to serve people. Gupta hit out at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), saying the party's "work and vision" was seen by people in the last one decade.

Court refuses chargesheet against AAP leader

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Pulling up the probe officer for the delay in investigation, a city court has refused to take cognisance of a chargesheet against former AAP MLA Rituraj Govind Jha and others in a case of allegedly defying police order during a protest in March 2024. Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Paras Dalal said even if it was assumed that he disobeyed the order, such disobedience was not shown to have caused any obstruction, annoyance or injury, to any person.

In a recent order, the court said: "Even if it assumed that proposed accused persons disobeyed the order of ACP, Aman Vihar, such disobedience is not shown to have caused or tended to cause obstruction, annoyance or injury, or risk of obstruction, annoyance or injury, to any person lawfully employed. Since no offence has been made out from the police report, this court declines to take cognisance of the offence." On March 24, 2024, Mr Jha, along with councilor Ravindra Bhardwaj and other workers of

the AAP gathered and started protesting when the Model Code of Conduct was in effect and they tried to burn effigy of the Prime Minister and Enforcement Directorate. The accused were detained for defying police order and were charged under section 188 (disobedience to order of a public servant) IPC. Pulling up the probe officer, the judge said: "This court fails to understand the working of enforcement agencies and specially the Delhi Police in the present case. Firstly, the police report has not stated the ingredients of the alleged

offence. As stated above the present police report fails to show even prima facie what fact constituted an offence punishable under Section 188 IPC and no preliminary inquiry or legal opinion was obtained by the investigating officer before registering an FIR." The judge said the investigating officer ought to have gathered enough evidence and legal opinion to see if the ingredients of the offence were actually made out. He said: "And since the IO failed to form a rational opinion before registering the

FIR, this Court finds the same as a reason for delaying the investigation and ultimately filing of the police report. When the entire investigation required 13 documents and four witnesses, then it is shocking that the investigating officer kept such an investigation pending for eight months and a police report was filed after almost nine months." In fact, there was no difference in the first complaint, contents of FIR and the chargesheet, except that the FIR had the details of registering process and then chargesheet has fact

about notice issued to the proposed accused and process of filing the chargesheet, the judge said. "What is more disturbing is the blatant and casual forwarding of the police report by the SHO and ACP concerned. Neither the SHO nor the ACP questioned the IO as to what took him 10 months when there was no investigation required to be done," the judge said. The court directed a copy of the order be sent to the DCP concerned for information and necessary action, if warranted.

Preliminary inquiry not mandatory in every case under Prevention of Corruption Act: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said conducting a preliminary inquiry is not mandatory in every case lodged under the Prevention of Corruption Act and it is not a vested right of the accused.

The court has said while a preliminary inquiry is desirable in certain categories of cases, including those lodged under the Prevention of Corruption (PC) Act, it is not a mandatory pre-requisite for the registration of a criminal case.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Sandeep Mehta has said the purpose of a preliminary inquiry is not to verify the veracity of the information received, but merely to ascertain whether the said information revealed the commission of a cognisable offence.



Supreme Court of India

File photo

"The preliminary inquiry is not mandatory in every case under the PC Act," the bench said in its verdict delivered on February 17. "If

a superior officer is in seisin of a source information report, which is both detailed and well-reasoned and such that any reasonable person

would be of the view that it prima facie discloses the commission of a cognisable offence, the preliminary inquiry may be avoided," it

said. The top court delivered its verdict on an appeal filed by the Karnataka government, challenging a March 2024 judgment of the state high court.

The high court had quashed an FIR lodged by the Karnataka Lokayukta police station against a public servant for alleged offences under the PC Act.

The public servant was accused of acquiring assets that were disproportionate to his known sources of income. The apex court dealt with the issue of whether a preliminary inquiry was mandatory before directing registration of an FIR under the PC Act in the facts of the case or whether the source information report could be treated as a substitute for the preliminary inquiry.

Referring to previous apex court judgments, the bench said, "Applying these principles to the case at hand,

it is perspicuous that conducting a preliminary inquiry is not sine qua non for registering a case against a public servant who is accused of corruption."

"While a preliminary inquiry is desirable in certain categories of cases, including those under the PC Act, it is neither a vested right of the accused nor a mandatory pre-requisite for the registration of a criminal case," it said.

The court said the determination of whether a preliminary inquiry was necessary or not would vary according to the facts and circumstances of each case.

It said the high court had erred in concluding that the FIR was liable to be quashed on account of the omission to conduct a preliminary inquiry in the case. The bench also referred to section 17 of the PC Act that pertains to persons authorised to investigate.

Production, export of pain relief drugs halted in West Africa

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The apex drug regulatory authority has prohibited the production and export of all combinations of pain relief medicines tapentadol and carisoprodol, over news reports that unapproved combinations of the drugs exported to West African countries are driving an opioid crisis there.

In a communication, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has asked the drug control authorities of states and Union territories to withdraw all export NOCs and permission to manufacture all combinations of the two drugs.

Tapentadol is an opioid medication that is used to treat moderate to severe pain. Carisoprodol is a muscle relaxant which works on the centres in the brain and

spinal cord to relieve pain.

Both Tapentadol and Carisoprodol are approved individually by Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) but not approved as a combination in the country. Also, they are not part of NDPS drugs list in India.

"This is in connection with a recent article from BBC whereby, it has been written that the combination drug Tapentadol and Carisoprodol has significant abuse potential and this combination is being exported to West African countries from India," the communication sent by DCGI on Friday said.

Looking into the potential to have a harmful impact on people, DCGI requested an immediate withdrawal of all export NOCs and permission to manufacture, issued for all combinations of tapentadol and carisoprodol.

Congress MLAs continue 'dharna' in Rajasthan Assembly over suspension of six MLAs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAIPUR

The deadlock between the opposition Congress and the government over the comment of minister Avinash Gehlot on former prime minister Indira Gandhi during the Question Hour on Friday continued with the Congress MLAs carrying on their 'dharna' in the Assembly. The Congress MLAs have been sitting on the 'dharna' since Friday evening after the House was adjourned. They spent nights there, demanding that the comments be expunged from the proceedings and suspension of their six MLAs, including PCC chief Govind Singh Dotasra, be revoked.

Leader of Opposition Tikaram Jyoti said on Sunday that the 'dharna' will continue if the demands are not met. He said that the government itself does not want to end the deadlock and the ministers have held talks with the agitating Congress MLAs in

the Assembly just for "formalities".

Minister of State Jawahar Singh Bedham and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel met the senior Congress MLAs on Saturday night but the talks remained inconclusive. On Friday night also, the ministers held talks with Jyoti and other senior MLAs.

During the Question Hour on Friday, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Avinash Gehlot pointed to the opposition and said, "In the 2023-24 budget of also, like always, you named the scheme (on working women's hostels) after your 'dadi' (grandmother) Indira Gandhi." The remark led to a heavy uproar in the House, which led to three adjournments.

Government chief whip Jogeshwar Garg moved a proposal to suspend Congress MLAs Govind Singh Dotasra, Ramkesh Meena, Amin Kagzi, Jakir Hussain, Hakam Ali and Sanjay Kumar, which was passed

by a voice vote.

The Congress MLAs started 'dharna' in the House after it was adjourned.

Talking to reporters outside the Assembly on Sunday, Tikaram Jyoti said that the government does not want the deadlock to break.

"We had said on the first day that we are ready to end the issue and demanded that the remarks made by the minister in a sarcastic tone should be expunged and the suspension of our six MLAs should be revoked but the entire BJP is busy saving the minister by saying that whatever he said was right.

"This is not good in a parliamentary democracy. The fight here is ideological but the ruling party is full of stubbornness and arrogance and is only pretending to make efforts to end the deadlock," he said.

Meanwhile, Bedham said that talks with the Congress MLAs were held last night and they should end the 'dharna'.



Chief Justice of India Justice Sanjiv Khanna plays a shot during a cricket match of the first SC Advocate On Records Association Vs CJI XI in New Delhi.

PTI

Suspended IAS officer claims unjust delay in promotion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Suspended IAS officer N Prasanth has once again shot off a letter to Kerala Chief Secretary Sarada Muralidharan, claiming that his promotion to the Secretary rank has been unjustly delayed since January 2022, despite his full eligibility.

In a letter dated February 18, Prasanth, who was suspended in November last year for criticising a senior IAS officer on social media, alleged that over the past three years, three batches of officers junior to him have been promoted, while his promotion has been deliberately stalled.

"The only reason cited for this denial is the pendency of disciplinary action, which was initiated after my promotion was due, solely to create an artificial justification to withhold it," he stated.

In an open letter last week, Prasanth had accused the Chief Secretary of bias in the disciplinary action against him, claiming that the matter was not handled fairly.

"In January 2022, my promotion was withheld without reason. Then, on November 16, 2022, a disciplinary action was instituted against me, evidently to manufacture grounds for denying my

promotion. Now, in 2025, the file remains indefinitely stalled without a decision. My repeated requests for a copy of the file have been denied, raising a critical question, what exactly is being concealed in an administrative file concerning me?

It is said that 'every file is a life,' but this file has been lying lifeless for years," the latest letter said.

He claimed that there has never been any allegation of shortcomings in his professional duties or work performance.

"The actions initiated against me are entirely extraneous to my official duties, blatantly displaying bias and procedural impropriety.

It is well-established in law that disciplinary proceedings must be based on objective and legitimate considerations, not personal grievances or targeted harassment," he said.

He alleged that, according to established service rules and judicial precedents, disciplinary proceedings against an IAS officer should be concluded within six months.

However, the action initiated against him on November 16, 2022, remains unresolved even in 2025. He claimed that the prolonged delay had unjustly hindered his career advancement without any valid justification.

Congress to hold AICC session in Ahmedabad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday announced that it will hold its AICC session in Gujarat's Ahmedabad on April 8 and 9 to deliberate on the challenges posed by the anti-people policies and the relentless attack on the Constitution and its values by the BJP, while charting the party's future course of action," Venugopal said.

The session will commence on April 8 with an extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, followed by the AICC Delegates' meeting on April 9, he said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge will preside over both the meetings,

and present a strong alternative vision for the nation. "This significant gathering will bring together AICC delegates from across the nation to deliberate on the challenges posed by the anti-people policies and the relentless attack on the Constitution and its values by the BJP, while charting the party's future course of action," Venugopal said.

The session will commence on April 8 with an extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting, followed by the AICC Delegates' meeting on April 9, he said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge will preside over both the meetings,

which will be attended by Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, all chief ministers of the Congress-ruled states, national office bearers, senior party leaders, and other AICC delegates, Venugopal said.

This AICC session is being convened as a continuation of the resolutions adopted at the Belagavi Extended CWC meeting (Nava Satyagraha Baithak), which commemorated the 100th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's presidency at the 1924 Congress session, he said.

Recognising the urgent need to preserve, protect, and promote the legacy of Mahatma

Gandhi, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, and the Constitution, it was decided that between January 26, 2025 and January 26, 2026, the Congress will launch a massive, nationwide public outreach campaign called the Samvidhan Bachao Rashtriya Padayatra, along with an AICC session in Gujarat, the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi, Venugopal recalled. "The upcoming session will serve not only as a platform for crucial deliberations but also as a reaffirmation of the Congress party's collective resolve to address the concerns of the common people and present a strong alternative vision for the nation," he said.

Maharashtra FDA issues show cause notice to pharma firm in Palghar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PALGHAR

Maharashtra's Food and Drug Administration has issued a show cause notice to a pharmaceutical company here for alleged illegal export of opioids, an official said on Sunday.

Following the Central government's directives on Friday, a joint team of drug inspectors from the Centre and state government raided Aveo Pharmaceuticals, a Palghar-based company allegedly involved in exporting these drugs, the FDA stated in a release.

Aveo Pharmaceuticals, however, has denied the allegations and said it is fully cooperating with the government authorities in the probe.

As per a statement issued by the FDA, the action was taken after the BBC's investigative report highlighted that Tapentadol and Carisoprodol manufactured in India were illegally exported to African countries, where they are misused for recreational purposes. Authorities have seized all

existing stock in the company, prohibited further production, and initiated stringent legal action against the company in Palghar, the FDA said.

The company has been served a show cause notice under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940, and officials have assured that all necessary legal measures will be taken without any delay, fear, or favour.

A spokesperson of Aveo Pharmaceuticals said the company has always adhered to the rules and regulations set by various regulatory authorities to manufacture and export its products.

"Tafrodol is our registered trademark, which contains both Tapentadol and Carisoprodol. This combination is licensed by the relevant State Food and Drug Administration and is exported under the necessary No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Assistant Drug Controllers (ADC) and with an export licence issued by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)," he said.

SC to hear plea over shortage of anti-retroviral drugs for HIV treatment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea concerning alleged shortage of anti-retroviral therapy drugs for treating HIV patients in the country. As per the cause list of February 24 uploaded on the apex court website, a bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan is slated to hear the petition filed in 2022 by NGO 'Network of

People Living with HIV/AIDS' and others.

The Centre had in July last year apprised the apex court that the government was ensuring availability of free, life-long anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs for all people living with HIV through anti-retroviral therapy centres under the National AIDS Control Programme.

It had said as on date, there was adequate stock of all ARV drugs nationally under the programme.

The counsel appearing for the petitioners had said in view of the developments which had taken place since the filing of the petition, presently there was no shortage of ART drugs. However, the counsel had flagged certain difficulties in regard to the process of procurement and quality of the drugs.

The top court had suggested a meeting between the Centre, National AIDS Control Organisation and an organisation working for AIDS

patients to discuss issues of quality and shortage of ARV drugs for treating HIV patients.

Anti-retroviral therapy involves treatment of people infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) using anti-HIV drugs.

The plea had claimed that non-availability of drugs at the anti-retroviral therapy centres of the National AIDS Control Organisation and an organisation working for AIDS

USFDA pulls up Jagsonpal Pharmaceuticals for manufacturing lapses at API plant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The US health regulator has pulled up Jagsonpal Pharmaceuticals for significant manufacturing lapses at its Rajasthan-based active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) plant. In a warning letter issued to the company's Managing Director Manish Gupta, the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) noted that the correspondence summarizes significant deviations from Current Good Manufacturing Practice for APIs. The US health regulator stated that it inspected the company's

Bhiwadi-based plant in Rajasthan on March 20, March 27, and April 3, 2024. "This warning letter summarises significant deviations from Current Good Manufacturing Practice (CGMP) for APIs. Because the methods, facilities, or controls for manufacturing, processing, packing, or holding do not conform to CGMP, your API is adulterated," the USFDA stated in the warning letter.

A warning letter issued by the USFDA usually identifies the violations, such as poor manufacturing practices, problems with claims for what a product can do, or incorrect directions for use.

The letter also makes clear that the company must correct the problem and provides directions and a timeframe of its plans for correction. FDA then checks to ensure that the company's corrections are adequate. The USFDA noted that the company's quality systems were inadequate. It pointed out failure of the company's quality unit to exercise its responsibility to ensure the API manufactured at the contract facility is in compliance with CGMP.

"FDA is aware that many drug manufacturers use independent contractors such as production facilities, testing laboratories,

packagers, and labellers. FDA regards contractors as extensions of the manufacturer. You are responsible for the quality of your drugs regardless of agreements in place with your contract facility," it noted.

The USFDA alleged that its inspectors were refused entry into the facility on March 15, 2024. On March 20, 2024, the FDA was permitted to enter the facility at the registered address to conduct an inspection; however, access to requested documents was limited during the inspection, it added.

"When an owner, operator, or agent delays, denies, limits, or

refuses an inspection, the drugs may be deemed adulterated," the USFDA stated.

Based upon the nature of the deviations identified, the company should engage a consultant qualified to evaluate operations and to assist in meeting CGMP requirements, it said. "FDA may withhold approval of new applications or supplements listing your firm as a drug manufacturer until any deviations are completely addressed and we confirm your compliance with CGMP. We may have completed corrective actions to any deviations," the USFDA said.

Advocates Amendment Bill direct assault on autonomy of legal profession: Stalin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday flayed the Centre over the Advocates Amendment Bill 2025, calling it "a direct assault on the autonomy of the legal profession."

The BJP's aversion to Tamil is evident in this Bill, "as it wants to rename the Bar Council of Tamil Nadu & Puducherry as the Bar Council of Madras," he claimed.

"Tamil Nadu is not just a name; it is our identity!" he said.

Taking to 'X', the CM alleged that since 2014, the BJP government has been "systematically undermining the independence of the Judiciary—first by trying to hijack judicial appointments through the NJAC, then by ignoring the collegium's recommendations for judicial appointments and transfers."

"Now, by seeking control over Bar Councils, it aims to weaken judicial independence by

eroding the autonomy of the legal profession," he said.

"Though spontaneous protests and strong opposition to the Draft Bill forced the Union government to withdraw it, the rider that it will be reconsidered and processed afresh is condemnable," he said. The ruling DMK president said his party demands the total withdrawal of this Bill and "appeals to the Union Government to respect the autonomy of the legal profession."

PM slams Opposition criticism of Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHATTARPUR (MP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday slammed the Opposition for allegedly mocking religious traditions and attempting to divide society and said they have a "slave mentality." His remarks came amid the ongoing criticism from several opposition leaders regarding the Maha Kumbh, currently taking place in Prayagraj.

Addressing a gathering in Madhya Pradesh's Chhattarpur, the Prime Minister criticised politicians who, he claimed, ridicule faith and cultural practices, describing them as people with a "slave mentality" who undermine India's religious heritage.

"Nowadays, we see that there is a group of leaders who mock religion, ridicule it, are engaged in dividing people and many times foreign powers also try to weaken the country and religion by supporting these people. People who have the Hindu faith have been living in some phase or the other for centuries," Modi said without taking any names.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister also slammed those targeting temples, traditions and festivals, emphasising that



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses during the foundation stone laying of Bageshwar Dham Medical and Science Research Institute in Madhya Pradesh. PTI

their agenda is to disrupt societal unity.

"They dare to attack a religion and culture that has always been progressive in nature. Dividing our society and breaking its unity is their motive," he added. Praising 'safai karmis' (sanitation workers) and police personnel for their great job in making the Maha Kumbh a successful event, Modi also said in this

"great Kumbh of unity", thousands of doctors and volunteers are engaged voluntarily with dedication and the spirit of service.

"People who are going to this great Kumbh of unity are appreciating these efforts," he said and also praised services rendered by ophthalmologists to people at the fair.

He was addressing people after inaugurating the Bageshwar

Dham Medical and Science Research Centre and Cancer Hospital at Chhattarpur in Madhya Pradesh.

The Maha Kumbh currently underway at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh is taking place after 144 years due to a rare celestial alignment.

The Prime Minister also praised Bageshwar Dham's spiritual leader, Dharendra Shastri, for promoting unity

and announced a significant healthcare initiative — a cancer institute at the religious site. He said alongside spiritual offerings, Bageshwar Dham would now provide medical support to those in need.

"In this time, Dharendra Shastri has been making people aware of the mantra of unity in the country for a long time. Now, he has reached another resolution in the interest of society and humanity. This is the plan to build this cancer institute. That means now, here in Bageshwar Dham, you will get the blessings of bhajan, food and healthy life," Modi said.

Referring to efforts made by his government in fighting cancer, Modi said in this year's budget, many announcements have been made to fight the disease and it has been decided that cancer medicines will be made cheaper. Cancer daycare centres will be opened in every district of the country in the next three years, he added.

The BJP has been criticising opposition leaders for questioning the arrangements at Maha Kumbh. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee referred to the sacred event as "Mrityu Kumbh" citing deaths caused by stampedes in Prayagraj and New Delhi.

Manipur Chief Secretary assures aid to internally displaced people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Secretary Prashant Kumar Singh on Sunday assured that internally displaced people in the violence-hit state would get funds and assistance in time. He also said all-out support from the administration would be provided to them.

Speaking at an event held in Imphal East district, Singh acknowledged "the hardship faced by the displaced people, who have endured the ongoing conflict for nearly two years, with lack of basic amenities".

The chief secretary asserted that ongoing initiatives would be made more efficient and transparent to provide better support for the displaced people.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The chief secretary expressed admiration for the courage and resilience of those displaced from their homes



Security personnel during search operations and area domination in Manipur. PTI

in enduring the situation. Noting that there was a delay in providing funds and assistance in the past, Singh assured "timely delivery henceforth and all-out support from the administration" and wished "a safer, free from fear and self-reliant future for the displaced people".

Imphal East Deputy Commissioner Khumanthem Diana Devi also stated that the district currently hosts 3,500 displaced people across 17 relief camps and 400 units of pre-fabricated houses accommodating 1,394 from

359 families. She mentioned that over 293 families have returned to their villages with the improvement of law and order situation.

During the event, a total of 146 looms with accessories, provided by the Weavers Service Centre under the National Handloom Development Programme, were distributed to internally displaced women weavers. Powergrid Corporation of India Ltd also provided 300 bicycles for displaced students and 150 looms with accessories for such women weavers of the district.

Karnataka-Maharashtra bus services suspended amid border row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

Bus services between Karnataka and Maharashtra have been affected due to attack on bus drivers from both sides amid the sudden flare-up of border row in Belagavi in the last two days.

The decades-old dispute resurfaced on Friday when a bus driver and a conductor were beaten up for allegedly not speaking in Marathi at Marihal in Belagavi.

The bus conductor stated in his police complaint that a girl asked for a ticket in Marathi. When he said he did not know Marathi and asked her to speak in Kannada, she and her male friend attacked him.

At Marihal, a group of youths intercepted the bus and beat up the conductor.

While police arrested four people for the attack, the conductor has also been booked for 'indecent behaviour' with the minor girl on a



UBT workers stage protest by blackening buses bearing Karnataka number plates after Marathi bus drivers were allegedly assaulted in Karnataka's Belagavi. PTI

complaint filed by the girl, Belagavi Police Commissioner Yada Martin Marbanian told reporters.

In a retaliatory act, miscreants attacked and blackened a bus driver of Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation

(MSRTC) Bhaskar Jadhav at Guyilal in Hiriur Taluk of Chitradurga district on Saturday.

Police have arrested a few who were allegedly involved in the crime. Following the incident, the Maharashtra Transport

Minister Pratap Sarnaik on Saturday ordered the suspension of the state transport buses to Karnataka. Sarnaik said the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) bus, which was plying from Bengaluru to Mumbai, was attacked in Chitradurga around 9.10 pm on Friday by pro-Kannada activists.

On Sunday an ultra-luxury bus belonging to the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) was disguised with slogans like 'Jai Maharashtra', 'Marathi' and 'Maharashtra Navnirman Sena' written on it with black paint.

The KSRTC has also minimised the bus services to Maharashtra following the incident.

"We have limited the number of buses going to Maharashtra for the time being and are taking all precautions to normalise the situation," a senior officer in the North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC) told PTI.

Uttar Pradesh to install 300 CCTV cameras in Sambhal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SAMBHAL

The administration in Sambhal is set to install 300 CCTV cameras at 127 locations across the city to bolster security and surveillance.

This comes following violence in November last year in which four persons were killed.

The project, funded under the 15th Finance Commission grant, will be implemented as part of the city surveillance initiative.

Municipal Executive Officer Mani Bhusan Tiwari said. The district administration proposed this plan to ensure security and monitor any future incidents effectively, he said.

Tiwari said that previously installed CCTV cameras had aided the law enforcement in

tracking and identifying miscreants.

The new CCTV cameras at 127 locations across the city will bolster security and surveillance and is expected to enhance traffic management, law enforcement, and public safety, particularly in preventing chain-snatching and ensuring women's security, the officer said.

The cameras will be installed at key entry and exit points, sensitive areas, and major intersections.

The system will include PTZ (Pan-Tilt-Zoom) and ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) cameras, with a total estimated cost of Rs two crore.

Voice controllers will be integrated into the system, he said. The control and monitoring of the cameras will be managed through two

centralised control rooms-one under the supervision of an additional superintendent of police (ASP) and the other operated jointly by police, municipal authorities, and the agency responsible for its maintenance, he said.

Tiwari mentioned that the project has commenced and is expected to take two to three months for full implementation. Once completed, it will enable real-time tracking of activities across Sambhal, significantly strengthening the city's security framework, he said.

On November 24 last year, violence erupted in Sambhal's Kot Garvi locality during a survey of the Mughal-era Jama Masjid.

The incident led to the death of four people due to gunfire, while several others sustained injuries.

894 ineligible people identified for receiving old age pension

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAJPUR (ODISHA)

Altogether 894 ineligible people have fraudulently received benefits under an old-age pension scheme in Odisha's Jajpur district and have been asked to return the money, officials said on Sunday.

These people have availed of the financial benefit under the old-age pension scheme by allegedly producing fake documents, they said.

The fraud came to the fore at Binjharpur block of Jajpur district, following which the officials swung into action.

"We inquired about an allegation from the block that ineligible people were receiving old age pensions by producing fake documents. During the probe, we detected 894 fake beneficiaries in at least 29 gram panchayats, who were taking old age pension fraudulently by producing fake documents from September 2023 to September 2024.

"Hence, we have sent notices to them to refund all old-age pension money they had received," Binjharpur BDO Hitanshu Samal said.

The BDO said officials visited the residences of the ineligible people and served notices to them.

"If they fail to refund the money that they had taken fraudulently, the administration will take legal action against them," he said.

Last year, the complaint was lodged with former BDO Dibyendu Kumar Das that an irregularity took place as several ineligible beneficiaries took old age pension fraudulently.

Maharashtra seeks UNESCO World Heritage Status for Shivaji's forts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

A high-level delegation led by Maharashtra Cultural Affairs Minister Ashish Shelar is in Paris to seek UNESCO World Heritage status for 12 forts of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, an official said on Sunday.

As per an official statement from Shelar's office, the Maharashtra government has submitted a proposal to UNESCO under the theme 'Maratha Military Landscape of India', seeking the inclusion of 12 forts in the World Heritage list.

The forts of Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Panhala, Shivneri, Lohavada, Salher, Sindhudurg, Suvarnadurg, Vijaydurg, Khanderi and Jinji in Tamil Nadu have been included in the proposal, the statement said.

On the directives of Chief

Minister Devendra Fadnavis, a delegation left for Paris on Saturday to present the state's case for UNESCO recognition.

Shelar expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for forwarding Maharashtra's proposal to UNESCO and Fadnavis for giving him the responsibility of representing the state on the global platform.

The four-member delegation, including additional chief secretary Vikas Kharge, deputy director of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums Hemant Dalvi, and architect Shikha Jain, will be in Paris till February 26.

The delegation will conduct technical and diplomatic presentations before the UNESCO authorities, emphasising the historical and architectural significance of these forts, the statement said.

Seven arrested in Jharkhand for kidnapping Odisha mining executive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KEONJHAR (ODISHA)

Seven people were arrested from Jharkhand's Ranchi for their alleged involvement in kidnapping the vice-president of a mining company in Odisha's Keonjhar district, police said on Sunday.

The arrested people include the kidnapped person's driver from Keonjhar and his six associates, who are natives of neighbouring Jharkhand, a police officer said.

On February 13, Sujata Pradhan, wife of Nimananda Pradhan, lodged a complaint with the Barbil Police Station in Keonjhar district, alleging that her husband did not return home from office a day ago, DIG (western

range) Brijesh Rai said. On that day, a new driver was hired instead of the regular one.

Mobile phones of her husband and the driver were found switched off, he said.

After the complaint was lodged, both DIG Rai and Keonjhar SP Kushalkar Nitin Dagudu visited Barbil, formed twelve teams and sent them to various places in Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal to trace Pradhan.

Various investigating agencies from Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal collaborated and it was found that the crime took place in and around Ranchi, Rai said. "Police raided various places in Patna, Jamshedpur, Ranchi,

Kolkata, Purulia, Chaibasa and Bidhannagar for 10 days and finally rescued Pradhan from a place near Ranchi and arrested the seven accused on Saturday," he said.

The kidnapers demanded a ransom of ₹2 Crore and Pradhan's family paid ₹60 Lakh even as the police stepped up its investigation, the officer said.

The DIG said ₹50.90 Lakh in cash, a toy rifle, a blueprint of the crime, eight mobile phones, Pradhan's car, a motorcycle and identity cards of the accused were seized.

However, a Jharkhand-based gang leader, who was suspected to be the mastermind of the crime, has escaped from the police net, he added.

Record 6.82 Lakh Olive Ridley turtles nest in Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BERHAMPUR (ODISHA)

The mouth of the Rushikulya river in Odisha's Ganjam district has emerged as a major rookery for the endangered olive ridley turtles with over 6.82 lakh such marine species assembling for mass nesting, officials said on Sunday.

The mass nesting of the turtles in the Rushikulya river mouth commenced on February 16.

"Over 6.82 Lakh olive ridley turtles have laid eggs on the beach so far, surpassing the previous record of the arrival of 6.37 Lakh marine species in 2023," Berhampur divisional forest officer (DFO) Sunny Khokkar said.

A total of 6,37,008 turtles had laid eggs in eight days of mass nesting from February 23 to March 2, in 2023, while 550

lakh turtles laid eggs in 2022, sources said.

As the mass nesting of olive ridley is yet to be completed, the number might increase, the DFO said.

Favourable climatic conditions are one of the reasons for a record number of olive ridley turtles visiting the beach for mass nesting, experts said. "The better climatic condition this year has helped more turtles lay eggs in the Rushikulya river mouth, which is emerging as a major rookery for the turtles," Wildlife Institute of India (WII) Dehradun senior scientist Bivas Pandav said.

Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) senior scientist Basudev Tripathy predicts a good number of hatchlings likely to emerge as the mass nesting has taken place in time in the rookery.

Bihar Government to appoint 140 protection officers to combat domestic violence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

The Bihar government has decided to appoint 140 full-time 'protection officers' across the state to support women affected by domestic violence more effectively.

The Social Welfare Department has decided to create a separate cadre under which sub-division, district and state-level protection officers will be appointed.

The decision has been taken in view of the rising number of domestic violence cases in the state.

Speaking to PTI, Harjot Kaur Bamhras, additional chief secretary of the Social Welfare Department and chairman cum MD of Bihar Women and Child Development Corporation, said, "The department has decided to appoint full-time POs to effectively deal with cases of domestic violence."

"The process will start soon. A separate cadre will be created for

the purpose... More than 140 POs will be appointed across the state. Of them, 101 will be appointed at the sub-division level and 38 at the district level. A state-level PO will also be appointed," she added.

The decision has been taken as per the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, she said.

"The move aims to provide more effective protection of the rights of women, guaranteed under the Constitution, to victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto," Bamhras said.

As per the Act, the PO will assist the magistrate in the discharge of his functions and the former will also be responsible to get the aggrieved person medically examined, if she has sustained bodily injuries and forward a copy of the medical report to the



Representative photo

police station and the magistrate having jurisdiction in the area where the domestic violence is alleged to have been taken place, she said.

The PO will also ensure that the order for monetary relief under Section 20 of Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is complied with and executed, in accordance with the

procedure prescribed under the existing law, she added.

The state government has already taken several steps to ensure justice for women facing domestic violence through the enactment of the Dowry Prohibition Act, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, among others, Bamhras said, adding that different schemes also provide various kinds of services to women who face domestic violence.

"The Bihar government has also initiated the process of opening 11 additional 'one stop centres' (OSCs) in certain districts to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace more effectively.

An approval letter for operationalisation and establishment of 11 additional OSOs in the state was recently received by the WCDC from the

Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (Sambal Division)," she said.

The 'OSC' is a centrally sponsored scheme launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) in 2015 to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces under one roof in states and Union territories.

Currently, there are 39 OSOs operating in 38 districts of the state, with Patna having two.

With the additional OSOs, the total number will increase to 40. The additional 11 OSOs will be opened in Muzaffarpur, Gaya, East Champaran, West Champaran, Purnea, Katihar, Rohtas, Madhubani, Kaimur, Aurangabad and Jamui districts, Bamhras said.

The number of cases registered and disposed of relating to crimes committed against women increased in 2022-23,

when compared to the previous year, according to the Bihar Economic Survey report (2023-24) released by the state government last year.

"It can be attributed to increased awareness and integrated support provided by the OSC scheme of the government, as many women are coming forward to register cases with the authorities," the officer said.

Of the total 8,002 cases registered in 2022-23, 6,952 cases relating to offences against women were disposed of.

"Out of all cases of crimes against women in 2022-23, registration is the highest for domestic violence at 5,615, followed by dowry abuse (708), rape and trafficking case (147), second marriage (71), child marriage (48), cybercrimes (42), sexual harassment at workplace (23), and others (1,284). In 2021-22, out of a total of 7,030 cases, 6,002 were disposed of," the report added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Rise of the Right

Giorgia Meloni's recent speech struck a chord with the Right, yet it also exposed its inherent contradictions

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni recently made headlines with her fiery remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in the US. Speaking via video link, she claimed that the global Right is unfairly branded as a threat to democracy, while the Left enjoys undeserved legitimacy. In her speech, she drew a parallel between figures like Donald Trump, Argentina's Javier Milei and India's Narendra Modi, arguing that when the Left created a global network in the 1990s, it was celebrated, whereas today's Right is vilified for doing the same. While Meloni's argument taps into the grievances of conservative movements worldwide, it is riddled with logical gaps and selective reasoning. Meloni paints a picture of right-wing leaders as persecuted underdogs fighting against an entrenched leftist establishment. However, the reality is more complex. The rise of leaders like Trump, Milei and Modi demonstrates that conservative politics is not an underdog movement but a dominant force in many parts of the world.



Trump served as the President of the United States, Narendra Modi is in his third term as India's Prime Minister and Milei recently won the Argentine presidency. If anything, the Right has been steadily gaining power rather than being systematically oppressed. Moreover, Meloni's assertion that the world no longer believes in the Left's "lies" is an oversimplification. The political landscape remains deeply divided, with both right-wing and left-wing parties winning elections in different parts of the world.

While conservative movements have gained momentum, liberal and progressive politics continue to hold substantial influence. The notion that people have

wholesale rejected the Left is misleading and fails to acknowledge the electoral victories of left-leaning leaders in countries like Brazil, Germany and Spain. Trump's tenure was marked by an unprecedented number of falsehoods, ranging from his claims about election fraud to downplaying the COVID-19 pandemic. If the global Right is positioning itself as a movement rooted in truth, aligning with a figure like Trump severely undermines that claim. The argument that the Right is unfairly labelled as a threat to democracy also ignores the legitimate concerns surrounding authoritarian tendencies within conservative movements. Trump's refusal to accept the results of the 2020 US election and the subsequent Capitol riot were direct attacks on democratic institutions. Similarly, Modi's government has faced criticism for suppressing dissent and Milei has made inflammatory remarks about eliminating key government institutions. Indeed, Meloni's speech captures the defiant spirit of the modern Right, but it also exposes its selective reasoning and internal contradictions. While it is true that right-wing movements have gained traction, it does not follow that concerns about the Right's democratic integrity are unfounded. Yes, the world may be more right than left at the moment—but that does not mean all is right with the Right.

PICTALK



A worker paints the statue of Lord Shiva ahead of the Maha Shivaratri festival, in Chikmagalur

Prakriti Lamsal tragic death: A wake-up call

Prakriti Lamsal's tragic fate calls for urgent reflection on education diplomacy, bilateral trust and the necessity of systemic reforms



NAVITA SRIKANT

Armed Forces personnel often narrate stories of valour and courage of Nepali Gorkha soldiers. They say their sacrifice for India's security is unparalleled. The unique tradition of Honorary General Rank to each other's Chief of Army Staff is a jewel in bilateral relations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier noted, "I salute the Nepali braves who have laid down their lives for India" during his address to the Constituent Assembly of Nepal (August 3, 2014).

In bilateral relations such as these, a private university's administration acted inhumanely and irresponsibly to the grievance of harassment – the outcome – a 20-year-old Nepali female student Prakriti Lamsal committed suicide (under investigation) on February 16, 2025, at KIIT Bhubaneswar. Other resident Nepali students, shocked by the alleged suicide, protested against the harassment of Lamsal. Nepali students were abused, asked to leave and forcibly evicted. Hundreds of Nepali students rushed back to Nepal with bare survival means. Nepali students in trauma due to the death of Lamsal and the ordeal they underwent seek answers. So, "What did we miss?"

It has been alleged that Lamsal complained to the college authorities of harassment by her batch-mate but no action was taken. Did willful neglect and cruelty lead to Lamsal committing suicide? Access to emergency medical services and safeguarding evidence after being declared dead did not seem to function as one would expect.

Undoubtedly, the basic compliances to safeguard students failed. Several key questions are unanswered to day as the state investigation is under progress and justice is yet to be served. The case is no longer about justice for a deceased Nepali student but leaves a question mark on the capability of India as a nation to assure wellbeing and justice to a foreign student. The authorities did not stop at mere oral refusal of information but abused, used fear and forced eviction of hundreds of Nepali students risking



their lives. No doubt that KIIT's conduct should be a template of 'what not to do' for every public or private institution in India dealing with foreign students.

There has to be zero tolerance for actions against the law of the land, the ethos of the nation and the civilisational legacy that India and Nepal take pride in. Every Indian condemned the action of the KIIT Administration and expressed unequivocal solidarity with Nepali Students. It is at this juncture, recollecting PM Modi's Address to the Constituent Assembly of Nepal in August 2014 "When an adverse wind blows in Nepal, India too feels cold."

"How can India be happy if Nepal is unhappy"? One wonders why the Prime Minister has not addressed the people of India and Nepal assuring Nepali Students' safety, security and wellbeing as high priority. Reiterating these words to Nepali parents and students would strengthen relations for times immemorial. Undoubtedly, the Government of India managed the situation diligently, however, it is PM Modi whose personal connection with Nepal reinforces trust among Nepali people. PM Modi has spoken for the rights of Palestinians, Afghans and Bangladeshi minorities. It is even more important that he is seen assuring Nepali Students' concerns.

The Vishwamitra vision of India's foreign policy begins at home. To recalibrate the India-Nepal friendship and heal the wounds inflicted by the ill deeds of KIIT, India must be consciously seen as Vishwa Bandhu of Nepal. It is necessary to walk the extra mile towards the safety and wellbeing of foreign students, bring culprits to justice and regain the trust of Nepali Parents as "India First" for educational pursuits.

The education system in Nepal is flawed. On average, about five lakh students appear for grade X every year, and less than 50 per cent pass the exam. Frustrated with ghost colleges and universities, students want to leave Nepal for even Grade X and two levels. If 70 per cent of eligible higher secondary pass-out students are leaving for abroad, then where does the accountability lie for the state of despair among youth? If the National Lawmakers do not respect the youth's future, where and how the youth will garner respect abroad? The lawmakers roar for a while in Parliament, make powerful nationalistic statements, victim's family reconciles eventually and Nepali lawmakers diseased with short memory move on abandoning pending education reforms.

There has been no news so far if the Nepali government constituted any high-level com-

mittee to review education reforms and migration-related safeguards.

How many of these 70 per cent of students traveling abroad are registered with Nepali missions, and receive any cultural or crisis-handling counselling? When Lamsal did not get counselling support against harassment, why did she not reach out to local law enforcement authorities or the Nepali Embassy?

There have been unfortunate incidents in earlier years with Nepali students studying abroad, as in the case of Pramod Bhattarai found dead in the USA, Shristi Bhandari in Australia and John Lama in Japan. Wake up Nepal!! Invest in your demographic dividend, Nepali youth, impart technical education, skill and empower them with cognitive and socio-emotional skills for holistic development. This is not the first and certainly not the last unpleasant event in global disruptive times.

It is high time that sustainable lessons are learned at all levels. If education diplomacy between the two open border states fails, the repercussions are far-reaching. India and Nepal boasting of timeless relations and open border cultural ties should invest in its youth, their aspirations and importantly grievances.

(The author is a financial, geopolitical and security analyst; views are personal)



THE CASE IS NO LONGER ABOUT JUSTICE FOR A DECEASED NEPALI STUDENT BUT LEAVES A QUESTION MARK ON THE CAPABILITY OF INDIA AS A NATION TO ASSURE WELLBEING AND JUSTICE TO A FOREIGN STUDENT

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CORRUPTION CONTINUES TO RISE

Madam — Recently, Transparency International, a global organisation, released its Corruption Perceptions Index for 2024, ranking India 96th out of 180 countries. In 2023, India was ranked 93rd, indicating that corruption has increased. Even today, corruption scandals involving politicians, government employees and high-ranking officials continue to surface in every state across the country. Despite the widespread use of digital technology, the level of corruption has not decreased, as evidenced by this report. We often talk about India's glorious past and the ideals of 'Ram Rajya', but honesty, integrity and transparency are rarely reflected in our actions.

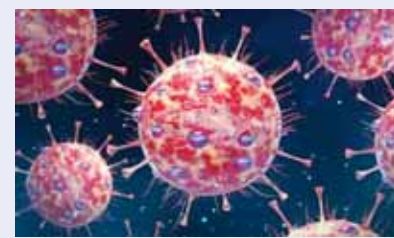
There is a clear disconnect between what we preach and what we practice. Moreover, corruption has gained social acceptance, allowing individuals to amass wealth through dishonest means because they know that society primarily respects and honours the wealthy. Honest government employees, leaders and self-employed individuals do not receive the same social recognition. This is why corruption, like the mythical demon 'Bhasmasura', continues to grow day by day. To eradicate corruption, the citizens of the country must become aware and stop giving social respect to corrupt individuals. Additionally, the government must strictly enforce stringent laws against corruption to set an example. Only then can corruption be truly eradicated.

Jitesh Mori | Kutch

WELFARE SCHEMES FOR DELHITES

Madam — Newspapers are abuzz with the news about the new BJP government in Delhi under the new CM Rekha Gupta. Now Delhi enters political tranquillity after a decade of turmoil. All the welfare schemes, including Ayushman Bharat, will now be implemented for Delhites. It also ends an era of confrontation with the Union Government. This is perhaps the first time that the environmental

New bat virus identified



A recent study has identified a new bat coronavirus in China that has the potential to infect humans, raising concerns about future zoonotic outbreaks. Bats have long been recognised as natural reservoirs for coronaviruses and this discovery underscores the ongoing risk of spillover events where viruses jump from animals to humans. Scientists emphasise

the importance of monitoring such viruses closely, as past outbreaks like SARS and COVID-19 originated from similar sources.

While there is no immediate evidence of human-to-human transmission, the genetic makeup of this new virus suggests it could adapt over time. Factors such as habitat destruction, illegal wildlife trade and increased human-animal interactions contribute to the growing emergence of such diseases. The key takeaway from this finding is the need for proactive research and global collaboration in tracking and containing potential threats. With advancements in virus surveillance and vaccine technology, early detection could prevent future pandemics.

Anushka Bohra | Ujjain

EDUCATION NEEDS REFORM

Madam — Attention must be drawn to the alarming findings of India's Graduate Skill Index 2025 by Mercer-Mettl. The report reveals that only 42.6 per cent of Indian graduates are employable, reflecting a decline from 44.3 per cent in 2023. This downward trend highlights a growing mismatch between academic training and industry requirements. Bridging this gap requires urgent intervention. Academic institutions must align their programmes with industry demands, incorporating skill-based training, internships and technology-driven learning. Additionally, collaboration between policymakers, educators and businesses is essential to reform the education system and enhance career readiness. The employability crisis, if left unaddressed, will hinder India's economic growth and global competitiveness.

Akash Kumar | Jagraon

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Steep hike in passport & visa services abroad: A big blow to blue-collar workers

This sharp price hike could impose severe financial strain on most vulnerable citizens, who work under harsh conditions to support their families back home

For millions of Indian workers abroad, securing and renewing essential documents like passports and visas is already a challenging process. However, a newly revised Request for Proposal (RFP) by the Government of India threatens to make it even more difficult by drastically increasing service fees. This move, which could raise costs by 15 to 20 times, is set to impose a significant financial burden on blue-collar workers—individuals who work tirelessly overseas to support their families and contribute to India's economy through remittances.

It is a fact that drastic fee hike threatens millions of Indian workers abroad. The Government of India has introduced a revised Request for Proposal (RFP) for outsourcing Passport, Visa, and Consular (CPV) services across 23 Indian Missions/Posts worldwide. There is genuine concern that this new fee structure could increase service costs by 15 to 20 times and that could impose a heavy financial burden on those blue-collar workers who is considered the backbone of India's global



diaspora. A mandatory bundled service cannot be justified at an exorbitant price! The proposed model enforces a "Service Fee per application" that requires applicants to pay for a bundled package, including document digitization, fingerprint and facial biometric capture, and four additional services—photocopying, photography, form filling, and courier services. Crucially, this fee is mandatory, even if the applicant does not require all these services.

As a result, a simple service that currently costs \$5-\$7 could surge to an alarming \$90-\$100. This hike disproportionately affects Indian workers in Gulf countries, the UK, and beyond, many of whom struggle to make ends meet.

It is also well-known that Indian blue-collar workers abroad face several unseen struggles. They form the backbone of industries such as construction, hospitality, and domestic labour across the Gulf, the UK, and Southeast Asia. Most come from humble backgrounds, often taking loans to secure jobs abroad. Their primary goal is to support their families back home, sending every possible rupee as remittance to cover household expenses, children's education, and medical needs. Despite enduring harsh working conditions, low wages, and exploitative contracts, these workers persevere for a better future. However, the government's latest fee hike threatens their already fragile financial stability.

It is easy to understand how this fee hike will harm Indian workers. Earning as little as Rs 20,000- Rs 30,000 per month, many blue-collar workers barely manage to save. A sudden jump in service fees from \$5-\$7 to \$90-\$100 means they will have to cut down on basic necessities. Many may even struggle to renew passports or access essential documentation,

jeopardizing their employment abroad. Many of these workers rely on loans to finance their overseas employment. Higher service fees add financial strain, potentially pushing them into debt or forcing them to return home jobless because they cannot afford visa renewals or work permits.

Furthermore, the hike will be a direct hit to India's foreign remittances. India received over \$100 billion in remittances in 2023, much of it from blue-collar workers. If rising service costs force many to return home, the country could see a significant drop in remittances, affecting millions of dependent families and impacting the national economy. The question remains—will India's policymakers stand by their overseas workers, or will they burden them further with unnecessary and exploitative service costs? The government must reconsider this fee structure to prevent further hardship for millions of Indian workers who contribute not only to their families but also to the nation's economy.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)



B K JHA



FIRST COLUMN

A KASHMIRI AT MAHA KUMBH

Maha Kumbh is a deeply immersive experience, a transformative journey like no other



JEHANZEB ALLAQABAND

As a Kashmiri Muslim, I, Jehanzeb Allaqaband, had heard of the Maha Kumbh Mela but never imagined experiencing it. In 2025, my friend Yuvraj Srivastava invited me to witness the event in Prayagraj, and what was meant to be a two-day visit turned into an unforgettable week. The spiritual energy and unity of the gathering left me deeply moved, and I didn't want to leave, though prior commitments forced me to return home. The Kumbh Mela was a unique blend of ancient rituals and modern technology. The event attracted millions of pilgrims and was especially significant due to a rare cosmic alignment. It was more than just a religious event; it was an experience of learning, connection and respect for all cultures. I was struck by the seamless combination of tradition and innovation, such as AI being used to manage crowds and sustainability efforts. The efforts of the Uttar Pradesh government under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were impressive. The cleanliness, security and hospitality were top-notch. I was particularly moved by the creation of a temporary city for the pilgrims, with 150,000 tents, medical camps and free healthcare. When I fell ill, I received prompt treatment without charge. One remarkable initiative was the "Vidya Kumbh" project, which provided free education to the children of 15,000 sanitation workers. This showed the administration's commitment to both the event and the well-being of the workers' families. As a Kashmiri Muslim, I was warmly welcomed by the pilgrims, and the sense of unity and brotherhood was palpable. The experience left a lasting impression on me, strengthening my belief in the power of faith and unity. My time at the Maha Kumbh Mela was a life-changing experience. As a social activist, I am com-



mitted to applying the lessons of spirituality, unity, and service to humanity within my community. The event's success under Yogi Adityanath's leadership is a model of effective public administration, showing how large-scale gatherings can honour tradition while embracing progress. Indeed, Maha Kumbh is not just a religious congregation; it is a symbol of unity, inclusivity and spiritual awakening. Held once every twelve years, this grand event draws millions of people from across the world, transcending barriers of caste, creed, nationality and social status. From ascetics and spiritual seekers to scholars, pilgrims, and tourists, everyone comes together in pursuit of divine blessings, wisdom, and self-discovery. At its core, Maha Kumbh embodies the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—"the world is one family." It fosters an environment where people from diverse backgrounds coexist in harmony, sharing prayers, knowledge and experiences. The sacred rivers become the melting pot of traditions, where faith unites humanity beyond differences. It is a place where the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlettered, stand side by side, immersed in devotion and introspection. Beyond its spiritual significance, Maha Kumbh serves as a cultural confluence, bringing together art, philosophy, and age-old traditions. It is a global event where seekers of truth and wisdom are welcomed with open arms. Maha Kumbh is for all—an enduring testament to inclusivity, faith, and the boundless spirit of togetherness that defines humanity.

(The writer is an activist; views are personal)

Agarwood: The golden green tree revives Tripura's economy



V K BAHUGUNA

As Tripura emerges as India's Agarwood hub, farmers across the country are eyeing its cultivation. However, unlocking its full potential requires streamlining regulatory policies



The Agar tree known scientifically as *Aquilaria malaccensis* in India is found primarily in the North-Eastern states of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. The capital city of Agartala was once full of Agarwood trees and hence named after it by the Tripura Royal family. Myanmar, Sumatra, Laos, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Borneo and the Philippines. It is a critically endangered tree species due to its heavy demand and illegal trade and is on the Red list of the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN). There are 15 crore Agarwood trees in India and the tree species are making a ripple in Tripura due to proactive actions taken by the state government on its promotion and value addition and providing a platform for its conservation and promotion on private lands. Now farmers from other states are taking seedlings from Tripura and North-East and this species is poised to grow in other suitable localities. I visited Tripura in the second week of this month to study the economic and ecological potential of Agar trees in Tripura and as such for the farmers of the country. The Architecture of Agar tree management especially in Tripura has undergone a sea change for the last eight to ten years and the Dharmanagar area in North Tripura is now becoming an epicentre of Agar tree propagation and value addition. Earlier the distillation units were raided and destroyed by the forest department now is being promoted along with the big push for plantation on farmers' land considering its immense potential for increasing the income of farmers manifold. Considering the demand for Agarwood oil and chips in the international market especially in Middle Eastern countries there is huge scope for its propagation in a big way. The Agarwood market was initially monopolised by a single family of Assam as it thrived also from illegal cutting of trees from Tripura and Assam but now after a major policy thrust by the government and involvement of farmers and traders, Tripura is driving not only the conservation of Agarwood tree but leading the nation in its innovative value addition.



THE FOREST DEPARTMENT DURING THE LAST SEVEN YEARS HAS WORKED ON ALL FRONTS OF AGAR FROM PROPAGATION TO MARKETING TO VALUE ADDITION AND SOON IT WILL BE GROWN IN EVERY HOMESTEAD MAKING ITS CONSERVATION EASY AND VALUE ADDITION PERFECT FOR THE FARMERS TO EARN BIG MONEY

Thanks to policy support from the state government the forest department during the last seven years has worked on all fronts of Agar from propagation to marketing to value addition and soon it will be grown in every homestead making its conservation easy and value addition perfect for the farmers to earn big money. Let us discuss the economics of growing Agarwood trees and the steps needed to be further taken by the government of India and the States. Each tree if inoculated artificially or naturally attacked by fungi like *Fusarium*, *Lasiodiplodia*, *Penicillium*, and *Aspergillus* after around seven years of age or more will yield resin in the next 5 to 6 years and the tree shall be felled to extract the resin which then can be distilled to produce around 20 to 25 ml of Agar oil worth Rs 20,000 and worth Rs 80,000 wood chips in the international and national market according to Mr Parvin Agrawal IFS officers who as head of Agar project oversaw the Agarwood revolution in Tripura. The sale price of one litre of Agar oil in the international market is 10 lakhs per litre and of the chips is 1 lakh per kg. A farmer can earn anything between 15 to 20 lakh per year from around 500 trees in one hectare of Agarwood plantation and thus 2 crores in ten to fifteen years. Agar, therefore, is a Golden Green Tree and a wonderful gift of nature that needs to be promoted on a large scale in India through trials along with a policy push that helps farmers adopt it on a large scale. During my visit, I spoke with Mr Mamon Ali proprietor of 'Momin Enterprise distillery' in Kadamtala in North Tripura and visited his plantations and distillery. He is having a turnover of more than one crore every year. The government of Tripura has also

promoted its diversification in perfume making from the oil of Agar resin. In Middle Eastern countries Agar oil is used directly but a few value addition units for perfume and Agarbatti production had been set up by a few entrepreneurs in Tripura and the quality of the perfume is very pleasing. In yet another example, the forest department had through a public-private partnership initiated a project to artificially inoculate agar plantation near Agartala through chemicals under which nine inoculation supplier firms are participating. The initial results are encouraging after burning the chips for perfume. The chips are sold for religious purposes to Buddhists and other religious groups and for that, the smoke yields a good fragrance. During my visit to Tripura, I met a senior Priest of Mahakaal Jyotirlinga Ujjain in Agartala on February 11 who is going to invest 5 crore to help farmers grow Agar trees in collaboration with the forest department to produce Agarwood dust for the Mahakaal temple of Ujjain. The Royal family of Baroda had funded him for this investment. Now the question is what needs to be done at the national level to promote income generation for the farmers. Agar tree is under the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species (CITES) of wild flora and fauna. Therefore, Agar product sales and exports are regulated as per international protocols. For every state, a quota is fixed and recently the Government of India had increased the quota from states. However, if we want to make Agar Tree a household tree the government needs to emulate the example of one trader Mr Habib Chaudhury from Assam. He took his Agar business from Assam to Laos and settled there and is now a very rich and big trader because he

found the Laos government had created a very trader and farmer-friendly quick system of approval for export within a few days. In India, it is still a big bureaucratic process and involves a lot of paperwork at every stage which discourages the farmers and entrepreneurs. The government apart from promoting Agar plantation trials in suitable agro-climatic zones of the country must first create a customer-friendly business environment. Like in Laos, the DFO office should issue the clearance online and it must have online access with govt of India and the CITES office simultaneously so that clearance is given to traders quickly. With a suitable infrastructure and a friendly regulatory policy framework, the Agarwood business profile has the potential of touching 15,000 to 20,000 crores in the next ten to twelve years. The tea export of 250.7 million kg during the fiscal year 2023-24 with a value of US\$ 776 million corresponding to around 7,000 crores Rupees. I have been writing to create an Agarwood and Red Sanders Board at the government of India level to promote these two species at the international level and to double the farmer's income as desired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed with PCCF and Principal Secretary RK Samal who is keen on leapfrogging the Agarwood policy framework. It is, therefore, high time that both Centre and States sit together and chalk out a policy framework for this by creating a National Board for Agarwood and Red Sanders to be housed in the Commerce Ministry. (The writer is former Director-General of ICFRE and Chancellor FRI Deemed University, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; views are personal)

The footwear industry takes a step towards sustainability and social empowerment

With the footwear sector projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of nearly 12.39 per cent, the emphasis on sustainable growth has never been more crucial

The Indian footwear industry has evolved significantly in the 21st century, blending tradition with innovation. Once solely focused on fashion and quality, the industry now embraces sustainability, fairness and social empowerment. Of late the industry is aggressively pursuing its corporate social responsibility as it is in direct touch with the people on the lower rung of the society. With the footwear sector projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of nearly 12.39 per cent from 2025 to 2032 (as per Statista), the emphasis on sustainable growth has never been more crucial. **Embracing CSR as a Core Strategy** The journey towards sustain-



SUNIL BATRA

ability begins with a clear vision that prioritises human welfare alongside business growth. As the Indian footwear industry rapidly expands, it is adapting to meet the expectations of socially conscious consumers. Companies are integrating CSR efforts with government schemes to focus on environmental conservation, education and healthcare.

For instance, Relaxo's CSR initiatives stem from a deep-seated commitment to uplifting underserved communities and making a tangible difference in their lives. **Transformative Projects** One of the most compelling examples of CSR in action is seen in Rajasthan's Alwar district, where water scarcity has long been a pressing issue. In response, check dams have been constructed along the Ruparel River under the 'Mukhya Mantri Jal Sanchay Yojana'. These reservoirs, with a total storage capacity of 146,000 cubic meters, have transformed local agriculture by recharging 455 hectares of irrigated land, benefiting nearly 1,000 families. This initiative highlights the power of

responsible water management in enhancing rural livelihoods. Another impactful initiative is a large-scale afforestation project near the Sariska Tiger Reserve. By planting 50,000 saplings, including 25-30 per cent fruit-bearing trees, this project not only restores biodiversity but also provides sustainable income opportunities for local communities. By involving villagers directly in conservation efforts, such projects promote environmental awareness and reduce human-wildlife conflicts. **Education and Skill Development:** Beyond environmental initiatives, the Indian footwear industry is actively driving change in education and skill development. Recognising the



importance of quality education, companies like Relaxo have taken significant steps to improve school infrastructure. The Parivartan Model School Project, for instance, has revitalised over 100 government schools in Haridwar district, particularly in the Khanpur and Laksar blocks. With 77 schools already renovated, the

project has upgraded classrooms, built protective boundaries, and improved sanitation and mid-day meal facilities. These enhancements have significantly boosted student enrollment and retention, particularly among girls, creating a more inclusive learning environment. Equally transformative are vocational training programs that equip young people with marketable skills. Collaborations with NGOs such as GMRVF and Teamlease Foundation have facilitated training for nearly 400 youths annually in fields like customer service, front office management, banking, and financial services. With a job placement rate of around 80 per cent, these programmes are empowering young indi-

viduals with skills that ensure long-term career stability. Healthcare is another area where CSR initiatives are making a significant impact. Relaxo's 'Nayan Avoidable Blindness Project' is a shining example. This initiative provides high-quality eye care services to 194 villages in Rajasthan's Tijara Block. Since its inception in 2018, the project has established two advanced vision centers staffed by certified ophthalmic professionals. Utilising state-of-the-art technology, these centers offer comprehensive eye exams and vision correction services. The project also prioritises training local youth, particularly women, in eye care professions, thereby fostering economic independence. By 2026,

the initiative aims to screen nearly 60,000 students across 281 government schools, improving both health outcomes and quality of life in marginalised communities. **Sustainable Business Growth:** The future of India's footwear industry is bright, fueled by robust market growth and a strong commitment to CSR. As consumer awareness grows, leading companies like Relaxo are proving that profitability and social responsibility can go hand in hand. By prioritising people and sustainability, the Indian footwear sector is setting a global example—demonstrating that businesses can thrive while making a lasting positive impact on society. (The writer is ED & CFO, Relaxo; views are personal)

Tens of thousands attend funeral of Hezbollah leader Nasrallah

PTI ■ BEIRUT

Tens of thousands of people packed into a stadium in Beirut early Sunday to attend the funeral of Hezbollah's former leader, Hassan Nasrallah, nearly five months after he was killed in an Israeli airstrike. Nasrallah died after Israel's air force dropped more than 80 bombs on the militant group's main operations room in a southern suburb of the Lebanese capital. His death was a major blow for the Iran-backed group that the late leader transformed into a potent force in the Middle East. He was one of the group's founders and led it for more than 30 years, enjoying wide influence among Iran-backed groups in the region. The late Hezbollah chief was widely respected in the so-called Iran-led axis of resistance that included Iraqi, Yemeni and Palestinian factions. Sahar al-Attar, a mourner who travelled from Lebanon's Bekaa Valley for the funeral said she still "cannot believe what happened." "We would have come even

under bullets" to attend Nasrallah's burial, she said. "It is an indescribable feeling." Nasrallah shares the funeral with his cousin and successor, Hashem Safieddine, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike on a Beirut suburb a few days later. The late Hezbollah leader will be laid to rest later Sunday in Beirut while Safieddine will be buried in his hometown in southern Lebanon. Both had temporarily been buried in secret locations. Hezbollah earlier this month announced plans for their official funerals. As the coffins were paraded before the huge crowd, men on a platform tossed flowers, while some threw clothing articles in the hope they come in contact with the coffin, believing it would bless them. Officials from around the region, including Iran's parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived at the Lebanese capital's main sports stadium. Lebanese parliament speaker and representatives of the president and prime minister were also in attendance at the funeral

believed to be Lebanon's largest in two decades. Qalibaf and Araghchi arrived on separate flights from Tehran Sunday morning in an apparent lifting of a ban on flights from Iran that Lebanese authorities imposed after the Israeli army claimed the Islamic Republic was smuggling cash to Hezbollah on commercial flights. Senior Hezbollah official Ali Daamouh told reporters Saturday that about 800 figures from 65 countries will be attending the funeral in addition to thousands of individuals and activists from around the world. "Come from every home, village and city so that we tell the enemy that this resistance will stay and is ready in the field," Daamouh said, referring to Israel. Hezbollah has been calling on its supporters to attend the funeral in large numbers in what appears to be a move to show that the group remains powerful after suffering major blows during a 14-month war with Israel that left many of its senior political and military officials dead. In the crowded stands, thou-



People gather for the funeral ceremony of the Lebanon's late Hezbollah leaders Hassan Nasrallah and Hashem Safieddine at the Sports City Stadium in Beirut, Lebanon, on Sunday

sands of Hezbollah supporters waved the group's yellow flag and chanted: "Death to

America, death to Israel." Sarah Taqi, an attendee, said the large number of mourners

shows that Hezbollah is still strong. "There is pain, but we have to be strong," Taqi said.

Hours before and during the funeral, the Israeli military launched a series of strikes in southern and eastern Lebanon. The Israeli army said in a statement that it had "conducted a precise intelligence-based strike on a military site containing rocket launchers and weapons in Lebanese territory." Lebanon's state news agency reported that one of the strikes wounded a Syrian woman. "The Israeli Air Force planes that are flying now in the skies over Beirut above the funeral of Hassan Nasrallah," Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz, adding that it is to "send a clear message: whoever threatens to annihilate Israel and strike Israel - that will be his end." Israeli jets also flew at low altitude over Beirut as Nasrallah's coffin was paraded into the stadium while his speech following the 2006 war with Israel played. The crowd chanted: "Death to Israel" in response. Hezbollah was served another blow with the fall of the Assad family's five-decade rule in Syria in early December, a strong ally of the Lebanese group and a main route for the

flow of weapons and money from Iran. As part of the US-brokered ceasefire deal that ended the war with Israel on November 27, Hezbollah is not supposed to have an armed presence along the border with Israel. Hezbollah's rivals have been calling on the group to lay down its weapons all over Lebanon and become a political faction. Hezbollah has prepared for the funeral by setting up the stadium to host tens of thousands of people while giant screens were placed along the airport road outside the stadium for people who won't get a space inside to watch the funeral. Tight security measures have been taken, including the closure of major roads in the area of the funeral. Lebanese army and police forces were placed on alert and the army has banned the use of drones in Beirut and its suburbs during the day. Flights to and from Beirut's Rafik Hariri International Airport were set to halt for four hours starting at noon. Hezbollah has given a title to the funeral: "We are committed to the covenant."

Israel says troops will remain in some West Bank areas for year

PTI ■ QABATIYA (WEST BANK)

Israel's defence minister said on Sunday troops would remain "for the coming year" in parts of the occupied West Bank where they have launched a weeklong offensive and would prevent tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians from returning, as Israel deepens its crackdown on the Palestinian territory. Israel launched a broad offensive on the northern West Bank on January 21 — two days after the ceasefire that paused the war in Gaza took hold — and then expanded it to include other nearby areas. Israel says it is determined to stamp out militancy amid a rise in attacks. Palestinians view such raids as part of an effort to cement Israeli control over the territory, where 3 million Palestinians live under military rule. The raids have been deadly, caused destruction to urban areas and displaced tens of thousands. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said he had instructed the military to prepare to remain in some of the West Bank's urban refugee camps, from where he said some 40,000 Palestinians had fled — a figure confirmed by the United Nations — leaving the areas "emptied of residents". He said in a statement he had ordered the military to "prepare for an extended stay in the camps that were cleared for the coming year and to not allow the return of residents or for terror to grow again". It was not clear for how long Palestinians would be prevented from returning. The military said it was expanding the raid in the West Bank to other areas and, in a rare move, was sending tanks to Jenin, long a bastion of armed struggle against Israel. It was the first time Israel had



Demonstrators light a flare during a protest demanding the immediate release of hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Saturday

sent tanks to the territory since 2002, in response to a deadly Palestinian uprising. The refugee camps are home to descendants of Palestinians who fled or were forced to flee during wars with Israel decades ago. Netanyahu under pressure to crack down on the West Bank: Under interim peace agreements from the early 1990s, Israel maintains control over large parts of the West Bank while the Palestinian Authority administers other areas. Israel regularly sends troops into Palestinian zones but it typically withdraws them once forces complete their missions. The UN says the current operation is the longest since the Palestinian uprising of the early 2000s. Violence has surged in the West Bank throughout the Israel-Hamas war. Israel has carried out repeated raids dur-

ing that time, but with fighting in Gaza and in Lebanon on hold, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been under pressure from his far-right governing partners to crack down on militancy in the West Bank. More than 800 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since the war in Gaza erupted on October 7, 2023. Israel says most of those were militants, but stone-throwing youths protesting the incursions as well as people not involved in confrontations have also been killed. In the most recent operation, a pregnant Palestinian woman was killed. Jewish settlers have also carried out repeated rampages throughout Palestinian areas in the territory. There has also been a spike in Palestinian attacks emanating from the West Bank and late Thursday,

blasts rocked three empty parked buses in Israel, what police are viewing as a suspected militant attack. Israel delays release of Palestinian prisoners: The intensifying raids come at a sensitive time, as the truce between Israel and Hamas in Gaza holds yet remains tenuous. Israel said it was delaying the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners until it gets assurances that Hamas stops what Israel says are "humiliating" handovers of hostages being freed. The sides do not yet appear to have begun negotiations on extending the ceasefire and its collapse could lead to renewed fighting in war-torn Gaza. Israel captured the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war, and Palestinians want all three territories for their future independent state.

Four people detained in France after deadly stabbing

Paris (PTI): Four people were in custody on Sunday after a deadly stabbing in eastern France that authorities linked to Islamic extremism, according to the national anti-terrorism prosecutor's office. A Portuguese man was killed in the Saturday attack in the city of Mulhouse, near the border with Germany. Seven police officers were wounded, including a parking control agent hospitalized with grave injuries, the prosecutor's office said. Those detained include the suspected assailant, a 37-year-old Algerian man identified by prosecutors as Brahim A. The interior minister described him as an Islamic extremist with a schizophrenic profile. Two of the suspect's family members and a person who lodged him were also detained, the prosecutor's office said. French President Emmanuel Macron said the government has "complete determination" to respond to the attack, which he blamed on 'Islamist terrorism, France has been on high alert for extremist threats. The suspect repeatedly said 'Allahu akbar' — "God is great" in Arabic — during the attack, the prosecutor said. He was armed with a knife and a screwdriver. The suspect arrived in France without papers in 2014 and was arrested and convicted of glorifying terrorism in the wake of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau told reporters Saturday night. Police experts had "detected a schizophrenic profile" in the suspect, he added. After several months in prison for that conviction, the suspect was confined to house arrest as authorities sought to expel him to Algeria. Retailleau criticised Algeria for postponing the return of criminals France is seeking to deport.

Officer killed after gunman takes hostages at US hosp

PTI ■ NEW YORK

A man armed with a pistol and carrying zip ties entered a Pennsylvania hospital's intensive care unit on Saturday and took staff members hostage before he was killed by police in a shootout that also left an officer dead, authorities said. Three staffers at UPMC Memorial Hospital, including a doctor, a nurse and a custodian, and two other officers were shot and wounded in the attack, York County District Attorney Tim Barker said. A fourth staff member was injured during a fall, Barker said. Gunfire erupted after officers from several different agencies went to engage the shooter, who Barker identified as Diogenes Archangel-Ortiz, 49. He said Archangel-Ortiz was holding at gunpoint a female staff member hostage who had her hands tied with zip ties when police opened fire. "This is a huge loss to our community," Barker said at a press conference following the shooting. "It is absolutely

clear, and beyond any and all doubt, that the officers were justified in taking their action using deadly force." The officer who died in the shooting was identified as Andrew Duarte of the West York Borough Police Department. "We all have broken hearts and are grieving at his loss," West York Borough Manager Shawn Mauck told The Associated Press. Duarte was a law enforcement veteran who joined the West York Borough Police Department in 2022 after five years with the Denver Police Department in Colorado, according to his LinkedIn profile. He described receiving a "hero award" in 2021 from Mothers Against Drunk Driving for his work in impaired driving enforcement for the state of Colorado. "I have a type A personality and like to succeed in all that I do," his LinkedIn profile said. UPMC Memorial is a five-story, 104-bed hospital that opened in 2019 in York, a city of about 40,000 people known for its creation of York Peppermint Patties in 1940.

The shooting is part of a wave of gun violence in recent years that has swept through US hospitals and medical centres, which have struggled to adapt to the growing threats. Such attacks have helped make health care one of the nation's most violent fields, with workers suffering more non-fatal injuries from workplace violence than workers in any other profession, according to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2022, a shooter killed a security guard in the lobby of New Hampshire's state psychiatric hospital before being fatally shot by a state trooper. In 2022, a man killed two workers at a Dallas hospital while there to watch his child's birth. In May of that year, a man opened fire in a medical centre waiting room in Atlanta, killing one woman and wounding four. And just one month later, a gunman killed his surgeon and three other people at a Tulsa, Oklahoma, medical office because he blamed the doctor for his continuing pain after an operation.

Shooting after pursuit at Air Force Base in New Mexico kills airman

PTI ■ ALBUQUERQUE

A shooting at a US Air Force base in New Mexico early Saturday left one airman dead and another wounded, military officials said, adding that it was not an act of terrorism or an attack by an outsider. A statement from Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque said security forces responded to a shooting near one of the entrances to the base at about

2 am. One airman died at the scene, and the other was taken to a hospital with a gunshot wound to a hand and later discharged, the statement said. An update in the afternoon said the shooting occurred following "an off-base pursuit". There was no threat to the public, it said. The Air Force released few other details and did not immediately say whether anyone was in custody. A spokesperson

declined to say whether the shooter or shooters also were airmen. The names of the airmen who were shot were not immediately released. The Air Force Office of Special Investigations was leading the probe. FBI investigators were also at the scene being helped by Albuquerque police, said Gilbert Gallegos, a police spokesperson. Police were not searching for any suspects, he added.

Europe leaders attempt to urge Trump not to abandon Ukraine

London (PTI): The leaders of France and Britain are making tag-team visits to Washington this week as Europe attempts to persuade President Donald Trump not to abandon Ukraine in pursuit of a peace deal in the three-year-old war with Russia. There is an element of good cop, bad cop in efforts by UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron to salvage American support for Kyiv. Starmer, reluctant to openly confront Trump, speaks of being a bridge between Europe and the US administration. Macron has more strongly criticised Trump's recent statements that echo Russia's narrative and American moves to negotiate with Moscow while sidelining Ukraine. Both leaders stress Ukraine's voice and sovereignty must be at the center of any peace talks. The French president warned Trump against appearing "weak in the face of President Putin." "It's not you, it's not your trademark, it's not in your interest," said Macron, who is due at the White House on Monday, the

third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Starmer is set to follow on Thursday. Double-track diplomacy: The trips come after Macron called a crisis meeting of European leaders in Paris last week to discuss the continent's next steps — and after Trump on Friday claimed Macron and Starmer "haven't done anything" over the past three years to end the war. The centrist French leader, known for his bold diplomatic moves, says he'll seek to persuade Trump that American and European interests are the same, telling him: "If you let Russia take over Ukraine, it would be unstoppable." Starmer, a cautious center-left politician, has avoided directly contradicting Trump or criticizing his actions. The UK joined the US in refusing to sign a joint declaration at an Artificial Intelligence summit hosted by Macron in Paris this month in what was seen as an attempt to curry favour with Washington. But the prime minister has reaffirmed Britain's support for Ukraine, rejecting Trump's

assertion that Zelenskyy is a "dictator" and the president's suggestion that Kyiv started the war, which erupted when Russia invaded its neighbour on February 24, 2022. Starmer spoke to Zelenskyy on Saturday, expressing "the U.K.'s ironclad support for Ukraine and commitment to securing a just and enduring peace." He said he would stress "safeguarding Ukraine's sovereignty" when he speaks to Trump in Washington. Some historians say the idea that Britain can be a transatlantic bridge is built on shaky foundations. "The special relationship" has always been more important from the British end," said Oxford University history professor Margaret MacMillan. "When it comes right down to it, great powers tend to do what suits them." Macron and Starmer may be at the table for negotiations on its future. They hope to get U.S. support for an emerging plan to have Europe deploy troops in a "reassurance force" to help guarantee Ukraine's future security.

Pope conscious, receiving supplemental oxygen

PTI ■ ROME

Pope Francis was conscious but still receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen Sunday following a respiratory crisis and blood transfusions, as he remains in critical condition with a complex lung infection, the Vatican said. The brief statement early Sunday didn't mention if Francis was out of bed or eating breakfast, which it had on previous days. "The night passed quietly, the pope rested," it said. The Vatican later said Francis was conscious, continuing to receive supplemental oxygen and that further clinical tests were being conducted. A more detailed medical update was expected later Sunday. On Saturday, doctors said the 88-year-old pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, was in critical condition after suffering a prolonged asthmatic respiratory crisis while being treated for pneumonia and a complex lung infection. The pope received "high flows" of oxygen to help him breathe through a nasal tube. He also received blood transfusions after tests showed low counts of

platelets, which are needed for clotting, the Vatican said in a late update. The Saturday statement also said that the pontiff "continues to be alert and spent the day in an armchair although in more discomfort than yesterday." Doctors said the prognosis was "reserved." Doctors have said Francis' condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. His condition has revived speculation about what might happen if he becomes unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, and whether he might resign. Prayers for pope at Vatican: Francis was supposed to have celebrated Mass on Sunday morning in St. Peter's Basilica and ordained deacons as part of the Vatican's yearlong Holy Year commemoration. The organiser of the Holy Year, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, celebrated the Mass in his place and offered a special prayer for Francis from the altar before delivering the homily the pope had prepared. "Even though he is in a hospital bed, we feel Pope Francis close to us, we feel him present among us," Fisichella told the hundreds of white-robed dea-



Nuns pray for Pope Francis in front of the Agostino Gemelli Polyclinic, in Rome, on Saturday

pneumonia. As of Friday, there was no evidence of any sepsis, and Francis was responding to the various drugs he is taking, the pope's medical team said in their first in-depth update on the pope's condition. Saturday's blood tests showed that he had developed a low platelet count, a condition called plateletopenia or thrombocytopenia. Platelets are cell-like fragments that circulate in the blood that help form blood clots to stop bleeding or help wounds heal. Low platelet counts can be caused by a number of things, including side effects from medicines or infections, according to the US National Institutes of Health. Francis, who has chronic lung disease and is prone to bronchitis in winter, was admitted to Gemelli hospital on February 14 after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened. Doctors first diagnosed the complex viral, bacterial and fungal respiratory tract infection and then the onset of pneumonia in both lungs. They prescribed "absolute rest" and a combination of cortisone and antibiotics, along with supplemental oxygen when he needs it.

cons. "And this compels us to make even stronger and more intense our prayer that the Lord will assist him in his time of trial and illness." A pre-written message that Francis had prepared for his Sunday noon prayer but did not deliver said he was "confidently continuing my hospitalization at the Gemelli Hospital, carrying on with the necessary treatment, and rest is also part

of the therapy!" The message noted the upcoming anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "a painful and shameful occasion for the whole of humanity." The main threat facing the pope is sepsis: Doctors have warned that the main threat facing Francis would be the onset of sepsis, a serious infection of the blood that can occur as a complication of

Germany votes in election with economy, migration in focus

PTI ■ BERLIN

German voters are choosing a new government in an election on Sunday dominated by worries about the years-long stagnation of Europe's biggest economy, pressure to curb migration and growing uncertainty over the future of Ukraine and Europe's alliance with the United States.

The centre-right opposition is favoured to win, while polls point to the strongest result for a far-right party since World War II. Germany is the most populous country in the 27-nation European Union and a leading member of NATO. It has been Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier, after the US.

It will be central to shaping the continent's response to the challenges of the coming years, including the Trump administration's confrontational foreign and trade policy. The top candidates, conservative front-runner Friedrich Merz and current Chancellor Olaf Scholz of the Social Democrats, voted within minutes of each other in different parts of the country on Sunday morning.

What are Germans voting for?: More than 59 million people in the nation of 84 million are eligible to elect the 630 members of the lower house of parliament, and Merz is favoured to replace Scholz. Scholz's Social Democrats have been polling between 14-16 per cent, which would be their worst postwar result in a national parliamentary election. The far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, has been running in second place with around 20 per cent of the vote — well above its previous best of 12.6 per cent in a national election, from 2017 — and has fielded its first candidate for



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier casts his vote at a polling station in Berlin, Germany, on Sunday

This election is taking place seven months before it was originally planned after centre-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition collapsed in November, three years into a term that was increasingly marred by fighting. There's widespread discontent and not much enthusiasm for any of the candidates. **Who could take charge?:** Centre-right opposition leader Friedrich Merz's Union bloc has consistently led polls, with 28-32 per cent support in the most recent surveys, and Merz is favoured to replace Scholz. Scholz's Social Democrats have been polling between 14-16 per cent, which would be their worst postwar result in a national parliamentary election. The far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany, or AfD, has been running in second place with around 20 per cent of the vote — well above its previous best of 12.6 per cent in a national election, from 2017 — and has fielded its first candidate for

chancellor in Alice Weidel. But other parties say they won't work with it, a stance often known as the "firewall". The environmentalist Greens also are running for the top job, with outgoing Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, but have been polling a little behind Scholz's party. Merz has pledged "stability instead of chaos" after Scholz's three-party coalition collapsed following long-running internal arguments, including over how to revitalize the economy. But it's unclear whether the conservative leader, if he wins, will be able to put together a stable government that does much better. Merz hopes for a two-party coalition, but may end up needing a third partner to form a government. The realistic candidates to join a Merz government are Scholz's Social Democrats, the Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats — who were the smallest partner in Scholz's collapsed government and may not manage to stay in par-

liament. The Free Democrats and another small party are hovering at around 5 per cent of the vote, the threshold to qualify for seats in parliament. If they do, there may be no majority for a two-party coalition.

What are the main issues?: The contenders have made contrasting proposals to turn around the German economy, which has shrunk for the past two years and hasn't managed real growth in much longer. That's going to be a central job for the new government. Migration moved to the forefront of the campaign in the past month following deadly attacks committed by immigrants. Merz vowed to bar people from entering the country without proper papers and to step up deportations if he is elected chancellor. He then brought a non-binding motion calling for many more migrants to be turned back at Germany's borders. Parliament approved it by a narrow majority thanks to AfD votes — a first in postwar Germany. Rivals made Merz's attitude toward AfD, which generated protests, an issue. Scholz accused Merz of "irresponsible gambling" and breaking a taboo. Merz has rejected those accusations, saying that he didn't and won't work with AfD. He has repeatedly and categorically said since that his party will "never" do so. Mainstream parties have vowed to keep up support for Ukraine in its war against Russia. And after the Scholz government reached a NATO target of spending 2 per cent of gross domestic product on defence, the next administration will have to find a way to keep that going — and likely expand it, in the face of US demands — once a special 100 billion-euro (USD 105 billion) fund to modernise the military is used up in 2027.

Congo's prez says he will create a unity government

PTI ■ ATLANTA

Kinshasa (Congo): Congo's president says he is going to launch a unity government, as violence spreads across the country's east and pressure mounts over his handling of the crisis. On Saturday, in some of his first statements since Rwandan-backed rebels captured major cities in eastern Congo, President Felix Tshisekedi, told a meeting of the Sacred Union of the Nation ruling coalition not to be distracted by internal quarrels. "I lost the battle and not the war. I must reach out to everyone including the opposition. There will be a government of national unity," said Tshisekedi. He didn't give more details on what that would entail or when it would happen.

M23 rebels — the most prominent of more than 100 armed groups vying for control and influence in eastern Congo — have swept through the region seizing key cities, killing some 3,000 people. In a lightning three-week offensive, the M23 took control of eastern Congo's main city Goma and seized the second largest city, Bukavu. The rebels are supported by about 4,000 troops from neighbouring Rwanda, according to UN experts, and at times have vowed to march as far as Congo's capital, Kinshasa, over 1,000 miles away. Rwanda has accused Congo of enlisting ethnic Hutu fighters responsible for the 1994 genocide in Rwanda of minority Tutsis and moderate Hutus. M23 says it's fighting to protect Tutsis and Congolese of Rwandan origin from discrimination and wants to transform Congo from a failed state to a modern one. Analysts have called those pretexts for Rwanda's involvement. On Saturday, Tshisekedi paid tribute to soldiers who were killed and vowed to prop up the army.

US officials who resist immigration crackdown face fines, jail time

PTI ■ ATLANTA

Republican state lawmakers seeking to aid President Donald Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration are threatening local officials who resist with lawsuits, fines and even potential jail time. Lawmakers in more than 20 states this year have filed legislation targeting so-called sanctuary policies that limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities, according to an Associated Press analysis using the bill-tracking software Plural. Some of those states already ban sanctuary policies but are now proposing to punish mayors, council members and other government officials who violate the prohibition. The goal is to provide "teeth to those who are being aggrieved by local governments and local officials who are not abiding by Georgia immigration law," said Republican state Sen. Blake Tillery, whose legislation would allow lawsuits against anyone who implements sanctuary policies. His bill recently passed the Senate and is now in the House. Opponents have raised concerns that the legislation could lead local police and sheriffs to detain immigrants for longer than they are supposed to under federal law out of fear of getting sued. "We're threatening our local law enforcement who are doing the best job they can to keep our communities safe," said Georgia state Sen Nikki Merritt, a Democrat. The state proposals come as the Trump administration also has begun taking legal action against governments that have

adopted policies inhibiting arrests and deportations by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The Department of Justice has sued Illinois, Chicago and Cook County, alleging they are violating federal law by not cooperating with immigration authorities. A Georgia law enacted last year already mandates that local law enforcement cooperate with federal authorities to identify and detain immigrants in the U.S. illegally, or else lose state funding and face misdemeanor charges. The legislation recently passed by the state Senate doubles down by letting people sue local governments, officials and employees for violating the ban. Immigrants and advocates in Georgia say the legislation, if passed, could stoke fear in communities already worried about ICE officials arresting loved ones in homes, churches or schools. "This all relates to Donald Trump's war on immigrants and local people trying to garner favor with him through legislation that doesn't solve any problems," said Charles Kuck, an Atlanta immigration attorney who opposes the legislation. Mike Mitchell, deputy executive director of the Georgia Sheriffs' Association, said the organization has a "neutral" position on the bill but noted sheriffs already are following immigration law. Louisiana passed a law last year requiring law enforcement agencies to "use best efforts" to enforce federal immigration law. Earlier this month, Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill sued the sheriff's office in New Orleans, alleging it is violating the state ban on

sanctuary immigration policies. The Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office declines ICE requests to hold detainees for extra time except when they face murder, rape, kidnapping, treason or robbery charges, according to a 2013 policy put in place under a consent judgment in federal court. The attorney general's lawsuit seeks to end that federal court order. The sheriff's office also restricts the information it shares with ICE and prevents federal immigration agents from entering its facilities without court authorization or interviewing detainees without legal counsel. The sheriff's office said in an emailed statement that it "remains in full compliance with all applicable state laws and valid court orders related to ICE detainers." An anti-sanctuary measure was the first item signed into law by Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden of South Dakota after he took over for former Gov. Kristi Noem, who was picked by Trump to be homeland security secretary. The law bans state and local policies that limit communication with federal officials about people's immigration status, however it contains no penalties. Other states have gone further. A sweeping immigration law signed recently by Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis requires the attorney general to take legal action against local governments that adopt policies refusing to comply with federal requests to detain immigrants in the country illegally. Local officials who willfully violate a ban on such sanctuary policies can face fines up to \$5,000.

Meloni slams Left's 'double standards'

Washington (PTI) ■

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has slammed the Left's "double standards" in perceiving conservatives globally, saying when leaders like herself, US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi collaborate they are called a "threat to democracy" while leftist leaders are praised for similar alliances. Meloni's remarks came as she addressed the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington via video link from Rome. During the address, Meloni praised Trump and said the Left is nervous about Trump's victory. "Their irritation has turned into hysteria, not only because conservatives are winning, but because conservatives are now collaborating globally," she said. "When Bill Clinton (former US president) and Tony Blair (former British prime minister) created the global leftist liberal network in the 90s, they were called statesmen."

"Today, when Trump, Meloni, (President of Argentina Javier) Milei or maybe Modi talk, they are called a threat to democracy. This is the last double standard, but we are used to it, and the good news is people no longer believe in their lies, despite all the mud they throw at us. Citizens keep voting for us," said Meloni. She said people vote for them as "we defend freedom, we love our nations, we want secure borders, we preserve businesses and citizens from the green leftist insanity and we defend family life." "We fight against wokeism...and we stand for common sense," she said. People are not as naive as the Left considers them, she said. "Our adversaries hope that President Trump will move away from us (Europe)," Meloni said. But, "knowing him as a strong and effective leader I bet that those who hope for divisions will be proven wrong," she said.

Musk gives all federal workers 48 hrs to explain what they did last week

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Hundreds of thousands of federal workers have been given little more than 48 hours to explain what they accomplished over the last week, sparking confusion across key agencies as billionaire Elon Musk expands his crusade to slash the size of federal government. Musk, who serves as President Donald Trump's cost-cutting chief, teased the extraordinary request on his social media network on Saturday. "Consistent with President @realDonaldTrump's instructions, all federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week," Musk posted on X, which he owns. "Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation." Shortly afterward, federal employees received a three-line email with this instruction: "Please reply to this email with approx. 5 bullets of what you accomplished last week and cc your manager."

The deadline to reply is Monday at 11:59 pm, although the email did not include Musk's social media threat about those who fail to respond. The latest unusual directive from Musk's team injects a new sense of chaos across beleaguered multiple agencies, including the National Weather Service and the State Department, as senior officials worked to verify the message's authenticity Saturday night and in some cases, instructed their employees not to respond. Thousands of government employees have already been forced out of the federal workforce — either by being fired or offered a buyout — during the first month of Trump's administration as the White House and Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency fire both new and career workers, tell agency leaders to plan for "large-scale reductions in force" and freeze trillions of dollars in federal

grant funds. There is no official figure available for the total firings or layoffs so far, but The Associated Press has tallied hundreds of thousands of workers who are being affected. Many work outside of Washington. The cuts include thousands at the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, Health and Human Services, the Internal Revenue Service and the National Parks Service, among others. AFGE President Everett Kelley quickly condemned the ultimatum as an example of Trump and Musk's "utter disdain for federal employees and the critical services they provide to the American people." "It is cruel and disrespectful to hundreds of thousands of veterans who are wearing their second uniform in the civil service to be forced to justify their job duties to this out-of-touch, privileged, unselected billionaire who has never performed one single hour of honest public service in his life," Kelley said.

Trump defends deportations, says he is draining swamp

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump has defended the mass deportation of undocumented foreign nationals, saying his administration draining the swamp by sending home fraudsters, cheaters, globalists and deep state bureaucrats. Trump has made the mass deportation of undocumented migrants a key policy. Addressing the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) outside Washington on Saturday, he said, "The fraudsters, liars, cheaters, globalists, and deep state bureaucrats are being sent packing." "Illegal alien criminals are being sent home. We're draining the swamp and restoring government by the people," he said. As of 2022, unauthorised immigrants represented 3.3 per cent of the total US population and 23 per cent of the foreign-born population, according to Pew Research Centre. US President Donald Trump has moved to overhaul parts of the US immigration system since returning to office and promised "mass deportations" and arrests. The Department of



Homeland Security posted on X that, as of February 3, its agents had arrested 8,768 people. Three batches comprising a total of 332 Indians have already been sent back to India from the US amid an intensified crackdown by the Trump administration against illegal immigrants.

A group of Indians deported from the US recently arrived in Panama after President Jose Raul Mulino agreed that his country would become a "bridge" country for deportees.

No passengers, no planes, no benefits at Pak newest airport

PTI ■ GWADAR

With no passengers and no planes, Pakistan's newest and most expensive airport is a bit of a mystery. Entirely financed by China to the tune of USD 240 million, it's anyone's guess when New Gwadar International Airport will open for business. Located in the coastal city of Gwadar and completed in October 2024, the airport is a stark contrast to the impoverished, restive southwestern Balochistan province around it. For the past decade, China has poured money into Balochistan and Gwadar as part of a multi-billion dollar project that connects its western Xinjiang province with the Arabian Sea, called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC. Authorities have hailed it as transformational but there's scant evidence of change in Gwadar. The city isn't connected to the national grid — electricity comes from neighboring Iran or solar panels — and there isn't enough clean water. An airport with a 400,000 pas-

senger capacity isn't a priority for the city's 90,000 people. "This airport is not for Pakistan or Gwadar," said Azeem Khalid, an international relations expert who specializes in Pakistan-China ties. "It is for China, so they can have secure access for their citizens to Gwadar and Balochistan." Caught between militants and the military: CPEC has catalysed a decadeslong insurgency in resource-rich and strategically located Balochistan. Separatists, aggrieved by what they say is state exploitation at the expense of locals, are fighting for independence — targeting both Pakistani troops and Chinese workers in the province and elsewhere. Members of Pakistan's ethnic Baloch minority say they face discrimination by the government and are denied opportunities available elsewhere in the country, charges the government denies. Pakistan, keen to protect China's investments, has stepped up its military footprint in Gwadar to combat dissent. The city is a jumble of check-

points, barbed wire, troops, barricades, and watchtowers. Roads close at any given time, several days a week, to permit the safe passage of Chinese workers and Pakistani VIPs. Intelligence officers monitor journalists visiting Gwadar. The city's fish market is deemed too sensitive for coverage. Many local residents are frazzled. "Nobody used to ask where we are going, what we are doing, and what is your name," said 76-year-old Gwadar native Khuda Bakhs Hashim. "We used to enjoy all-night picnics in the mountains or rural areas." "We are asked to prove our identity, who we are, where we have come from," he added. "We are residents. Those who ask should identify themselves as to who they are." Hashim recalled memories, warm like the winter sunshine, of when Gwadar was part of Oman, not Pakistan, and was a stop for passenger ships heading to Mumbai. People didn't go to bed hungry and men found work easily, he said.

Univ in Karachi faces flak for show-cause notice to students celebrating Holi

PTI ■ KARACHI

A leading private university in Karachi city of Pakistan's Sindh province has been criticized for issuing a show-cause notice to students for celebrating the Hindu festival of Holi on its campus. Lal Malhi, a former parliamentarian, posted on social media the notice issued to the students, most of them Hindus, by Dawood University of Engineering and Technology. The institute clarified it was an old case and dismissed reports that any FIRs had been registered against students. "The students were issued notices for having an event on campus without seeking clearance from administration, which is a breach of variety regulations," an official said. "The students have already responded to the notices," he added. Lal Malhi, expressing concern

over the growing criminalisation of minority religious practices in Pakistan, questioned: "Has the celebration of Holi now become a crime? Is celebrating Holi at a university considered an act against the State?" Last year, Hindu students faced similar issues in some other provinces during the Holi festival. However, the matter was buried. Student wings of Islamist parties have been known to oppose any cultural liberal celebrations on campuses even by Muslim students, deeming them against society's norms and un-Islamic. Viral videos of such celebrations and parties have caused conflict and violence on campuses between student groups. Hindus who mostly reside in the southern Sindh province have for long claimed they are not treated justly by authorities, with growing instances of forced conversion and marriage of young poor Hindu girls to Muslims.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Known to all that my client Smt. Veena Arora owner of the HOUSE NO-44, ROAD NO-5-36, AREA 6050 YARDS DLF CITY PHASE-II, VILLAGE NATHUPURTESIL AND DIST GURUGRAM and Smt. Veena Arora Have Not Originals 1. Sale deed executed by Sh. Sandeep Kumar and Sh. Satish Kumar in favour of 1.Sh.Saurabh Sharma, 2. Smt. Veena Arora, 3. Sh.Pawan Kumar Sharma. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 8 days of this publication.
AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile : 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE
General Public is hereby informed that the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), Haryana, Bays No. 55-58, Parvatan Bhawan, Sector - 2, Panchkula vide their letter No. -SEAC/HR/2024/271 dated 20.02.2025 has accorded the "Environmental Clearance" having EC Identification No. EC24B3813HR5352100N to Premium Infratech LLP having its office at 1204, Indra Prakash Building, 21, Barakhamba road, New Delhi-110001 for Group Housing Scheme Under TOD Zone (7.50 acres) at Sector-70, District Gurugram, Haryana in accordance with the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. General Public is further informed that copy of said Environmental Clearance letter is available with SEIAA, Haryana on the website http://environmentclearance.nic.in This public notice is issued in compliance to the Condition No. 10.1 of the Environmental Clearance Letter.
Authorized Signatory
For Premium Infratech LLP,
Place: Delhi
Date: 24.02.2025

Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam Limited (GMVN)
(A Govt. of Uttarakhand Undertaking), CIN U31101UR1976SC004259
74/1- Rajpur Road, Dehradun-248001, Ph: 0135246817, 2749308, E-mail: info.gmvn@gmail.com
No.22702/9/Out/Source/2022-25 **E Tender Notice** Date:22.02.2025
Tenders are invited by GMVN from reputed firm /eligible service providers to provide house keeping Services and other manpower services at all TRHS/Canteens and other units in GMVN. The Tender Fees for the above is Rs. 10000.00 (inclusive of GST) and the last date for submission of tender application is 13-03-2025 till 1.00 P.M. Detailed terms & conditions for applying tender are given in the tender documents which can be downloaded from the website www.uktenders.gov.in and gmvnonline.com.
Managing Director

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS
CHANGE OF NAME
I, Phoolwati legally mother of No. 8038393H Naik (GD) Kulwant R/o VPO-Barda, Police Station-Satnali, Tehsil-Mahendragarh, State-Haryana, have changed my name and date of birth from PHOOLWATI (12 Dec 1972) to PHULPATI DEVI (21 March 1962), vide affidavit dated 23 February 2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(1572)C

PUBLIC NOTICE
Known to all that my client Smt. Poonam Singh owner of the PLOT NO-33-B NEW PLOT NO-8-226, AREA 505Q YARDS KHARSA NO. 116/13, VILLAGE PALAM, MAHAVIR ENCLAVE AS MAHAVIR ENCLAVE PART-II GALI NO-27 NEW DELHI and Smt.Poonam Singh purchase property from Smt. Neelam vide Motorized P.S. Crime Branch in vide S.O.No.430/2014 LR No.2611476/2025 dated 23.02.2025. Poonam Singh wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.
AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile : 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that I, ADARSH JAIN S/O SH.SURESH KUMAR R/O RZH-1,GALI NO 6, RAGHU NAGAR,DELHI. The original documents ALLOTMENT LETTER, POSSESSION LETTER AND SITE POSSESSION ADDRESS No.34, BLOCK CAE/8 & 11 PANKHA ROAD, JANAKPURI, DELHI - 110058 of the above have been lost. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch in vide S.O.No.430/2014 LR No.2611476/2025 dated 23.02.2025. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9711274144, within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to by Director (COMM.) Estate or Director Commercial Estate Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Be it known to all that my client Mr. Vipender Singh S/o Sh. Kartar Singh R/o House No. 238A, Vill-Khandewla, Dist-Gurugram, Haryana-122504 have been disowned/debarred his son Bhanu Pratap from all his movable & immovable properties and severed all relations with him due to his misconduct. Any person dealing with him shall be doing at his/her own risk. **PRAVEEN RASTOGI (Advocate)**

PUBLIC NOTICE
Known to all that my client Sh. Pawan Kumar owner of the UPPER GROUND FLOOR (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) AREA MEASURING 120 SQ. YDS. PROPERTY BEARING NO.859/55 KHARSA NO.227,VILLAGE CHOWKRI MUDA KABAD, LEKHU NAGAR, TRI NAGAR, DELHI-11 0035 and Sh.Pawan Kumar Have Not Originals 1.Sale Deed executed by Sh. Panna Lal Chaudhary, 2. Survivor Certificate of Sh. Ram Saroop Dabas, 3. Survivor Certificate of Sh. Sukhbir Singh, 4. Survivor Member Certificate of Sh. Dalbir Singh, 5. Survivor Certificate of Sh. Mahavir Singh. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 8 days of this publication.
AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile : 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that I, ADARSH JAIN S/O SH.SURESH KUMAR R/O RZH-1,GALI NO 6, RAGHU NAGAR,DELHI. The original documents ALLOTMENT LETTER, POSSESSION LETTER AND SITE POSSESSION ADDRESS No.34, BLOCK CAE/8 & 11 PANKHA ROAD, JANAKPURI, DELHI - 110058 of the above have been lost. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch in vide S.O.No.430/2014 LR No.2611476/2025 dated 23.02.2025. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9711274144, within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to by Director (COMM.) Estate or Director Commercial Estate Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

Rural market at inflection point, offers opportunities: Marico CEO

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The “aspirational” rural market is at an “inflection point”, which offers significant opportunities and long-term potential to the FMCG companies with price point packs, said Marico MD and CEO Saugata Gupta. The hinterland, with its large population base and rising disposable income offers ‘headroom for growth’ for FMCG as people there now aspire for the same brands of products as other markets Gupta told PTI. Per capita income is on the rise, helped by the government’s spending on infrastructure, and an increase in the minimum support price of crops, which has helped in a significant uplift in terms of quality of life for the rural class, he said. “So, I believe that this is an inflection point,” said Gupta adding “for the large FMCG players this is an opportunity to continue to invest in rural because if you really look at it, everybody is chasing that same urban consumer

whether it’s D2C brands or international brands.” Marico is present in the rural markets with price point packs and Gupta believes “if you invest ahead of the curve, it has far more long-term potential and headroom for growth.” However, he also added that “affordability and availability” will always remain an important aspect for those markets. “Affordability is driven by price point packs. Availability is driven by distribution because sometimes otherwise there are counterfeits of your brand is not available” he said adding now “Bharat is aspirational, Bharat is ambitious and, therefore, we have to continuously best play the rural.” Gupta further added that rural distribution is still a source of competitive advantage for FMCG companies. “There are still huge entry barriers which are not there in top eight cities through modern trade and, therefore, it makes significant sense to

continuously invest in rural infrastructure, rural distribution and create moats for large FMCG companies,” he added. In the December quarter, rural markets have again surpassed the urban market in terms of growth. This was the fourth consecutive quarter, in which the rural beat the urban market in terms of growth, though on a smaller base. Marico, which is having a sequential volume growth, said urban consumption is relatively softer between the second and third quarters and is ‘stable’ now. Historically rural demand has been rising twice the rate of urban areas, but on a lower base, driven by over 800 Million people whose purchase behaviour is mostly linked to farm output. Moreover, over the growing debate between General Trade (Kirana stores) and Quick-Commerce, which has disrupted the market with its fast pace of growth, Gupta said the traditional retail channels will “coexist” with

the new age channels. However, Gupta also added each channel plays a “certain role with a certain catchment area” as GT is stronger in the smaller towns and rural markets, while online sales, which include e-Com and Q-Commerce, are driving premiumisation and diversification of Marico’s portfolio. He highlighted the role of having differentiated offerings in the channels to stop overlap. “Obviously, if you sell the same thing, there will be cannibalisation. The second thing which is important is, you need to have a different portfolio and also need to have a minimum operating price operating each channel so that it does not lead to channel conflict,” he said. Gupta also added as a responsible FMCG player, “We should also ensure that we do not over discount in one channel so that the other channel suffers” and ensure that there is at least, to a large extent, exclusivity of packs to the extent possible.

Climate change may increase probability of default in agriculture loan portfolio: BCG

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rising temperature and growing threat of climate change may increase default risk in 30 per cent of agri and housing loans portfolio in the next five years, according to an analysis by BCG. According to the report, the average global temperature has already increased approximately 1.2 degree Celsius versus pre-industrial levels leading to flooding in coastal areas and reduction in agriculture production. As a result, it said, there has been a drop in per capita income of people impacted by rising extreme weather events. Almost half of the credit of scheduled commercial banks is significantly dependent on nature and its ecosystem so any natural calamity impacts their bottomline. By 2030, as per estimates, 42 per cent India’s districts are projected to experience temperature rise by up to 2 degree Celsius. So, 321 districts may be affected by temperature rise in the next

five years. However, climate change also provides an opportunity to banks to the tune of \$150 Billion annually to fund energy transition needs of the country as public funding is hugely inadequate to achieve the goal of net-zero by 2070. “India is committing to sway away from coal and oil in favour of renewable energy. For India to make that difference/transition, an investment of \$150-200 Billion is required annually. On the contrary, the climate finance in India is somewhere between \$40-60 billion creating a gap of \$100-150 Billion,” BCG MD and Partner; APAC and India Leader, Risk Practice Abhinav Bansal said. “This transition will create a landscape of opportunity however we are very far from the target and we could see it happening by 2030-40 and so forth given that it begins right now,” he said. Pioneers will make the most of it by holding the lion’s share of the opportunity,

and “we could potentially witness a big scalp up for grabs from the banking context perspective,” he added. Rising climate risks are already impacting the global economy and the business case for collective action is clear, the report titled ‘the Cost of Inaction: A CEO Guide to Navigating Climate Risk’ said. Physical risks of climate change are becoming material for businesses, putting significant value at risk, it said, adding, transition risks for businesses are also significant. To deal with the impact, BCG managing director and senior partner global leader risk and compliance practice Matteo Coppola said banks need to systematically work towards raising awareness about the issue and advising their clients to adopt green technology. Besides, he said, blended finance should be accelerated so that adequate funds are made available to mitigate the risk.

Eight of top-10 most valued firms erodes ₹1.65 Lakh Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of eight of the top-10 most valued firms eroded ₹1,65,784.9 Crore last week, with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) taking the biggest hit, in line with bearish trends in equities. Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 628.15 points, or 0.82 per cent, while the Nifty went lower 133.35 points, or 0.58 per cent. The market valuation of TCS tanked ₹53,185.89 Crore to ₹13,69,717.48 Crore. Bharti Airtel’s market capitalisation (mcap) dropped ₹44,407.77 Crore to ₹9,34,223.77 Crore. The valuation of ICICI Bank tumbled ₹18,235.45 Crore to ₹8,70,579.68 Crore and that of Hindustan Unilever plunged ₹17,962.62 Crore to ₹5,26,684.38 Crore. Infosys faced an erosion of ₹17,086.61 Crore to ₹7,53,700.15 Crore from its market valuation.

India’s coal imports remain flat at 201 Million tonnes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s coal imports remained flat at 201.30 Million tonnes (MT) in the April-December period of the ongoing financial year. The country’s coal import was 201.52 MT in the year-ago period, according to the data compiled by mjunction services, a leading name in the e-auction space. Coal import in December declined to 19.28 MT over 23.35 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal year. “Imports in December 2024 stood around 19.28 Million Tonnes as against 23.35 MT imported in December 2023,” it said. During April-December 2024, non-coking coal imports were at 128.85 MT, lower than

133.46 MT imported during the same period in the previous year. Coking coal imports were at 40.64 MT during April-December 2024, down from 42.81 MT reported for April-December 2023. “The high stock position in the domestic market, coupled with lower-than-expected demand, has led to a drop in import volumes. We expect the demand scenario to remain unchanged in the coming weeks,” mjunction MD and CEO Vinaya Varma said. Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy recently said reducing coal imports and increasing domestic production is the focus of the government. The coal sector remains a cornerstone of the country’s energy security, playing an

important role in the nation’s industrial and economic growth. With the fifth-largest geological coal reserves globally and as the second-largest consumer, coal continues to be an indispensable energy source, contributing to 55 per cent of the national energy mix. Approximately 74 per cent of power generation in the country relies on thermal power plants. The cumulative domestic coal production in the April-December period of the current fiscal year reached 726.29 MT (provisional) compared to 684.45 MT during the corresponding period of 2023-24, registering a rise of 6.11 per cent. This showcases the ministry’s relentless efforts to meet the rising energy demand.

Bank of Maharashtra slashes interest rate on retail, car loan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has cut interest rate by 25 basis points on retail loans, including home and car loans in line with reduction in repo rate by RBI. After a gap of 5 years, RBI reduced the repo rate, the rate at which banks borrow from the central bank, by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent on February 7. Following this, the benchmark rate for home loan has been reduced to 8.10 per cent, one of the lowest in the banking industry, BoM said in a statement on Sunday. At the same time, it said, car loan came down to 8.45 per cent per annum. Similarly, education and other loans linked with Repo Linked Lending Rate (RLLR) has also

been reduced by 25 basis points. The bank has already waived processing fees on home and car loans, it said, adding, this dual benefit of reduced interest rates and waiver of processing fees reflects the bank’s commitment to offer best financing solutions to all its customers and help them fulfil their dreams. Meanwhile, the Pune-based lender has received Reserve Bank of India’s approval to set up an International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) Banking Unit at GIFT City. The branch will function as BoM’s first international branch carrying out offshore banking operations from India. This will help expand international banking business and also enable the bank to provide specialised banking services to its customers.

IT sector may see cautious salary hikes in FY25: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Salary increments in India’s \$250 Billion IT services sector are projected to be moderate in fiscal year 2025, as companies navigate a complex landscape of global economic uncertainties, evolving skill demands, and the increasing adoption of artificial intelligence (AI), according to experts. Industry experts predict an average wage increase of 4-8.5 per cent, a notable step down from previous years, signalling a shift towards more pragmatic compensation strategies. “The outlook for salary hikes this year is quite cautious,” noted Krishna Vij, VP, TeamLease Digital. “Industry players are looking at increments in the 4 per cent to

8.5 per cent range, which is lower than what we’ve seen in previous years. This slowdown is largely due to global economic challenges, reduced discretionary spending, and shifting business priorities.” Companies are being more conservative with their salary budgets, and many have even pushed their appraisal cycles beyond the usual April-June period, she said, which has made salary revisions less predictable in the current scenario. “Organisations are shifting to skills-based pay, leveraging Tier II hiring for cost efficiency. Instead of salary hikes, retention bonuses, ESOPs, and project-based incentives are being implemented as compensation strategies,” Vij said.

Reed and Willow CEO Janoo Motiani also gave a similar expected hike range, pegging it between 5-8.5 per cent. “The days of double-digit hikes seem behind us—at least for now. The industry is settling into a more pragmatic rhythm, with average hikes expected to hover between 5 per cent and 8.5 per cent. This aligns with the cautious optimism seen across the sector. TCS has taken the lead, announcing hikes ranging from 4-8 per cent effective April 2025, setting the tone for the rest of the industry. However, Infosys, HCLTech, Wipro, and Tech Mahindra are holding off on final announcements, likely waiting to gauge market movements in Q2 before locking in their plans,” she shared.

Power engineers’ body calls for nationwide strike

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All India Power Engineers Federation (AIPEF) on Sunday gave a call for nationwide strike on June 26 to protest against privatisation in the power sector. The National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers decided to resort to a nationwide strike on June 26 to protest against the privatisation of electricity utilities and departments, an AIPEF statement said on Sunday. According to the statement, the NCCOEEE has decided that big conferences will be held in all the provinces of the country in the months of April and May to make the nationwide strike a

success. The NCCOEEE will hold four big rallies in protest against the ongoing process of privatisation in Uttar Pradesh. In a resolution, NCCOEEE General Assembly criticised the privatisation of the profit-making power department of Chandigarh, terming it “extremely objectionable”. The proposal states that the transmission sector is being privatized extensively in the name of tariff-based competitive bidding and asset monetization. The curse of privatisation of generation is being faced by common consumers in the form of very expensive electricity in the field of generation, it stated.

Handicraft, handloom exports from Kashmir at ₹2,567 Crore in over last two fiscal years

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Kashmir exported its famed handicraft and handloom products worth ₹2,567 Crore in over last two fiscal years, officials said on Sunday. This export figure is expected to touch ₹3,000 Crore by the end of this fiscal year (March 2025). “The world-famous handicraft and handloom products worth ₹2,567 Crore have been exported from Kashmir valley in the last two financial years and the first three quarters of the current fiscal(2024-25),” an official said. However, the exports in the current financial year have been hit by global conflicts. As per the figures available with

Handicrafts and Handloom Department, Kashmir, while Kani and Sozni shawls exports stood at ₹1,105 Crore, hand-knotted carpet shipments were worth ₹728 Crore in the last three years. The other products exported include crewel, papier mache, chain stitch and wood carving. The officials said the department would facilitate the export of hand-made Kashmir products for which a subsidy scheme is available, giving an incentive of 10 per cent of the total volume of handloom, handicraft export products to any country with maximum reimbursement up to ₹5 Crore in favour of the eligible exporters registered with the department.

Highlighting the government’s strategy for the welfare of the artisan community in the valley, they said the department has a well-established ‘Design Studio’ in the Indian Institute of Carpet Technology and unique prototypes conceived by the School of Designs and Craft Development Institute. “The artisans can access these contemporary designs and packaging models to add value to their products in niche high-end markets,” an official said. For the welfare of the artisans, the department has several flagship schemes in operation including Credit Card Scheme, Mudra, Financial Assistance Scheme for Cooperatives, Karkhandar Scheme and Education Scholarship for the

children of craftsmen. Under the National Wool Policy, the department has selected 100 weaver beneficiaries for distribution of free modified modern steel carpet looms in Kashmir at a total cost of ₹43.70 Lakh and the department will pitch for another 250 improvised looms for distribution in the next financial year. Emphasising the department’s focus on testing and QR coding of GI-registered craft products to weed out sale of counterfeit products, the officials said the department has augmented manpower and equipment at its premier Pashmina Testing and Quality Certification Centre (PTQCC) and IICT lab for carpets.

SEBI mulls expanding pool of investors for angel funds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi is looking to expand the definition of qualified institutional buyers (QIB) and remove the 200-investor cap, allowing angel funds to access a broader pool of accredited investors. This move will enable more wealthy investors to participate, boosting funding for startups. It ensures that only financially strong investors take on high-risk investments, helping Angel Funds raise more capital and support early-stage companies. Angel Funds, a type of venture capital fund, mobilise money from investors to support startups.

However, concerns have been raised about inadequate verification of investors’ risk appetite, the onboarding of numerous investors without strong financial backing, and potential conflicts with private placement regulations under the Companies Act, 2013. To address these concerns, Sebi previously proposed that only Accredited Investors (AIs) should be allowed to invest in Angel Funds. Now, the regulator is seeking feedback on amending the definition of QIBs to include accredited investors, specifically for offering investment opportunities and allocating investments through angel funds.

Adani companies tax contribution reaches ₹58,104 Crore for FY 2023-24

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD



Gautam Adani

File Photo

In line with its commitment to practising the highest standard of governance and commitment towards all its stakeholders, the Adani Group, a global leader in infrastructure development, has announced the release of its Tax Transparency Reports for the financial year 2023-24. For the financial year 2023-24, the Adani Group’s total global tax and other contributions to the exchequer amounted to ₹58,104.4 Crore, showcasing a significant increase from the previous year’s ₹46,610.2 Crore through its portfolio of listed entities, said Adani Group in a statement. The details are covered in the independent reports published by seven of the group’s listed entities—Adani Enterprises Limited, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited, Adani Green Energy Limited, Adani Energy Solutions Limited, Adani Power Limited, Adani Total

Gas Limited, and Ambuja Cements Limited. The figure also includes the tax paid by three other listed companies—NDTV, ACC and Sanghi Industries—that are held by the seven companies. “Transparency is the foundation of trust, and trust is essential for sustainable growth,” said Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group. “As one of India’s largest contributors to the exchequer, we recognise that our responsibility goes beyond compliance. It is also about

operating with integrity and accountability. Every rupee we contribute to our nation’s finances reflects our commitment to transparency and good governance. By voluntarily sharing these reports with the public, we aim to foster greater stakeholder confidence and set new benchmarks for responsible corporate conduct.” Through this voluntary initiative, the Group aims to demonstrate its commitment to transparency, foster stakeholder trust and

contribute to a more accountable global tax environment. Adani Group considers tax transparency as an integral part of its broader ESG framework. The group strives to harmonise growth with social responsibility, aiming to transform India’s infrastructure landscape while promoting innovation and creating long-term value for stakeholders, said the Group. With the global tax environment entering a new age, forward-looking companies are voluntarily bringing out the Tax Transparency Report, even though the same is not mandatory. Through the report, such companies seek to drive wider stakeholder attention and greater credibility, besides creating the basis for the highest standards of tax transparency. Tax Transparency Report provides a complete breakdown of Adani Group’s global tax and other contributions. It includes: Direct Contributions like global taxes, duties and other

charges borne by Adani portfolio of companies. Indirect Contributions like global taxes and duties collected and paid on behalf of other stakeholders. Other Contributions like social security etc contributed for the benefit of the employees. The group has engaged a professional agency to provide an independent assurance report on its global contribution to the exchequer. This report is included in the Tax Transparency Reports and provides details on the various types of taxes and other contributions paid by the group companies globally, as well as the group’s approach to tax. By emphasizing transparency and integrity in tax compliance and reporting, the group aims to build trust with stakeholders and demonstrate its commitment to responsible business practices. By voluntarily disclosing information about its global tax contributions, the company strengthens its commitment to economic development, fosters

stakeholder understanding, and builds trust through transparent tax practices. The detailed reports of each of the seven companies can be accessed on their respective company websites, said Adani Group. Headquartered in Ahmedabad, the Adani Group is India’s largest and fastest-growing portfolio of diversified businesses. With interests across energy and utilities, transport and logistics (including seaports, airports, shipping, and rail), metals and materials, and consumer sectors, the Adani Group has established a leadership position in the market. The Group’s success is driven by its core philosophy of ‘Nation Building’ and ‘Growth with Goodness,’ focusing on sustainable development. Adani Group is committed to environmental stewardship and community improvement through its CSR programs, which are grounded in the principles of sustainability, diversity, and shared values.

Aza Fashions Unveils Flagship Store in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Aza Fashions, India’s premier luxury fashion retailer, has launched its latest flagship store in the upscale Dhan Mill area of Chattarpur, New Delhi. The store aims to redefine luxury shopping in the capital. With this opening, Aza has eleven stores across India, further solidifying its presence in the country’s high-end fashion landscape. The new store features a carefully curated selection of over 100 top-tier and emerging designer labels, including Amit Aggarwal, Anamika Khanna, Tarun Tahiliani, Rimple & Harpreet Narula, and Jayanti Reddy, among others. Offering a diverse range of designer apparel, accessories, and bridal couture, Aza ensures a comprehensive shopping experience tailored to its discerning clientele. Dr Alka Nishar, Founder and

Chairperson of Aza Fashions, expressed her excitement, stating, “Since our inception, Aza has been committed to elevating Indian fashion. This new store is a celebration of craftsmanship and innovation, bringing the best in couture to an exquisite location.” Taking luxury a step further, Aza Fashions has forayed into the diamond jewellery segment, blending timeless craftsmanship with contemporary elegance. Each piece in the collection is meticulously handcrafted by master artisans, designed to transition effortlessly from everyday wear to red-carpet glamour. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Alka Nishar emphasised, “Aza has carved its own niche in luxury. With this expansion, we continue our mission to offer exclusive and sophisticated designs, celebrating heritage with a modern touch.”



Future of Beauty

The majority of consumers are young adults who have beauty awareness are driving the beauty revolution this year, says **SHAHNAZ HUSAIN**



HEALTHY SKIN GLOW
The term Healthy Skin Glow refers to a naturally radiant, well-nourished, and balanced complexion achieved through organic and therapeutic skincare products rather than excessive makeup or artificial enhancements. It emphasises satin-like skin, a combination of dewy and matte finishes, that reflects overall skin health.

VIRAL BEAUTY INTERACTION
LIKELY REFERS TO INTERACTIVE DIGITAL BEAUTY EXPERIENCES THAT GAIN WIDESPREAD POPULARITY AND ENGAGEMENT ONLINE.

The elevated awareness of consumers and technological advancement are rapidly shaping up trends in the beauty industry. These beauty trends are defining the way consumers are reacting and are adapting their skincare and beauty routine. With the advent of technology along with rising awareness of skincare, there are a lot of new inclinations that are paving way to a new era of beauty trends in 2025.

Holistic Skin Therapy

Facials, massages and skin therapies are the prerequisite for enhancing beauty, however, a step further to it would be holistic skin therapy. Not only the consumers are inclined to choose aromatherapy inclusive skin therapies, but they are well aware of the rejuvenating benefits that come as an added advantage with it. A lymphatic drainage mas-

sage, crystal therapy with aromatic inclusions and acupressure combined with specialised massage oil suitable to individual needs. Using organic products based facials, foot reflexology combined with treatment essential oils are now in trend. It is all about a holistic way of engaging the mind and body.

Healthy Skin Glow

Although the trend of using sheet masks and achieving glass skin is still prevalent, beauty chasers are more inclined to choose organic products. Consumers are demanding therapy based products with plant blends that will naturally help restore their beauty without causing side effects. Additionally, even if consumers choose makeup for glow, they are indulging in dewy plus matte finishes. With this dual combination, consumers today are choosing healthy satin like skin in contrast to over indulgence in beauty prod-

ucts to make their skin shine.

Sustainability Factor

Whether it is the awareness about environmental consumption or awareness against the use of chemical products, it is all about picking environmentally friendly products. With the beginning of 2025, there is going to be an increase in cruelty-free formulations, and the focus is shifting on products and packaging that are eco-friendly. Natural ingredients that are ethically sourced and devoid of chemical adulteration just like Shahnaz Husain product line.



Oxygenation

Oxygenation is fast catching up with the new generation this year. It is all about reversing the harmful exposure to environmental aggressors, ageing, poor lifestyle choices that lead to loss of skin vibrancy. Oxygen facials that enhance skin texture, help restore rejuvenation and youthful properties of the skin are the in thing these days. It is much like the Oxygen Plus skincare line I have invested in, it contains tiny Oxygen bombs that assimilate within the skin when the products are used, oxygen is directly transported to the pores and within the skin improving blood circulation, hydration, radiance and youthful look.

Virtual Beauty Interaction

With the advent of technology and rise of AI, consumers are now inclined towards brands that are providing them with virtual beauty interaction. Using the virtual beauty experience with virtual try-on tools online whether it is makeup, lipsticks or even beauty consultation online for personalised experience, it is all on rise in 2025.

The fact that it is accessible through the comfort of convenience for consumers, and it becomes easier to try different looks prior to choosing products makes it a more immersive and enjoyable experience. Additionally, the interactive nature of virtual trials fosters engagement.

-The author is a pioneer in Ayurveda and a beauty expert.

The Truth About Hair Transplants

Hair transplant procedures have gained immense popularity in recent years, offering a permanent solution to hair loss. But, as with all medical procedures, there are advantages and disadvantages to it. While most people have been successful in achieving the results, some others will be worried about cost, efficiency, and possible dangers. It is important to know the advantages and disadvantages before making a decision and going for a hair transplant procedure.

A successful transplant depends on the availability of healthy donor hair. If a patient has extensive baldness and a limited donor area, achieving full coverage may be challenging.

Pros of Hair Transplant

- **Permanent and Natural:** Looking Results: In contrast to temporary options like wigs or hair fibres, a hair transplant is a permanent solution to baldness. Hair transplantation is the sole procedure that provides natural hair growth. Because we use the patient's own follicles, the outcome blends perfectly with the hair that already exists.
- **Low Maintenance:** After the transplanted hair begins to grow, it needs the same maintenance as normal hair like frequent washing, trimming, and styling. No costly upkeep or repeated treatments are necessary.

Cons of Hair Transplant

- **High Cost:** A hair transplant is an expensive procedure, especially for severe baldness. The cost is based on the number of grafts that need to be done and the expertise of the surgeon. Though it is a long-term investment, the initial cost can be substantial for most patients.
- **Time-Consuming Process:** The whole hair transplant process, right from consultation to complete results, takes a couple of months. New hair starts growing after



three to four months, and full results are observed in 9-12 months. Patients have to be patient during the entire process. The author suggests that although hair transplantation is the best treatment option for balding, it can't be offered as a fit-all solution to all patients. Each patient's balding pattern, scalp state, and expectations need to be thoroughly evaluated beforehand. She advises, "a very detailed consultation is important to determine if a patient is an ideal candidate. Done with the proper technique, hair transplantation can prove to be a life-altering remedy, transforming individuals not only in regaining their hair but even confidence.

- Inputs by Dr Shweta Mishra, Facial Cosmetic and Aesthetic surgeon

Healthy Habits, Radiant Skin

The foundation of healthy skin lies in maintaining overall health and is not just limited to skincare. Modern dermatology promotes holistic well being, considering quality sleep, stress management, healthy gut and good lifestyle to be as crucial as topical application of products for achieving healthy and glowing skin.



The Skin-Sleep Connection

It is rightly termed 'beauty sleep' as sleep is quintessential when it comes to achieving a glowing skin. During sleep, the body's repair mode gets activated and damaged cells of the skin regenerate into newer cells. Also when the body is in a sleep state, levels of growth hormones are on a rise which assists in collagen synthesis and thus promoting cellular turnover. In the absence of quality sleep, the body's cells undergo free radical damage which predisposes the skin to signs of premature aging such as fine lines and wrinkles.

Cortisol levels rise which break down collagen, disrupting the skin's protective barrier. Various scientific researchers have displayed a direct correlation between lack of sleep and higher incidence of fine lines, hyper-pigmented skin patches etc.

Gut-Skin Axis

The microbiome of the gut directly influences skin's health as there is a connection between the two. When the healthy gut microbiome gets disrupted and dysbiosis occurs, it gives rise to skin inflammation and predisposes the skin to various conditions namely acne, rosacea, eczema etc. An unhealthy gut triggers the body's immune responses and affects the skin's health too. Hence, for a healthy skin, nutrients required include probiotics, prebiotics, omega-3 fats, polyphenols, antioxidants etc.

- By Dr Ameesha Mahajan, Cosmetic Dermatologist

CONNECTION BETWEEN STRESS AND SKIN AGING

The condition of chronic stress raises the levels of cortisol which directly impairs the production of collagen and skin begins to display signs of premature aging. Stress also makes the skin look dull and dehydrated and triggers inflammatory skin concerns such as acne, rosacea, eczema, psoriasis etc. Hence, stress management plays a crucial role in maintenance of skin health. For this, practice mindfulness meditation, yoga, deep breathing exercises etc.

The new-age skincare trend not only focuses on topical application but also on holistic wellness. This includes good quality sleep, stress management, wholesome diet, good lifestyle etc. For achieving a healthy and radiant skin, maintenance of overall health plays a significant part.



Babar conspicuously absent from Pakistan nets

PTI ■ DUBAI

Pakistan's star batter Babar Azam was conspicuous by his absence from the team's training and there was no clarity on his availability for the Champions Trophy (CT) clash against India here on Sunday even as the country's cricket board chief Mohsin Naqvi urged the side to win "at any cost". Speculation is rife that he may be not be considered for the match after he was not seen at the practice session on Saturday evening. The practice was attended by PCB chief Naqvi and Azam was the only player who chose to take the day off. Azam copped a lot of criticism for a 94-ball 64 in the 60-run loss to New Zealand in the opening match. He was lambasted for failing to accelerate while the asking rate crept up in the chase of 320 runs in Karachi. Interim head coach Aqib Javed, who addressed the media after practice, did not give any specific reason for



Azam's absence, saying that the former captain chose to rest. Last night, Naqvi met the Pakistan cricket team at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium, and urged them to win Sunday's crucial match against India "at any cost" to silence critics. Pakistan

would be knocked out of the tournament if they lose this game. The team was scheduled to practice for about two hours but the proceedings were halted within an hour as Naqvi took "stock of things", met captain Mohammad Rizwan and head coach

Aqib Javed and discussed cricketing matters with them. PTI has learnt through reliable sources that he urged the captain, coach and players to give it their best shot against India and win the match to "silence their critics, including himself." He was seen having a long

chat with pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf. Naqvi, who was reportedly unhappy with the selection of the team, made it a point to meet each and every player, coach and support staff. Later, Naqvi told media-persons that the Pakistani team was ready to face India and do well against them. "It would be a great game and our team is fully prepared and in my opinion, they are in form. We are with our team, whether they win or lose," he said. When asked about Pakistan having to play India here despite being the hosts of Champions trophy, he quipped: "You should ask this to Indians if the same would have happened to them, then how they would have felt?" India had refused to travel to Pakistan citing security concerns and are playing their share of Champions Trophy matches in Dubai. Even the final of the tournament will be held in Dubai if India go the distance.

India face Dutch in Women's FIH Pro League match

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

A faltering India would look to halt the slide when they take on reigning champions the Netherlands in their women's FIH Pro League match here on Monday. India's home leg so far hasn't gone according to script with the team currently placed seventh in the standings with seven points from six games. They had opened their campaign with a thrilling 3-2 win over England but lost the second game against the same opponents in the shoot-out. Against Spain, the hosts came agonisingly close but suffered back-to-back defeats, first losing 3-4 and then being edged out 0-1 in a tightly-fought match. Against Germany, India endured a 0-4 defeat in the first leg but bounced back by securing a 1-0 win in the second leg. The team would look to forget the dismal run and just carry forward the momentum of defeating Germany in the



previous match and hope the Dutch are not at their menacing best. The Dutch are in dominant form, having comprehensively defeated England 5-1 and 6-0 in their last two matches. They have recorded five wins and just one loss in their six matches, placing them second in the table with 15 points. They will be eager to maintain their momentum and continue their impressive run in the competition. India captain Salima Tete acknowledged that getting past the Dutch would be easier said than done, though she added her team was motivated as they

wanted to end the home leg on a high. "The Netherlands are one of the strongest teams in the world, and we know it's going to be a tough match. But we are motivated to give it our best shot and finish the India leg of the tournament on a high. Our win against Germany gave us a lot of confidence, and we have worked on improving our weaknesses," said Salima. India and the Netherlands have faced each other seven times since 2013, with the European powerhouse winning five of those matches, while India have secured just one win.

Inter Milan beats Genoa 1-0

PTI ■ ROME

Lautaro Martinez scored late and Inter Milan beat Genoa 1-0 to take the provisional lead in Serie A on Saturday. Lautaro met a corner with a header that deflected off a defender's chest before going in to break a deadlock at the San Siro. The Argentina striker then climbed up on a security fence to celebrate with Inter's fans on the other side. Inter moved one point ahead of Antonio Conte's Napoli, which can reclaim the lead with a win at Como on Sunday. Next weekend, Inter visits Napoli. AC Milan falls further into crisis after Champions League exit. Four days after getting eliminated from the Champions League, AC Milan dropped further into crisis with an error-strewn 2-1 loss at Torino. The mistakes started with an own goal from Malick Thiauw five minutes in when a clearance from Milan



goalkeeper Mike Maignan ricocheted off his own defender into the net. United States international Christian Pulisic then failed to convert a penalty for the first time in his career when Torino goalkeeper Sergej Milinkovic-Savic lunged to his right to push away the American's low spot kick. Milinkovic-Savic has saved four of the five penalties he's faced this season. After a shot from Milan's Joao Felix hit the post, the Rossoneri equalized with a shot from Tijjani Reijnders in the 74th. But Torino

reclaimed the lead two minutes later with a quick shot from Gvidas Gineitis following a free kick that seemed to surprise Milan. Milan remained seventh while Torino moved up to 11th. On Tuesday, Milan was eliminated from the Champions League by Feyenoord on 2-1 aggregate. Earlier, Parma coach Cristian Chivu had a successful debut with a 2-0 win over regional rival Bologna; and fourth-place Lazio was held to a 0-0 draw at relegation-threatened Venezia.

UP Warriorz to face challenge from Mandhana

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's sturdy middle-order, in-form skipper Smriti Mandhana and a partisan home crowd will be the major challenges UP Warriorz will have to face when the two teams clash in their Women's Premier League match here on Monday. India vice-captain Mandhana has been in red-hot form, smashing five half-centuries and a ton in the last 10 matches she has played for the country and her franchise. But the top-order batter would not like to take Deepti Sharma's side, who just picked their maiden win of the season, lightly, knowing well that Australia pace all-rounder Tahlia McGrath's power-hitting could turn tables around anytime in the contest. However, after having made a confident start with back-to-back victories, and chasing down a 200-plus score against Gujarat Giants with plenty of deliveries to spare, Mandhana



would have oodles of confidence in her side going into the contest. Though RCB suffered a setback in their previous outing against Harmanpreet Kaur's side Mumbai Indians, it was more on account of the Bengaluru team's middle-order having an off day, though Elyse Perry stood rock-solid with a fine 81. Overall RCB have performed remarkably well so far this season, one of the reasons they are leading the table with four points from three games and maintaining a healthy net

run rate (NRR) of +0.835. UP Warriorz, on the other hand, have not enjoyed a great start which is evident as they are placed fourth with two points from three games in the five-team league. It's partly because of the team dishing out below-par performance despite having ace India spinner Deepti McGrath and England stalwart Sophie Ecclestone in the side. After consecutive losses to Gujarat Giants and Delhi Capitals, they did manage to defeat the Delhi franchise in

Arsenal loses to West Ham

PTI ■ LONDON

Arsenal's failure to sign a prolific striker might have cost the team the chance to win the Premier League title. Frequently collecting red cards hasn't helped, either. Second-place Arsenal was unexpectedly beaten 1-0 at home by West Ham on Saturday to dent its title challenge, just when it seemed Liverpool was starting to look vulnerable. The result left Liverpool with an eight-point lead, having played the same number of games as Arsenal, and that advantage could grow when the Reds play Manchester City away on Sunday. Jarrod Bowen's 44th-minute header secured a win for West Ham, which arrived at Emirates Stadium with just one victory in its last eight games. There was worse to come for Arsenal, with left back Myles Lewis-Skelly handed a red card in the 73rd following a video review for his foul on Mohammed Kudus as the last man. It was Arsenal's fifth red card of the campaign — two more than any other team — and its disciplinary record under Arteta is understandably coming under scrutiny, given it has contributed to valuable dropped points this season. Maybe a bigger annoyance to fans is the club's decision to not sign a proven out-and-out striker either last offseason or in the winter transfer window. With forwards Kai Havertz, Bukayo Saka, Gabriel Martinelli and Gabriel Jesus all out injured, Arsenal had only two shots on target against West Ham. "I am very disappointed, and obviously very angry as well," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "Even though we had 20 shots, I never felt that we were at the standard and the level that we needed. "We have to be (angry), and I hope we are because we didn't hit the levels today, and I am very much responsible for that so I am very, very angry."

Guirassy scores 4 goals for Dortmund

PTI ■ DORTMUND

Serhou Guirassy became the first player since Erling Haaland to score four goals for Borussia Dortmund in a 6-0 rout of Union Berlin on Saturday in the Bundesliga. "Four goals, victory, amazing fans," Guirassy told broadcaster Sky after the game. "The first time in my life, I think. Four goals is such a great thing, I'm happy of course, but always, the most important is the team and the victory." Haaland scored his four in a 5-2 win at Hertha Berlin in November 2020. "World class," Dortmund coach Niko Kovac said of Guirassy's performance. "There's nothing else to say." Kovac also praised midfielder Pascal Gross for setting up four goals.



Guirassy had only scored nine in 19 league games prior to Union's visit, far from reaching the 28 goals he scored in 28 Bundesliga appearances for Stuttgart last season. Altogether he scored 44 goals in 58 games over two seasons at Stuttgart after joining the German club from French team Rennes in 2022. The Guinea star was the second

player after Germany defender Waldemar Anton to join Dortmund from Bundesliga runner-up Stuttgart last summer, but both struggled to impress as Dortmund made a faltering start to the season. The club finally fired Nuri Sahin as coach in January, appointing Kovac, the former Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayern Munich coach, in his place. But

Kovac also labored to get the team going as Dortmund lost both of his first two Bundesliga games in charge. Performances in the Champions League suggested the team was capable of more. Dortmund won 3-0 at Sporting Lisbon, then drew 0-0 against the Portuguese team on Wednesday to seal progress to the last 16. Guirassy scored one goal and set up another in Lisbon. He has 10 goals and five assists in the Champions League this season. At Stuttgart, Guirassy thrived in a strike partnership with Germany forward Deniz Undav. At Dortmund he has been more isolated. He benefited from Gio Reyna being given a rare start on Saturday as Kovac gave the young American just his second league start this season.

New Zealand aim for semifinal spot, Bangladesh fight for survival

PTI ■ RAWALPINDI

A confident New Zealand side will be eager to seal their semifinal spot when they take on Bangladesh, who will be fighting for survival, in their Champions Trophy (CT) Group A match here on Monday. The Black Caps started their campaign in dominant fashion, defeating hosts Pakistan by 60 runs. This emphatic victory placed them at the top of Group A with a healthy net run rate of 1.200. A win on Monday will put them within touching distance of a semifinal berth. Bangladesh, on the other hand, suffered a six-wicket loss

to India and currently sit third in the group with a net run rate of -0.408. They must secure a victory to stay in contention for the knockout stage. New Zealand looked clinical in their opening match, and their recent triumph in the tri-series has further helped them adapt to the conditions in Pakistan. However, they now face a selection dilemma with the potential return of Rachin Ravindra from a head injury. In his absence, Devon Conway and Will Young opened the innings. Initially, Young was expected to make way for Ravindra, but the right-hander's century against Pakistan has complicated the

decision — in a positive way. Moreover, Young has consistently proven his ability to handle spin bowling effectively. Dropping him would also disrupt the left-hand-right-hand combination at the top, which could be crucial for New Zealand's batting strategy. Meanwhile, Conway appears to be regaining his best form. Apart from this selection call, New Zealand look well-settled and are unlikely to make further changes to their playing XI. Bangladesh, however, face an uphill task and must regroup quickly after their disappointing defeat against neighbours India.

Chappell calls curtains on his five-decade-long journalistic career

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Legendary cricketer Ian Chappell's insightful writings, critical reviews and anecdotes from his playing days will be missed after the Australian icon called curtains on his more than five-decade-long journalistic career, penning his last piece on Sunday. The 81-year-old fondly recalled some of the best moments he has written about, including the legendary battle between Sachin Tendulkar and the late spin wizard Shane Warne in the 1998 Chennai Test, as well as VVS Laxman's iconic 281 against Australia in Kolkata, in his last column for ESPNcricinfo.

"There have been many pleasures from writing, notably Sachin Tendulkar combating Shane Warne in Chennai. Other highlights included writing about the genius of Brian Lara, Ricky Ponting's aggression, and VVS Laxman's classic 281 in Kolkata," Chappell wrote. However, he felt the time was right for him to "put down the pen and pack away the computer", adding that retirement from journalism was as emotional as stepping away from cricket. "I have been writing for more than 50 years, but the time has come and this will be my last column. Retirement from journalism is similar to cricket - I knew the time was right," said the former top-order

batter, who played 75 Tests, scoring 5,345 runs. "In my playing days I asked former Australia captain Richie Benaud if retirement was a difficult decision. 'No Ian,' Benaud replied wisely, 'It's easy. You'll know the right time.'" Chappell said he would miss writing columns and shared an anecdote about how alcohol cannot enhance the quality of a piece, giving his example as a test case. Chappell added his columns has a "substantial influence" of American sports writer Walter Wellesley "Red" Smith. "The influence of Pulitzer-winning writer 'Red' Smith was substantial. He always strove for the right descriptive word, and in the days of the



typewriter stated, 'You have not got a column until you are knee deep in opening pars.'

Smith also added, 'No column is enhanced by alcohol.' "I observed that rule almost

exclusively, but having just retired from cricket, I forgot it once in my early days of

journalism. I met a few mates in the bar as the game was interrupted by rain. After having a few beers I suddenly realised the game might be called off but I still had to file a column". "With a copy-taker exhorting me to hurry, I finally finished the column despite my fingers missing the correct key a number of times. I read it the next morning and it was absolute codswallop, so I decided never to drink again before finishing my column," Chappell wrote. The Australian said he was a stickler for deadlines and despite coming close to busting them a few times, he managed to avoid the embarrassment. "Despite that stumble, I never

missed a deadline - came close a couple of times, but was never late. My wife Barbara-Ann has been a positive influence both as an excellent sub-editor and also by telling me. "However, the time has come to close the writing section of my computer. I wish each and every one who has helped and befriended me along the way all the best in their future endeavours." "I will miss filing a column, as writing has been a favoured task. A writing career spanning more than 50 years means I surpassed my journey both as a cricketer and a broadcaster. A justifiable part of writing is, it's all your own work -- it might be rubbish but at least it's your rubbish."