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## Modi attacks Rahul, Kejriwal ahead of polls



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

### PM to visit Kumbh today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

of doles at the type of elections but never fulfil them. "Some Government schemes saved lot of money, but we did not use it to build 'Sheesh Mahal', Modi said. Without naming Gandhis, Modi took

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

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## EC dismisses Kejriwal's allegations of partiality

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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## FIR against Atishi for model code violation



Delhi Chief Minister Atishi at a press conference

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

## Panel to draft Gujarat UCC law

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

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

Other members of the committee are retired IAS officer CL Meena, advocate RC Kodekar, former vice chancellor of Veer Narmad South Gujarat University Dakshesh Thakar and social worker Gita Shroff. Notably, the BJP-ruled Uttarakhnd has already implemented the UCC. CM Patel said his government is committed to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve of implement the UCC across the country. The panel will examine various aspects and take views of people from different walks of life, and an "appropriate decision" will be taken after perusing its report, the CM said. Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi said that the UCC, if implemented, will protect the rights of tribals. "The UCC implemented by Uttarakhnd presented a model before the country because it protects the customs and traditions of tribals. (Union) Home Minister Amit Shah has also clarified in Jharkhand that UCC will protect the traditions followed by tribals," Sanghavi said. The committee will meet religious leaders, including

Muslim leaders, to prepare the report, he added. Shroff and Thakar said the state government's approach is sensitive and shows it is committed to closing the loopholes in laws and ensuring justice to all. Leader of Opposition in the state assembly Amit Chavda said the BJP is more interested in the "politics of minority and majority". "In Gujarat, there are 14 per cent tribals. The UCC will affect the culture, customs, religious rites and marriage system of the tribal society. Similarly, the Jain community of Gujarat, and the Devipujaks will also be affected," he claimed. Even the Indian Constitution has given freedom to certain communities to pursue their customs and culture, the Congress leader said. "Implementation of the UCC is in the jurisdiction of the central government, and not the state. But since there is internal fighting in the BJP all over Gujarat, and the government here has failed in every way, this announcement is an attempt to divert people's attention ahead of the local body elections," he claimed.

Continued on page 8

## US flight carrying 205 illegal Indians headed for Amritsar



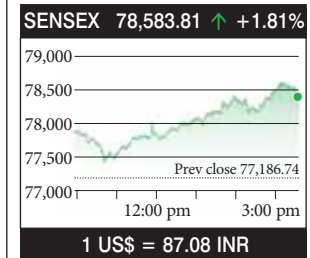
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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## MARKETS



## WEATHER

LUCKNOW  
MAX 28.2°C(+4.2)  
MIN 12.8°C(+3.8)

## SC censures Assam govt on detention centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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## GRAP controls Delhi pollution, not stubble burning: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



mass over Delhi-NCR and the (crop residue burning) over Punjab, highlighting the effectiveness of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in controlling air pollution in the region," the authors wrote. GRAP refers to the set of anti-pollution measures,

implemented in a staged manner in response to air quality levels. GRAP-4 is the most stringent, imposed when air quality index (AQI) crosses 450 and reaches 'severe plus' category. The researchers observed that PM2.5 levels varied in line with the stepping up or down of the GRAP stages. "The decrease of PM2.5 levels in Delhi-NCR was mainly attributed to GRAP IV when the major PM2.5 emissions from road traffic and construction activities, among other sources, were reduced. However, a rise in

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

11-yr-old boy killed in road mishap

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a tragic incident early on Tuesday morning, an 11-year-old boy named Suraj Kashyap lost his life in a road accident in the BBD police station area here.

Suraj sustained severe injuries and was immediately taken to RML Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. Preliminary investigations confirmed the cause of the accident and revealed that the truck driver fled the scene after the collision.

CLASSIFIEDS NOTICE

To be informed that I have lost my original allotment letter, possession letter and first sale deed of plot no 3/523 vikalp khand gomti nagar lucknow

CLASSIFIEDS NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that we V K Mishra and Vandana Mishra are the owners of House Property 1/335, Sector-1, Jankipuram Extension Lucknow

CLASSIFIEDS NOTICE

I have Changed My Name From Mahibullah to Mahibullah. In Future I shall be Known as Mahibullah. Mahibullah, 127/982, W-1, Saket Nagar, Kanpur

CLASSIFIEDS NOTICE

Under the instruction of Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited, Lucknow, I hereby informed the general public that Late Raju, wife of Meewala was the sole and absolute owner of Plot No. E-31, admeasuring 1250 sq. fts.

CLASSIFIEDS NOTICE

I YUNUS KHAN SON OF SHAMSHER KHAN H.No. 290 RAMCHABOOTRA KALPI DISTRICT JANAUN 285204 (U.P.) have changed my name YOONIS for all future purposes.

CLASSIFIEDS NOTICE

I have changed my name from Kajal Bachiyani to Janvi Pammani to be known as Janvi Pammani in all future references. Janvi Pammani, Add.- 402, B-block, Dilbagh Rose Garden, Fazalgaon, Kanpur

CLASSIFIEDS NOTICE

I have changed my name Muhammad Siddiq to Siddiq Ahmad S/o Iqbal Ahmad for future Purpose. Add- village painsa sirathu Kaushambi

CLASSIFIEDS NOTICE

SP, BJP set for crucial battle in Milkipur bypoll

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The stage is set for polling for the by-election to the Milkipur assembly seat on Wednesday, marking the final phase of a prestige battle between the Samajwadi Party and the BJP.

voters, playing a crucial role. Which party secures these votes could determine the winner. Additionally, both the Samajwadi Party and the BJP have Scheduled Caste candidates contesting, intensifying the competition.

criticised the SP for opposing Ayodhya's development, while the BJP's state chief mocked Akhilesh for never having visited Ayodhya. In turn, Akhilesh ridiculed Yogi, accusing him of being a saint only in appearance, not in action.



EVMs are kept at a distribution centre ahead of the Milkipur by-election, in Ayodhya on Tuesday

PTI

Yogi visits Ram temple head priest at SGPGI

PNS ■ LUCKNOW



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath visited Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGI) on Tuesday evening to check on the health of Acharya Satyendra Das, the chief priest of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple.

intensive care in the Neurology ICU, receiving treatment under the strict supervision of medical experts. CM Yogi inquired about Acharya Satyendra Das's condition during his visit, discussed his treatment with the doctors, and provided necessary directives.

Crypto scam: Directors flee to Dubai

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The directors of a company involved in a cryptocurrency-related fraud in Lucknow have reportedly fled to Dubai after defrauding investors of crores of rupees.

Victims have also filed complaints in both Lucknow and Prayagraj. Manish Srivastava, a resident of BBD Green and one of the complainants, stated that the directors of the company, led by Sameer Kesari, had lured people into investments not only in crypto but also in various schemes like educational portals, travel, and real estate.

accused raised around Rs 6 crore in cash and deposited another Rs 9 crore into the accounts they provided. Once the time came to repay the investors, the directors fled to Dubai. The police reported that the accused had opened a corporate office in Dubai in May 2023.

that the fraudsters set up a company with a name similar to that of a legitimate government website, adding to the deception. The cyber police have registered cases of fraud based on the victims' complaints, and they are collecting further details regarding the accused.

Challenges faced by street vendors highlighted

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Network Meeting, organised by the National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) at the Press Club on Tuesday, brought together street vendor leaders from across the state to discuss pressing challenges faced by vendors.

In her address, Savita Shukla acknowledged the challenges vendors face and emphasised the progress made, stating that 9.49 lakh vendors in Uttar Pradesh have received a certificate of vending, and 13.91 lakh have benefitted from the Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PMSVA Nidhi).

He also introduced NASVI's 'Street Sathi' app, aimed at supporting vendors with essential resources. The event brought attention to challenges in several cities. In Lucknow, Ghaziabad, Moradabad, and Etawah, vendors continue to struggle with the absence of designated vending zones, frequent evictions, and exploitation.

economic inclusion in urban spaces. The meeting served as a crucial step in advocating for the rights and dignity of street vendors, pushing for their social and economic inclusion in urban spaces.

Pickup van goes up in smoke

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow (PNS): A pickup van caught fire while driving on the road in the Sarojininar area here on Tuesday evening. The incident occurred around 4:45 pm, when the driver, Anuj, and his helper, Anil, were on their way to Transport Nagar, having just loaded courier goods from Om Logistics' godown in Daroga Kheda.

'Wild Wild Women' enthralled as Sanatkada Fest draws to a close

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow (PNS): The Sanatkada Fest came to a close on Tuesday with an energetic performance by 'Wild Wild Women', India's first hip-hop collective, made up entirely of women.

LDA to crack down on motor garages, washing stations operating illegally

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Lucknow Development Authority on Tuesday announced that it will take strict legal action against the owners of motor garages and washing stations operating illegally in residential areas of the city.

and painting shops, and vehicle washing stations have been set up in residential areas without the necessary permissions. Moreover, authorised automobile dealers have also established their businesses in these areas without requesting the appropriate land-use change from the designated officer.

orders from Divisional Commissioner Roshan Jacob, who received numerous complaints from residents about these setups disrupting their daily lives. The complaints indicated that the presence of these businesses has made driving through residential areas difficult and unsafe.

Additionally, residents reported concerns over safety, particularly for women, who felt uncomfortable due to the crowds of people coming for vehicle repairs or washes. Many also complained that the residential areas were becoming dirty, with water from the washing stations spilling onto the streets, causing further inconvenience.

Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice WORKS DEPARTMENT Bid Identification No.CCE-NHC(KJR) - 01/2024-25. e-mail : senhkeonjhar@gmail.com / senhbaripada@yahoo.in Letter No. 131 dt. 29.01.2025

# Kharge, Akhilesh spreading falsehood against Sanatan Dharma, says Yogi

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on the Congress and Samajwadi Party, accusing them of spreading falsehoods against Sanatan Dharma.

Yogi also warned that there are groups taking money to defame Sanatan Dharma and engaging in conspiracy. However, he declared that their plans would not succeed.

"We will investigate the incident of January 29 and expose the conspirators," he said.

Yogi on Tuesday criticised Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav for their "anti-Sanatan" remarks in Parliament, accusing them of misleading the public about the Maha Kumbh. Speaking to the media, the chief minister said: "While the nation and the world take pride in witnessing the grand celebration of Sanatan Dharma, those who have got 'supari' to defame Sanatan are setting new narratives of deceit every day regarding Maha Kumbh."

He termed Kharge's and Akhilesh Yadav's statements "shameful and condemnable". Referring to Kharge's claim about deaths in the stampede during Mauni Amavasya, CM Yogi said it was unfortunate and misleading.

He stated that as the leader of the country's oldest party, Kharge was expected to make responsible statements in Parliament. He accused both leaders of competing with each other to make the most anti-Sanatan remarks.

The CM dismissed allegations that no data was provided on the Mauni Amavasya incident, stating that both the administration and he had shared the figures publicly. He acknowledged the tragic nature of the incident and emphasised that everyone was deeply saddened by it.

He highlighted the quick response of the fair administration, police, NDRF, SDRF, and Civil Defence in ensuring that the injured were quickly taken to hospitals.

CM Yogi highlighted that crores of devotees were present in Prayagraj that day, alleging

## CM: Hindus and Buddhists are branches of same banyan tree



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at the Baudh Mahakumbh Yatra during Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Asserting that Hindus and Buddhists are branches of the same banyan tree, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Tuesday that if both come together on a common platform, they will form the strongest banyan tree in the world, providing protection

and unity to all. While inaugurating the Buddhist Mahakumbh Yatra during his visit to Prayagraj, the chief minister praised the coming together of different worship traditions on a single platform, calling it a commendable initiative. After the event, he showered flowers on Buddhist saints and scholars.

that anti-Sanatan elements and opposition parties were hoping for a disaster to happen. "Despite the government's best efforts to maintain a 'zero-incident' event, the unfortunate incident occurred. However, the administration acted quickly, providing immediate medical attention," he said. He assured that all injured individuals received proper treatment, with some recovering at Prayagraj Medical College while others had returned home. CM Yogi, along with ministers, the chief secretary, DGP, and other officials, personally met the affected individuals. He claimed that those hospitalised confirmed there was no lapse

in arrangements. Additionally, a judicial commission was immediately formed to investigate all aspects of the incident. Ensuring the safe return of approximately 8-9 crore devotees was the government's top priority, he added. The chief minister dismissed claims by opposition parties that lakhs of devotees could not take a holy dip and that Amrit and Shahi Snan did not take place. He termed these allegations misleading and part of a conspiracy to defame Sanatan Dharma. He clarified that no tradition was disrupted—Mauni Amavasya Snan began at 7:30 pm the previous evening and continued until late the

next day. Following the incident, Akharas briefly postponed their snan after discussions with the Mela Authority, but later, all saints, Acharyas, and Mahamandaleshwars participated in the traditional way. He affirmed that all Amrit Snans—Makar Sankranti, Mauni Amavasya, and Basant Panchami—were conducted as per tradition. Taking a jibe at Akhilesh, Yogi criticised his statement about the government's 100 crore announcement, urging him to read official statements properly. "These are people who wake up at noon and simply read out notes prepared by their office staff. They are not leaders but

mere readers, making a mockery of themselves and politicians," he added. Reaffirming the massive scale of Maha Kumbh, CM Yogi stated that he had repeatedly mentioned that 40-45 crore devotees would participate. In just 22 days, 38 crore devotees had already attended, with crores more expected in the coming weeks. The CM stated that the Amrit Snan for Basant Panchami was held on Monday. He added that Magh Purnima will be observed on February 12 and Mahashivaratri on February 26. He noted that crores of devotees from India and around the world are eager to attend these events.

less. He further stated that such forces are spreading propaganda through various means, but the truth remains unshaken. Quoting Lord Buddha, he said, "Truth is to be experienced; it is difficult to express it in words."

This truth, he added, is being witnessed by millions of saints and devotees gathered at the event. The chief minister stated that while Maha Kumbh is spreading a message of unity, there are some who oppose such events. He highlighted how 38 crore devotees have gathered at Prayagraj Maha Kumbh, taking a sacred dip, and how India's presence has resonated globally. "Such events have left anti-India elements restless," he remarked. He further emphasised that Maha Kumbh is the greatest platform to promote unity and self-realisation, and its message should reach the entire world. Expressing his happiness, he said, "I am glad that you have come here, witnessed the Maha Kumbh, and by taking a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam, you will carry forward this message of unity to every village and every home."

# King of Bhutan takes holy dip at Triveni Sangam



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck perform rituals at Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, in Prayagraj and take holy dip



PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck visited the Maha Kumbh on Tuesday and took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam. Accompanied by Uttar

Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the king performed rituals like offering 'arghya' to the Sun before taking the dip. He appeared in a formal Gho (the national dress for men in Bhutan) along with Kera (a

belt) when he landed at the airport and was greeted with an orange stole by the chief minister. Later, when King Wangchuck took the dip along with newly-made Mahamandaleshwar Santosh Das ji Maharaj also known as Satua Baba, according to pictures shared by the state government. The Bhutanese King landed in Lucknow on Monday and was welcomed with cultural performances by artists.

Later, he reached the Raj Bhavan and was hosted by Governor Anandiben Patel. He paid floral tributes to the statue of Mahatma Gandhi. The Governor and the Chief Minister held detailed discussions on India-Bhutan relations with the King.

The government said the King's visit will prove to be an important step towards further strengthening India-Bhutan friendship and cultural relations, the statement said.

# UP govt to conduct state's 8th Economic Census digitally

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has decided to conduct the State's Eighth Economic Census digitally. A web-based mobile app is being developed for precise data collection.

Uttar Pradesh has made significant strides in law, order, infrastructure, and economic growth in the last seven and a half years. With the goal of becoming a \$1 trillion economy, the state has launched the Eighth Economic Census 2025-26 to ensure inclusive development. By collecting accurate data, the government aims to create targeted policies and welfare schemes to uplift all sections of society and foster statewide growth, officials said here.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed officials to formulate a comprehensive plan for the Eighth Economic Census (2025-26), aiming to elevate Uttar Pradesh's economy to new heights.

The Yogi government envisions this census not merely as a data collection exercise but as a transformative tool to drive economic growth. To ensure accuracy and efficiency, the census will be conducted digitally, as per the chief minister's directives, officials said.

A web-based mobile application is being developed to facilitate real-time data verification, monitoring, and analysis, ensuring transparency and informed policy-making. This digital approach will help assess the current status of enterprises, self-employed individuals, workers, and small traders, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of government schemes, officials added.

The government plans to deploy 17,000 enumerators and 6,000 supervisors for the census. Local youth will be trained and integrated into the initiative, not only ensuring precise economic data collection but

also creating employment and skill development opportunities, reinforcing the government's commitment to economic empowerment and progress.

CM Yogi Adityanath has decided to include women enumerators in the Eighth Economic Census (2025-26), promoting their active participation. By offering technical training, data collection skills, and digital platform opportunities, the Yogi government is empowering women and advancing their self-reliance. This digital economic census will also serve as a milestone in recognising small entrepreneurs and businesses in Uttar Pradesh. By documenting the contributions of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the initiative aims to elevate them to national and international platforms.

The data-driven approach will enable the government to frame effective policies, ensuring that small businesses receive financial assistance, market access, business training, and technical support.

This initiative will benefit traders and entrepreneurs from both urban and rural areas, strengthening the state's economic landscape. With a fully digital approach, the census will enhance efficiency, accelerate data collection, and provide real-time insights. The Yogi government is developing a multi-layered monitoring system for the economic census, incorporating district magistrates, district statistical officers, and a team of IT experts. IT specialists will ensure data accuracy and authenticity through advanced digital systems. This initiative aims to bridge the economic gap between rural and urban areas. In villages, the focus will be on promoting small enterprises and creating employment opportunities for rural youth.

# 106 spl trains operate on Basant Panchami

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The grand Amrit Snan of Basant Panchami at Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj saw over 2.5 crore devotees taking a holy dip at Triveni Sangam, officials said here.

Devotees arrived in large numbers in the days leading up to the auspicious occasion, marking a significant spiritual event. To ensure smooth travel for pilgrims, the Prayagraj Railway Division operated 106 Mela Special trains on Basant Panchami, along with around 200 regular trains from various stations, ensuring safe transportation for lakhs of devotees. The Amrit Snan of Basant Panchami holds immense significance in Maha Kumbh, attracting millions of devotees seeking spiritual purification.

In response to this massive influx, the Prayagraj Railway Division strategically operated both regular and special trains, ensuring seamless travel for pilgrims. Special trains were run in a direction-wise manner, with services from Prayag and Phaphamau stations catering to travellers heading towards Lucknow and Rae Bareilly, while Rambagh and Jhansi stations managed routes towards Varanasi.



Devotees take a holy dip at Sangam during the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Tuesday

Similarly, trains from Prayagraj Junction and Subedarganj were directed towards Delhi, Agra, and Kanpur, whereas services from Naini and Cheeki stations operated towards Satna, Maihar, and Manikpur. This planning ensured that devotees could travel conveniently without unnecessary congestion. Estimates suggest that about 10 lakh passengers were safely transported to their destinations on Basant Panchami.

# Mathura district panchayat raj officer held for taking bribe

Lucknow (PNS): Mathura District Panchayat Raj Officer (DPRO) Kiran Chaudhary and retired driver Vijendra Singh have been arrested red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 70,000, the Vigilance department of the Uttar Pradesh Police said in a statement on Tuesday. A team of the Vigilance Department, Agra unit, took this action on the complaint of Pratap Singh Rana, the pradhan of Jhudaui village under Farah police station area of Sadar tehsil area of Mathura district. Acting on a complaint of irregularity by the pradhan in a case, the district magistrate of Mathura had constituted a three-member committee of the Gram Sabha, while divesting DPRO Kiran Chaudhary of financial and administrative powers and directed action. The DPRO had issued a notice against the gram pradhan to provide the records and files in this case in compliance with which he and the secretary provided the records and files related to

the case to the district panchayat raj officer's office. The complainant gram pradhan alleged that the district panchayat raj officer was misusing her position and demanding Rs 70,000 as bribe through her retired driver Vijendra Singh to file a report in his favour.

The gram pradhan complained about the matter to the Vigilance Establishment. It was said in the statement that a confidential investigation was conducted on the complaint and the investigation found the case to be true. After getting permission from the government, the Vigilance Establishment team arrested District Panchayat Raj Officer of Mathura Kiran Chaudhary and retired driver Vijendra Singh red-handed on Tuesday while taking a bribe of Rs 70,000 from the complainant Pratap Singh Rana. A case has been registered in this regard and further legal action has been initiated.

# Release names of those killed, injured in Kumbh stampede: Cong leaders

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress leaders on Tuesday staged a demonstration and handed over a memorandum demanding that the state government release the names of those who were killed or injured during a stampede on the occasion of Amrit Snan on Mauni Amavasya in Maha Kumbh on January 29. Congress accused the Yogi Adityanath government of concealing the facts, including the casualties in the incident.

Uttar Pradesh Congress spokesman Manish said that on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, many devotees died and many were seriously injured in the stampede allegedly caused by administrative negligence and chaos at Sangam but the Yogi government has not yet released the list of the dead and injured, leaving their families facing significant difficulties. He said that even the complaints of 'missing' family

members were not registered by the officials concerned.

Manish said that, keeping in mind the suffering of the families of the devotees who died or were injured in the stampede at the Maha Kumbh, thousands of Congress leaders on Tuesday staged a demonstration at all the district headquarters of Uttar Pradesh.

He said that they handed over a memorandum addressed to the governor, demanding that the government release a detailed report of the tragedy on January 29 and also publish the names of those killed or injured in the incident.

In Lucknow, hundreds of Congress members gathered near Begum Hazrat Mahal Park, Maqbara Road, under the leadership of the outgoing president of the City Congress Committee, Amit Srivastava 'Tyagi', and Dr Shahzad Alam, and staged a demonstration. They later went to the office of the district magistrate and submitted a memorandum addressed to the governor.

# Ancient well in Sambhal to be restored, developed

Sambhal (PTI): The Sambhal district administration has initiated plans to restore and develop the ancient Chaturmukh Well as a 'model well', and also uplift other religious pilgrimage sites in the district. Proposals in this regard will be sent to the state government soon, officials said.

Nagar Palika Executive Engineer Mani Bhushan Tiwari told reporters the district magistrate has visited all the religious and historical sites in the region. "There are 19 ancient wells in the city area, and their beautification work is being undertaken," he said, adding plans have been prepared to build improved access routes, entry gates, and also install informational boards. He added that proposals for the development of Bhadrak Ashram, Pap Mochan Teerth, Mrityunjay Teerth and Shankh Madhav Teerth are also being prepared. Speaking about the Chaturmukh well, he stated, "It will be developed as a model well, preserving its ancient structure using the same historical bricks. The site will be equipped with all necessary facilities to enhance its appeal."

For all the pilgrimage sites, the entrance gates will be designed to reflect their historical and cultural significance, he said. The history and facts related to each site will be displayed along with the depictions of Lord Kalki's avatars to educate visitors about the region's heritage, he said. According to Tiwari, proposals for 10 wells and three pilgrimage sites, including Bhadrak Ashram and Mrityunjay Mahateerth, are ready for submission. Plans for constructing a gate and boundary wall at Shankh Madhav Teerth and developing Pap Mochan Teerth under the Vandan Yojana will also be sent to the state government soon, he added.

# Maha Kumbh: Medical services available 24x7 at rly stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

During Maha Kumbh-2025, Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) has made arrangements to provide special medical facilities round-the-clock in observation rooms at Prayagraj Rambag and Jhusi railway stations to ensure health safety of pilgrims. Railway personnel are dedicatedly engaged in service to provide quick medical assistance to the pilgrims coming to Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj Rambag and Jhusi railway stations of Varanasi Division of NER. In this sequence, on Tuesday, medical facilities were provided to 278 fair travellers at the observation room and first aid centres located at Jhusi, while two fair travellers were referred to local hospitals. Similarly, medical facilities were provided to 263 fair passengers at the observation room and first aid centres located at Prayagraj Rambag, Public Relations



Doctors examining Kumbh pilgrims at NER observation room at a station on Tuesday.

Officer (PRO) Ashok Kumar said. During the Maha Kumbh fair, so far about 11,911 passenger devotees were given first aid and medical assistance under the leadership of Dr Neeraj Kumar, Additional Chief Medical Superintendent, Varanasi Division of NER, while 49 serious patients have been sent to local hospitals. The PRO said that observation rooms have been set up at

major stations, including Prayagraj Rambag and Jhusi, where doctors are providing first aid to sick pilgrims and railway employees deployed on duty. Serious patients are being provided the facility to be transported to the nearest hospital by the ambulances present there. Pharmacists deployed in observation rooms are distributing medicines to patients and maintaining medicine dis-

tribution room and equipment smoothly as well as providing medicines, dressing material and medical consumables to the passengers as per requirement. He said, "Round-the-clock medical services are available at railway stations during Maha Kumbh. Whenever a passenger needs medical assistance, they are immediately provided first aid. Along with this, serious patients are being referred immediately if needed by coordinating with railway hospitals and health centres." The Indian Railways aims to make the Maha Kumbh 2025 event safe, healthy and memorable, he added. The health facilities and arrangements made by the Railways are providing the highest level of medical services to the devotees, making their journey safe, healthy and comfortable. The Railway administration has paid attention to all aspects and necessary arrangements have been made keeping in mind the needs of the passengers.

# Factors contributing to rising cancer cases highlighted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

World Cancer Day is observed every year on February 4 with the aim of raising awareness about increasing risks of cancer worldwide and to encourage its prevention, detection and treatment. This year's theme is 'United by Unique'. In this context public awareness programmes were organised and screening was done in all the urban and rural community health centres (CHCs), primary health centres (PHCs) and Ayushman Arogya Mandirs of the district on Tuesday. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said due to rapidly increasing urbanisation, fast and sedentary lifestyle as well as poor eating habits, cancer is making not only the elderly but also people of other age groups its victims on a large scale. "So be alert. Eat fresh homemade food and give priority to fruits, seasonal vegetables, whole grains as they strengthen body's



A programme being organised at DDU Hospital in Varanasi on World Cancer Day on Tuesday

ability to fight diseases (immunity) and reduces the risk of cancer. Do exercise for at least 30 minutes daily. It controls weight and reduces the risk of cancer. Stop consuming tobacco and alcohol completely. This is the most effective way to prevent cancer. Wear a mask in polluted areas such as those with dust and smoke. Get regular health checkups and cancer screenings done", the CMO appealed to the people. On the

occasion, the youth were made aware about the dangers of cancer and ways to prevent it and were also motivated to adopt a healthy lifestyle saying that cancer treatment becomes easy if detected on time. Deputy Chief Medical Officer and nodal officer of the programme Dr YB Pathak said along with public awareness, as per the data on e-Kavach portal, 54 screenings have been done for oral cancer at rural health

centres, 15 in urban health centres, 33 for breast cancer and 33 for cervical cancer. He said habit of tobacco consumption and smoking is the main cause of about 40 per cent of cancer cases in the country. "Due to unhealthy lifestyle, environmental problems and lack of awareness about the disease among people, one in five men and one in eight women in India are at risk of getting cancer. If one just stays away from tobacco products, the risk of cancer can be reduced to a great extent. Tobacco consumption in any form is dangerous", he said, adding that a large number of youth population in the country consumes tobacco, generally tobacco and smoking are considered responsible for cancer of mouth and lungs only, but this habit can also increase cancer in other parts of the body. Apart from lung cancer, tobacco products increase the risk of mouth, throat, bladder, liver, kidney, stomach and pancreas as well as cervical cancer in women.

# DM conducts surprise inspection



DM Jitendra Pratap Singh checking the attendance register at CMO office on Tuesday.

District Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh conducted a surprise inspection of Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) office on Tuesday morning and found 34 employees absent out of a total strength of 101. The DM expressed strong objection and ordered to stop salary of all the absent employees for one day. He said the CMO's absence from his office without information is enough to indicate the working style of the remaining employees. He said similar inspection will continue to be conducted in future as well. He added that

strict disciplinary action will be initiated against those found slack in the discharge of their duties. LAUNCHED: A Design Development Centre 'Kala Gram' was launched at the Ranjit Singh Rozi Shiksha Kendra (RSK), IIT-K. It aims to preserve and revitalise traditional crafts through innovation. The Centre will serve as a hub for artisans to explore new materials, techniques and market trends, fostering collaboration with young designers from top institutions to co-create products. This initiative, supported by CSR funds from Philip Morris International

inc. (PMI)'s India affiliate IPM India Wholesale Trading Private Limited (IPM India), has already had a positive impact on women's empowerment. Director of External Affairs at IPM India Anushree Lakshminarayanan commended the project's efforts in empowering local artisans. Speaking at the inauguration of the centre, Director of IIT Kanpur, Prof Manindra Agrawal, said, "The launch of Kala Gram at RSK marks a significant step in empowering traditional artisans. By bringing together IIT Kanpur's faculty and external experts, we aim to elevate the craftsmanship of rural artisans and create a lasting impact on the value of their products". Coordinator of Kala Gram, Dr Monika Thakur, mentioned that the Centre will provide a space for artisans to experiment with new tools and techniques, discover market trends and learn packaging strategies. She added that collaborations with design institutions and studios will facilitate these exchanges.

# S-I suspended

Prayagraj (PNS): A sub-inspector (S-I) was suspended by Police Commissioner Tarun Gauba for allegedly beating up a lawyer on Tuesday. The incident occurred when in view of CM's visit police had closed the road by barricading at Hindu Hostel crossing A lawyer passing by protested and got into an argument with the area outpost in charge, Colonelganj police station Atul Kumar Singh. On getting information other lawyers also reached the spot and blocked the road. Somehow the police removed the lawyers from there. A complaint was lodged by the lawyers at the police station concerned. The PC said the image of the Police department has been tarnished. Singh has been attached to the Police Lines during the period of suspension and will not leave the headquarters without his order and a departmental inquiry has been ordered against him. Meanwhile the police nabbed two criminals near the veterinary hospital in Mauaima town with an illegal pistol, cartridges and stolen motorcycle on Tuesday morning.

# 'Cancer care in Asia-Pacific region should be accessible right for all'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In collaboration with Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences (SHUATS), the International Cancer Patient Coalition (ICPC) announces the launch of two crucial surveys aimed at transforming cancer care across India and the broader Asia-Pacific region. These surveys, which are now live, are designed to gather insights into the barriers and opportunities for improving cancer prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivorship care across the region. The surveys target both healthcare professionals and the general public, gathering essential data on key challenges such as infrastructure deficits, the integration of traditional medicine, and the scalability of innovations in rural areas. The responses will directly influence the agenda at the upcoming 'Equity in Action: Driving Progress in Cancer Care' summit, which will be held on February 20-21. "In the Asia-Pacific region, cancer care must be an accessible right for all. By fostering collaboration, innovation and leveraging resources from diverse healthcare systems, we can begin to address the disparities that continue to plague our communities. Only through a collective effort can we bring equitable cancer care to every patient, regardless of their economic background or geographical location," said Prof Jonathan A Lal, Pro-VC Academic Affairs at SHUATS and Board Member of ICPC. The surveys provide vital data that is actively being used, in collaboration with SHUATS, to build actionable frameworks addressing inequities in cancer care faced by millions across India and the Asia-Pacific region. "The key to addressing cancer care inequities in the Asia-Pacific lies not only in adopting the latest advancements in science and technol-

ogy but also in ensuring that these innovations reach every corner of our region. Our focus must remain on building strong healthcare systems that empower patients, communities and policymakers to work together in achieving cancer care that is both advanced and equitable," said Prof Denis Horgan, Secretary General of ICPC and Executive Director of the European Alliance for Personalised Medicine (EAPM). The surveys cover critical topics, including access to cancer treatments and diagnostics, cancer prevention programme challenges, barriers to cancer care in rural and underprivileged areas, sustainability of telemedicine and public-private partnerships, training and retention of oncology professionals. The 'Equity in Action: Driving Progress in Cancer Care' summit will bring together political leaders, healthcare experts, patient advocates, industry represen-

tatives and researchers. In collaboration with SHUATS, the summit will focus on transforming cancer care by leveraging regional collaboration, promoting innovation and driving sustainable public-private partnerships. By addressing disparities in cancer care across the Asia-Pacific region, the event aims to launch actionable frameworks and formal commitments to equitable care through the Asia-Pacific Declaration on Cancer Care. The data gathered from these surveys will help shape the summit's agenda and contribute to advancing policies for patient-centred innovation and regional solidarity. SUICIDE: An elderly man committed suicide by jumping in front of a train on Tuesday. RPF S-I Deepak Kumar reached the spot and took the body into possession. The GRP is investigating the matter. Meanwhile a 35-year-old married woman died under mysterious circumstances in Sarai Mamarez police station area.

# Transformative role of AI in urban development underscored

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The two-day National Conference on Innovative AI Solutions for Sustainable Cities was concluded here at the Senate Hall, CSJM University, on Tuesday. The event brought together distinguished academicians, industry leaders, policymakers and young innovators to discuss AI-driven strategies for urban sustainability. The second day of the conference commenced with an opening ceremony graced by Vice-Chancellor, CSJM University, Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak, along with Prof Sachchida Nand Tripathi, K Vijayendra Pandian and chief guest Prof TG Sitharaman. In his address, the V-C emphasised India's deep-rooted traditions and the significance of the Sanatan way of living, which the world is now recognising for its sustainable practices. He



CSJMU V-C Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak inaugurating the national conference on Tuesday.

highlighted how India is emerging as a hub for innovative solutions that balance technological advancement with ecological responsibility. In his keynote address, Prof TG Sitharaman underscored the transformative role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in urban development. He described AI as Augmented Intelligence, which enhances human capabilities rather than replacing them. He also praised India's

young talent pool, acknowledging that the country is producing world-class engineers and scientists through institutions like the IITs. Prof Sitharaman stressed the importance of integrating AI into academia to drive innovation. He highlighted initiatives such as Idea Labs and hackathons, which are fostering creativity and problem-solving skills among students. "We can no longer afford to be conventional universities. We must embrace blended learning models to keep pace with the evolving landscape of education," he remarked. Guest of honour and Joint Commissioner of the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative Sunil Kumar spoke about challenges of sustainable urban planning, particularly in brownfield cities like Kanpur. He emphasised that many Indian cities have grown organically, preserving their historical essence while

adapting to modernisation. Drawing from Buddhist philosophy, he introduced the concept of Poutichya Samipat, advocating for a balanced approach where rural planning becomes an integral part of urban development. He stressed that if artisans and craftsmen in rural areas are provided fair wages and opportunities, migration to cities can be reduced, thereby strengthening local economies. "Sustainable urban development is not just about smart cities, it is about smart rural planning as well," he noted. Prof Sachchida Nand Tripathi was recognised for his contributions to government-led air quality initiatives and his commitment to working closely with industries to achieve environmental goals. He emphasised India's ambitious net zero by 2070 target and highlighted the role of AI-driven startups in accelerating

progress. The event also celebrated the rise of over 100 startups in the AI and sustainability sector. The valedictory session featured key takeaways from vice-chancellors and academic leaders, focusing on AI's role in shaping sustainable urban development. The discussions emphasised the need for stronger industry-academia collaborations, policy frameworks supporting AI startups, and inclusion of AI-based skill development programmes in higher education. The conference successfully highlighted how AI can be leveraged to build resilient, eco-friendly and technologically advanced urban spaces. The discussions and insights shared over the two days are expected to pave the way for stronger interdisciplinary collaborations and policy interventions, ensuring that India remains at the forefront of AI-driven sustainable development.

BOOK FAIR: On the auspicious occasion of Basant Panchami and Saraswati Puja, Kanpur Metro brought exciting news for book lovers. A month-long book fair has been organised at Gate No. 2 of Motijheel Metro Station from Monday, in collaboration with V&S Company. The fair features works by acclaimed authors from both India and abroad and visitors will enjoy special discounts on purchases. Additionally, Kanpur Metro will host a range of literary activities throughout the duration of the event. Managing Director of Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Limited (UPMRC), Sushil Kumar, said that the primary goal of the book fair is to foster a reading culture among the public. The fair offers a wide selection of books across various genres, including stories, novels, poetry, essays, memoirs, biographies and more—all under one roof.

# Gadgets provided to 41 students



Tablets provided to DAV PG College students on Tuesday under the Digi Shakti scheme of the Uttar Pradesh government.

Tablets were provided to DAV PG College on Tuesday under the Digi Shakti scheme of the Uttar Pradesh government. Acting principal of the college Prof Mishrial and vice-principal Prof Rahul provided tablets to 41 students under the scheme. Addressing the beneficiary students on the occasion, Prof Mishrial said we have now entered the digital age, we all have to participate

in this change and improve our lives with its positive use. He said no section of the society is untouched by the digital revolution, in such a situation, this effort of the government to empower the students digitally is extremely commendable and useful. College secretary and manager Ajit Kumar Singh Yadav congratulated the beneficiaries. On the occasion, professors and employees of various departments of the college were present.

# 'Devotion a comprehensive experience'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

An amazing view of devotion and spiritual energy was seen in Navgrah Temple located in Umarhan here on Monday. Hundreds of devotees had gathered in the temple premises, where *satsang* and discourse were organised. As soon as Swamini Vishwamohini reached the stage, a wave of devotion and reverence swept across the entire atmosphere. Swamini started her discourse by blessing the devotees and said devotion is not just *sadhana*, but the essence of life. She described devotion as a comprehensive experience and said it is not limited to just going to the temple, worshipping or chanting *mantras*, but experiencing the constant presence of God and living with devotion, free from ego, is true devotion. Swamini laid special emphasis on the importance of the Guru and added a true Guru is the one who gives the disciple not only external knowledge, but self-realisation. She said spiritual progress is not possible without the grace of the Guru. The guidance of the Guru takes us out of the darkness of ignorance and leads us towards self-illumination. Quoting the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, she said, "Devotion remains incomplete without love and dedication." When a devotee leaves his ego and remembers God with a feeling of complete dedication, only then

real devotion is experienced. She said, "True devotion is that which is manifested in selfless love and service. When a person rises above his selfishness and works for the welfare of others, he attains the proximity to God." Giving the example of saints Mirabai and Tulsidas, she said that their devotion was full of love and dedication, so they came very close to God. Swamini said *satsang* takes us towards spiritual purity. She inspired everyone to do regular meditation, *sadhana* and chanting of names of God, which will calm the mind and lead to spiritual progress. Before the discourse of Swamini Vishwamohini, famous scholar Pandit Vishnukant Shastri gave a detailed description of the glory of Lord Shiva. He said Shiva is not only the god of destruction, but also a symbol of compassion, love and penance. He said Mahabharata is not only a war story, but a book that guides life. He said, "Only through Shiva devotion can one achieve success and peace in life. When a person worships Shiva with a true heart, there is no lack of anything in his life." He urged the devotees to do service with a true heart. After the discourse of Swamini Vishwamohini, the devotees performed *bhajans* and *kirtans*, which made the entire atmosphere devotional. President of Kashi Vishwanath Mandir Nyas Trust Prof Nagendra Pandey welcomed the guests.

# Workshop on film appreciation inaugurated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A five-day national workshop on Film Appreciation and Parallel Cinema was inaugurated under the joint auspices of Malaviya Moolya Anusheelan Kendra (MMAK) and Inter-Cultural Studies Centre. The keynote speaker of the inaugural session was Prof Sisir Basu, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, BHU. Speaking on his topic 'Indian Parallel Cinema: What the Future Holds for It?', Prof Sisir Basu discussed parallel cinema and explained its elements. He said that the most prominent names who established parallel cinema in India were Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak and Satyajit Ray. These filmmakers were influenced by the Indian theatre group IFTA and were trying to bring about a change in Indian cinema by taking inspiration from Italian neo-realism and French New Wave prevalent in European countries. "With the help of minimum technical support, low expenses and inclusion of ordinary actors, they were making such cinema which talked about the prob-



lems of the common section of the society", Prof Basu said, adding that later, filmmakers like Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihalani also contributed significantly in this. At the beginning of the programme, the coordinator of the Centre for Inter-Cultural Studies, Prof Rajkumar, in his welcome address said that just as we understand literature, we need to understand cinema in the same way. In particular, we should discuss parallel cinema. In India, institutions like FTII and CSDS have made special contributions in this field, he added.

# 2-day event celebrates wisdom, healing & ancient traditions

Varanasi (PNS): Varanasi, the spiritual heart of India, recently hosted an event to celebrate wisdom, healing and ancient traditions during the inaugural Aatman-2025 festival at Namo Ghat. This two-day event saw a remarkable gathering of spiritual leaders from across the country, who shared their deep insights on mind, body and soul healing. The festival's opening session set the tone with Swami Ayayananda of Chinmaya Mission, who spoke on 'Indic life hacks for fulfillment and success', challenging attendees to reflect on the true meaning of success and happiness. Sri M, founder of Satsang Foundation, followed with a compelling talk on the 'relevance of Upanishads today', emphasising their timeless value in helping people discover their true selves. The festival's second day was equally inspiring, with Jagadguru Dr Charukerthi Bhattarakapanditacharya

Pattacharya varya Swami of the Jain Mutt at Moodbidri discussing the profound concept of Anekantavada (many truths). His enlightening example of the seven blind men describing an elephant underscored the idea that multiple truths coexist within one universal reality. Jaya Row delivered an impactful session on Karma, Gita and destiny, asserting that the law of Karma shapes our lives and true happiness comes from selfless actions. Diverse perspectives were further enriched by the presence of a Tibetan Buddhist master, a Jewish priest and experts from the Brahma Kumaris and Ananda Sangha. The festival was not only a space for spiritual learning but also cultural expression. The opening day culminated in a mesmerising Bharatanatyam performance by Vidushi Geeta Chandran, which paid tribute to Shiva Tattva, the very essence of Kashi. Aatman-

2025 concluded with a vibrant performance by HG Rishi Kumar Prabhu of ISKCON, who spoke on 'Krishna as a symbol of playfulness', followed by a spirited chanting and dancing session that invited all attendees to join the celebration. Over the two days, thousands of people who flocked to the ghat had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the wisdom of the masters at the Aatman festival. Head of Aatman Trust, Gaurav Singhania, said: "The true measure of Aatman's success lies in the meaningful interactions between the audience and spiritual masters, where timeless wisdom rooted in Indic traditions addressed modern-day challenges. We are thrilled that for the first time, we were able to bring this vision to life so successfully. We eagerly look forward to building on this success and welcoming everyone again next year."

# Rajnath Singh accuses Rahul Gandhi of misattributing Army chief

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of making "false allegations" about the statement of the Army chief on the situation at the India-China border.

"The words attributed to the Army Chief by Shri Rahul Gandhi were never spoken by him at any time. It is a matter of deep regret that Shri Rahul Gandhi should indulge in irresponsible politics on matters of national interest," he said in a social media post.

This reaction came after Rahul Gandhi, who is leader of opposition, in his speech on Monday in Lok Sabha during the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, claimed that the Chinese have intruded on Indian land but Prime Minister Narendra Modi has denied it. The Army disagreed with the prime minister, he had said.

"The Prime Minister has denied that Chinese forces are inside our territory but for some rea-

son our army keeps talking to the Chinese about their entry into our territory and our chief of army staff has said that the Chinese are inside our territory," Rahul Gandhi had said.

On Tuesday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in a social media post regarding certain remarks made in Parliament by Rahul Gandhi about the statement of the Chief of the Army Staff on the situation along the India-China border, officials statement said.

A statement by defence ministry about Rajnath's remarks said he stated that the Army Chief's observations pertained to the temporary disturbance of traditional patrolling patterns by both sides along the border. He further emphasised that these patrolling practices have now been restored to their traditional pattern following the recent disengagement efforts. These details were previously shared in Parliament.

The defence minister also clarified that the words attributed to the Army Chief in the parliamentary debate were never stated by him at any time. He



underscored the importance of accuracy and responsible discourse on matters concerning national security.

Rajnath Singh reiterated that with respect to territorial issues, it is well documented that 38,000 sq. km of Indian territory in Aksai Chin has been under Chinese control since the 1962 conflict. Furthermore,

5,180 sq. km of territory was ceded by Pakistan to China in 1963. These historical facts remain an integral part of India's territorial discourse.

Meanwhile, BJP MP Nishikant Dubey on Tuesday wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for initiating breach of privilege proceedings against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for "bla-

tant lies and vilification campaign" during his speech in the House.

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

the Congress leader is using his parliamentary privilege to spread canards without authenticating his charges.

The BJP MP said Rahul Gandhi's speech carried mainly claims, including that mobile phones were not made in India but only assembled here and China has captured the Indian territory. He had also alleged that India had sent Foreign Minister S Jaishankar to the US get an invite for Prime Minister Narendra Modi for US President Donald Trump's swearing-in ceremony.

In his letter, Dubey touched on the issues as well as the Congress leader's allegations related to his demand for caste census.

He alleged, "While raising these issues, Rahul Gandhi has not only shamelessly distorted the historical and substantive facts but also made an attempt to ridicule our country and lowering the prestige of our Republic." Dubey noted that Birla had asked Rahul Gandhi to authenticate his claims while noting that the Congress leader had not done it yet.

In a swipe at the Leader of Opposition, Dubey said, "This 'erudite' person has neither authenticated his gibberish canards nor apologised of using the pious forum of Parliament to defame our country and the elected government."

He accused Gandhi of blatantly misusing the Constitution's Article 105, which accords privileges to parliamentarians for their comments made inside the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

Claiming that the privilege is subject to provisions of the Constitution and to the rules and standing orders regulating the procedure of Parliament, Dubey alleged that Rahul Gandhi was misusing Parliament on an "utterly false and imaginary notion" that he as an MP has an inherent privilege to speak whatever he likes on the floor of the House.

The Congress leader seemed to believe that even the presiding officer or the Leader of the House or the treasury benches have no authority to discipline his "delinquent" behaviour, he said.

He said, "The fact remains that the Article 105 does not give absolute powers and freedom to any public representative, especially of the ilk of Rahul Gandhi, of there would be anarchy in the House."

Dubey said it is an established legal position that MPs broadly enjoy various privileges are subject to various widely accepted "mores".

Urging the Speaker to initiate proceedings against Gandhi, he alleged that Parliament's records and proceedings are a testimony to his incessant irresponsible attitude as the "guardian of India Chapter of Foreign Tool-Kit" aimed at destabilizing the country. In his speech, Rahul Gandhi had claimed that the Modi's 'Make in India' initiative had failed.

"When we talk to the US, we wouldn't send our foreign minister to (get) our PM invited to his (US President's) coronation. We will not send our foreign minister 3-4 times (to say) please invite our prime minister," he said while levelling several charges against the government.



## Prime Minister Modi congratulates new Belgium leader Bart De Wever

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday congratulated Barr De Wever on taking over as the new leader of Belgium. "Heartiest congratulations to Prime Minister @Bart\_DeWever on assuming office.

I look forward to working together to further strengthen India-Belgium ties and enhance our collaboration on global matters.

Wishing you a successful tenure ahead," Modi said in a social media post.

De Wever of the Flemish nationalist N-VA party succeeds Alexander De Croo, who had remained in office as a caretaker since the June elections last year.

## Delhi court grants bail to accused in Landon High Commission attack



PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has granted bail to a London resident in a case related to the alleged attack on the High Commission of India in London in March 2023.

According to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the incident on March 19, 2023 and an agitation organised on March 22, 2023, in which Inderpal Singh Gaba, a resident of Hounslow in west London, participated, were part of the same transaction.

However, principal district and sessions judge Vimal Kumar Yadav, in an order on January 29, said Gaba's role seemed to be confined to the incident on March 22, 2023.

Both the incidents were led and planned by the same set of people with a clear objective of influencing the crackdown on "Waris Punjab De" and its leader Amritpal Singh, the NIA said.

"The NIA is unable to establish

any link of the applicant with the incident of March 19, 2023. He was neither present at the spot nor associated with arranging anything for the demonstration and for that matter, nothing could be shown that he was part of the conspiracy to organise the demonstration on March 19, 2023 or for that matter on March 22, 2023," the order said.

The court said the allegations over the March 22, 2023 incident even if "taken true" still did not make a case for life imprisonment or death penalty.

"He is a young man with clean antecedents as nothing objectionable could be brought on record or shown...His complicity or involvement in any manner could not be shown in the incident of March 19, 2023," the judge said.

The court observed though "insult to national honour" was a serious allegation against him, Gaba wasn't accused of violence.

It appeared the case's trial, which

hadn't commenced yet was likely to take "a very long time", added the court.

"In such circumstances, when there is no mechanism available with the human race to return time to anyone, how far then it would be appropriate to keep a person under custody under such allegations?" asked the court.

The NIA cited a photograph where Gaba is allegedly posing with an AK47 rifle and claimed "it reflected and was indicative of his tendencies".

The court dismissed the argument saying aside from the photo, which was found in the accused's cellphone's photo gallery, neither any such rifle was recovered, nor could it be said conclusively that it was an AK 47 rifle or a dummy.

"In this era of deepfake photoshop, etc., there can't be any certainty about what has been shown is correct.

More so, it is not very uncommon that people pose for photographs with all kinds of stuff," the judge said.

Gaba was detained by the Immigration Authorities at Attari border on December 9, 2023 while he was coming from London via Pakistan.

Later on, he was arrested on April 25, 2024 under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), Prevention of Insult of National Honour Act, and IPC.

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

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said in a world that promises to be so volatile and uncertain, a stronger India-European Union(EU) relationship can be an "important stabilising factor", as he asserted that the relationship between the two sides is more important than ever before.

In his address at the inaugural session of the IIC-Bruegel annual seminar here, the minister, without naming any country, also said that "in our own continent, international law has been disregarded with significant consequences".

"Even on a question like democracy and military rule, different standards have been applied to our neighbours in the east and our neighbour in the west," he said. The second IIC-Bruegel annual seminar is being held at the India International Centre (IIC) from February 4-5.

"The world is currently witnessing two major conflicts, these are often presented as matters of principle. We are told that the very future of the world order is at stake. Yet, the record shows how selectively and unevenly these principles have been applied," Jaishankar said.

In his address, he also touched upon the aspects of trade and digital technology, climate action, and their interplay with geopolitics.

He said today there is much talk about the world order unravelling. "The fact is that the consensus which underpinned it, has done so well before."

"There are North-South contradictions as much there is an East-West divide. In



fact, even these broad characterisations are no longer tenable in an era of sharper nationalism," the external affairs minister said.

Both economic and political logic of an earlier era needs refreshing, Jaishankar said. "Much of the architecture will undoubtedly continue because we are too deeply invested into it, but some of it, perhaps aspects that are critical and sensitive, will be more nationally driven," he added.

Jaishankar asserted, "We are truly entering a time of multipolarity and rebalancing, the sooner we come to terms with this reality, the better for all of us." He underlined that these are some of the questions that India and the European Union confront today.

"It is important that as we reflect on appropriate policies and responses, there is a quest for convergence as well as an honesty in conversations. We clearly have common interests and shared values,

there may be some differences on priorities and specifics, but what binds us is a sentiment much stronger," the minister said.

"At the end of the day, we are political democracies, pluralistic societies and market economies," he said.

The minister said as the two sides take stock of the changes underway, it is likely that "our meeting points will increase".

"Moreover, in a world that promises to be so volatile, so uncertain, a stronger India-EU relationship can be an important stabilising factor," Jaishankar said.

India is certainly cognisant of the greater strategic awakening of Europe in the last few years, that too can serve as a "driver of deeper engagement", he added.

"We already see that happening, for example, in defence and security and technology cooperation. The bottom line is that our India-EU relationship is more important than ever before," Jaishankar said.



## India boasts robust system to combat future pandemics: Nadda

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has a very robust system to deal with future pandemics and public health emergencies, Union Health and Family Welfare Minister J P Nadda asserted in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

Replying to supplementary questions in the Rajya Sabha, Nadda highlighted the steps taken by the government in the last 10 years to strengthen India's health system, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

India has proven under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that we have got a very robust system to address the issue of any pandemic that comes, the minister said.

Listing out India's capabilities, Nadda said the country has the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), which oversees and keeps surveillance. "It is the apex body which takes care of the diseases and the pathogens, and the other emerging virus mutation, which takes place," he added.

Under the NCDC, he said the

country has an integrated disease surveillance programme, a platform for disease surveillance.

"We have got the RRT, which is called the rapid response team, which is there in the states. And we have got very decentralised multidisciplinary teams for health control and containment. And also, we have got an integrated health information platform where advanced data with analysis and analytical data and data modelling tools are there," the minister said.

"We give real-time reporting for all the emerging pandemics or the there are chances of having any pandemic."

The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) has 150 labs, he said, adding that there are viral research diagnostic laboratories. India has a world-class National Institute of Virology in Pune.

"So, we have got a very robust system wherever any pandemic or any chances of the pandemic are there, these laboratories confirm what type of mutation is taking place, what change, what type of medicine or what type of treatment is to be given," Nadda said.

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

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President of the UN General Assembly Philemon Yang is paying a four-day visit to India beginning Tuesday. Yang, who assumed the responsibility at the global body in September, previously served as the prime minister of Cameroon.

The President of the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly (PGA) is visiting India at the invitation of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, according



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

visit, the external affairs minister and the PGA will discuss key multilateral and regional issues of mutual interest," the readout said. Yang will also pay a courtesy call on President Droupadi Murmu. Apart from New Delhi, Yang will be visiting Bengaluru.

"The PGA is scheduled to visit Infosys and the Indian Institute of Science, where he would have the opportunity to interact with experts on India's innovations in various fields such as sustainability, digital public infrastructures, etc," the readout said.

## India seeks cooperation from Bangladesh to combat cross-border crimes

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has conveyed to Bangladesh that it expects a cooperative approach from the neighbouring country for combating cross-border crimes, the government informed Parliament on Tuesday.

India has also informed Bangladesh that it is observing all existing agreements in this regard, including for fencing along this front, the government said.

Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said in a written reply to Lok Sabha that the total length of the India-Bangladesh border is 4,096.7 km out of which 3,232.21 km has been "covered" with a fence.

The minister was asked if border fencing "impacted" bilateral relations between the two countries. "Construction of fencing is an important security measure for securing the border. Fencing helps to ensure a crime-free border by effectively addressing the challenges

of cross-border criminal activities, smuggling, movement of criminals and trafficking," Rai said.

It has been "conveyed" to the government of Bangladesh that with regard to security measures at the border, including for fencing, India observes all protocols and agreements between the two governments and between the Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the minister said.

## Parliamentary report flags delays in youth empowerment scheme

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary report has flagged delays in fund allocations, lack of targeted outreach, and insufficient government action on key recommendations for the youths on disaster preparedness, skilling, and hostel facilities for women.

The 360th report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth, and Sports, presented in Parliament on Tuesday, reviewed the government's response to its earlier recommendations on the Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram (RYSK), a key youth empowerment scheme.

The committee expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of implementation and urged the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to take urgent corrective



steps.

The report flagged concerns over the lack of a structured approach to youth volunteerism in disaster response, citing a 2022 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assessment. It urged the government to

integrate Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, or NYKS, volunteers into mandatory disaster management committees at the village and district levels and establish Disaster Risk Reduction Teams in every district. While the Ministry reported that over 12,000

NYKS volunteers have been trained, the committee called for better coordination with disaster relief authorities to ensure effective deployment.

The committee also criticised delays in transforming NYKS centres into District Youth Resource Centres (DYRCs), which could serve as hubs for skill development, employment, and entrepreneurship.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs stated that it had forwarded the proposal to the Finance Ministry, but the committee urged stronger follow-ups to secure the required funding.

The report also noted a lack of collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Employment to turn NYKS into a gateway for youth employment. It also called for the creation of 'Girl Child NYKS Centres' to ensure greater participation of young women in skill training pro-

grammes and job placements. The committee found gaps in representation from rural youth and students from tier-2 and tier-3 colleges in international exchange programmes. It recommended tracking the long-term impact of such initiatives and ensuring a more inclusive selection process to provide equal opportunities for marginalised students.

The report expressed serious concerns over the lack of youth hostels exclusively for women, particularly in state capitals, educational hubs, and cultural sites. While the Ministry cited the construction of one hostel in Kota, Rajasthan, the committee deemed it inadequate and directed the government to seek additional funds in the 2025-26 Union Budget for dedicated women hostels with Wi-Fi, CCTV sur-

veillance, and round-the-clock security.

The committee also noted discrepancies in use of funds under the National Young Leaders Programme (NYLP) and recommended more transparent budgeting and expenditure tracking.

It criticised the limited awareness and outreach of Scouts and Guides programmes, recommending an expansion of gender sensitisation, environmental protection, and digital literacy initiatives in rural schools.

While the government has acknowledged some recommendations, the committee's report indicates that several key youth empowerment measures remain under-implemented.

The committee urged the MYAS to act swiftly and report back on pending issues before the next parliamentary review.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Delhi decides

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

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



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

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## PICTALK



Labourers plant paddy saplings in a field, in Nadia

## Imbuing warrior ethos through strength

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



ASHOK K MEHTA

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

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

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

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

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



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

Otherwise, few would clear the viva, especially for the Defence Minister. Last week former Fox News commentator, Pete Hegseth former Army National Guard who was President Trump's most endangered cabinet choice went through hell before the Senate Armed Services Committee for his confirmation. Poor Pete! he was facing multiple allegations of abuse including sex and alcohol. He pledged to never drink alcohol if confirmed. Professionally he was well prepared, answering accurate questions on military equipment like the size of a 9mm bullet and the number of rounds in a carbine magazine. He told his examiners he would restore 'warrior ethos' in the armed services. Americans have much to worry about as the Chinese are catching up in technology, military and economic prowess. Singh has no similar worries. India has abandoned any catch-up with China, its main enemy. It hopes to make up the deterrent and capability gap through diplomacy as was evident from the meagre defence allocations (1.9 per cent of GDP) in last week's budget.

After inflation and foreign exchange fluctuations, modernisation funds have decreased. In a tweet, Singh described the budget as 'wonderful' and congratulated Sitharaman for fulfilling the resolve of PM Modi for Viksit Bharat. No defence minister, service chief or CDS has ever put his job on the line, asking for additional funds. Recently a French CDS did so. He had to resign when the Euro 1bn extra that he demanded was not provided. Later, President Macron reinstated him along with Euro 1bn. For the last few years, Sitharaman has ceased mentioning defence allocation in budget presentations. The armed forces are expected to employ force multipliers like invoking Chanakya, imbuing ancient military craft and becoming contemporary through the fusion of past, present and future, as reflected by the new painting on this theme that replaced the once-in-1000-year surrender ceremony painting in the Army Chief's annex. For all his virtues - injecting Hindutva in a hitherto secular armed force, venerating weapons with religious symbols and motivating triservice warriors by pledging mooh tod jawab, Singh has ceded his area of responsibility to PMO and NSA. Former Defence Minister AK Antony in contrast was the Rock of Gibraltar, never letting the NSA or even the PM bypass him. So little reform got done. Singh is an affable team play-



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

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

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

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## CANCER CASES RISING RAPIDLY

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

Although cancer is a life-threatening disease, it can be prevented and treated if detected early. Screening programmes such as breast self-examination and mammography substantially increase breast cancer survival. Options such as breast-conserving surgery and breast reconstruction surgery should be more available in the SEA region. Cervical cancer is the second most frequent cancer in the SEA region, caused by high-risk human papillomavirus (HPV), and can be prevented by vaccination. Tobacco is another major cause of cancer and preventable deaths worldwide.

More actions are to be taken as tobacco and smoking are still the cause of many deaths in the region. Equal attention should be paid to less prevalent types of cancer. Governments need to include cancer treatment in national insurance as done in countries like Indonesia, not restricted to surgeries but allowing lifelong treatment. There is an urgent need for continued efforts from clinicians, researchers, and policymakers to collaborate and find the most effective strategies to serve cancer patients in the best way possible.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

## PROMOTE RENEWABLE ENERGY

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

## Retired judges to boost efficiency



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

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

Gopalswamy J | Chennai

## EGGS ESSENTIAL FOR NUTRITION

Madam - According to the data, around 35-40 per cent of children in rural areas in Maharashtra are underweight, and the highest rate of malnutrition is found in North Maharashtra. Lack of access to nutritious food is one of the major factors behind malnutrition. With this backdrop, it is surprising to learn why the state government dropped eggs from the mid-day meals. Egg is a major source of protein and its substitute, pulses, are costlier than eggs, so eggs should remain a core part of mid-day meals, and if any student does not want to eat it, he can skip it.

Earlier states like Madhya Pradesh and Goa also made such decisions, while it should be noted that a few states in Southern India have added the number of eggs given to children to ensure protein requirements are met. Such drastic decisions could prove detrimental to the families living below the poverty line.

Bal Govind | Noida

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## The digital age and the decline of meaningful connections

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

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

At an age when many resign themselves to solitude, she picks up the phone and calls people from decades ago. Not just text messages, voice notes, or hurried "Hope you're well" followed by silence. She calls, she converses, she cares. It is a simple act, yet in today's world, it feels almost extraordinary. Her phone conversations are not perfunctory check-ins; they are rich tapestries of shared history, laughter, and updates on each other's lives. And the warmth with which she is received at the other end of the line is a testament to the bonds she has nurtured over the years. She is remembered because she remembers. She is loved because she has loved. It makes me wonder: What



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

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

One of the reasons we don't stay in touch is because we assume people are busy. They probably don't have time to talk. Or worse, we convince ourselves that if they really cared, they would call us too. And so, we let months slip into years, waiting for the other person to make the first move. But my mother-in-law doesn't wait. She doesn't hesitate to pick up the phone, regardless of how long it has been. And what's more, people respond to her with the same warmth and eagerness. It reminds me that relationships are not about keeping score; they are about keeping the connection alive.

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

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

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

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



ASHA IYER KUMAR



## FIRST COLUMN

## A DARK CLOUD BEFORE THE GOLDEN DAWN

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



RAJYOGI BRAHM KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

None of us would deny the fact that the whole world is in chaos today. The human race is in more pain and suffering than ever before. The root cause of this is, because three key powers i.e., religion, politics and science that run the world have miserably failed to function by their essential characteristics to look after the wellbeing of people at large. These powers have deviated from their normal course, lost their essential traits and degraded to the lowest level, which is quite visible from the sorry state of affairs across the world. The power of religion which was meant to show human beings the righteous path which is necessary to maintain social harmony has today become a perpetrator of conflict. It's evident from the facts that religion has failed to uphold moral values in society which can be seen in the form of ever-increasing molestation and sexual assault cases at homes, workplaces, public places and even at schools and colleges that are considered temples of learning.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



RAMAKANT CHAUDHARY

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Wazirpur constituency, Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over keys to more than 1,650 flats to slum residents, creating a significant connection with local voters. Key areas like Chandni Chowk, Northwest Delhi, and Northeast Delhi have become pivotal grounds for the BJP's potential resurgence.

The BJP should prioritize the 38 constituencies where it secured over 40% of the vote share in 2020. Out of these, the party narrowly lost 17 seats to AAP by less than five percentage points but managed to win eight. These represent easier opportunities to gain ground. For the remaining 21 seats, the BJP will aim to capitalize on anti-incumbency sentiments against AAP to sway voters in its favour.

**AAP Strategy**  
AAP of 2025, which might dominate the elections as the C-Voter survey suggests, looks different from its 2020 avatar. The Lok Sabha Elections 2024 speaks volumes that AAP, despite an alliance with Congress, drew nought in all seven parliamentary seats of Delhi. Kejriwal's AAP looks lacking in sympathy as experts opine. Besieged with corruption charges and stern anti-incumbency, AAP has meticulously evolved strategies to launch popular welfare schemes to outweigh the allegations.

The party leaders are burning the midnight oil to retain floating voters who keep changing allegiance during the Lok Sabha polls and assembly elections. Kejriwal's poll manoeuvre is trying hard to win the hearts of Dalit and Muslim voters. AAP has

viscerally attracted voters from the Purvanchal community—a key demographic in Delhi hailing from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand that account for around 40 per cent of the electorate and holds a significant sway on 27 seats—by connecting the community on the ground level as the party, according to media grapevine, has held around 600 meetings in this context.

**Congress Revival**  
With nothing to lose, Congress, which went from dominating Delhi's electoral landscape from 1998 to 2013 to not having a single MLA since, has entered the poll fray late yet remains determined to lock horns with AAP and dislodge the Kejriwal-led establishment from power, avenging the campaign that cost the UPA government heavily over a decade ago. The results of the 2022 Delhi Municipal polls, in which Congress won five wards in the Northeast district areas that were hit by the riots, buttress the perception that the minority community is disillusioned with AAP.

This electoral scenario could reinforce the poll fortune of the BJP, especially the vote bank of Muslims—21.6 lakh in the national capital—who have Congress in their heart and AAP in mind.

The Muslim voters could play a key role in six assembly seats: Babarpur (35 per cent), Okhla (43 per cent), Seelampur (50 per cent), Matia Mahal (48 per cent), Mustafabad (36 per cent), and Ballimaran (38 per cent). In that sense, if Muslims—accounting for 12.86 per cent of Delhi's pop-

ulation—are divided between Congress and AAP, BJP will have the upper hand. The Delhi Elections 2025 is deemed the cynosure of all states' eyes.

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

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

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

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

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

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



POOJA SINGH

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

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

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

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

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



ital infrastructure with financial incentives, the budget paves the way for startups and MSMEs to expand, innovate, and compete globally." The budget also provides a significant boost to innovation and research. The extension of the period of incorporation for startups by five years is expected to

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

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

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

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

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

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

The customized credit cards for MSMEs, fund of funds for startups, and expanded fund-of-funds will undoubtedly improve capital access and stimulate growth. Enhancing investment and turnover limits for MSMEs will also provide a much-needed boost to their operational efficiency."

Overall, the Union Budget 2025 signals a bold commitment to making India a global leader in entrepreneurship, technology, and innovation.

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

# Farooq Abdullah challenges J and K normalcy claims

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

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

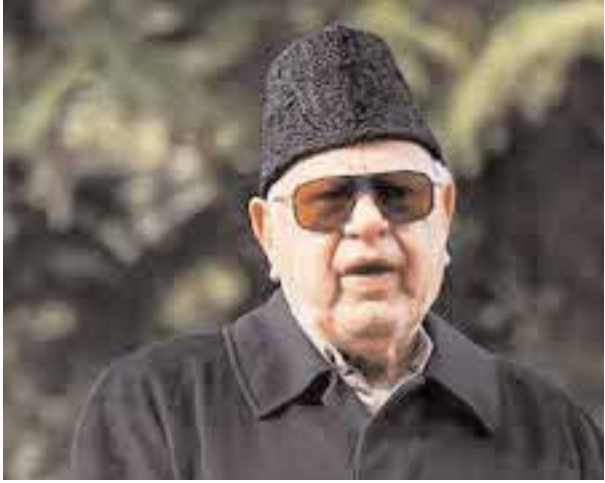
Dr Abdullah's remarks came ahead of the crucial security review meeting chaired by the Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

with anti-national elements aiming at procuring /transportation/ smuggling of SIM cards inside the Central Jail premises for its use by the jail inmates which include those involved in terrorism and Narco-terrorism," said the spokesman, in a statement.

Police Station CIK had earlier carried out searches inside the Central Jail premises and it was found that these suspects in connivance with some inmates have procured and transported SIM cards inside the Jail for its use in a variety of terror related activities, added the spokesman.

"The role of PoS/vendors of different Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) who have issued these SIM cards is being ascertained and further arrests are expected," he said, adding the suspects detained belong to the areas of Dawoodpora Anantnag, Qamarwari Srinagar, Nathpora, Kaloosa, Bandipora and KursuPadshahibagh, Srinagar.

# 3 youths try to rob police on Gurugram expressway, nabbed

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

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

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

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

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

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

# BMC allocates ₹74,427 Crore for 2025-26

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

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

Interestingly enough, the BMC has proposed to construct "Mumbai Eye" during the year when Asia's largest civic body is all set to go to the polls. In fact, this is the third attempt to construct a massive Ferris wheel, along the lines of "London Eye" — a 135-meter (443-foot) Ferris wheel on the River Thames.

This is the third attempt to construct "Mumbai Eye" in the country's commercial capital. Earlier, the then ruling united Shiv Sena had proposed to construct "Mumbai Eye" way back in 2008, but it remained on paper. The state-run Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) had volunteered to construct the the giant cantilevered observation wheel during 2022-23.

However, the plan was dropped after the local residents opposed the project. Tabling the Mumbai civic budget for 2025-26, BMC Commissioner Bhusan Gagrani made a brief mention

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

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

Given that the term of the elected corporators ended on March 7, 2022, the BMC has not elected body and in the absence of an elected body, it is being ruled by the administration.

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

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

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

crore has been earmarked.

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

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

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

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

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

In the first phase started in

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

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

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

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

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

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

# SC censures Assam govt on detention centres

From page 3

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

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

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

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

that this does not bother the government, it added.

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

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

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

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

# Bengal to provide land to BSF for border fencing

PTI ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

outposts or install wired fences.

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

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

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

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

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

Of them, five would lead probe teams.

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

# LIC gets GST notice of ₹101.95 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

# Modi attacks Rahul, Kejriwal ahead of polls

From page 3

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

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

Modi said his Government started the Ayushman Bharat for poor, but some states have stalled the scheme, leaving poor people in hardship.

# FIR against Atishi for model code violation

From page 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

against her.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal weighed in. He alleged that it is now the "official stand" of Delhi Police and Election Commission to back BJP's "hooliganism" against AAP and protect them as they distribute liquor and money. "If anyone stops them, they will be charged under a case of obstructing work," he said.

When asked to leave, she refused, according to the police. Soon after, the senior AAP leader was booked in a disobedience case registered under Section 223 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. In response, Ramesh Bidhuri said the chief minister was panicking over her "imminent defeat" and suggested that she should not "shred the dignity of" the constitutional post held by her.

# Panel to draft Gujarat UCC law

From page 3

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

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

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

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

politics," Gadhvi said.

He claimed the issue has been raked up as local bodies polls are around the corner, it might be raised again before the assembly polls. "BJP has done nothing about inflation or unemployment, it does not create jobs," he charged.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# US flight carrying 205 illegal Indians headed for Amritsar

From page 3

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

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

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

the US.

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

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

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

"When I am reelected, we will

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

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

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

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

inauguration speech.

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

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

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

migrants.

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

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

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

# EC dismisses Kejriwal's allegations...

From page 3

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

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

seems as if the Election Commission does not exist. This is raising a very big question. It is justified for people to have questions in their minds that Rajiv Kumar Ji, who is the Chief Election Commissioner, is retiring at the end of this month. What kind of post has been offered to him post-retirement? The post of governor, the post of president, what kind of post can it be?" AAP chief said at a press conference.

"I request Rajiv Kumar Ji with folded hands. Do your duty, give up the desire for the post, give up the greed for the post. Now at the end of your career, do not destroy the country, the country's democracy," he added.

Kejriwal had alleged that Kumar is not taking action against the BJP to bag a post-retirement assignment. Kumar demits office on February 18 on attaining the age of 65 years. Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu are the other election commissioners.

Earlier this month, the poll panel sought an explanation from Kejriwal over his remark that the BJP government in Haryana had been poisoning the Yamuna water supply to Delhi. In his reply to the poll panel, the former Delhi chief minister said he made the comments in the context of an "urgent public health crisis" over drinking water quality in the national capital.



# EU leaders scramble to avoid US friction, tariff war

AP ■ BRUSSELS

After three years spent trying to deter Russia from destroying Ukraine, European Union leaders grappled on Monday with how to respond to a major ally who appears determined to start a trade war or even seize part of their territory. It would be a cruel paradox if, during the time of this direct Russian threat and Chinese expansion, the EU and the United States might end up in a "conflict among allies," said Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency. Since taking office last month, US President Donald Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on EU imports and refused to rule out military force to take control of Greenland, an autonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark. Trump has also mystified

Europeans by showing little sign of how he intends to end the war in Ukraine within six months as promised, let alone in a day, as he boasted while campaigning last year. "We have to do everything to avoid this totally unnecessary and stupid tariff war or trade war," the Polish prime minister told reporters in Brussels, where EU leaders met for talks on boosting and improving military spending and ramping up Europe's defense industry. Tusk said Trump's threats amount to "a serious test" of European unity, and "in a very strange context, because it's the first time where we have such a problem among allies." French President Emmanuel Macron said the EU is "a power that stands its ground" and that if hit with tariffs, the 27-nation bloc "would have to make itself respected." He said Trump's threats are "pushing Europeans to be more united, more active

in addressing their collective security challenges." Trump slapped tariffs on European steel and aluminum during his first term, and EU leaders have already been in contact with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau since Canada imposed retaliatory duties on US goods in response to a 25 per cent tariff levied by Trump. The US president later on Monday agreed to a 30-day pause on his tariff threat as America's two largest trading partners took steps to appease his concerns about border security and drug trafficking. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen underlined that ties between the bloc and the United States are part of "our most consequential relationship. It is fundamental to promoting peace, security and prosperity." But she warned that "there are clearly new challenges and growing uncertainty" and the

EU stands ready to defend itself. "When targeted unfairly or arbitrarily, the European Union will respond firmly," von der Leyen told reporters after the meeting. Meanwhile, Denmark's prime minister again insisted on Monday that Greenland isn't for sale and called for a robust response from the EU should U.S. Trump press ahead with his threat to take control of the island. "I will never support the idea of fighting allies. But of course, if the US puts tough terms on Europe, we need a collective and robust response," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told reporters. Last month, Trump left open the possibility that the American military might be used to secure Greenland, as well as the Panama Canal. "We need Greenland for national security purposes," he said. Frederiksen said she has "great support" from her EU partners

on the fact "that everybody has to respect the sovereignty of all national states in the world, and that Greenland is today a part of the Kingdom of Denmark. It's part of our territory and it's not for sale." European Council President Antonio Costa, noting that the EU has stood beside Ukraine in defense of its borders, said of Greenland: "Of course, we will stand also for these principles, all the more so if the territorial integrity of a member state of the European Union is questioned." Frederiksen acknowledged US concerns about security in the Arctic Region, where Russia and China have been increasingly active. "I totally agree with the Americans that the High North, that the Arctic region is becoming more and more important when we are talking about defense and security and deterrence," Frederiksen said.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer, left, speaks with European Council President Antonio Costa as he arrives for an EU summit at the Egmont Palace in Brussels, Monday. AP/PTI

# Trump and Netanyahu hold talks

## US Prez warns 'no guarantees' Gaza peace will hold

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu are set to meet Tuesday as the Israeli prime minister faces competing pressure from his right-wing coalition to end a temporary truce against Hamas militants in Gaza and from war-weary Israelis who want the remaining hostages home and the 15-month conflict to end. Trump is guarded about the long-term prospects for the truce, even as he takes credit for pressuring Hamas and Israel into the hostage and ceasefire agreement that went into effect the day before he returned to office last month. I have no guarantees that the peace is going to hold," Trump told reporters Monday. The leaders' talks are expected to touch on a long-sought Israel-Saudi Arabia normalization deal and concerns about Iran's nuclear program, but hammering out the second phase of the hostage deal will be at the top of the agenda.

Netanyahu's arrival in Washington for the first foreign leader visit of Trump's second term comes as the prime minister's popular support is lagging. Netanyahu is in the middle of weeklong testimony in an ongoing corruption trial that centres on allegations he exchanged favours with media moguls and wealthy associates. He has decried the accusations and said he is the victim of a "witch hunt." Being seen with Trump, who is popular in Israel, could help distract the public from the trial and boost Netanyahu's standing. It's Netanyahu's first travel outside Israel since the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants in November for him, his former defense minister and Hamas' military chief, accusing them of crimes against humanity during the war in Gaza. The US does not recognise the ICC's authority over its citizens or territory. Netanyahu and Trump's Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff on Monday began the daunting

work of brokering the next phase of a ceasefire agreement. But Netanyahu is under intense pressure from hard-right members of his governing coalition to abandon the ceasefire and resume fighting in Gaza to eliminate Hamas. Bezalel Smotrich, one of Netanyahu's key partners, vows to topple the government if the war isn't relaunched, a step that could lead to early elections. Hamas, which has reasserted control over Gaza since the ceasefire began last month, has said it will not release hostages in the second phase without an end to the war and Israeli forces' full withdrawal. Netanyahu, meanwhile, maintains that Israel is committed to victory over Hamas and the return of all hostages captured in the Oct. 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war. Mira Resnick, a former deputy assistant secretary of state for Israeli and Palestinian affairs, said Trump may "have little patience for political woes of Netanyahu if it gets in the way

of the broader goals of this administration." "The president started his term by saying that he wanted the ceasefire to be in place by Jan. 20. That's what he got," Resnick said. "He is invested in this because he was able to take credit for it." Einav Zangauker, whose son Matan is among the hostages, called on Trump to use American leverage to keep Netanyahu committed to the agreement. Matan, 24, is among those who are expected to be included in the second phase of the deal, when all remaining living hostages — including men under the age of 50 and male soldiers — are to be exchanged for a yet-to-be-determined number of Palestinian prisoners. The second phase is also expected to include the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. "I want President Trump to know there are certain extreme elements from within Israel who are trying to torpedo his vision," said Zangauker, who

travelled to Washington from Israel to join a planned Tuesday rally outside the White House. "He is representative of the vast, vast majority of Israel. The ultra-extremists are blackmailing the prime minister to do their bidding." Since returning to office, Trump has called for relocating Palestinians from Gaza to neighboring Egypt and Jordan, even as Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Jordanian King Abdullah II have rejected it. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the Palestinian Authority and the Arab League have joined Egypt and Jordan in rejecting plans to move Palestinians out of their territories in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Yet Trump insists he can persuade Egypt and Jordan to come around to accept displaced Palestinians because of the significant aid that the US provides Cairo and Amman. Hard-line right-wing members of Netanyahu's government have embraced the

call to move displaced Palestinians out of Gaza. Shibley Telhami, the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, said the push by Trump to move Palestinians out of Gaza is helpful to Netanyahu. But he added that it undercuts Trump and Netanyahu's desire to land a normalization deal with Saudi Arabia. The Saudis, the biggest Arab power in the Middle East, have said they would only agree to such a deal if the war ends and there is a credible pathway to a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank. "This push by Trump doesn't square with the idea of a Palestinian state as we know it," Telhami said. "It's hard to see the Saudis going along with it." Netanyahu on Monday met with Trump's pick to serve as ambassador to Israel, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, and evangelical leaders. Huckabee has long rejected a Palestinian state in territory previously seized by Israel.

# China hits back with tariffs on US goods, probes Google

AP ■ BEIJING

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

"They have a much more developed export control regime. We depend on them for a lot of critical minerals: gallium, germanium, graphite, a host of others. So ... they could put some significant harm on our economy," said Philip Luck, a former State Department official and director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Monday at a forum. The slew of measures announced Tuesday cut across different sectors of the economy, from energy to individual US companies. China said it would implement a 15 per cent tariff on coal and liquefied natural gas products as well as a 10 per cent tariff on crude oil, agricultural machinery and large-engine cars imported from the US. The tariffs would take effect next Monday. "The US's unilateral tariff increase seriously violates the rules of the World Trade Organization," the State Council Tariff Commission said in a statement. "It is not only unhelpful in solving its own problems, but also damages normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the US." China is the world's largest importer of liquefied natural gas, with its top suppliers being Australia, Qatar and Malaysia. The US, which is the biggest exporter of LNG globally, does not significantly export LNG to China. In 2023, the US exported 173,247 million cubic feet of LNG to China, representing about 2.3 per cent of total natural gas export volumes, according to data released by the US Energy Information Administration. Further export controls on critical minerals. In addition to the tariffs, China announced export controls on several elements critical to the production of modern high-tech products. They include tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, molybdenum and indium, many of which are designated as critical minerals by the US Geological Survey, meaning they are essential to US economic or national security that have supply chains vulnerable to disruption. The export controls are in addition to ones China placed in December on key elements such as gallium used in manufacturing. In addition, China's State Administration for Market Regulation said Tuesday it is investigating Google on suspicion of violating antitrust laws. The announcement did not mention the tariffs but came just minutes after Trump's 10 per cent tariffs on China were to take effect. It is unclear how the probe will affect Google's operations. Google has a limited presence in China, and its search engine is blocked in the country like most other Western platforms. Google exited the Chinese market in 2010 after refusing to comply with censorship requests from the Chinese government and following a series of cyberattacks on the company. The Commerce Ministry also placed two American companies on an unreliable entities list: PVH Group, which owns Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiker, and Illumina, which is a biotechnology company with offices in China. The listing bars them from engaging in China-related import or export activities and from making new investments in the country. Beijing began investigating PVH Group in September last year over "improper Xinjiang-related behaviour" after the company allegedly boycotted the use of Xinjiang cotton.

# 6 hurt in West Bank; attack assailant killed

Jerusalem (AP): At least six people were injured in a shooting attack at a checkpoint in the Israeli-occupied West Bank early Tuesday morning, according to the Israeli military and area hospitals. The Israeli military said an attacker fired at soldiers at a checkpoint in the village of Tayasir, which is in the northern West Bank. In a tense exchange, soldiers returned fire and the attacker was killed, the military added. Israeli hospitals said they had received a total of six people injured in the shooting attack. Israeli media reported the injured are soldiers and at least two of them were critically injured. Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad militant group praised the attack but neither claimed responsibility for it. Israel has carried out an extensive operation in nearby Jenin over the past weeks to clamp down on what Israel said is militant activity in the city, as soldiers and armored bulldozers have caused widespread damage and destroyed scores of homes.

# Rubio to push Trump's migration plans amid USAID turmoil

AP ■ SAN SALVADOR

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio was visiting El Salvador on Monday to press a friendly government to do more to meet Trump administration demands for a major crackdown on immigration amid turmoil in Washington over the status of the government's main foreign development agency. Rubio arrived in San Salvador shortly after watching a U.S.-funded deportation flight with 43 migrants leave from Panama for Colombia. That came a day after Rubio delivered a warning to Panama that unless the government moved immediately to reduce or eliminate China's presence at the Panama Canal, the US would act to do so. Migration, though, was the main issue of the day as it will be for the next stops on his five-nation Central American tour of Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic after Panama and El Salvador. President Donald Trump's administration prioritizes

# 'El Salvador to accept US deportees of any nationality and violent American criminals'

San Salvador (AP): US Secretary of State Marco Rubio says El Salvador's president has offered to accept deportees from the US of any nationality as well as violent American criminals now imprisoned in the United States. President Nayib Bukele "has agreed to the most unprecedented, extraordinary, extraordinary migratory agreement anywhere in the world," Rubio said. "He's also offered to do the same for dangerous criminals currently in custody and serving their sentence in the United States even though they're US citizens or legal residents." US Secretary of State Marco Rubio was visiting El Salvador

on Monday to press a friendly government to do more to meet Trump administration demands for a major crackdown on immigration amid turmoil in Washington over the status of the government's main foreign development agency. Rubio arrived in San Salvador shortly after watching a US-funded deportation flight with 43 migrants leave from Panama for Colombia. That came a day after Rubio delivered a warning to Panama that unless the government moved immediately to reduce or eliminate China's presence at the Panama Canal, the US would act to do so. Migration, though, was the

main issue of the day as it will be for the next stops on his five-nation Central American tour of Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic after Panama and El Salvador. President Donald Trump's administration prioritizes stopping people from making the journey to the United States and has worked with regional countries to boost immigration enforcement on their borders as well as to accept deportees from the United States. One idea being floated is to negotiate a so-called "safe third country" agreement with El Salvador that would allow for non-Salvadorean migrants in the US to be deported to El Salvador.

Officials have suggested this might be an option for Venezuelan gang members convicted of crimes in the United States should Venezuela refuse to accept them. When asked about such an agreement, Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele said they were finalizing one and it would be announced by Rubio. Bukele said it was a broad agreement "that does not have precedent in the history of the relationship, not just of the United States with El Salvador but rather I think in Latin America." Human rights activists have warned, however, that El Salvador lacks a consistent policy for the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees and that such an agreement might not be limited to violent criminals. Manuel Flores, the secretary general of the leftist opposition party Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, criticized any such plan, saying it would signal that the region is Washington's "backyard to dump the garbage."

stopping people from making the journey to the United States and has worked with regional countries to boost immigration enforcement on

their borders as well as to accept deportees from the United States. One idea being floated is to negotiate a so-called "safe

third country" agreement with El Salvador that would allow for non-Salvadorean migrants in the US to be deported to El Salvador.



Red Cross personnel load bodies of victims of the fighting between Congolese government forces and M23 rebels in a truck in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Monday as the U.N. health agency said 900 died in the fight. AP/PTI

# Georgia's Russia-style crackdown jails dozens

AP ■ TBILISI

Tailed journalist Mzia Amaghlobeli gets weaker every day as her hunger strike has reached three weeks in Rustavi, a town near the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, her lawyer says. Now the 49-year-old is having difficulty walking the short distance from her cell to the room where they usually meet, and human rights officials, colleagues and family fear for her life. Amaghlobeli was arrested January 12 during an anti-government protest in the coastal city of Batumi, one of over 40 people in custody on criminal charges from a series of demonstrations that have hit the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million in recent months. The political turmoil follows a parliamentary election that

was won by the ruling Georgian Dream party, although its opponents allege the vote was rigged. Its outcome pushed Georgia further into Russia's orbit of influence. Georgia aspired to join the European Union, but the party suspended accession talks with the bloc after the election. As it sought to cement its grip on power, Georgian Dream has cracked down on freedom of assembly and expression in what the opposition says is similar to President Vladimir Putin's actions in neighbouring Russia, its former imperial ruler. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze defended the actions of his government, accusing the protesters of seeking "to inflict harm on the state" and trying to stage a revolution akin to the uprising in

Ukraine in 2014 that ousted a pro-Kremlin leader. Georgian Dream last year adopted a series of laws similar to ones in Russia imposing restrictions on rights groups and media outlets and severely curtailing LGBTQ+ rights. Those laws, condemned by the EU, also drew protests. Amaghlobeli, founder of two prominent independent media outlets in Georgia, faces charges of assaulting a police officer, with a possible prison sentence of up to seven years. Many of those detained by police have reported being abused physically and verbally by police or while in detention. International human rights groups are sounding the alarm. "All of that paints a picture of an aggressive campaign to halt these demonstrations of which the large majority are report-

ed to have been peaceful," Alice Jill Edwards, the UN special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, told The Associated Press. A video released by the media showed Amaghlobeli slapping Batumi's police chief in the protest. Witnesses and her lawyers say police physically and verbally abused her beforehand, and the slap was her reaction to it. The abuse continued while in custody, when the police chief "spat in Mzia's face and denied her access to drinking water or using the toilet," her lawyer, Juba Sikharulidze, told AP. Authorities were investigating the accusations, the lawyer said. The Interior Ministry has not responded to an AP request for comment. Kobakhidze has said authori-

ties would investigate any excessive use of force, but in Amaghlobeli's case, her actions came "in front of cameras." Amaghlobeli, who founded the independent media sites Batumelebi and Netgazeti, began a hunger strike in protest, and now Georgian and Western rights advocates say her life is in danger. Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights, told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that Amaghlobeli's situation "requires urgent action." This is not just a matter of freedom and imprisonment — this is a matter of life and death. And I very much hope that the authorities will act with the necessary speed in this extremely difficult situation," O'Flaherty was quoted by the outlet as saying.

# No corruption in foodgrain procurement: Pralhad Joshi junks Opposition charges

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday claimed there was no corruption in the procurement of foodgrains and farmers were paid 100 per cent directly into their bank accounts.

Responding to supplementary questions on alleged corruption through middlemen in the procurement process, the minister in the Rajya Sabha rejected charges that there was any corruption in the system anymore.



corruption during the UPA tenure.

MP Upendra Kushwaha from Bihar also raised the issue of corruption in the

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

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

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

# China imposes tariffs on US goods, launches investigation into Google

PTI ■ BEIJING

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Activist short-seller Nathan Anderson, known for his high-profile campaigns against the likes of Adani Group, said the decision to shut his firm, Hindenburg Research was not because of any legal or any other threat, but due to workload. And that he stands by all its reports including the one against Adani Group.

Anderson said that Hindenburg's January 2023 report accusing Adani Group of "the largest con in corporate history" was a result of following "red flags" raised against the conglomerate in media reports. Adani Group had repeatedly denied all allegations in the report. He termed as "goofy conspiracy" the attempts by some to link Hindenburg with alleged anti-India groups like OCCRP and George Soros, saying his outlet never commented on them as it followed the policy of not feeding into "silly conspiracy theories".

Anderson, who came to be known for meticulously detailed reports against companies he alleged were committing fraud, last month announced shutting down his forensic research firm nearly eight years after he founded it. Asked why he chose to shut down Hindenburg when he could have stepped back and passed on the reins of the company to someone else, he said there is "no way to separate me from the brand."

"Hindenburg is basically synonymous with me," he said. "If it was a software application or a bicycle factory you can sell the application or the factory. But when it's research driven by me, you can't really just hand that off, and so I would not actually be 'done'. But I am happy to support the team if they want to launch a new brand, which I expect they will."

Anderson, who first shot to fame with a report against electric truck company Nikola and had gone after the companies of major financial figures, including Carl Icahn's Icahn Enterprises LP, had last month blamed the "intensity and focus" of the job for the decision to wind up. He had spent much of the last eight years either in fights or preparing for the next fight. Many times during this period, he was often trailed and attempts were made to infiltrate his system.

"As to why I retired - it is all in the letter (released on January 16 that announced shutting

down of Hindenburg) - it is not based on any threat, health issue, personal issue or otherwise," he said. Conspiracy theories like being on the verge of an investigation by the US Department of Justice and, or US SEC to "concoct a counter-narrative about my retirement is a great example of why I am happy to instead be enjoying more time with family, friends and good music," he said.

Hindenburg has said it is not under investigation by the US SEC over anonymous reports linking its founder to a hedge fund for preparing reports targeting companies. Asked if he stood by Hindenburg's reports, particularly against the Adani group, Anderson said, "We 100 per cent stand by all of our research findings."

Hindenburg had alleged that Adani Group had used a web of companies in tax havens to inflate its revenue and manipulate stock prices, even as debt piled up. The conglomerate vehemently denied all claims but the damning report at one point sheared over USD 150 billion off its value, losses it eventually recouped in over a year's time. This, as it slashed debt, pared share pledges and won new investors.

The issue was agitated before the Supreme Court which did not find any need for a probe other than the one markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) had initiated into certain issues prior to the Hindenburg report.

On some seeing the Hindenburg report as against India and India's growth story, Anderson said, "We have always believed in India's potential and view market transparency and strong corporate governance as key factors that can fuel India's growth story." He did not elaborate. "We initially saw media articles outlining red flags, took a closer look, and just kept following the evidence," he said on why the Adani group was chosen.

On allegations of being in cohorts with OCCRP and George Soros, he said, "Of course not, but we have a policy of not feeding into silly conspiracy theories. When the main response to 100 plus pages of evidence (presented in the report against Adani Group) is a goofy conspiracy, we view it as a sign that we were right on the mark."

Asked about the response of regulatory bodies in India to Hindenburg reports, he said,

"We view our role as researching and writing about issues in need of transparency. The rest is out of our hands." He dismissed allegations of sharing reports with hedge funds, saying, "We have always maintained full editorial control over all of our research."

"As we and many other US-based short sellers have discussed in public interviews for years, our model involves investing our own capital and sometimes also bringing on a balance sheet partner. This is one of the most common business models in our industry, it is fully compliant with all applicable laws, and we disclose this in our reports," he added.

The 40-year-old son of a university professor and a nurse, Nathan (Nate) Anderson on January 15 issued a personal note that Hindenburg Research was being wound up after it "finished the pipeline of ideas we were working on."

The Connecticut man, who worked for 10 months as an ambulance medic in Israel, and studied international business, finance, and accounting, believed he could make money by exposing corporate corruption. Hindenburg, founded in 2017, placed bets against the companies it was researching. And it made money when stock prices of its targets tumbled on disclosure of fraud and other abuses that it unearthed through deep forensic financial research.

It however made surprisingly little money -- just over USD 4 million -- from the report on billionaire Gautam Adani's sprawling business empire in January 2023.

That figure was disclosed for the first time by Hindenburg on its website last year, along with details of a letter it said it had received from India's markets regulator, SEBI. Anderson appears to be wanting to move on, having achieved what he and his colleagues wanted. "We shook some empires that we felt needed shaking," he wrote in a personal memo last month. But, this did take a toll on him. "It has come at the cost of missing a lot of the rest of the world and the people I care about," he had written. "It wasn't always obvious to me, but I now view all of this as a love story."

Hindenburg's research has led to fraud charges and indictments against dozens of individuals but has also resulted in expensive legal battles.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as eight firms including defence equipment manufacturer SMPP, Aditya Infotech, Brigade Hotel and PVC blend-based building material maker Kumar Arch Tech have received market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) go ahead to raise funds through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs).

Other companies that have received SEBI's approval include Solarworld Energy Solutions, Indogulf Crosciences, Globe Civil Projects, and Prostarm Info Systems, an update with the markets regulator showed on Tuesday. Together, these firms aim to raise more than ₹7,800 Crore, merchant bankers said. So far in 2025, six companies floated their maiden public issues. This came after the primary market witnessed a remarkable year when 91 IPOs were launched collectively raising ₹1.6 Lakh Crore. Going by the update on Tuesday, SEBI received preliminary IPO documents from eight firms between October and November, and issued its observations during January 28-31.

In SEBI's parlance, obtaining the observations means its go ahead to float the public issue.



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

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

looking to raise ₹900 Crore through a fresh issue of equity shares.

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

# Centre frames schemes to empower exporters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is framing schemes for MSME exporters to provide credit at easy terms, promote alternate financing instrument through strengthening factoring services for them, and offer assistance to deal with non-tariff measures imposed by other countries, an official said on Tuesday.

The commerce, MSME and finance ministries are working on these schemes, Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said.

These schemes are being formulated under the export promotion mission, announced in the Union Budget for 2025-26. The schemes are expected to be rolled out in about four-five months, he said.

The government on February 1 announced the setting up of an Export Promotion Mission with an outlay of ₹2,250 Crore to promote the country's outbound shipments. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said through the mission, the government will facilitate exporters to get easy access to credit, and cross-border factoring support.

# Stock markets surge as Trump postpones tariffs on neighbors

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices - Sensex and Nifty - rebounded nearly two per cent on Tuesday in line with a recovery in Asian peers after US President Donald Trump delayed tariffs on Mexico and Canada for a month.

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

European markets were trading mostly lower. US markets ended in the negative territory on Monday.

"Yesterday, the Indian market struggled to absorb the optimism generated by the good Union Budget due to heightened geopolitical risks stemming from Trump tariff war". However, India could outperform in a weak global market, and as a rebound has been triggered in the global sentiment, it has fuelled a sharp surge in domestic equities," Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services, said. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 1.05 per cent to USD 75.16 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹3,958.37 Crore on Monday, according to exchange data. The BSE bellwether index Sensex declined 319.22 points or 0.41 per cent to settle at 77,186.74 on Monday, snapping its five-day rally. The Nifty declined 121.10 points or 0.52 per cent to 23,361.05.

# Rupee recovers three paise against USD

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered three paise from its all-time low level to close at 87.08 (provisional) against US dollar on Tuesday, as the American currency index retreated from its elevated level after President Donald Trump agreed to pause tariffs on Mexico and Canada. Forex traders said the US dollar index, which had surged past 109.88 level, retreated to 108 level after Trump announced the temporary pause on tariffs for 30 days.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.98 and touched an intraday low of 87.13 against the American currency during the session. The local unit finally settled at 87.08 (provisional), higher by 3 paise over its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee plunged 49 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.11 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias over

uncertainty over US trade tariffs. Escalation of the tariff war by China may dent global risk sentiments wherein the US dollar may strengthen and investors would look out for safe haven. However, any central bank intervention may support the rupee," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.

Investors may remain cautious ahead of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy meeting this week, Choudhary added. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the RBI will begin its three-day meeting on February 5. The MPC will announce its policy decisions on February 7.

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The new Shein India application, which went live last Friday, has products which are manufactured, marketed and sold only by Nextgen Fast Fashion, a fully owned subsidiary of Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd.

Nextgen manufactures these products on the Shein India platform through a wide network of Indian manufacturers, in which most of which are Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), according to an industry insider.

Shein has re-entered the Indian market almost five years after its ban through the country's leading retailer Reliance Retail. The new Shein Platform is built and hosted in India and its ownership and control will always remain with Reliance Retail, he said.

Shein India Fast Fashion App from Reliance Retail currently has over 10,000 downloads on Google's Play Store and is ranked among the top 10 among peers on Apple's store. There is no equity ownership of Shein in the Indian company and application Shein India has been developed by Reliance

Retail and is hosted in the country.

The newly launched platforms have no links with the now operational Shein app and the former website (Shein.in) which were previously managed and operated directly by Shein, he said.

Further, the platform will be hosted on infrastructure in India and all platform data will remain in India. Shein will not have any access to, or rights, over such data, the industry insiders informed. Reliance Retail is now working with Shein to develop a completely localised model for

digitising the supply chain of Indian MSMEs and factories, creating jobs and enhancing the competitiveness of the Indian textile sector globally.

Moreover, Nextgen is also scaling up the network of Indian manufacturers so that India can become a supply source for Shein's global operations in future. This will also help to create substantial export opportunities for Indian MSME garment manufacturers, he said.

Shein was one of the apps that was banned by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in June 2020 after

the escalation of tensions with China.

Almost three years after getting banned in India, Shein signed a partnership in 2023 with Reliance Retail, led by Isha Ambani, the daughter of billionaire Mukesh Ambani. Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd (RRVL), through its subsidiary Reliance Retail Ltd (RRL), had entered into a technology agreement with Roadget Business Pte Ltd, which owns Shein, to develop an indigenous e-commerce retail platform.

In December last year, the government informed the Lok Sabha that the sale of branded

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

# INBRIEF

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

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

## VICE CHANCELLOR PROF KARAMJEET SINGH LAUNCHES BOOK ON THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

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

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

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



## Carlsen accuses FIDE chief of coercion, broken promises

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

## David Beckham wins gold in National Games

PTI ■ RUDRAPUR

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



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

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

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

## Anmol Kharb wins gold in National Games



PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Rising shuttler Anmol Kharb continued her impressive run, defeating top seed Anupama Upadhyaya in straight games in the women's singles final to claim the gold medal at the 38th National Games here on Tuesday. The 18-year-old from Haryana, a member of the gold medal-winning Indian team at the Asia Team Championships, showcased her skill and determination by outclassing world number 43 Anupama 21-16, 22-20 to secure the top prize. The gold medal marked another milestone in Anmol's rising career, following her runner-up finish at the Guwahati Masters Super 100 tournament last December and her victories at the Belgian and Polish Internationals last year. In other events, Satish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath battled hard to overcome Deep Rambhaya and Akshaya Warang 21-11, 20-22, 21-8 in the mixed doubles final and win the gold medal. In men's doubles, Nithin HV and Prakash Raj S defeated Vaibhav and Ashish Surya 21-16, 21-14 in a one-sided final to take home the coveted gold. Later in the day, top seed Sathish Kumar Karunakaran will face Suryaksh Rawat in the men's singles final. Star shuttler and home state favourite Lakshya Sen, ranked world number 10, withdrew from the competition at the last moment on Monday.

## Punjab FC look to upset Mohun Bagan Super Giant

PTI ■ KOLKATA

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ NAGPUR

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

# Varun Chakravarthy added to Indian ODI squad

PTI ■ NAGPUR

In-form mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy has been included in the Indian ODI squad after his heroics in the just-concluded T20I series against England as the team management wants the KKR mystery spinner to "keep up the momentum". There is a fair chance that Chakravarthy might just replace one of the four specialist spinners in the Champions Trophy (CT) squad. It could be one among Kuldeep Yadav or Washington Sundar, who could be axed to accommodate Chakravarthy before the final squad is announced. A lot will depend on how he fares in the ODIs. Chakravarthy, who got 14 wickets in five T20Is against England and was adjudged the 'Player of The Series', has not been picked for the three ODIs against England and the Champions Trophy later this month. Chakravarthy was seen training and bowling in the nets on Tuesday. "Yes, Varun Chakravarthy is part of the squad," India vice-captain Shubman Gill confirmed in a media interaction after the team's training. It is understood that head coach Gautam Gambhir wants Chakravarthy to remain in rhythm and bowl to the likes of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Rishabh Pant. With the deadline for squad changes



for the Champions Trophy set for February 12, he remains a strong candidate for selection. However, it is unlikely that he will be added to the CT squad without playing a single ODI. India have got three finger spinners – two left-armers (Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel) and one right-arm off-spinner in Washington Sundar.

Kuldeep Yadav, who is returning to the Indian team after undergoing a sports hernia surgery in October 2024, is the lone wrist spinner in the squad. "As of now, the team management wanted Varun to bowl in ODI squad nets ahead of England series. Varun doesn't play red-ball cricket," a senior BCCI source said on

conditions of anonymity. "With domestic white ball season already concluded, he does not have any assignments till start of IPL end March. He is in good rhythm and they want him to continue that," he added. When asked if there is a possibility of him being selected for the ODI series and subsequent Champions

Trophy based on current form, the source replied, "The selectors have already picked four spinners and you only have three ODI games. "But if team management wants Varun, it will certainly have to speak to the chairman of selection committee. Whether they intend to or not, it is still not known." The Men in Blue don't have a second wrist spinner and Chakravarthy's strong form could work in his favour. When he last played on the flatter tracks in Dubai during the 2021 T20 World Cup, Chakravarthy struggled to make an impact. However, he has significantly improved since then, focusing more on over-spin to refine his variations. The English team has not read him well and in Champions Trophy, one of the opposition is Bangladesh, which was bamboozled by him in October during the T20I series. He could also be an unknown entity for most of the New Zealand and Pakistan teams. Additionally, he has performed consistently on batting-friendly surfaces in the recent T20I series against England, finishing as the leading wicket-taker at an impressive average of 9.85. India are set to play all their league matches in Dubai. Chakravarthy picked up 18 wickets for Tamil Nadu in the National One Day Championship.



# Dimuth Karunaratne to retire from cricket

PTI ■ GALLE

Former Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne is set to retire from international cricket after playing his 100th Test, which will be the second and final match against Australia starting here on Thursday. The 36-year-old, one of the most prolific batters for Sri Lanka, has scored 7,172 runs at an average of just under 40, with 16 centuries and 34 half-centuries in 99 Tests over nearly 14 years. He has also featured in 50 ODIs, scoring 1,316 runs with one century and 11 fifties. "It is difficult for a Test player to keep himself motivated to play four Tests for a year and maintain his form," Karunaratne, who made his Test debut in 2012, was quoted as saying by 'Daily FT'. "In the last two-three years after the WTC (World Test Championship) was introduced, we have been having very little bilateral series. My current form is another reason; completing my 100 Tests, the end of the WTC cycle (2023-25), I thought is the right time to retire." Karunaratne plans to relocate to Australia with his family next month. Having made his first-class debut for Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) in 2008, he will play his final match for them against NCC in the SLC Major Club three-Day Tournament from February 14-16. "I have some personal plans of my own. I've decided to retire after speaking to other senior players like Angie

(Angelo Mathews) and Chandni (Dinesh Chandimal)," he said. "Rather than the three of us retiring at the same time, it will be better for us to go one by one. I thought I will retire first because I know I cannot go for my next target – 10,000 runs – with the lesser number of Tests being played. "I am happy with what I have achieved so far. I want to announce my retirement with a happy moment like playing in my 100th Test." Karunaratne has been struggling for form of late, managing scores of 7 and 0 in the first Test against Australia in which Sri Lanka slumped to an innings and 242 run defeat to go 0-1 down in the two-Test series. "Any cricketer's dream is to play 100 Tests and score 10,000 runs. It's a big achievement. When you start playing cricket, you don't think of those targets, but when you continue playing, you come across different targets," he said. "But as Sri Lanka are playing less Test matches for a year, getting to 10,000 runs seems far away. Appearing in 100 Tests I feel is an achievement," he added. He would look back at his career as a satisfied man due to its sheer longevity. "Several players play Test cricket but only a handful are able to go and play 100 Tests. To become a member of that exclusive club I am very happy. To become Sri Lanka's seventh cricketer to play in 100 Tests is also a happy moment," he signed off.



# I wanted to lead MI Cape Town: Rashid

PTI ■ GOEBERHA

Rashid Khan said he wanted to lead MI Cape Town in the same manner as he led Afghanistan during the T20 World Cup and credited his improved leadership this season to his familiarity with the team, which helped secure a spot in the SA20 playoffs. After two forgettable seasons, MI Cape Town now sits at the top of the points table with 30 points from nine matches ahead of the playoffs. The 26-year-old led Afghanistan to a historic victory over Australia in the Super Eight stage of the T20 World Cup 2024, following which the team made it to the semifinals. "I wanted to lead MI Cape Town the way I led Afghanistan in the T20 World Cup. Coach Robbie Peterson also encouraged me in this direction," Rashid, who captained MI Cape Town in the first season but missed out last season due to injury, said in a media interaction ahead of the first qualifier against Paarl Royals. "I think this year I knew the players quite well and spent more time with them so I had the knowledge about which bowler to use at what point of time. "The most important thing was to have clear

communication with the players. To have what is happening in the mind of the captain and to know what is going through in their minds. I think I could have done better in the first year but you just keep learning." Rashid noted that every player has taken responsibility and risen to the occasion, marking a major shift from the previous seasons. "In the last couple of years, we played good cricket, but it was just about that we haven't finished well. You know, we haven't hit those points where it was a matter of going to the result," he said. "I feel like this year we just have done that well. It's an overall team effort. Whoever got the opportunity, they have contributed for the team. Even if it's like he goes for one ball or two balls to hit there, he did it for the team." Praising the contribution from the bowlers, Rashid said: "Everyone has been contributing with the ball as well. So, I feel like this year, this is a massive difference. The biggest thing is we're enjoying ourselves. You know, we're having fun and we're not much thinking about what the result will be." Rashid emphasised the importance of having a leadership group in the team.

# Shillong to become new ISL venue

PTI ■ SHILLONG

A new venue will be added to the Indian Super League (ISL) when Shillong hosts NorthEast United FC's 'home' match against Mumbai City FC on Friday at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. The football loving fans of Meghalaya have been waiting for this ISL's debut match with much anticipation. The Guwahati-based Highlanders will also host Bengaluru FC and East Bengal at the same venue here on February 21 and March 8, respectively, as the fans look forward to witness Indian football's biggest stars, including Sunil Chhetri, Lallianzuala Chhangte and Naorem Mahesh Singh in action. NorthEast United CEO Mandar Tamhane on Tuesday shed light on how



the club's move to Shillong came about. "When we played the semi-final of the Durand Cup against Shillong Lajong here, it was an eye opener for me even though I've been involved in Indian football for over 25 years," Tamhane said. "The online tickets were sold out in 12 minutes and there were 5km long queues for physical tickets. Fan parks in

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

government extended their support to the move. NorthEast United forward Redeem Tlang, who hails from Shillong, has been one of the ISL's notable domestic talents. With over 100 ISL appearances under his belt and having played a key role in NorthEast United's historic Durand Cup victory in 2024, Tlang is thrilled about the league's arrival in his home city. "It's a very special moment for me personally and also for the people of Meghalaya to experience ISL matches in Shillong," he said. "ISL is the top league in the country and to have it come to your home is an incredible feeling. People all over Meghalaya love football. Football is like a religion in Shillong. It's the first game that you play when you grow up here," said Tlang who began his football journey with Shillong Lajong.

# Ashwin expresses concern over Sanju Samson's lack of form

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India spinner R Ashwin has expressed concern at T20 batting star Sanju Samson's lack of form, saying his mind will start "playing tricks" with him if he does not find a way out of the current rut. The 30-year-old Samson, who will be out of action for a month due to a fracture in his right index finger, endured a terrible series against England's express pace and short balls. He managed a mere 51 runs in the five-match contest that India won 4-1. "...If Sanju keeps getting dismissed like this, as a batter, the mind will be playing tricks," Ashwin said. "(It will force you to think) the bowler is bowling a certain way and I am getting

dismissed like this, is the bowler bowling well or do I have a shortcoming? Will I be able to adapt? Once so many questions arises, then it becomes difficult," he explained. Ashwin also advised out-of-form skipper Suryakumar Yadav to change his approach to come out of the form slump that he is also enduring right now. Suryakumar could only manage 28 runs in the just-concluded series against England. "I can understand it happening in one or two games, but it is quite surprising," Ashwin said on his Hindi YouTube channel. "...When you know you are being attacked in a certain way, there should be a different approach to that ball or just avoid it and force the bowler to bowl at your



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

Ashwin said Samson, who has blown hot and cold throughout his run in international cricket, should take responsive actions to ensure that doubts don't creep into his subconscious mind. "But Ashwin cited legendary Sachin Tendulkar's advice during last week's BCCI

Naman Awards that players should use their subconscious mind too. "Sachin Tendulkar also said during the (BCCI) awards function that (you must) do so many repetitions that you allow the subconscious mind to take over," he said. "But if so much confusion comes over on the subconscious mind, then batting becomes a different ball game altogether." Ashwin said failing in T20 cricket is not the problem but the manner of dismissals can be a cause of concern. "As an experienced cricketer I will not focus on someone failing in T20 cricket but on how he is getting out, what is his decision making is like, I will focus on that. They are good enough players to find solutions and they will think over it," he said.

Ashwin said a player is always rated on his ability to handle pressure in the shortest formats. "T20 cricket is (all) about failures, you are bound to fail. You will not be able to play percentage cricket. As per this, I will think (about) the player who can handle pressure and can deliver wins," he said. "Those players can be given long rope because T20 cricket is not about consistency, it's about excitement, putting fear in the opposition." Ashwin also expressed surprise at England's approach across formats, saying they are losing more than they are winning due to their aggressive strategy. "...If I was England, I would be really worried, because they play Bazball, one-day and T20 cricket... All that is fine," he said.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

They may have struggled in recent times but the form of skipper Rohit Sharma and his longtime colleague Virat Kohli will be key to India's success in the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, reckoned former batter Suresh Raina on Tuesday. The Champions Trophy starts in Pakistan from February 19 and will conclude on March 9 but India will play all their matches in Dubai as per the hybrid model agreement signed by the concerned parties. Speaking to broadcaster Star Sports, Raina said, "Rohit Sharma's strike rate has improved significantly after

the ODI World Cup in 2023. Since then, he has scored runs at a strike rate of 119-120, making him one of India's best ODI batsmen. "For Rohit and Virat, I would say that when you have a strong record of past performances, it gives you a lot of confidence. They complement each other well, and both have the skill to score big runs. If they perform well, India's Champions Trophy campaign will benefit immensely." India have been clubbed with arch-rivals Pakistan, New Zealand and Bangladesh in the group stage of the tournament. Speaking about the spin department and team combination, Raina said, "I

think (Ravindra) Jadeja will definitely play because of his effectiveness in ODIs. Kuldeep (Yadav) has not played a match since his injury, but we also have Axar Patel, who has been consistently performing well. "The pitches in Dubai will offer some seam movement, but spin will also play a role. That's why Kuldeep, Axar, and Jadeja need to be in top form. Rohit's choice of team combination will be crucial." Before the Champions Trophy, India are also playing a three-match ODI series at home against England, and Raina believed it will help the likes of Kohli and Rohit to get some valuable game time before the mega event. "When it comes to white-ball



cricket, Virat knows how to switch on and switch off. He has scored the most runs

against England, so his energy will be at a different level automatically. The three ODIs

will be played in Nagpur, Ahmedabad, and Cuttack -- all of which are high-scoring

venues," Raina said of Kohli, who has struggled for runs in the Test series in Australia. Sharing his thoughts on the upcoming series, Raina said Rohit should continue to go after the bowlers from the get-go as it has also brought him success in the last ODI World Cup in 2023. Speaking on his expectations from Rohit, Raina said, "I think Rohit should play aggressively. You saw how he batted in the ODI World Cup -- he was attacking even in the final. So, I believe his approach will remain the same. "The key question is who will open alongside him -- will it be Shubman (Gill)? I remember, whenever they play together, they maintain an aggressive

intent." Raina also lauded Rohit's captaincy. "Rohit Sharma is an attacking captain. The way he utilises his bowlers is commendable -- bringing in Mohammad Shami at crucial moments and relying on spinners strategically. "When Rohit scores runs, it also reflects in his captaincy. This could be his last ICC trophy as captain, and if he wins, he will become the first Indian player to win four ICC trophies. "He has already won the T20 World Cup, and securing the Champions Trophy would be a remarkable achievement. He will be motivated to make it happen, but scoring runs will be crucial for him."

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