



the pioneer

Established 1865

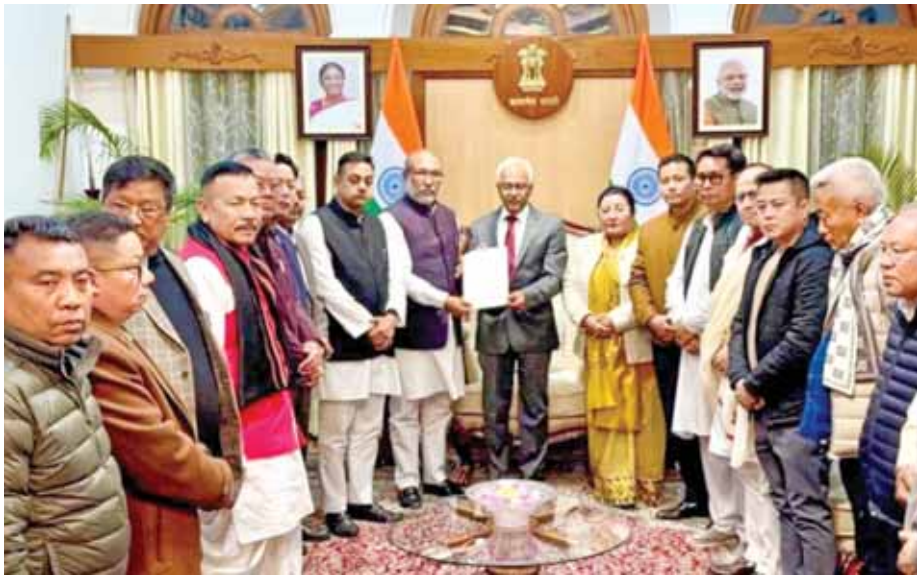
INSIDE
MONEY 10
INDIA'S WHITE-COLLAR
HIRING GROWS BY 32
PER CENT: REPORT

LUCKNOW, FRIDAY FEBRUARY 14, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹3

www.dailypioneer.com

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

MANIPUR UNDER PRESIDENT RULE



Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh submits his resignation to Governor AK Bhalla, in Imphal on February 9 File Photo: PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/IMPHAL

In a quick turn of events in strife torn Manipur, President's rule was imposed in the State on Thursday and the State Assembly put under suspended animation. This comes days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned from his post that led to political uncertainty in the northeastern state and within a month of taking over of bureaucrat turned Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla. The Manipur Assembly, which has tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation, according to a notification issued by the

Ministry of Home Affairs. Singh, who was heading the BJP government in Manipur, resigned as chief minister after nearly 21 months of ethnic violence that has claimed over 250 lives so far. Singh resigned on February 9 and submitted his resignation to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla in Imphal, hours after his meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the national Capital. The Congress which has been continuously raising the issue of Manipur at every platforms including the Parliament, rued the fact that President's rule in the state came after fabric of state's society was allowed to be severely damaged, if not destroyed. "President rule

imposed in Manipur after Home Minister Amit Shah clearly failed to manage state, a task entrusted by Prime Minister. BJP, allies got majority in Manipur in 2022, but their politics led to 'colossal tragedy' 15 months later," the Congress said in a statement. The decision to impose the Central rule was taken after the governor sent a report to President Droupadi Murmu. "After considering the report and other information received by me, I am satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of that state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of India," the notification said. **Continued on page 8**

New I-Tax bill to be simpler

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Income Tax Bill, 2025, in the Lok Sabha on Thursday and urged Speaker Om Birla to refer it to a select committee of the House. The much-anticipated Bill will replace terminologies such as "assessment year" and "previous year" with the easier-to-understand "tax year" as part of a move to simplify language while removing provisos and explanations. Following introduction, the Bill was referred to the select committee of the Lok Sabha, which is mandated to submit its report by March 10. Responding to the objections raised by some Opposition members at the introduction stage of the bill, the Finance Minister said Manish Tewari



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi PTI

of the Congress and NK Premchandran of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) were incorrect in stating that the new bill has more sections in comparison with the existing income tax law. Finance

Minister said that while in 1961 the present law had fewer sections, after a series of changes over the years it now has 819 sections. The proposed Act only has 536 sections. The simplified Income Tax Bill,

which is half the size of the 1961 Income Tax Act, seeks to achieve tax certainty by minimising the scope of litigation and fresh interpretation, said the Income Tax Department, after tabling of the new bill. The new bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha, has a word count of 2.6 lakh, lower than 5.12 lakh in the I-T Act. The number of sections is 536, as against 819 effective sections in the existing law. The number of chapters has also been halved to 23 from 47, according to the FAQ issued by the I-T department. The Income Tax Bill 2025, has 57 tables, compared to 18 in the existing Act and removed 1,200 provisos and 900 explanations. Provisions relating to exemptions, and TDS/TCS have been made crispier in the bill by putting them in a tabular format. **Continued on page 8**

Modi, Gabbard talk counter-terrorism

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the newly appointed Director of National Intelligence in the Donald Trump administration Tulsi Gabbard, and discussed India-USA friendship, of which he said, she has been a "strong votary". Modi also congratulated Hindu-American Gabbard on her confirmation as the nation's top intelligence official. She was confirmed on Wednesday. "Met USA's Director of National Intelligence, @TulsiGabbard in Washington DC. Congratulated her on her confirmation. Discussed various aspects of the India-USA friendship, of which she's always been a strong votary," Modi posted on X. Discussions also focused on enhancing intelligence cooperation in counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and emerging threats, Ministry of External Affairs official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with USA Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard in Washington DC PTI

"PM @narendramodi held a productive meeting with US Director of National Intelligence @TulsiGabbard in Washington DC today. Discussions focused on enhancing intelligence cooperation in counter-terrorism, cybersecurity & emerging threats," the post said. Modi arrived in the US capital on Wednesday around 5:30 pm (Thursday, 4 am IST) after a visit to France where he had co-chaired the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit with French President Emmanuel Macron. Modi and Trump will hold bilateral discussions in the White House on Thursday. "Our nations will keep working closely for the benefit of our people and for a better future for our planet," Modi said on X. On Wednesday, Gabbard was sworn in as director of national intelligence on Wednesday in the Oval Office, hours after the Senate confirmed her, The Hill reported.

Attorney General Pam Bondi administered the oath of office to Gabbard, who Trump called "an American of extraordinary courage and patriotism." He noted that she was deployed three times in the Army National Guard and that she is a former Democratic congresswoman, riffing "Can you believe that?" Gabbard, 43, a former Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, had faced bipartisan scepticism about her suitability for overseeing the spy agencies. Gabbard thanked the president for his trust in her and vowed to "refocus our intelligence community" after she was sworn in. "Unfortunately, the American people have very little trust in the intelligence community, largely because they've seen the weaponization and politicization of an entity that is supposed to be purely focused on ensuring our national security," the new intelligence chief said.

Waqf Bill report sparks protests

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The report of the joint committee of Parliament on the Waqf bill was tabled in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha amid uproar on Thursday, with the proceedings briefly adjourned following a heated debate between the treasury and the Opposition benches. In Rajya Sabha the Opposition MPs led by Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that dissent notes were deleted from the report. Later in Lok Sabha Home Minister Amit Shah asserting the BJP has no objection to the Opposition's dissent notes being included without redaction, and asked the Speaker decide according to procedures. When panel chairman Jagdambika Pal rose to table the report, Opposition members shouted slogans, which were countered by thumping of benches by the Treasury side. The Opposition members then staged a walkout, raising slogans against Pal. Amid noisy protests by the Opposition, Shah said, "Some opposition members have objected to their dissent notes not annexed fully. I wish to request you on behalf of my party that whatever their objections you can attach the same to the report as per parliamentary practice as you feel appropriate." "My party has no objection to it," he added. The Joint Committee of Parliament (JCP) on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill adopted the report on the draft legislation by a 15-11 majority vote. Earlier, reacting to Mallikarjun Kharge's charges, at a press conference in Parliament House complex, Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju said that certain portions which amounted to casting aspersions on the panel itself were



Members protest in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament PTI

redacted. "Some of the points which amount to casting aspersion on the committee itself have been removed. The chairman of the committee has powers to do so," he said, asserting, "Everything has been done as per rules," he said. Later redacted portions were also submitted to Rajya Sabha. The report on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill was tabled in Rajya Sabha by BJP member Medha Vishram Kulkarni, a member of the panel. The tabling of the report was followed by uproar by members from the Opposition benches. The clamour continued as Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar tried to read out a message from President Droupadi Murmu. "Don't show disrespect to the President of India..." Dhankhar said and urged Kharge to ask the Opposition members to take their seats. As the uproar continued, the Upper House was adjourned till 11:20

am. When the Upper House reconvened, the chairman read out the message from the president that she had received the expression of thanks by members of the Rajya Sabha on her address to a joint sitting of Parliament on January 31. When the chairman tried to proceed with the Zero Hour, Opposition members continued to protest and some MPs trooped into the well of the House. Leader of the House JP Nadra regretted that the Rajya Sabha was not in order when the president's message was read out. Chairman Dhankhar said Samirul Islam, Nadimul Haque and M Mohamed Abdulla "created chaos and disruption in the House". Kharge was then called to speak. The Congress chief said dissent notes from the Opposition MPs to the Waqf bill were redacted from the report."The report of the joint

committee of Parliament on Waqf... in which several members had given their dissent note has been taken out. Bulldozing the report by only keeping the views of the majority members is not right. It is condemnable, anti-democratic," he said. Calling it a "fake report", he said it should be withdrawn and sent back to a committee. The MPs are protesting not for personal reasons but because of the injustice being done to a community, he said. "This is not about any individual... These MPs are not protesting for their own sake, they are protesting for the community against which injustice is being done," Kharge said. DMK's Tiruchi Siva and AAP's Sanjay Singh also objected to the alleged removal of dissent notes from the report. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Rijju, however, denied the charge. "There is no deletion or removal of any part of the report. Don't mislead the House. Opposition members (are) making unnecessary issues. The allegation is false," he said. Union ministers Bhupender Yadav and Nirmala Sitharaman also accused the opposition parties of misleading the Upper House, prompting another heated exchange between the treasury and the opposition benches. The Congress' Syed Nasir Hussain accused Rijju -- who is also the Union Minority Affairs Minister -- of misleading the House and said, "My own dissent note has been redacted." TMC member Saket Gokhale said it was not a "religious" but a "Constitutional issue". Rijju reiterated that the report had all annexures and nothing was taken out. The opposition MPs then staged a walkout and the House proceeded with the Question Hour.

PMLA misused like dowry law: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday pulled up the ED for using the Prevention of Money Laundering Act to keep an accused in jail and questioned if the provision was "being misused" like the dowry law. A bench of Justice Abhay S Oka and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan made the observation on Wednesday while granting bail to Arun Pati Tripathi, a former Excise Officer from Chhattisgarh. The top court expressed surprise at how the accused was kept in custody if a court order taking cognisance of the complaint was quashed by Chhattisgarh High Court. "The concept of PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) cannot be that a person should remain in jail. If the tendency is to keep the person in jail, even after cognisance is quashed, what can be said? See what happened in 498A cases, PMLA also being misused like that?" the bench asked. Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code protects married women from cruelty by their husbands and their relatives. During the hearing, Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the Enforcement Directorate (ED), opposed the grant of bail, saying crooks could not get away on technical grounds. Raju submitted cognisance was quashed for



lack of sanction and that it was irrelevant for bail. Expressing dismay, the bench said, "It is shocking that the ED knows the cognisance was quashed, yet this was suppressed. We should summon the officers. The ED must come clean." "What kind of signals are we giving? Order taking cognisance is quashed and the person is in custody," the top court bench said. The top court was hearing an appeal of Tripathi, an Indian Telecom Services officer, challenging a Chhattisgarh High Court order denying him bail in connection with the high-profile liquor scam in the state. Tripathi, who served on

Wedding crashers: Leopard joins baraat; sends guests running for cover

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

What was supposed to be a grand wedding celebration in Uttar Pradesh's capital turned into an action-packed thriller when an uninvited guest—a leopard—decided to join the festivities. Akshay Srivastava and Jyoti Kumari's wedding at MM Lawn was in full swing on Wednesday night, with music, laughter, and clinking glasses setting the mood. That was until, at around 11 PM, a four-legged gate crasher made a dramatic entry, turning the dream wedding into a scene straight out of a survival movie. "I thought it was part of the decor at first—until it moved!" said one stunned guest, still catching his

breath. What followed was pure chaos. Guests abandoned their plates and fled in all directions. Some made a beeline for the gate, while one particularly panicked guest decided that jumping off the first floor was a better idea—unfortunately, he ended up with injuries. "I could not believe my eyes. One moment we were enjoying the wedding, and the next, we were running for our lives," said Rajesh Verma, a family friend of the groom. Meanwhile, the bride and groom, proving their teamwork skills early in their marriage, sprinted to their car and locked themselves inside. On the other hand, the leopard,



A leopard is seen in the left image after it entered a banquet hall amid an ongoing wedding, while the bride and others are seen on the right image running to save their lives, in Lucknow PTI

confused by the flashing lights and the screaming people, darted around the venue, looking for an

escape. Forest officials and police arrived after an urgent SOS and began

what turned into a five-hour game of hide-and-seek with the big cat. To locate the leopard, the

authorities then deployed a drone. The live footage confirmed that the animal was on the roof, crouched in a corner. As the forest department's team cautiously climbed the stairs to approach the leopard, the animal, sensing danger, suddenly leaped down. "It all happened in seconds. One moment the leopard was on the roof, and the next, it was charging toward us. It roared and pounced on our officer," said Mukul Yadav, a police constable. The leopard was eventually located on the first floor, crouching in a room, probably wondering why no one had offered it any biryani. As forest official Muqaddar Ali approached the feline intruder,

the animal made its objections clear—by swiping at him with its paw. The next moment, Ali's left hand was covered in blood. "That leopard had no wedding invitation, but it sure had sharp claws," Ali later said, holding his bandaged hand. Finally, at around 3:30 AM, the leopard was safely captured, allowing everyone to exhale for the first time in hours. Two camerapersons, caught up in the chaos, also suffered minor injuries. By morning, with the drama behind them and the leopard safely out of the picture, the wedding rituals resumed—though guests were likely keeping one eye on the mandap and the other on the exits.

Two pilgrims killed, 10 hurt as mini-bus collides with trailer

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two people were killed, and 10 others sustained injuries when a mini-bus carrying pilgrims from Varanasi to Ayodhya collided with a trailer on a highway in Jaunpur,

police said on Thursday. The incident took place on the Varanasi-Sultanpur highway near Chak Mirzapur village in the Baksha police station area around 2 am on Thursday. The pilgrims were from Punjab, the police said.

Shortly afterward, the Line Bazar Inspector also reached the location and initiated a rescue operation. Several passengers were trapped inside the vehicle and officials used heavy machinery to extract them. A JCB machine was brought in to clear the wreckage and restore traffic movement on the highway.

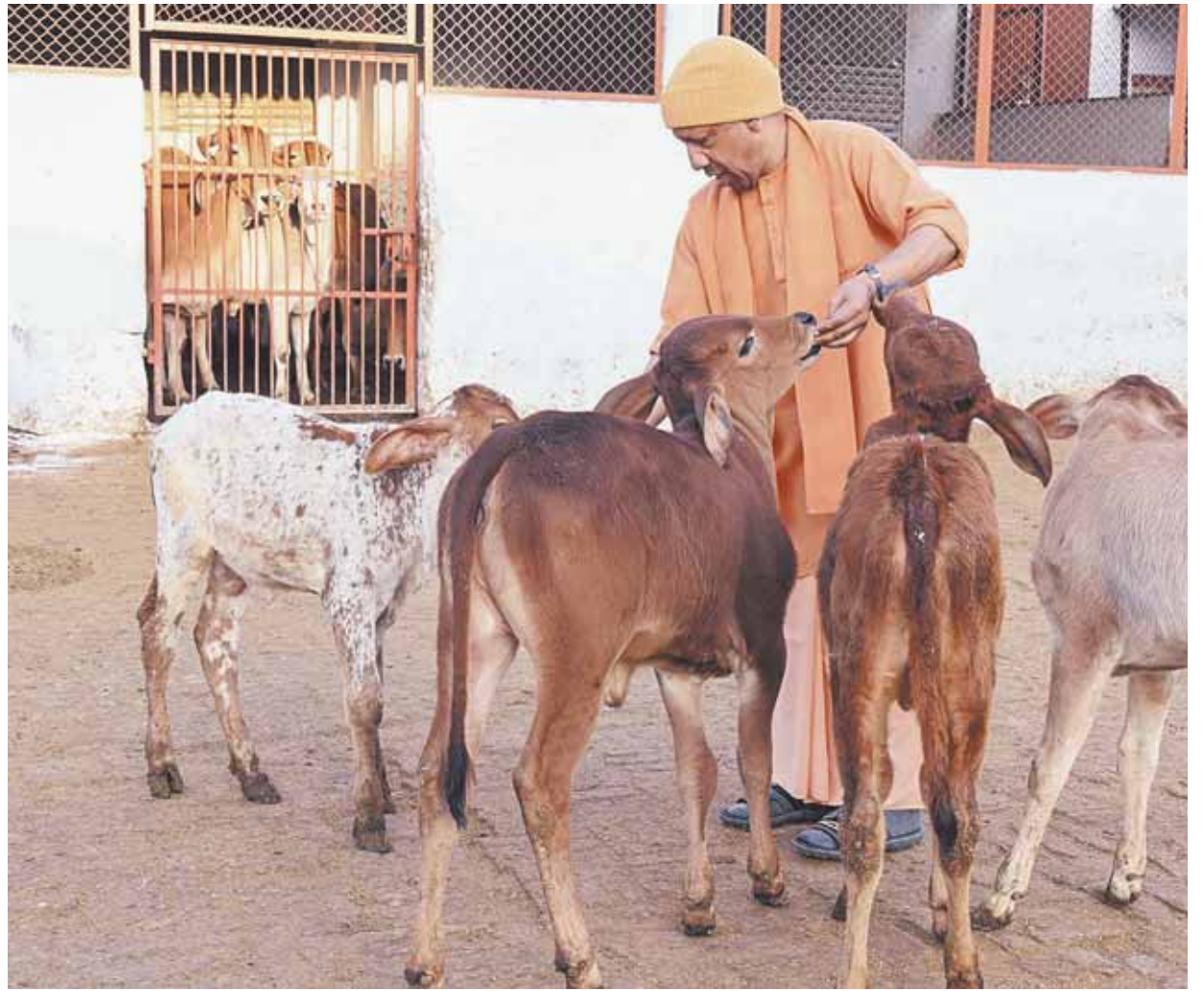
investigation into the accident is underway.

YOUTH INJURED IN CAR-BIKE COLLISION

A bike-borne youth was injured after his vehicle collided with a car in the Indiranagar area on Wednesday. He has been identified as Abhijeet Srivastava, a Rapido driver from Sector 12/230, Indiranagar. He was heading to work around 12:30 pm when the accident occurred near Sector-13.

The collision, involving a Swift Dzire, caused Abhijeet to be thrown off his bike due to the heavy impact. A CCTV video of the incident surfaced on Thursday, showing the sequence of events in detail. The footage captures the car making a turn from the street, with Abhijeet, riding his bike at high speed, colliding with the front of the vehicle.

The impact catapulted him, and he was later seen falling behind the car. After being unconscious for a brief period, bystanders quickly assisted him and took him to RML Hospital, from where he was discharged after receiving medical care.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath feeds cows at Gorakhnath Temple, in Gorakhpur

PTI



NOTICE

my correct name is Abhay Yadav s/o Amar Singh R/o Gram nibori sihara Dara sikho bilhaur Kanpur Nagar which is mentioned all educational Records by mistake adhar card no.290908713337my name is mentioned as Kuldeep which is my household name In future I will be known Abhay Yadav I have completed all legal formalities regarding the above by me

NOTICE

I have changed my name Mohammad Jamal to Jamal Athar S/o Mohd Athar for future purpose. H.No.40/104 Parade Kanpur Nagar.

सूचना

सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि पूर्व में मेरा नाम मोहम्मद अली था तथा साहिल मेरा रूप नाम होने के कारण अब नविथ में मुझे मोहम्मद अली साहिल के नाम से जाना व पहचाना जायेगा। मोहम्मद अली साहिल पुत्र स्व. बादशाह, निवासी-34, हसन गार्डन कोलोनो, कमला, चिनहट, लखनऊ।

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Chhatti to Chhatti Devi. Now I'll be known by this name only. Flat no.1302-A, Dilbagh Rose Garden, Fazalganj R.K. Nagar Kanpur 208012

NOTICE

I have changed my name from SEETA BAI to SITA DEVI. Now I'll be known by this name only. Flat no.1302-A, Dilbagh Rose Garden Fazalganj R.K. Nagar Kanpur 208012

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Dhinesh Nihalani to DINESH NIHALANI. Now I will be known by this name only. Flat no.1302-A, Dilbagh Rose Garden, Fazalganj R.K. Nagar Kanpur 208012

NOTICE

My Army No. 1076572L Ex LD Ram Ratan, Son of Laxman, Permanent Resident of Village Bank, Post Banki, District Hamirpur, Uttar Pradesh-210502, and Local Address: House No. 77A, Bihari Nagar, Bingawan, Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh - 208021. In my Army records, my son's name has been mistakenly recorded as Sandeep Kumar with the date of birth 26.08.1992, which is incorrect. My son's correct name is Sandeep Kushwaha, and his correct date of birth is 06.07.1992, as mentioned in his Aadhaar Card (No. 635243981992), PAN Card, and U.P. Board High School Marksheet, Handicap Certificate.

NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Syed Sarfraz Ahmad S/o Syed Ausaf Ahmad, R/o 211, Eldico Near Fur Mall, Gontli Nagar, Lucknow. Original (Sale Deed) dated 05.05.2022, Sr. No. 8089 in the Syed Sarfraz Ahmad is lost. The address of the property is Flat No. 18-05-3D, 5th Floor T. No. 18, Metro City, Lucknow. I further state that I wish to create Equitable Mortgage on the said property for loan from SBI RDSO Branch Code 13427. An FIR has been lodged with the police in respect of lost (Sale Deed) vide FIR No. 2025000104126 dated 11.02.2025. If anyone has any objection, kindly contact above mentioned branch of SBI Mrs. Sonika Gagwar, Mob.: 8006141243.

NOTICE

This is to inform that Original sale deed bearing document no. 698, dated 28/02/2003, regarding the property Flat no. 2/301, New Malhar Sahara State, Jankipuram Yojana, Lucknow U.P., which was duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar Lucknow was lost on 10/04/2023 with my client namely Himanshu Kumar Pant S/O Bhagwati Prasad Pant R/O 2/301, New Malhar Sahara State, Jankipuram Yojana, Lucknow. If any person has any claim or objection over it, kindly inform within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice and after the completion of above time period, no claim of any kind will be considered. **B.N. Tripathi Advocate**, Res: C-15, Nehru Vihar, Kalyanpur, Lucknow, Mob: 9336127853

Tricked into inhaling intoxicant, woman deprived of ornaments

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Unidentified accused pretending to be astrologers allegedly tricked a woman into inhaling an intoxicating substance that caused her to faint, after which they stole her jewellery. The fraudsters claimed to be experts in propitiating malefic planets and offered to perform rituals to bring peace and happiness to her family. When the woman refused, the duo began following her. Shortly after, they made her inhale a substance, causing her to feel dizzy, and then took her jewellery. Police have registered a case and are investigating. The complainant, Amit Kumar Gupta, a resident of Sector-A, Aliganj, explained that his mother, Shanti Gupta, had gone to buy fruits near Urmila Hospital at around 12 noon on Tuesday. There, two men

The fraudsters claimed to be experts in propitiating malefic planets and offered to perform rituals to bring peace and happiness to her family

approached her, introducing themselves as astrologers. They told her they would perform religious rituals with her jewellery to ward off the evil effects of malefic planets. One of them assured her that it would bring peace and happiness to her home. When she declined, the men began following her, continuously talking about the rituals. Despite her refusal to participate, one of the men made her smell an intoxicating substance, causing her to feel dizzy. The two men then took off two gold rings from her

hand and also stole her purse, which contained her mobile phone, house keys, and cash. Inspector, Madiaon, confirmed that a case has been registered and the police are searching for the suspects. In another case, a team from the Cyber Crime police station here arrested an accused who had allegedly committed a fraud worth Rs 120 crore by opening a bank account at Union Bank while posing as an officer from AKTU. In June 2024, a gang of cyber fraudsters obtained an offer letter required to transfer

money exceeding Rs 100 crore from the public sector's branch manager, Anuj Kumar Saxena, and opened a bank account impersonating an authorised signatory of AKTU. They then procured cheque books and transferred money into a Gujarat-based company's bank account. The fraud was uncovered after the bank manager, Anuj Kumar Saxena, filed a complaint, which led to the registration of an FIR and the arrest of over seven individuals. The accused, identified as Mohammed Chand alias Sunny Johnson from Behta in Lucknow, was arrested, and a car purchased with the defrauded money was recovered from Pune Airport. The car was brought to the Cyber Crime police station in Lucknow, but the accused, Chand, had already fled abroad by flight.

Social media users booked for post against CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Hazratganj resident filed a complaint against unidentified individuals on Thursday, accusing them of lampooning Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Rajkumar Tiwari, a resident of Banarasi Bagh, near Bhuiyan Devi Mandir in Narhi, gave an application stating that he saw a post on his mobile in which Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is photographed with a person wearing a skull cap. "The post is going viral on X and the video has been made viral from a Facebook ID named 'Pyara Islam'. There is anger in our Hindu society after seeing the photo," he said. A spokesman said on the basis of the application a case was registered and the investigation was ongoing.

Photo of suspect from Sambhal violence pasted in public places

Sambhal (PTI): Police in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal have put up posters of an unidentified suspect involved in the November 24 violence that erupted during the survey of Shahi Jama Masjid, officials said Thursday. The suspect was identified through CCTV footage, but his whereabouts remain unknown, according to an official. The violence led to several arrests, with 76 accused already sent to jail, according to the police. The violence had broken out during a court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid in the Kot Garvi area of the city. It resulted in the death of four civilians and injuries to many others, including security personnel. However, some suspects are yet to be identified. To aid the

investigation, Sambhal Kotwali police have pasted posters at various locations, including Chaman Sarai, Hospital Chauraha and the Community Health Centre. The posters state that the individual was involved in the November 24 violence and request the public's help in identifying him. The notice assures that the identity of informants will be kept confidential, and they will be rewarded. Contact numbers of Sambhal Kotwal and Circle Officer are also provided. Speaking to PTI, Sambhal Kotwal Anuj Kumar Tomar said, "A photo of a suspect involved in the November 24 incident has been pasted in the city. He was identified through CCTV footage, and anyone providing information about him will remain anonymous."

Headmasters' training to boost inclusive education for kids with special needs

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has undertaken a significant initiative to strengthen inclusive education and integrate children with disabilities (CWSN) into the mainstream education system. The state government is currently training 1.33 lakh headmasters of council schools to serve as nodal teachers, officials said here. In the first phase, over 66,000 headmasters have successfully completed their training, while the remaining are presently undergoing the programme. As nodal teachers, these headmasters will be responsible for understanding the needs of the differently-abled children enrolled in council schools and ensuring that they receive the appropriate educational environment and facilities, officials said.

engagement strategies. The Yogi government is prioritising inclusive education to ensure that children with disabilities receive quality education and equal learning opportunities. The specialised training programme for headmasters focuses on equipping them with the necessary skills to support and empower students with special needs, making the learning process more effective and inclusive, officials said. Uttar Pradesh's Basic Education Minister, Sandeep Singh, emphasised that the Yogi government is dedicated to providing quality education to every child, regardless of their circumstances. He highlighted that integrating approximately 3 lakh children with special needs into the mainstream education system remains a top priority. "Through this training programme, headmasters will not only gain a deeper understanding of these children's needs but will also play a crucial role in fostering their independence and empowerment," he remarked.

This initiative will reinforce the state's education system, providing equal opportunities to children with special needs while enhancing their self-confidence, they said. Uttar Pradesh is poised to set a national benchmark in inclusive education through this initiative. Approximately 3 lakh children with special needs are currently enrolled in council schools across the state, officials noted. To secure their educational and personal development, a comprehensive 10-day training programme (conducted in two batches of five days each) is being organised at Block Resource Centres. This training equips headmasters with essential skills in child care, understanding individual learning needs, specialised teaching methodologies, knowledge of government schemes, and effective parent

Key features of the training programme: Headmasters are being trained as nodal teachers to cater to the specific needs of children with disabilities and integrate them into the mainstream education system. The process of recording CWSN students' attendance on the Samarth portal will be introduced, ensuring the efficient implementation of government schemes. Training includes methods to establish communication with parents, address students' challenges, and improve the overall quality of education. Modern teaching techniques will be imparted to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education.

Woman alleges sexual exploitation by cop

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Bihar police constable, currently posted in Patna, has been accused of sexually exploiting a woman from Thakurganj. Two of his associates, including a woman, have also been accused of threatening and pressuring the victim into silence. The woman has filed a case against the constable, alleging that he raped her after spiking her cold drink with intoxicants. She claimed that he sexually exploited her under the pretext of marriage. When she attempted to approach the police, the accused's female friend allegedly threatened to leak an obscene video of her. According to the victim, she befriended Rocky Raj, a resident of Madhepur, Bihar, through Facebook in January 2022. Rocky, who was posted in Patna, lured her into a relationship. In January 2023, he visited her home, drugged her cold drink, and raped her. He also

recorded a video of the assault and later used it to blackmail her into continued exploitation. After she filed a complaint at the Thakurganj Police Station on December 10, 2024, Rocky's associates, Aditya and Akanksha, allegedly made the obscene video public. Thakurganj Inspector Srikant Rai confirmed that a case has been registered against Rocky, Aditya, and Akanksha. Further action will be taken based on the victim's statement before the magistrate. The victim further stated that her maternal uncle had passed away on March 15, 2023. Around that time, Rocky visited her home in Lucknow and took her to Aliganj temple on March 29, where he reportedly married her. However, he soon cut off contact. When her family reached out to him, they assured them that the matter would be resolved. Meanwhile, Rocky allegedly began threatening her with divorce over the phone and later released the obscene videos online.

Forest officials begin preps for mega plantation drive

Lucknow (PNS): The Forest department has begun preparations for the upcoming mega tree plantation campaign scheduled for this year. In this regard, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment, Forest, Climate Change, and Zoo, Dr Arun Kumar Saxena, held a meeting with forest officials from across the state. During the meeting, he provided necessary guidelines to ensure the success of the campaign. Additionally, he conducted a detailed review of other departmental schemes and the budget. Saxena shared that from 2015 to 2024, trees have been planted on a total of 4,07,186 hectares of land. This year, the Forest department has set a target to plant 12.60 crore trees on 80,000 hectares of land. Specific targets have also been allocated to other departments. The minister emphasised the importance of timely completion of all arrangements related to large-scale tree plantation. He highlighted that nurseries should ensure the avail-

ability of healthy and quality saplings of the appropriate height. He also warned that strict actions would be taken against individuals involved in illegal activities such as illegal felling and hunting, stressing the goal of reducing such incidents to zero. Furthermore, he called for the proper development and supervision of ecotourism across all districts. The meeting included a comprehensive discussion on various aspects, such as the total forest land available in each district, the number of nurseries established, the plants available, and the progress of surveys and physical verification for plantation sites. The status of the 'Save Trees Campaign Scheme' was also reviewed, along with important departmental works, including the land received by the department in the last five years, plantations under the CAMPA scheme, plantations along national highways and main district roads in 2024-25, and cases related to wildlife crimes in the last three years.

Teen hangs self after kin refuse to take her to b'day party

Bhadohi (PTI): A 17-year-old girl in Bhadohi district allegedly hanged herself after her family refused to take her to a birthday party. The girl, Sanjana Kumari, was found hanging from a ceiling fan with her dupatta. Her grandfather, Chhavinath, informed the police following which the body was sent for post-mortem, a police officer said. SP Abhimanyu Manglik said Sanjana lived in Jethupur village in Aurai area with her grandfather, her 30-year-old elder sister, and two younger brothers, aged five and seven. Her father, Jitendra Kumar, works in Delhi and her mother died five years ago, the SP said. According to the family, on Wednesday, her uncle took other family members to a birthday party but left her behind despite her insistence on going. When the family returned late at night and found her room locked from the inside, they peered through a window and found her hanging from the ceiling fan.

Woman commits suicide after poisoning two daughters

Muzaffarnagar: A 42-year-old woman committed suicide allegedly after giving poison to her two minor daughters in Chachroli village here, police said on Thursday. One of the daughters has survived and is undergoing treatment as her condition remains critical, they said. According to the police, Vinti gave poison to her daughters, Sapna (13) and Saraswati (11), before taking the extreme step on Wednesday evening, they said. Bhopa SHO police station Vijay Kumar said they were rushed to a hospital, where Vinti and

Sapna succumbed. Saraswati is undergoing treatment. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem, he said, adding that an investigation is underway.

4 LABOURERS DEAD IN ROAD MISHAP
Shahjahanpur: Four labourers died and 16 others got injured when their van overturned after being hit by the unidentified vehicle, resulting in the immediate deaths of two passengers — Shyamwati (60) and Samila (26). The police rescued others and rushed them to Farrukhabad district hospital, where Ram Kumar (35) and Lavkush (30) succumbed to injuries during treatment, Awasthi said. The official further stated that 16 people sustained severe injuries are currently undergoing treatment at the hospital.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER,
P.H. CIRCLE, NAYABAZAR, CUTTACK-753004
Ph: 0671-2440941, E-mail: saahcde@gmail.com

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement
Invitation For Bids (IFB) No.ACEPHCTC-02/2024-25 Dtd.06.02.2025

Sl. No.	Name of the work	Estimated cost (Approx)
1.	Improvement of water supply to Pattanmurai Municipality including O&M for 5 years under AMRUT 2.0 SWAP-III	Rs.611.40 lakh

1. Date & time of availability of bid document in the portal > 11.00 Hrs. of dt.17.02.2025 to 17.30 Hrs. of dt.06.03.2025.

2. Last date / time of receipt of bids in the portal > 06.03.2025 upto 17.30 Hrs.

3. Date & time of opening of bids > 07.03.2025 at 12.30 Hrs.

4. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid > The Additional Chief Engineer, P.H. Circle, Nayabazar, Cuttack-753004, Odisha, Ph:(0671)2440941, email:saahcde@gmail.com

Further details can be seen from the web site www.tendersorissa.gov.in

OPR-13029119004/2425

Addr. Chief Engineer, P.H. Circle, Cuttack

Kalyan Mandapams to ensure 5-star facilities for poor: CM

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced on Thursday that programmes for the poor and economically weaker sections, as well as the middle-income group, will now have access to five-star facilities through Kalyan Mandapams. Speaking at the inauguration and foundation stone-laying ceremony organised by the municipal corporation in Khorabar township, where he dedicated development projects worth Rs 103 crore, CM Yogi stated, "Today marks the inauguration of Gorakhpur's first Kalyan Mandapam, and within the next few months, seven more will be completed." Notably, he has allocated funds from his MLA fund for the construction of five of these Kalyan Mandapams. The chief minister also directed the municipal corporation to offer Kalyan Mandapam bookings to its employees and sanitation workers for just Rs 11,000. Alongside inaugurating the city's first Kalyan Mandapam, built at a cost of Rs 4.71 crore in the newly created Khorabar ward, the chief minister also inaugurated a gas-based animal crematorium worth Rs 4.55 crore, the drain construction project from Mahadevpuram to Phase 2 (pumping station) in Ramgarhal at Rs 2.46 crore, a road project from Ekla Dam to the Animal Crematorium (Carcass Plant) at Rs 0.68 crore, and the shed construction at Kanha Gausghala in Mahewa for Rs 0.97 crore. With a total of Rs 26.31 crore allocated for these completed projects, he also laid the foundation for additional development projects worth Rs 76.40 crore. Highlighting the significance of Kalyan Mandapam, CM Yogi emphasised that its inauguration marks a new era in civic amenities. He noted that while those with financial means can organise events in hotels and grand lawns, economically weaker sections



often lack suitable venues. To address this, municipal corporations and development authorities were instructed to establish Kalyan Mandapams — dedicated spaces where weddings and auspicious ceremonies for the poor, lower, and middle-income groups can be held with ease. The Kalyan Mandapam features a spacious auditorium, dormitory, six rooms, a kitchen, and a well-maintained lawn. CM Yogi described it as a permanent asset for economically weaker sections, ensuring five-star facilities for their special occasions. Highlighting the extensive development initiatives being introduced for Gorakhpur Municipal Corporation and other urban bodies, Yogi stated, "Among these, one of the most significant projects is the animal crematorium, which will effectively address the issue of animal body disposal and provide relief from foul odors." He further noted that beautification efforts for the iconic clock tower are underway

while preserving Gorakhpur's historical identity. Simultaneously, a multi-level parking is being constructed at Shaheed Bandhu Singh Park, adjacent to Ghantaghar, to ease traffic congestion. Work is also progressing rapidly on park development, road widening, and drainage projects. Once the Goddhoiya Nala project is completed, the city will be free from the recurring problem of waterlogging, he said. The chief minister also highlighted an innovative initiative where contaminated water flowing into the Rapti River is being purified using indigenous methods, making it suitable for agricultural use. Urging citizens to actively participate in Vikas Yatra and adopt a strong commitment to cleanliness, CM Yogi referenced the Swachhata Comic, launched on the occasion. He reminded the audience that for four decades, eastern Uttar Pradesh, including Gorakhpur, had suffered significant loss of life due to poor sanitation. He pointed out that garbage

accumulation, pond encroachments, and clogged drains had contributed to large-scale deaths from encephalitis. However, due to the Swachh Bharat Mission, public awareness, and the efforts of the double-engine government, encephalitis has now been completely eradicated, he added. He urged people to continue prioritising cleanliness and take a pledge to eliminate single-use plastic. CM Yogi emphasised that affordable housing for every income group is becoming a reality through the Medicity/Township project in Khorabar, where EWS (Economically Weaker Sections), LIG (Low Income Group), MIG (Middle Income Group), and HIG (High Income Group) houses are being developed. He said that a two-bedroom house with a dining hall, kitchen, and bathroom costs Rs 28 lakh, while a LIG house is priced around Rs 16 lakh, and similar price reductions will be applied to EWS houses, making them even more accessible.

All HC limits appointment of teachers for poll duty

Prayagraj (PTI): The Allahabad High Court has ruled that teachers need not be appointed as booth level officers nor be assigned election duties, stressing on strict adherence to the EC's guidelines on "minimal appointment of teachers". Their appointments have to be made only when there is no availability of employees from other categories, the high court said in an order passed earlier this week. Hearing a petition by an assistant primary school teacher in Jhansi district, Justice Ajay Bhanot ruled that the Election Commission (EC) guidelines regarding "minimal appointment of teachers" on poll duty had to be strictly followed. The petitioner, Surya Pratap Singh, had filed a plea in the high court against his engagement as a booth level officer and allocation of election-related duties. After going through the EC guidelines and earlier judgments, the court said, "The Election Commission guidelines restricting the appointment of teachers seeks to balance the competing imperatives of the Right to Education, the indispensable role of teachers in society, and the necessity of electoral work in a democracy." "The aforesaid restrictions in the EC guidelines have to be interpreted in the backdrop of the importance of education in our country, the role of teachers in our constitutional scheme, and that elections are the life blood of any democracy," it added. The court was of the view that the EC guidelines clearly mandated teachers would be employed on election duty only after all other categories of employees mentioned had been exhausted. "There may be occasions when even after appointment of all other categories of employees (apart from teachers), vacancies of booth level officers are not filled and there is need for additional hands. In that situation alone, teachers can be appointed as booth level officers and assigned election duties. Engagement of teachers on election duty shall always be a measure of last resort," the bench said.

Chhattisgarh Gov, CM, take holy dip at Sangam



Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai with wife performs rituals at Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj PTI

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A 166-member Chhattisgarh A delegation, led by Governor Ramen Deka, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, and Speaker Dr Raman Singh, visited Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj on Thursday, along with several opposition MLAs. Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai expressed gratitude to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for organising the "divine and grand" Maha Kumbh. Along with taking a dip in the Triveni Sangam, he prayed for the welfare and prosperity of the people of Chhattisgarh. Later, Sai visited the Chhattisgarh Mandap in Sector 7 to check on the well-being of devotees from his state and review the arrangements made for them. Vishnu Deo Sai, accompanied by his wife Kaushalya Sai, Governor Ramen Deka, Assembly Speaker Raman Singh, MPs, and MLAs, reached Arai Ghat for the holy bath. The entire delegation took a dip in the Sangam together. Sai expressed his gratitude to CM Yogi Adityanath, saying, "Today, the governor, MLAs, MPs, and my entire cabinet have come to take this sacred dip of faith. We are deeply thankful to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for inviting us to this divine event." Following the holy bath, CM shared his experience on social



Tripura CM Manik Saha prays after taking a holy dip at Sangam during Maha Kumbh Mela on Thursday. PTI

media, writing, "Today, I took a dip in the Triveni Sangam at Tirthraj Prayag, seeking the happiness, prosperity, and well-being of three crore people of Chhattisgarh. Mahakumbh is a grand festival of divinity and spiritual energy in Sanatan Dharma, where faith transforms into nectar and unites the soul with the divine." In a subsequent post, CM Sai reflected on the significance of Kumbh, stating, "Kumbh is a source of energy, a flow of humanity, a beacon of spiritual consciousness, and a path to self-illumination. It is the confluence of all cultures in the universe, harmonising nature and human life. Mahakumbh embodies the sacred confluence of rivers, forests, and the wisdom of ancient sages." Kaushalya Sai also shared her spiritual experience, saying, "We sought the blessings of Maa Ganga and prayed to the divine rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati for the happiness

and prosperity of Chhattisgarh." Chhattisgarh Assembly Speaker Dr Raman Singh emphasised the privilege of participating in the Maha Kumbh, saying, "It is a matter of great fortune for Chhattisgarh that under the leadership of our chief minister, we along with the governor, ruling party MLAs, and even opposition MLAs have come together to take this sacred bath. Maha Kumbh is a blessing for the peace, prosperity, and well-being of our state. Only the truly fortunate get the opportunity to take part in this holy event, which occurs once every 144 years." Meanwhile, Tripura Chief Minister Dr Manik Saha also took a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam along with his family on Thursday, seeking divine blessings. After the bath, Saha shared his experience on his official social media handle, writing, "Today, I had the privilege of taking a holy dip at Mahakumbh, Prayagraj. The sacred waters, divine energy, and spiritual ambience made this an unforgettable experience." Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also took a dip at the Sangam on Thursday and prayed for public welfare as part of this sacred tradition. Expressing his gratitude, he said that immersing in the holy waters of the Sangam is akin to attaining salvation. He also considered himself fortunate to be part of this divine occasion.

Mahant Satyendra Das given 'Jal Samadhi'



Priests and others pay tribute to the mortal remains of Ram Janmabhoomi Temple chief priest Mahant Satyendra Das during his last rites in Ayodhya on Thursday. PTI

PTI ■ AYODHYA

The late chief priest of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya, Mahant Satyendra Das, was given 'Jal Samadhi' on Thursday evening. The mortal remains of Acharya Satyendra Das were taken from his residence in a palanquin to the banks of the Sarayu river, where he was given water burial at the Tulsidas Ghat. In the afternoon, his body was taken around the city in a procession on a chariot. His successor Pradeep Das earlier told PTI that in accor-

dance with the traditions of the Ramanandi sect, Das will be given a water burial. As part of the 'jal samadhi', heavy stones are tied to the body before it is immersed into the middle of a river, explained Pradeep Das. The 85-year-old Satyendra Das died at a hospital in Lucknow on Wednesday. He served as a priest during the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992. Later, when the government took control of the premises, he was made chief priest of the makeshift temple.

Police crack down on social media users spreading rumours

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Uttar Pradesh Police are taking strict action against individuals spreading rumours about the Maha Kumbh on social media. On the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Director General of Police Prashant Kumar has identified and initiated action against such accounts, officials said here on Thursday. During social media monitoring, seven accounts were found circulating misleading propaganda by linking an old video of bodies found on the riverbank in Ghazipur to an alleged stampede at Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, officials said. Accused of tarnishing the image of the state government and the police, as well as spreading social unrest, a case has been registered against individuals operating these accounts at the Kotwali Kumbh Mela police station in Prayagraj, and legal proceedings are underway. A video from 2021, depicting bodies on the riverbank in Ghazipur, was allegedly falsely circulated on social media

as an incident related to Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. The police promptly exposed the misinformation and clarified that the video had no connection to Maha Kumbh, officials said. The official Kumbh Mela Police account also issued a denial to counter the misleading claims. Legal action has been initiated against the following social media accounts for spreading misinformation and attempting to disrupt law and order: — Yadavking000011 (@Yadavking000011) - Instagram Komal Yadav (@komalyadav_lalubadi94) - Instagram Amar Nath Yadav (@amar_yadvkp_5354_) - Meta Thread Banwari Lal - Bairwa (@B_L_VERMA) - X (Twitter) Kavita Kumari (@KavitaK22628) - X (Twitter) Sonu Chaudhary (@SonyChaudhary70) - X (Twitter) Putul Kumar Kumar (@Puatulkumar9795) - YouTube

Two tents damaged in fire, no casualties

Mahakumbh Nagar (PTI): A fire broke out at the police line camp near Nagvasuki on Bindu Madhav Marg in Sector 6 of the Maha Kumbh on Thursday afternoon, gutting two tents, officials said. However, no casualties were reported. Chief Fire Officer (Kumbh) Pramod Sharma said that smoke was rising from the police line camp in Sector 6 under Nagvasuki police station limits around noon. "Four fire tenders were immediately dispatched to the spot, and they managed to control the blaze within minutes. However, two tents were completely destroyed in the fire," Sharma said, confirming that there were no casualties in the incident. The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, officials said. On February 7, a fire broke out at the ISKCON camp and quickly spread to over a dozen nearby camps, leaving them gutted. No casualties were reported. A massive fire broke out in the Maha Kumbh Mela area's Sector 19 due to a cylinder blast on January 19.



Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia with wife Priyadarshini (left) and others after taking a holy dip at Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela PTI



'Kalpawasi' with their belongings leave Sangam area during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela on Thursday PTI



Devotees wrap their belongings as they prepare to leave from Sangam area during the Maha Kumbh PTI

Spiritual and cultural fervour to continue into Phalgun

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

With the Maghi Purnima snan already completed, the spiritual and cultural fervour is set to continue into the Phalgun month, with a fusion of culture, environment, and the Bird Festival along the Sangam banks. Starting Friday, the Triveni, Saraswati, and Yamuna pandals will host vibrant cultural performances, while a Climate Conference is scheduled for February 16. On the same day, a three-day Bird Festival will also commence. Meanwhile, at the Ganga pandal, cultural events already began on Thursday. Adding to the grandeur, renowned Bollywood singers like Kailash Kher, Mohit Chauhan, Kavita Seth, and



Devotees gather to take a holy dip in Ganga river during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 at the Sangam in Prayagraj on Thursday. PTI

Navdeep Wadali are set to enthral audiences with soulful musical performances at the Ganga pandal. With this, devotees and visitors will continue to experience India's rich cultural heritage during the serene evenings of the Phalgun month. The event will also showcase classical music, violin, tabla, flute recitals, and traditional dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak, and Odissi, bringing India's artistic diversity to life. Maha Kumbh 2025 is not just about faith but also about nature and environmental conservation. On the initiative of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a special ecotourism plan has been designed for pilgrims. From February 16 to 18, an International Bird Festival will take place, featur-

ing around 200 bird species, including rare Indian skimmers, flamingos, and Siberian cranes. Visitors will also get a glimpse of migratory birds from Siberia, Mongolia, Afghanistan, and more than a dozen other countries. The event will host photography, painting, slogan-writing, debate, and quiz competitions, with winners receiving awards. The International Bird Festival will be a unique blend of Indian culture, love for nature, and scientific awareness. Moreover, the Uttar Pradesh Department of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change will organise a Climate Conference on 'Kumbh ki Aastha aur Jalvayu Parivartan' (faith and climate change) during the Maha Kumbh. The aim is to address climate chal-

lenges and promote environmental awareness. CM Yogi Adityanath will attend the conference, along with spiritual leaders, environmentalists, social organisations, business leaders, and distinguished citizens, to discuss ways to protect and improve the environment. Sangam Ghats restored: The Maha Kumbh 2025 administration swiftly restored the Sangam Ghats after the Maghi Purnima bathing festival. As soon as the sacred snan concluded, a dedicated team of cleaners launched a large-scale cleaning drive by the evening itself, officials said here. Their prompt efforts ensured that, by night, the Sangam Ghats were once again ready to welcome the next influx of devotees, they said. On Maghi Purnima, more than 2 crore

devotees took a holy dip at Sangam on Wednesday. As part of the ritual offerings, a large number of devotees left flowers, garlands, clothes, and food at the ghats, and the extensive use of public toilets was observed. Following the decrease in crowd density, the mela administration launched an intensive cleaning drive, restoring the ghats to their pristine condition by morning. To ensure prompt cleanliness, all sector magistrates were instructed to initiate a large-scale sanitation campaign as soon as the crowd dispersed. In response, the administration swiftly disposed of solid waste left behind during the bathing festival. Special cleaning vehicles were deployed to collect rubbish from the ghats and the fairgrounds.

Arrival of pilgrims in Kashi: DM inspects arrangements

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate S Rajalingam inspected the areas around Maidagin on Thursday in view of continuous arrival of thousands of pilgrims from Maha Kumbh, crowd control and their smooth movement and easy darshan at Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT) and gave necessary instructions to officers present on the spot. He talked to Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Pragna Pathak posted at Kotwali police station and checked the arrangement for movement of people. He appealed to the people to walk in queue, avoid unnecessary crowding and asked the shopkeepers of Kripalani Market to keep their goods inside the shops so that traffic is not disrupted. He directed the police officers concerned to deploy civil defence volunteers in this area. In view of heavy



District Magistrate S Rajalingam inspecting Maidagin area in Varanasi on Thursday.

crowd, the DM shifted the people in queue from Kripalani and Malviya Market to the streets of Gurunanak and Nehru Market. Additional Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Dr S Channappa was also present. **PODCAST:** Prof Ida Tiwari, Department of Chemistry,

Institute of Science, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) was invited by the Royal Society of Chemistry to its event in Mumbai to be part of a podcast on 'Chemistry For Peace and Development' in the segment on advanced career scientists. The event included dinner with British Deputy High

Commissioner for Western India Harjinder Kang and Trade Commissioner to South Asia for interaction with Royal Society of Chemistry CEO Helen Pain, MBE CChem FRSC, and other members of RSC and academic leaders from different reputed organisations and industry people in Mumbai.

KTS 3.0 programme from tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate S Rajalingam held a meeting with local Tamil residents regarding the Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0 programme in the Circuit House auditorium on Wednesday. The DM said the programme will start from February 15 and its main event will be held at Namoo Ghat and people from Tamil Nadu will reach Kashi in six groups to participate in the programme.



DM S Rajalingam reviewing preparations of KTS 3.0 in Varanasi

The DM appealed to the local Tamil residents to work as a bridge to strengthen the cultural and religious relations of the people of the north and south. He urged everyone to connect with the concept of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'. He said participation of local people is very important. He said students of IIT-BHU and IIT-Madras will also participate in it. He said this time emphasis is being laid

on the academic session in KTS and stalls related to various artefacts and cultural topics of north-south will also be set up. He said people coming from outside should definitely be apprised of major religious places here like Sringeri Math, Kanchi Math, Jangamwadi Math, Kumaraswamy Math, Tailang Swami Temple,

Kedareshwar Temple, Agasteshwar Temple, Annapurna Temple and Kaudiya Mata Temple in Varanasi so that they can visit these places. Rajalingam said every type of art form of Tamil Nadu will be performed every day. "If anyone wants to perform, then they should definitely give a list

of it so that they can participate in the programme", he said, inviting all the local Tamil residents to join it. He added for the wide publicity of the KTS 3.0 programme a meeting was held with the Vyapar Mandal, Tourism group, advocates, artists, CAs, hotels etc associations and information was given about the outline and preparations. He requested all officials present to ensure participation in large numbers. Some suggestions were also given by the officials who came to the meeting regarding the programme, on which he assured to implement. At the end Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal gave information about Kashi MP Guide Competition and said it will be held between February 20 to 28. Additional District Magistrate (City) Alok Kumar Verma, DD (Tourism) and other officials were also present in the meeting.

NER facilitates travel of over 48L passengers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Over 48.22 lakh passengers have travelled to/from Maha Kumbh areas from the different stations of Varanasi division of North Eastern Railway (NER) till the auspicious occasion of Maghi Purnima. Giving this information, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava said with the aim of providing better passenger facilities to the devotees coming during the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, special arrangements were made at Prayagraj Rambag and Jhusi stations on all the main bathing dates till Maghi Purnima on Wednesday. As many as 16 Mela Special trains were operated by the NER on Thursday and the process to run special trains will continue till February 28, though Maha Kumbh will conclude on February 26 with the last bathing of Mahashivratri. According to the DRM, the NER operated 56 (Mela special and regular) trains and transported 1,67,776 passengers to the fair area and sent them to their destination till 5 pm on the occasion of Maghi Purnima. "During Maha Kumbh, a total of 48,22,100 passengers travelled at the stations of Varanasi division of NER from January 12 to February 12", Srivastava said, adding that on Maghi Purnima, in view of the movement of a large number of rail passengers and devotees at Jhusi and Prayagraj Rambag stations, extensive preparations were made at Varanasi division of NER for smooth traffic and safety of passengers. Public Relations Officer (PRO) Ashok Kumar said after completing all preparations under



Railway personnel helping an elderly woman devotee at Prayagraj Rambag station in Varanasi division of North Eastern Railway

the guidance of the DRM all arrangements and policies of passenger convenience and crowd management were reviewed on Wednesday and the entire system of stations was kept strong and well-prepared. In the Mela Control Room located at Prayagraj Rambag station, the DRM monitored all arrangements and kept issuing necessary suggestions and guidelines by holding continuous meetings with other officers of the division. According to the DRM, implemented a well-planned and systematic plan, the entire operational system was continuously strengthened and streamlined by paying attention to all the essential requirements, including easy entry and exit of passengers from main road to the station, proper arrangements for food and

security, availability of immediate medical facilities in case of illness of any passenger, safe boarding and departure of passengers in trains, easy and detailed ticketing facility etc. He said keeping an eye on every situation, attention was also paid to measures to take immediate action when needed. Action plan was executed by keeping in mind availability and efficiency of emergency and contingency management and coordination with the state government. Giving priority to cleanliness, mechanised cleaning of platforms is being done at Prayagraj Rambag and Jhusi stations and sanitation workers are engaged in cleaning work with full devotion by forming eight hour shifts. "Ticket checking staff, Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel and members of Scouts and Guides are con-

tinuously helping the passengers to serve and assist them. Necessary instructions are being given to these employees continuously for smooth and uninterrupted passenger and crowd management. Every part of the station is being closely monitored through large LED screens installed in the control centre and CCTV cameras installed on platforms and premises and all rules of smooth passenger operation, passenger safety, safe and timely train operation and crowd management are being fully followed", the DRM said. Srivastava said all the facilities related to passenger facilities at Prayagraj Rambag and Jhusi stations such as passenger shelters, help counters, lost and found counters, ticket counters, refreshment rooms, catering stalls, multipurpose stalls, food stalls, medical camps, observation rooms, cloak-rooms, mobile charging kiosks, waiting rooms, toilets for men/women and Divyangians (physically challenged), wheel chairs and stretchers, multilingual announcement system, passenger convenience centres etc are functioning properly. Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (SDCM) Shaikh Rehman said the DRM is constantly taking information about the latest status of all arrangements and is constantly motivating the employees of all departments to provide best services by meeting and communicating with them. The DRM and other senior divisional officers of NER are also communicating with passengers and helping them and giving information about fair special trains along with passenger facilities, he added.

Inno-Vision 2025 held for students

Varanasi (PNS): An innovative idea pitching contest titled Inno-Vision 2025 was organised at Rajarshi school of Management & Technology (RSMT), UP College. The objective of organising this contest was to encourage the students to observe problems around, come up

with innovative solutions to them and develop their mindset to embark on the entrepreneurial journey. In it 15 teams of students from MBA and MCA course, RSMT and five teams from UP College pitched their ideas. The jury members were Prof Ashutosh Gupta

(Head IIC, UP College), Dr Satish Pratap Singh and Dr Deo Narayan Singh from UP College. The first prize was won by the team Travel Buddies — Akhil Verma, Sameer Gupta and Aniket Singh of MCA I Semester, second prize by the students of MBA III Semester — Alok

Singh, Tripti Singh and Suraj Srivastava and third prize by Kshitij Baranwal, Dev Verma and Aryan Soni of BSc, UP College. On the occasion PN Singh, Dr Sanjay Singh, Dr Rajendra Sharma, Anurag Singh and other faculty members were present.

Symposium on AI ecosystem in India



Kavita Gulati being felicitated with Shree Shakti Award.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Shakti Degree College organised a symposium on 'Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem in India' on Thursday. Managing Director of Spin Landon and Member of World Health Organisation Kavita Gulati was the chief guest on this occasion. She was felicitated with Shree Shakti Award by the college founder Ramesh Chandra Trivedi. Welcoming the guests, Manager Vinay Trivedi said Gulati allowed four BCA students of the college to do internship in her company operating in London and America and paid stipend to

them. In her address, she assured of allowing internship and providing job to more students in future. Cyber Security and Artificial Intelligence Expert Vinay Gulati of Landon, noted artificial intelligence specialist of Bengaluru (Karnataka) Srinivas Padmanabhuni and Operating Officer Neelima Vobugari also addressed the audience. Lt Vivek Trivedi, Deepti Sachan, Shyam Ji Shukla and Puneet Dwivedi were also present. Isha Yadav and Anushka Tewari conducted the proceedings who also gave a power-point presentation on AI along with Arpit Trivedi, Ankush Shailesh and Neha Sahu.

AKY to visit Kashi today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and National President of Samajwadi Party (SP) Akhilesh Yadav will reach Varanasi on Friday afternoon. District SP president Sujit Yadav 'Lakkar' and former city chief Vishnu Sharma jointly said the party chief will land at Lal Bahadur International Airport Babatpur in Varanasi on Friday by a private plane. From the airport, Akhilesh Yadav will reach Rameshwar Dham Lawn in Vajidpur in Harhua directly and will attend the marriage ceremony of the daughter of Leader of Opposition in Legislative Council Lal Bihari Yadav and bless the bride and groom. From Harhua Rameshwar Dham Lawn, he will depart for Lucknow from Lal Bahadur International Airport Babatpur at 1:15 pm.

PADYATRA: Under the banner of Bahujan Samta Party led by its national president Rajesh Azad, a *padayatra* was taken out from Azad Park (Lahurabir) to Bharat Mata Mandir (Sagra) on Thursday raising the demand for creation of a separate Purvanchal (Eastern UP) state and formation of Sanatan Board.

Road accident claims two lives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Two persons died while eight others were seriously injured when a speeding truck collided with a Roadways bus carrying pilgrims from Prayagraj and a car at a dhaba near Chiruhuli village on the highway in Auraiya district late on Wednesday night. The deceased included the co-cleaner of the bus and a passenger. Police sent all the injured to the district hospital, Auraiya from where in view of their serious condition, four of them were referred to Safai Medical College. The incident took place near Chiruhuli village. After taking holy dip in Maha Kumbh two Roadways bus of Mathura Depot and a car carrying pilgrims had stopped at a dhaba for dinner. Meanwhile the speeding truck coming from Kanpur after hitting the co-driver Parvesh, knocked down the bus and the car. Due to high speed of truck, it also hit the another Roadways bus parked there. On getting information about the incident, Circle Officer (City) MP Singh, Kotwali in charge Lalitesh Narain Tripathi said he had received complaint from the cleaner Jitendra Singh. A first information report (FIR) was being lodged. ACP Alok Mishra said on hearing about the incident, police had rushed to spot and sent all the injured to Auraiya district hospital. Meanwhile two persons died while two others were injured when their uncontrolled car fell into a nullah in Ghatampur Kotwali police station area late on Wednesday night. The



The damaged truck after it hit a Roadways bus and car in Auraiya.

injured have been referred to LLR (Hallet) Hospital. Police sent the bodies for autopsy. The incident took place when they were going to attend a marriage ceremony in Patara in Ghatampur from Punkhrayan in Kanpur Dehat. Rahul Singh (28) of New Azad Nagar under Sen Pashchimpara police area was posted as Army Commanding Officer in Bengaluru. He along with Ramu Kushwaha alias Virendra (28) of Ismailpur under Reuna police station, Shivam (25) and Rupesh (28) of Punkhrayan was going to Patara to attend the marriage ceremony of his friend. He suddenly lost control over the car on a blind turn on Gajner-Patara road near Dharmagadpur village and it fell into a nullah. On getting

information police rushed to the spot and sent all the injured to Patara CHC where Rahul Singh and Ramu Kushwaha were declared dead. Shivam and Rupesh were referred to LLR (Hallet) Hospital. Rahul had arrived on leave to attend the marriage of his friend Ashish. Inspector Dhananjay Kumar Pandey said kin of the deceased and injured had been informed. Both the bodies had been sent for autopsy. Deceased Ramu Kushwaha was a mason and is survived by wife Poonam, two-and-a-half-year-old son and six-month-old daughter, he said.

SUICIDE: A teenaged girl allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself after an argument with her brother some petty issue in Bilharu police station area on Thursday morning. The matter was resolved after intervention of family members but thereafter she hanged herself from the ceiling hook. On coming to know about the incident, family members took to the community health centre (CHC) where she was declared dead by the doctors. SHO Ashok Kumar Saroj along with force rushed to spot and carried out probe. He sent the body for autopsy and said on the basis of autopsy report, further action will be initiated in the matter.

Two brothers die in mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Two brothers were killed in a road accident in the Meja police station area on Thursday. According to a report, the accident occurred in Auta area when Sandeep Kumar and Kuldeep Kumar of Madraha (Mamoli) village were returning home on a bike from a programme organised in a relative's house. Both the brothers died on the spot in the accident. On getting information Meja police reached the spot after being informed, got the bodies identified and informed the family members. On hearing the news, the distraught family also rushed to the spot. Meja police station in charge Rajesh Upadhyay said the bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination and the matter is being investigated. Meanwhile another report said that a man and his sister-in-law who were feared drowned in Sangam, the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati on Wednesday afternoon could not be traced even on the second day. Water police and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams conducted a search operation but failed to trace them.

Technology can help ensure access to quality education: Prof

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A two-day workshop on the topic 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Digital Pedagogy: Shaping the Future of Learning in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)' was inaugurated in the premises of Inter-University Centre for Teacher Education (IUCTE), BHU, on Thursday under the joint aegis of IUCTE BHU and Faculty of Educational Communication, New Delhi. The chief guest and Additional Director, Faculty of Educational Communication Prof Rajneesh Srivastava, in his address, said that technology can help in ensuring access to quality education to all people, increasing Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education by 50 per cent by the year 2050 and acquiring knowledge, experience and skills by connecting with good teachers and experts



at the global level, in which AI is providing an opportunity and will contribute to the quality as well as the accessibility of education. In his presidential address, IUCTE Director Prof PN Singh said AI should be used in education with caution and responsibility. Emphasising on character building and development of moral values, he said this workshop will provide the participants with a deep understanding of AI and its possibilities in teaching. Dean (Academics & Research) Prof Ashish Srivastava said

that the market for AI-enabled education in India is growing rapidly, teachers should use this opportunity to improve teaching and learning. Presenting the outline of the workshop, Convener of the workshop Prof Ajay Kumar Singh highlighted the objectives of the workshop and the role of AI in shaping the future of education and Co-Convener Dr Gyanendra Singh conducted the stage and gave the vote of thanks. Earlier, the programme was inaugurated with recital of Mangalcharan and floral tribute and lighting of

lamps on the statue of Maa Saraswati and Mahamana Pt Madan Mohan Malviya. This workshop focuses on understanding and adopting the transformative role of AI in the reconstruction of teaching and learning methods in the digital age. In this, the participants were given an opportunity to know in depth the use of AI in education and its possibilities. In the second session, Manas Dewan (Founder Director, Brand Kiln, Pune) delivered a lecture titled 'Envisioning the Digital Future' and conducted activities with the participants. He said the emerging trends in education and the impact of AI were discussed and future of digital-based education was highlighted. In the third session, Dr Pankaj Tiwari (Director, EMMRC, Sagar, Madhya Pradesh) gave a very interesting and knowledge enhancing lecture on 'Swayam MOOCs: Development and Presentation of

Proposal' and said that in today's changing environment it is necessary for us to know and adopt all the aspects of plagiarism and AI in the creation of digital content so that digital course development is promoted and its accessibility is ensured. In the fourth session, Dr Pankaj Tiwari interacted with participants on 'Digital Content Creation: An Innovative Approach' and made the participants work and make proposals. More than 70 assistant professors, associate professors, principals of HEIs across the country participated, learnt and practiced AI based tools and applications. Dr Vinod Kumar Singh, Dr Kushagri Singh, Dr Deepti Gupta, Dr Raj Singh, Dr Sunil Kumar Tripathi and academic and non-academic people of the centre were present. The programme was coordinated by Prof Ajay Kumar Singh and Dr Shatrudh and co-ordinated by Dr Gyanendra Singh.

Educational tour for students organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Ranjit Singh Rozi Shiksha Kendra at IIT-K in collaboration with the Department of SPASE and the Indian National Science Academy (INSA - Kanpur Local Chapter), organised an educational tour for students from 15 government and government-aided secondary schools of Kanpur Dehat. The initiative aimed at fostering scientific curiosity and awareness among young minds. Welcoming the students, Prof Sudhanshu S Singh from Rozi Shiksha Kendra highlighted their commitment to advancing rural education through structured outreach programmes. As part of the programme, Dr Tejpreet Kaur, an

Institute Post-Doctoral Fellow, conducted an interactive session on the solar system, engaging students with a hands-on demonstration of crater formation. The session also explored galaxy classification and deep-space exploration through the Voyager 1 and 2 missions. The students actively participated and engaged in a dynamic Q&A discussion. Prof Bushra Ateeq delivered an insightful session on genetic coding and the molecular basis of life. She elucidated how genetic mutations, environmental influences and lifestyle factors contribute to the development of cancer. Her talk provided students with a deeper understanding of cellular mutations and broader implications of genetic research. Students also

had the opportunity to visit IIT-K's state-of-the-art research laboratories, where they observed advanced scientific equipment, including high-resolution microscopes. They interacted with researchers and scientists, gaining first-hand exposure to the world of scientific exploration and innovation. The visit emphasises organizer's dedication to promoting science education at the grassroots level, inspiring the next generation of innovators and researchers. Through such outreach efforts, IIT-K continues to play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between academic institutions and school-level education, encouraging students to explore the vast potential of science and technology.

Government to keep inflation in check: Finance Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the government will continue to take measures to check inflation and ensure that citizens are not burdened.

Replying to the discussion on the Union Budget in the Rajya Sabha, the minister said the retail inflation based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) reduced to 4.31 per cent in January from 5.22 per cent in December and is moving towards the 4 per cent target given to the Reserve Bank of India.

The House witnessed several instances of altercations between the Opposition and the treasury benches over issues like Budget allocations to Telangana, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. Several Opposition parties staged walkout from the House during the minister's reply, even though Sitharaman stressed that the Modi government has never discriminated against any state.

On Budget proposals, she said they seek to "accelerate growth, secure inclusive development, and invigorate private sector investments", and there has been no decrease in capital expenditure for the next fiscal year. Sitharaman told the House that the Budget was prepared



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament New Delhi PTI

during a challenging time, with serious external challenges beyond estimates or forecasts and there has been reduction in sectoral allocations. Despite this, the government has tried to keep the assessment as accurate as possible, keeping India's interests paramount, she said. "There are no models that you can build and understand how the trends will be because they are very dynamic... Despite that, we have tried keeping the assessments as

close as possible, keeping India's interests as topmost... this immense uncertainty is still playing out and many Indian imports which are very critical for our economy to grow are also going to be left with uncertainty," she said. On inflation, she said data showed steep correction in prices of tomato, onion and potato prices, and even pulses. "So food inflation, which gets triggered when you have an adverse weather condition, and supply chain disruptions

are being managed by a group of ministers who are ensuring that timely import happens if there is a shortfall in supply," the minister said. The Reserve Bank of India is keeping a watch on volatility in the Indian rupee, she said. Sitharaman listed out the steps proposed in the Budget to boost agricultural production in the country. "So it is clear that government's attempt to remove the stress of price rise is actually being received in the ground. The efforts will

continue. We shall make sure that price should not be a burden on the ordinary citizens," Sitharaman said.

The minister, who presented her record eighth Budget in a row, also said the Modi government's Budget numbers are always realistic and neither conservative nor overestimated. Sitharaman told the House that the first advance estimates from National Statistics Office (NSO) has projected India's economy will grow 6.4 per cent in real terms and 9.7 per cent in nominal terms. So for the Budget, "we have kept our goals" such that we are able to accelerate growth, secure inclusive development, invigorate private sector investments, she said.

The minister also highlighted that the government steered the economy very well during the Covid crisis, and the country emerged as the fifth largest major economy in the world. She also recalled that after the global financial crisis of 2008, India was termed as among the "fragile five" economies. The minister also rebutted opposition parties' assertions that income tax incentives would only benefit rich people. She said income tax liability of the middle will significantly come down. The House was adjourned for a recess and will meet again on March 10 to continue the Budget session.

RS Chair asserts Parliament's jurisdiction on HC judge removal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday asserted that only Parliament has the jurisdiction to constitutionally remove a high court judge, saying a notice for removal of Justice Shekhar Yadav of Allahabad High Court is pending with him.

Speaking in the House, the chairman also asked the Rajya Sabha Secretary General to share with the Secretary General of the Supreme Court the information that 55 members of the upper house had given a notice to the Chairman for removal of Justice Yadav in December. "I am seized of an undated notice for motion received on 13 December 2024, bearing 55 purported signatures of the members of the Rajya Sabha seeking removal from office of Justice Shekhar Yadav of Allahabad High Court under Article 124(4) of the Constitution. The jurisdiction for the stated subject matter constitutionally lies in exclusivity with the Chairman Rajya Sabha and in an eventuality with the Parliament and Hon'ble President," Dhankhar said. "Taking note of public domain information and inputs available, it is expedient that the Secretary General, Rajya Sabha shares this for information with the Secretary General, Supreme Court of India," he said.



Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar reacts during the Budget session of Parliament, New Delhi PTI

The Supreme Court had sought a report from the chief justice of the Allahabad High Court on the remarks made by Justice Yadav and had later asked him to appear before senior judges of the court.

Members of several opposition parties had moved the notice in Rajya Sabha on December 13, 2024 for impeachment of Justice Yadav over his alleged controversial remarks at a recent VHP event, sources said.

The notice was signed by Kapil Sibal, Vivek Tankha, Digvijaya Singh, John Brittas, Manoj Kumar Jha and Saket Gokhale among others. These MPs met the Rajya Sabha secretary general and handed over the notice for impeachment a few minutes before the start of the day's proceedings, the sources said. Other MPs who signed the notice included P

Chidambaram, Randeep Surjewala, Pramod Tiwari, Jairam Ramesh, Mukul Wasnik, Naseer Hussain, Raghav Chadha, Fauzia Khan, Sanjay Singh, AA Rahim, V Sivadasan and Renuka Chowdhury. The notice for the motion was moved under the Judges' (Inquiry) Act, 1968, and Article 218 of the Constitution, seeking initiation of proceedings for impeachment of Justice Yadav. The notice mentioned that the speech/lecture delivered by Justice Yadav during the VHP-organised event prima facie showed that he "engaged in hate speech and incitement to communal disharmony in violation of the Constitution of India". The notice also mentioned that the judge prima facie showed that he targeted minorities and displayed bias and prejudice against them.

Delhi HC seeks status on DFI forgery case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi High Court has directed the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) & Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) to submit Status Reports on why FIR was not filed against Drone Federation India (DFI) for forging DGCA documents with the signature of the Director General.

Delhi High Court on Wednesday expressed displeasure with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) while issuing notice on a public interest litigation (PIL) filed against the Drone Federation of India over allegations of forgery.

The bench led by Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyay, also comprising Justice Tushar Rao Gedela, orally remarked that the DGCA should have filed a complaint and registered an FIR regarding the forgery. Court also directed DGCA, MCA and other authorities to submit separate reports on the status of the investigation. The court fixed the matter for March 19, 2025 for detail hearing.

The bench also orally observed how a private entity could protect itself by presenting itself as a government organisation. During the hearing, the counsel representing concerned ministries of Union of India submitted that the we looking at the complaint and seriously perusing it. It was also stat-



ed that MCA suspected the authenticity of the provided No Objection Certificate (NOC) and subsequently sent a letter to DGCA. The concerned ministry stated that an inspection was initiated, which eventually led to an investigation. Senior Advocate PV Dinesh, representing petitioner RTI activist Tej Pratap Singh, stated that the Drone Federation of India (DFI) forged an NOC to bypass legal hurdles and rebrand the organisation.

The fraudulent document was allegedly submitted to the MCA, misleading the public into believing the organisation had official government endorsement. The petition was filed by Advocate Piyo Harold Jaimon. The plea further alleged that DFI has in collusion with Pioneer Flying Academy (Respondent) issued drone pilot certifications to two individuals, without securing any approval or authorisation from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation or Ministry of Civil Aviation. These certifications were

issued to individuals associated with one, M/s Quidich Innovation Labs (Respondent), to operate drones. Since the certified pilots had used these certifications for covering Indian Premier League held in Dubai, senior officer of Dubai Civil Aviation Authority (DCAA) had written to DGCA to verify the authenticity of these certifications, it said.

However, DGCA has failed to initiate any enquiry and has even refrained from cooperating with DCAA. The entity has not only escaped from the investigations but also organised the Bharat Drone Shakti Event at the Air Force Station, Hindan, Uttar Pradesh, where DFI used pilots without valid licenses for flying drones in the Red Zone, plea added.

According to the petitioner, the body, by forging a letter from the regulatory authority, is not only attempting to project patronage from the Government of India but has also evaded accountability for its actions as described above.

PM Modi to inaugurate SOUL Leadership Conclave

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the first edition of the SOUL Leadership Conclave by the School of Ultimate Leadership here on February 21, officials said on Thursday.

The two-day event at Bharat Manadpam will bring together leaders from across politics, sports, arts and media, public policy, business, the social sector and the spiritual world to talk about their personal leadership journeys, engaging in insightful conversations and sharing transfor-



mative experiences to inspire a new generation of thinkers. The conclave will feature speakers such as Rail Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, former Chief Justice of

India D Y Chandrachud, former Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das, Spiritual Leader of the Brahma Kumaris BK Shivani, chess world champion D

Gukesh, Piramal Group chief Ajay Piramal, and Bharti Enterprises Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal, among others.

"Leadership is not just about guiding others. It is about inspiring them to act with vision, purpose and integrity -- towards the greater cause of public good. Our imperative at SOUL is to help broaden the landscape of political leadership in India through formal training and to include those who rise through merit, commitment and passion for public service and not just from political lineage," said Saurabh Johri, director in-charge, School of Ultimate Leadership (SOUL).

"The SOUL Leadership Conclave offers a unique opportunity to spark meaningful dialogue on leadership and its profound impact on society, creating a platform where new ideas can flourish and the next generation of leaders can find inspiration," he added.

Located on the periphery of GIFT City in Gandhinagar, SOUL is a privately-funded leadership institution, designed to equip government and public sector leaders with access to tools, skills and expert insights necessary to navigate the complex challenges of leadership in today's world.

UPSC introduces new online application module for 2025

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A new module of registration and online application form replacing the Detailed Application Form (DAF)-I and DAF-II has been introduced by the UPSC in civil services examination-2025, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Thursday.

The primary objective for implementing this module is to enhance convenience for the candidates, streamline the application process and optimise the examination cycle, he said in the Rajya Sabha. The civil services examination (CSE) is conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) annually in accordance with the CSE rules notified by the Department of Personnel & Training, said Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel.

"A new module of registration and online application form replacing the Detailed

Application Form (DAF)-I and DAF-II has been introduced by UPSC in CSE-2025," he said in a written reply to Rajya Sabha. Singh cited sections of the notified rules that make it mandatory for the applicant to submit requisite information and supporting documents towards various claims, such as date of birth, reservation category and educational qualification among others along with the online application form.

"The failure to provide the required information/documents along with the registration and online application form will entail cancellation of candidature for the examination," read the rules. The civil services examination is conducted annually by the UPSC in three stages - preliminary, main and interview - to select officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), among others.

India to procure 1,000 surveillance helicopters for high-altitude operations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The government has begun the process to procure nearly 1,000 surveillance helicopters with accessories capable of operating up to an altitude of 5,500 metres above sea level and both during day and night time, as a Request for Information (RFI) was issued.

The RFI says the surveillance helicopters, along with the accessories, are planned to be procured in the spirit of the 'Make in India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programmes. "The preferred categorisation for the project as per provisions of Chapter-II of DAP-2020 may be indicated by the vendors with due justification," it adds.

The defence ministry intends to procure an "approximate quantity of 1,000 surveillance copters (high altitude area) with accessories", according to the RFI document. This RFI is being issued to "finalise SQRs (Service Qualitative Requirements), decide procurement category



and identify probable Indian vendors who are capable to supply surveillance copter (HAA) along with accessories". The first part of the RFI incorporates the intended use of the equipment and the operational requirement that should be met by the surveillance copter with accessories. The RFI also mentions the terrain conditions under which the "surveillance copters" will be employed primarily in high altitude (up to 5,500 metres), mountainous terrain in India. The surveillance copters with accessories should be operational by day and night and in

commonly encountered weather conditions in all kinds of terrains in the country, the RFI says. "Surveillance Copter (High Altitude Area) is modular in design, thereby lending itself to future upgrades through simple modifications, not leading to design or structural change. It should also facilitate integration and installation, without impacting the performance of any system/sub-system," it added. The Indian Army is also planning to procure 50 "heavy crawler rock drill" with the government on Wednesday issuing a draft RFI. "The RFI intends to achieve aim

and objectives as per Paragraphs 2 to 4 of Chapter II of DAP 2020," it said.

The Indian Army deployment in Northern, Eastern and Central Commands comprises inaccessible areas with some of the most difficult and treacherous terrain, the document reads.

"Creating sustainable infrastructure in these areas in the shortest time frame is an inescapable operational necessity. Quick development of suitable lines of communication (L of C) is the most critical element of this aspect," it said.

"A self-propelled heavy-duty crawler-based rock drill with an on-board compressor shall be used extensively for moving and positioning the drill machine to the initial formation site for drilling and road cutting in hard rock strata, powering pneumatic/hydraulic motors fitted on the rock drill. "It shall be used for quarry operations and initial road formation cutting by drilling bench holes, toe holes for charging and blasting in mountains," it said.

Aditya Thackeray meets Rahul, Kejriwal on INDIA Bloc unity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aditya Thackeray met Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal, days after their losses in the Delhi assembly polls, with a message to strengthen the fight for free and fair elections.

Aditya Thackeray, on a whirlwind tour of the national capital, also met the party's parliamentarians amid reports of dissent in the ranks and some leaders planning to join the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena. He met Rahul Gandhi late on Wednesday and called on Kejriwal, the former Delhi chief minister, whose party faced defeat in last week's assembly elections on Thursday. "Is there any difference between the BJP and the Election Commission (EC)?... I don't even know where my vote goes. There needs to be more clarity on EVMs (electronic voting machines) and VVPATs (voter-verifiable paper

audit trail)," Aditya Thackeray said.

After calling on Kejriwal, Aditya Thackeray described the meeting as a gesture of friendship. "Governments keep coming and going but relationships continue. We met Kejriwal as a gesture of friendship. However, our democracy is not free and fair. Elections are not free and fair," he told reporters after the meeting. He was accompanied by party MPs Sanjay Raut, Arvind Sawant, Priyanka Chaturvedi, Sanjay Dina Patil and Bhausaheb Wakchaure, among others.

The Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and the NCP (SP) had alleged irregularities in the conduct of last year's Maharashtra assembly election, claiming that there were more registered voters in the state than its total adult population. The three parties, which formed the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) grouping, claimed 39 lakh new voters were added between the Lok Sabha elections in May and the November assembly polls.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

Revamping the tax regime

Nirmala Sitharaman introduces the Income Tax Bill 2025 in Parliament, aiming to replace the 1961 Act with a more taxpayer-friendly framework

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Income Tax Bill 2025 in Parliament on Thursday. This new bill aims to replace the Income Tax Act, 1961, which has become cumbersome due to numerous amendments over the last six decades. The bill focuses on simplification, clarity and ease of compliance for taxpayers while retaining the fundamental structure of the tax system. The bill consists of 536 sections, 23 chapters and 16 schedules within 622 pages, making it significantly more concise than the 880-page 1961 Act. One of the major changes is the replacement of the term 'previous year' and 'assessment year' with 'tax year,' eliminating confusion regarding tax filing timelines. To further enhance clarity, ambiguous terms such as 'notwithstanding' have been replaced with 'irrespective.' The new bill also introduces tables and formulae for key calculations, such as TDS, presumptive taxation, salary taxation and deductions for bad debts. Complex explanations and provisos have been omitted, making the law more comprehensible and user-friendly.



A formal Taxpayer's Charter has been included, outlining rights and responsibilities to promote transparency and fairness in tax administration. All TDS-related provisions have been consolidated under a single clause using simple tabular formats, reducing complexity and improving compliance. Additionally, the bill integrates key court rulings from the last 60 years, providing more legal certainty and reducing disputes. The tax treatment for employee stock options has been refined, offering a more transparent taxation structure to ensure fair and predictable tax treatment for employees receiving stock options. To make tax exemptions clearer,

income that does not form part of total income has now been moved to dedicated schedules instead of being scattered throughout the Act. These changes are expected to bring multiple benefits, such as simpler compliance, a clear taxation structure, reduced litigation, an easier TDS framework and greater predictability for employees with stock options. Despite these advantages, the bill faces certain challenges. Taxpayers and businesses will need time to adapt to the new terminologies and provisions. The removal of 'previous year' and 'assessment year' may cause temporary confusion during the transition. Additionally, the introduction of tables and streamlined TDS clauses will require updates in income tax return (ITR) forms, software utilities and reporting systems. The Income Tax Bill 2025 marks a significant step toward a more transparent, efficient and taxpayer-friendly system. While it does not introduce new taxes, its simplification of language, removal of redundancies, and integration of judicial precedents will reduce compliance costs and tax disputes. If successfully implemented, this bill could enhance tax administration efficiency and encourage better voluntary compliance among taxpayers. After deliberation by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, it is expected to come into effect from April 1, 2026. How it will actually work will only be clear then.

PICTALK



Farmer carries rose flowers during the Valentine's Week, in Agartala

The true cost of 5G: Why prices are high now—but will not stay that way

New technologies start costly but become more affordable as adoption grows. With economies of scale, 5G costs will drop, unlocking new opportunities for businesses

The 5G technology is widely recognised for its ability to deliver lower latency, faster speeds and improved connectivity, supporting a vast number of devices simultaneously. However, many consumers perceive 5G as an expensive innovation, primarily due to the high cost of chipsets, while overlooking broader cost factors. Although chipset expenses are a component, they do not represent the complete financial picture. **The Cost of 5G Hardware** When considering 5G, it is common to focus on the price of chips. While 4G chips are priced below \$10, 5G chips currently exceed \$100. However, focusing solely on chipset costs ignores the larger financial framework. The primary expense of 5G stems from the extensive infrastructure required to support the network. Telecom providers must invest in building new base stations, fibre-optic networks, and antennas to enable 5G connectivity. Historically, new technologies such as cloud computing and smartphones were expensive when first introduced.



However, as demand grew and adoption increased, prices gradually decreased. A similar trend is anticipated with 5G. **The Inevitable Drop in 5G Costs** Technological progress consistently follows a pattern: initial prices are high, but they decline over time. A case in point is the smartphone market, where the average cost dropped from \$443 in 2011 to \$372 in 2013. Similarly, cloud computing services have become significantly cheaper over the past decade. The same economic principles apply to 5G. As technology advances and adoption rates increase, costs will inevitably decrease. **Economies of Scale and Cost Reduction** One of the key drivers of cost reduction in 5G is economies

of scale. As more telecom providers, businesses and consumers adopt 5G, the cost of deployment will continue to decline. The larger the global 5G network, the more cost-effective its implementation becomes. Research by Juniper predicts that global 5G connections will surge from 5 million in 2019 to 1.5 billion by 2025. Mass production plays a crucial role in reducing costs. Increased production volumes lead to lower prices for 5G hardware, including chips, antennas, and base stations. The 5G base station market is expected to grow from \$37.44 billion in 2025 to \$132.06 billion by 2030, at a CAGR of 28.67 per cent, according to Mordor Intelligence. These massive investments will drive economies of scale, further lowering the cost of private 5G network deployment for businesses. **Affordable 5G Handsets and Private Networks** The competition in chipset manufacturing is already pushing down 5G handset prices. As these prices drop, the overall cost of related hardware and services will follow, accelerating global 5G

adoption. **5G's Impact on Business** As 5G technology becomes more affordable, businesses will have greater opportunities to enhance their operations. While early adoption may come with higher costs, the long-term benefits will far outweigh these expenses. 5G's ultra-fast connectivity and real-time data transfer capabilities will drive productivity, streamline processes, and facilitate better decision-making. Furthermore, 5G can revolutionise industries by enabling advanced applications in customer service, video streaming, and mobile capabilities. **The Future of 5G Affordability** As adoption scales up, deployment costs will decline, making 5G a more democratised technology. This affordability will allow businesses of all sizes to embrace 5G, fostering innovation in artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and beyond. The widespread availability of 5G will enable businesses to stay competitive in the digital world. (The writer is Founder & CEO, Echelon Edge Pvt Ltd; views are personal)



GAURAV GANDHI

Russia combines diplomatic strategy with military tactics

Russia's military philosophy extends beyond traditional warfare, incorporating hybrid tactics that blend Eastern endurance with Western innovation

Russia's military strategy has long been shaped by its geopolitical position, straddling both Europe and Asia. This dual identity has led to a warfare doctrine that merges Western technological advancement with Eastern strategic depth and endurance. The ongoing evolution of Russian military tactics provides valuable insight into its approach to global conflicts, shaped by a fusion of European and Asian influences. From the European side, Russia has historically adopted a professionalised military structure similar to Western armies, particularly during the Imperial era and through Soviet reforms. Its command structures have evolved to centralise authority while enabling flexibility on the battlefield. The modernisation of weaponry has also followed Western advancements, integrating precision-strike capabilities and network-centric warfare. Drawing lessons from NATO conflicts, Russia has enhanced its rapid manoeuvre warfare strategies, incorporating elements of German Blitzkrieg and modern NATO doctrines, which were evident in its campaigns in Georgia and Ukraine. On the other hand, Russia's Eastern influences are deeply rooted in its strategic patience and attritional warfare, a legacy of the Mongol conquests and Soviet-era endurance strategies. Rather than seeking swift victories, Russia often engages in prolonged, resource-draining conflicts that wear down its adversaries over time. Its embrace of asymmetric and hybrid tactics aligns with guerrilla warfare methods, employing unconventional approaches such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and proxy warfare. This strategic approach mirrors the methods used by China and other Eastern powers, relying on destabilisation rather than direct confrontation. Furthermore, Russia's influence in regional conflicts extends beyond conventional military engagements, utilising mercenaries like the Wagner Group and supporting separatist movements, a strategy similar to



Iran's and China's use of regional proxy forces. Russia's military doctrine extends its influence over neighboring states, shaping their security and geopolitical dynamics. Ukraine has been the epicenter of Russia's hybrid warfare, where cyberattacks, military incursions, and disinformation campaigns have been employed to destabilise the country. Belarus remains a critical ally, hosting Russian forces and acting as a logistical facilitator for military operations. The Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—are under constant Russian influence, facing frequent cyber intrusions and political destabilisation efforts, despite their NATO membership. In Central Asia, Russia maintains a military and economic presence in former Soviet republics like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, ensuring their alignment within its sphere of influence. Similarly, in the Caucasus, Russia has engaged in military conflicts, as seen in Georgia, and continues to exert influence in Armenia and Azerbaijan through peace-keeping operations and strategic alliances. Beyond its immediate borders, Russia balances relationships with China and India, maintaining military cooperation with the former while supplying arms to the latter, ensuring its strategic autonomy amid shifting glob-



DRAWING LESSONS FROM NATO CONFLICTS, RUSSIA HAS ENHANCED ITS RAPID MANOEUVRE WARFARE STRATEGIES, INCORPORATING ELEMENTS OF GERMAN BLITZKRIEG AND MODERN NATO DOCTRINES, WHICH WERE EVIDENT IN ITS CAMPAIGNS IN GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

al alliances. The geopolitical strategy of the United States in the Russia-Ukraine war has been pivotal in countering Russian aggression through military, economic, and diplomatic means. One of the most significant aspects of US involvement has been its military support for Ukraine. The US has supplied Ukraine with advanced weaponry, including Javelin anti-tank missiles, HIMARS rocket systems, and Patriot air defence systems, significantly enhancing its defensive and offensive capabilities. Another key aspect of the economic strategy has been reducing Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas. The US has increased its liquefied natural gas exports to Europe and supported alternative energy sources to mitigate Russia's ability to use energy as a political weapon. Additionally, billions of dollars in direct economic aid have been provided to Ukraine to stabilize its economy and sustain its military operations. India, as a key global player, has maintained a delicate balancing act in the Russia-Ukraine war due to its historical ties with Russia and its growing partnerships with the West. Economically, India has continued its energy cooperation with Russia, increasing imports of Russian oil at discounted prices to mitigate global energy inflation. At the same time, India is expanding

its trade partnerships with Western nations to ensure diversification and avoid over-reliance on any single economic partner. In the geopolitical sphere, India has positioned itself as a neutral entity, abstaining from several UN votes condemning Russia and advocating diplomatic dialogue over sanctions. India's military procurement strategy reflects this balance, as it continues to acquire Russian military hardware such as S-400 missile systems while simultaneously strengthening defense ties with the US and France to modernise its armed forces. The broader Indo-Pacific security landscape remains a key concern for India, as it remains wary of deepening Russia-China military ties. Given China's aggressive posturing in the region, India has increased its engagement with Western powers, particularly through the QUAD alliance with the US, Japan and Australia, to counterbalance Chinese influence. Russia's military philosophy extends beyond traditional warfare, incorporating hybrid tactics that blend Eastern endurance with Western innovation. Cyber and information warfare play a significant role in Russia's strategy, heavily influenced by China's cyber tactics. (The writer is an expert on cyber security and counter terrorism; views expressed are personal)



NISHAKANT OJHA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

COUNSELLING CENTRES FOR COUPLES

Madam — Recently, many cases of divorce rocked the nation. The case of Atul Subhash, who ended his life, giving up due to the mental agony faced by his wife during divorce and another incident where a Karnataka woman demanded Rs 6.16 lakh per month as alimony, raised doubts among youth on the institution of marriage. To curb the rising cases of divorce, the Odisha government has come up with a welcome initiative to open a pre-marriage counselling centre in the state. CM Mohan Charan Majhi, following a proposal from National Commission for Women (NCW) Chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar, took this thoughtful initiative. With the changing times, the mindset of the young couples is changing. The word 'divorce' is becoming very common in the country these days. In case of any conflict, be it external or internal, without giving a second thought, the married couple is straightaway heading for a divorce, just like returning a defective product to a shop. Due to a lack of guidance and understanding, some couples don't even put effort into fixing their marriage, which later leads to affairs and family disputes. This practice needs to change; this is where the pre-marriage counselling centres will help the couples. There are some conflicts that can be resolved under proper guidance and advice that the pre-marriage counsellors will provide to couples. This initiative will pave the path for young couples to take the right call at the right time without falling prey to any misjudgments and misunderstandings. The initiative from the Odisha government is a commendable approach to curb divorce cases and to ensure the mental and emotional wellbeing of married couples. Manoj Kumar Jena | Cuttack

IAF CHIEF CRITICISES HAL

Madam — Indian Air Force Chief Air Marshal Amar Pratap Singh has said his confidence in defence PSU Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) continues to

Supreme Court slams freebies



Recently, during the hearing of a PIL seeking shelter for the homeless in Delhi, the Supreme Court's bench deprecated the distribution of freebies ahead of elections and remarked that it would be better if the homeless were sought to be integrated into mainstream society so that they could contribute to the nation. The order has been passed in the backdrop of a chart handed over in the court by a petitioner in person, which showed the statewide position with regard to the number of homeless persons, the

number of shelters available, and the number of persons who could be accommodated in the said shelters. The Supreme Court expressed concern over political parties promising freebies and asking whether it was not 'creating a class of parasites' instead of bringing people into the mainstream workforce who could contribute towards the nation's development. The bench has also remarked that people are not willing to work due to the lure of cash transfer schemes like 'Ladkhi Behin' and free rations. Shooting down his submission, Justice B R Gavai recounted his personal experience of how agriculturists in Maharashtra were not getting labourers as they were getting things free at home. SC's strong observation comes at a time when political parties go all out to woo voters by promising freebies like free electricity and water with little concern for state finance. P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

INVEST IN AI

Madam — The Chinese DeepSeek has motivated the major countries including India seeking deep into the Artificial Intelligence pursuit. China surprised the world with its latest AI application but it is the hard work of their government, fund managers, institutions, regulatory authorities for two decades with the investment of billions of US Dollars. The global cooperation in developing the latest AI technology to excel ahead of DeepSeek is welcome. Our 23 IITs and 26 IIITs, IISc have thousands of students, researchers and the most competent faculty who can synergise their efforts, resources and infrastructure to develop our own advanced AI. The Government should immediately thrust their concerted efforts with the regulatory framework, funding and infrastructural resources and pool our top and globally prestigious engineering institutions to develop our own AI at a fast pace. Vinod Johri | Delhi

erode over its failure to fix delays in delivery and upgrades to the light combat aircraft Tejas. I think the Air Force Chief should be more circumspect in issuing such statements, which harm our nation globally. He should understand that this will be watched by our enemy countries. Let him air his views with the defence minister or the Chief of all the services. This is not the way one has to mock our own enterprises, that too in the defence sector. He should be aware that the GE firm in the US has been the main obstacle in developing the Tejas, as they are not willing to transfer the technology of the engines because of a lack of certain key materials like titanium. GE might be sending these engines this March, so let us wait for them. The delay from HAL is a combination of various factors. No one should be allowed to speak openly about the state of our defence industries; it's a matter of national security. India should hasten up and ought to go in for Sukhoi/Rafel, as the US can hardly be trusted for reasons well known to all of us. Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

INDIA'S AI DIPLOMACY

India's plan to host the fourth global AI summit in Delhi underscores its strategic push for leadership in AI innovation



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visits to Paris and Washington, where he engaged with two of the most influential leaders from the developed world, come at a crucial juncture of shifting geopolitical dynamics. The central theme of these high-level bilateral discussions revolved around advanced technology cooperation in an increasingly fragmented world. India played a significant role as the co-chair of the AI Action Summit in Paris, alongside host nation France. This marked the third global event dedicated to artificial intelligence, drawing comparisons to the Kumbh Mela of technology—bringing together policymakers, corporate leaders, experts, and world leaders.

The summit's primary focus was on leveraging the transformative potential of AI, a technology that has been likened to groundbreaking human advancements such as the invention of the wheel and the mastery of fire. Meanwhile, China introduced DeepSeek, a nimble generative AI tool, posing a serious challenge to the near-monopolistic dominance of US tech giants that have invested billions in AI research and development. Compounding the complexities of global AI governance, former US President Joe Biden, during his final week in office, passed an executive order known as the Interim Final Rule (IFR) on the Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion.

This order imposed export restrictions on critical software and hardware essential for AI development, targeting nations deemed adversarial to US interests—chiefly China—but also impacting close allies



such as India. Global technology stakeholders have since urged the new US administration to maintain consistency with the previously established Regulatory Freeze Order. They have called for the suspension of the AI Diffusion Rule until further review and stakeholder consultations ensure that the regulations align with both national security and international trade interests.

Despite industry appeals, President Donald Trump has yet to overturn the executive order signed by his predecessor. However, his administration issued a fresh executive order on January 23, signalling a possible shift in approach. Within days of assuming office, President Trump reaffirmed the United States' commitment to AI leadership, stating that the country has historically been at the forefront of AI innovation due to its robust free-market economy, world-class research institutions, and entrepreneurial drive. His directive emphasized eliminating barriers that could hinder American AI progress, revoking certain existing AI policies, and reinforcing the US's global leadership in AI. He further asserted that sustaining AI dominance was vital for human advancement, economic competitiveness, and national security. India, aiming for a prominent role in global AI governance, innovation and development, has set forth an ambitious AI mission of its own.

This vision, however, is heavily reliant on high-end semiconductor chips and Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) currently controlled by US technology firms. Any restrictions on access to these critical processors could pose significant challenges to India's AI aspirations. Modi's engagements in Paris, India's announcement to host the fourth global AI summit in Delhi, and his discussions with President Trump and other world leaders signal a strategic move toward securing India's place at the forefront of global AI advancements. These diplomatic efforts mark an essential step in navigating the rapidly evolving AI landscape and ensuring India's stake in shaping the future of this transformative technology.

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

Will 'Jan Vishwas 2.0' deliver real reform



A S MITTAL

While initiatives like upcoming Jan Vishwas 2.0 aim to ease regulatory burdens, deeper reforms are essential to cut red tape and curb the menace of bribery



Despite concerted efforts to combat corruption, red-tapism and bribery remain formidable barriers to business growth in India. The recent "India Business Corruption Survey 2024" presents a troubling picture: 66 per cent of business entities admit to paying bribes, with 54 per cent stating they were coerced to expedite government processes, obtain permits, ensure compliance, or acquire duplicate licenses. The problem is most acute in sectors governed by over-reaching officials in labour, GST, income tax, pollution, provident funds, property registration, drug and health departments. The economic impact is undeniable.

A survey by EY-FICCI reveals that four out of five respondents believe corruption is a significant deterrent to foreign direct investment (FDI). This underscores the urgent need to overhaul India's compliance framework to foster a transparent, fair, and predictable regulatory environment. While the government initiated compliance reforms two years ago, progress has been sluggish.

The Jan Vishwas Act of 2023 was a step forward, decriminalising 180 provisions related to imprisonment clauses that burden businesses and entrepreneurs. However, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's 2025 budget announcement about 'Jan Vishwas 2.0' aims to further decriminalise around 100 provisions. While this is a welcome step, it barely scratches the surface—over 20,000 provisions with imprisonment clauses remain untouched.

The Constant Flux of Compliance Rules

For Indian businesses, compliance is already a complex challenge, but its intersection with corruption makes it nearly insurmountable. Regulatory officials often wield compliance provisions as tools to extract bribes. Many businesses report that unofficial payments are still required to secure regulatory approvals, even when all necessary compliances are met. A significant flaw in the system is



FOR INDIAN BUSINESSES, COMPLIANCE IS ALREADY A COMPLEX CHALLENGE, BUT ITS INTERSECTION WITH CORRUPTION MAKES IT NEARLY INSURMOUNTABLE

the enormous subjectivity granted to inspectors, who can threaten imprisonment or factory shutdowns without accountability.

Another pressing issue is the overwhelming frequency of compliance updates, which fosters inefficiency and corruption. Over the past year alone, there have been 9,420 compliance updates—an average of 36 daily changes. This staggering rate of change indicates either regulatory incompetence or a deliberate design to create systemic corruption pipelines. A bureaucracy that needs to update rules at such an erratic pace is either incapable of foresight or complicit in fostering an environment where bribes become inevitable.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) recent directive is a promising initiative to curb this chaos. Effective this January, changes to food label regulations will be announced only once a year, offering a model for predictable regulatory changes. Similar measures should be extended across all regulatory bodies.

Labour Laws: The Elephant in the Room

A significant portion of compliance-related imprisonment clauses stem from labour laws, which fall under the Concurrent List of the Constitution. While India has replaced 29 colonial-era labour laws with four modern labour codes, they remain in limbo, awaiting implementation. Without this critical step, the long-touted "biggest labour reforms in independent India" remain mere rhetoric. State governments must act swiftly to operationalise these reforms.

Simplifying Business Permits: A Digital-First Approach
Establishing a factory in India

requires submitting hundreds of self-attested and notarised documents across more than 40 government departments.

This archaic system breeds corruption and inefficiency. A digital-first approach could transform the process. Imagine a scenario where entrepreneurs can apply for factory permissions using a single business identifier, granting regulators access to verified documents via an entity called Digi Locker. Such a tamper-proof, authenticated repository could cut approval times from months to days, mirroring the success of India's Digi Yatra in streamlining airport security.

One Nation, One Business Identity

India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has revolutionised governance, but business compliance remains fragmented. Entrepreneurs must navigate at least 23 identity numbers issued by various Union and state authorities—from PAN, GSTIN, and CIN to professional tax numbers and factory licenses. Each identifier has its lifecycle, requiring periodic renewals and payments, leading to inefficiencies and corruption. A unified One Nation, One Business Identity system could dramatically simplify compliance, reducing bureaucratic friction and the opportunities for corrupt practices.

A small budgetary allocation toward this initiative could streamline regulatory interactions, enhancing India's appeal as a business destination.

A Global Perspective: The US Efficiency Threat

The global competition for investment and talent is intensifying. The United States is advancing governance reforms, including the proposed

Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), to make business operations seamless. If the world's largest economy (GDP: \$27 trillion) becomes even more business-friendly, why would investors choose India's \$4 trillion economy, where red tape and corruption persist? The answer is simple: they won't. As American efficiency attracts global capital, India risks losing out on both investment and entrepreneurial talent, a fundamental driver of its knowledge economy.

The Way Forward

The time for complacency is over. What was an opportunity yesterday is now an urgent necessity. To sustain its economic momentum, India must dismantle bureaucratic hurdles, create a predictable compliance environment, and eradicate corruption. A clear, well-structured compliance framework—ushered in through Jan Vishwas 2.0—is not just about ease of doing business; it's about safeguarding India's economic future.

The government must act decisively to attract global companies and empower Indian entrepreneurs to innovate, expand, and create jobs without fear or unnecessary regulatory friction. India stands at a crossroads. Whether the High-Level Committee for Regulatory Reforms embraces a bold compliance overhaul or hesitates, the stakes are high. The choice is clear: modernise or risk being left behind in the global economic race.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

Making road safety a national priority: A targeted mission to save lives

To achieve meaningful change and save lives, India must move beyond symbolism and adopt a mission-driven approach, treating road safety as a national imperative

Every year, India observes Road Safety Month, during which various events and programmes are organised by the government and civil society organisations at national and regional levels. These initiatives focus on raising awareness and educating the public on ways to reduce road casualties. While this acknowledgment is a step forward, the critical question remains—has road safety truly become a national priority? Unfortunately, our approach is often reactive, addressing the issue only after tragic accidents occur, rather than proactively implementing global best practices to prevent them.

A Grim Reality: What the Data Reveals

Road accident statistics paint

a stark picture, suggesting that road safety is yet to be treated as a priority by Indian citizens. Road accidents are an everyday occurrence in India, and there is rarely a day when one does not hear about a fatal crash.

According to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) report for 2022, India witnessed 461,312 road crashes, resulting in 168,491 deaths and 443,366 injuries. Alarming, nearly 70 per cent of these fatalities involved young individuals—many of whom were the primary earners of their families.

While the 2023 report is yet to be released, officials have already indicated a steep rise in casualties, making Indian roads even more hazardous. The United Nations Decade of



ASHIM SANYAL

Action for Road Safety aims to reduce road deaths by 50 per cent by 2030, and India is a signatory to this ambitious goal. However, despite past commitments, the recent MoRTH report shows an 11.9 per cent increase in accidents, with deaths rising by 9.4 per cent and injuries by 15.3 per cent compared to 2021. This translates to an average of 1,264 accidents and 462 deaths

per day, or 53 accidents and 19 deaths every hour. Achieving the 50 per cent reduction target by 2030 seems increasingly difficult unless immediate and sustained action is taken at both central and state levels.

Strengthening Laws and Enforcement

The introduction of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, was a significant step toward improving road safety, imposing stricter penalties and regulations. Initially, the law was taken seriously, but its impact faded over time due to inconsistent enforcement. Socio-cultural factors often override the fear of legal consequences, making road safety a neglected concern. The reality is that road crashes are preventable, and the



term "accident" itself is misleading.

The Urgent Need for Action

Adopting a structured and data-driven approach to road safety is imperative. Studies indicate that focusing on key risk factors—such as speeding, non-compliance with seatbelt and helmet laws, and unsafe road designs—can significantly reduce casualties. Speeding alone contributes to approximately 73 per cent

of all road accidents in India. Scientific speed limits should be enforced on expressways, highways, urban roads and even rural areas where mobility is increasing rapidly. Non-compliance with safety measures is another major concern. In 2022, over 16,715 people lost their lives due to not wearing seatbelts, and more than 50,000 two-wheeler riders died because they were not wearing helmets. These numbers highlight the urgent need to enforce safety regulations strictly and create widespread awareness about their importance.

Road Safety as a National Mission

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has successfully led multiple national missions, including Swachh Bharat

Abhiyan, Skill Development, Yoga for Fitness, Immunisation Programmes, and Child Health Initiatives. These programmes achieved remarkable success through targeted policies, funding and regular progress reviews. Given the scale of road safety concerns, India must adopt a similar mission-driven approach. Declaring road safety a National Mission would ensure the allocation of dedicated budgets, the establishment of clear targets, and continuous monitoring at both central and state levels. Regular progress reviews, monthly reports, and rigorous enforcement mechanisms would motivate authorities to take proactive steps toward improving road safety.

A Collective Commitment to Saving Lives
Road safety is not just about reducing casualties; it is about safeguarding the wellbeing of every citizen, strengthening the economy, and securing the future of India's youth. The financial burden of post-crash medical care, loss of productivity and emotional distress on families is immense. As a global signatory committed to saving lives, India must take decisive steps to ensure road safety is not merely a campaign but an integral part of governance. The time to act is now—by adopting a mission-mode approach, enforcing existing laws and making road safety a top national priority, we can create safer roads for all.

(The author is COO consumer VOICE; views are personal)

Haryana cracks down on illegal mining, seizes 324 vehicles



Photo: File photo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

The Mines and Geology Department, Haryana has stepped up its efforts to combat illegal mining in the state, with district-level officials inspecting 3,950 locations across the state under a special drive, an official statement said on Thursday. The extensive effort from January till February 10 led to the seizure of 324 vehicles involved in illegal mining, it said. According to the statement, the department has set up a robust enforcement strategy including inspections, monitoring, and the use of cutting-edge technology, to conserve natural resources and stopping unauthorized mining activities. Additionally, drones and other advanced tools are being deployed to detect illegal mining operations, while vehicles associated with illicit activities are being seized, it said. The statement said that FIRs are being registered and

heavy fines are being levied on violators. Acting swiftly on a complaint of illegal mining in Bhagwapur village of Yamunanagar district recently, the department conducted an inspection of the area. Investigations revealed that boulders, gravel, sand, and ordinary soil were illegally mined over approximately two acres of land. A fine of Rs 65,37,732 was imposed, and an FIR was registered on February 11, the statement added. As per the guidelines of the mining department, regular inspections are ongoing in every district of Haryana. Notably, in Yamunanagar district, 123 vehicles have been seized, and 116 FIRs have been registered for illegal mining activities during the months of January and February (till February 10). "The department remains committed to fully eradicating illegal mining to ensure the responsible exploitation of the state's natural resources and prevent revenue loss," it said.

Change of Odisha government in 2024 was a declaration of faith: Odisha Governor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati on Thursday said the people of the state opted for a change of government in 2024 general elections and it was not just a political decision, but a "declaration of faith". The people changed the nearly two-and-a-half decade long government in the state with a vision for the future and hope of a transformation in their lives, he said. The governor said this while addressing the Budget Session of Odisha Assembly which commenced on Thursday. He said the state, despite its glorious past and abundant

human resources, struggled to fulfil its immense potential. "The state's promises often remained unrealised. The people of Odisha, with hope in their hearts and a vision for the future, opted for change over continuity in the 2024 general elections," the governor said. Noting that they were tired of waiting for a transformation that never seemed to come, the governor said: "They (people) embraced the promise of my government that they would listen, understand and act. Their vote was not just a political decision, it was a declaration of faith." The people entrusted his government with the hope of the poor, aspirations of youths,

dreams of farmers and aims of women believing that change would usher in a new era, an era of unmatched prosperity, he said. Kambhampati said that with the mandate of the people and a determined vision for the future, the new government shouldered the onerous responsibility of taking the state forward in the path of prosperity. He said it is just eight months of assuming responsibility and during such a short span of time, the new government has taken various landmark decisions, launched numerous schemes and hosted several programmes in the interest of the people. "The government implemented its flagship

scheme 'Subhadra' which is poised to benefit about a crore of women of the state, rolled out the 'Samrudha Krushak Yojana' to provide input assistance of Rs 800 per quintal of paddy over and above the MSP, opened the 'Ratna Bhandar' of Shree Jagannath Temple honouring the demands of devotees and took up many initiatives to revive Odia Asmita (pride). The governor also highlighted the state government hosting the DG/IGP conference, 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, visit of Singapore President and Utkarsh Odisha-Make in Odisha conclave. He said the state government has received three lakh suggestions for 'Vision 2036' which aspires to

build a developed Odisha targeting a 500 USD billion economy by 2036. Starting his speech by chanting 'Jai Jagannath', the governor said poor, youth, women empowerment are the main pillars of the state government. He said the state has implemented the National Education Policy, Ayushman Bharat in the health sector, Kamadhenu scheme for dairy farmers and others. Stating that 1.5 lakh government jobs to be filled in five years duration, the governor said as many as 65,000 posts to be filled in two years. More than 24,000 posts have been filled in 2024-25. The governor also said the state government will

empower 25 lakh women as 'Lakhpati Didi' by 2027. He said the state government has proposed a new scheme 'Swachha Odisha' to enhance solid, liquid and wastewater management in cities. The state has also launched a new scheme 'Urban Mobility' to ensure seamless transportation in urban areas, and secured approval for development of Hirakud and Satkosia projects to elevate them to a global standard tourist destination, he said. "My government remains committed to a people first approach in delivering essential services, creating livelihood opportunities and developing infrastructures," the governor said.

Centre dispatches teams to tackle bird flu outbreak in Andhra Pradesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Animal Husbandry Minister K Atchannaidu said on Thursday that the Central Government has dispatched teams to assess the Avian Influenza situation in the state following the outbreak of the viral disease in three districts. Over the past 45 days as many as 5.4 Lakh chickens have died in the southern state due to the disease, prompting the Animal Husbandry Department to begin culling birds and creating restricted zones in the affected areas.



Photo: File photo

Badampudi village in Eluru district reported the death of 2.2 Lakh chickens, Velpuru in West Godavari district

recorded 2.5 Lakh deaths, Kanuru Agraharam in East Godavari district reported 65,000 deaths and

Gampalagudem in NTR district saw 7,000 deaths. "The Chief Minister spoke in detail with senior scientists in Bhopal and the Central Government secretary. Following this, the Central Government secretary dispatched teams to Andhra Pradesh," Atchannaidu said at a press conference at the secretariat. The minister also noted that a senior official from the Centre will visit Andhra Pradesh on February 14. In addition to declaring the affected poultry farms as bio-secure zones, the senior TDP leader stated that officials have been deputed to these areas to ensure the

strict implementation of containment measures. He added that the culling of chickens has been completed at three affected poultry farms and will be completed at the remaining two farms today. According to the minister, officials are monitoring the situation on an hourly basis. Reiterating that there is no harm in consuming boiled eggs and cooked chicken, Atchannaidu assured people that they can eat them without fear. He urged restraint against unnecessary rumour-mongering about the disease on social media and mainstream media.

Criminal with ₹10,000 bounty arrested at India-Nepal border

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A criminal with a bounty of ₹10,000 was arrested from the India-Nepal border, who was absconding after out of jail on parole on Wednesday, police said. The accused was identified as Surender alias Choti, a resident of the village Bans Aliyar district Gurugram. According to the police, on September 9, a complaint was received at Police Station Sector-7 IMT Manesar, Gurugram from District Jail Gurugram that an inmate Surender, who was serving a life sentence on murder charges District Jail Gurugram was sent on parole for four weeks on 14.08.2024 and was asked to surrender in District Jail Gurugram on 12.09.2024. The prisoner did not surrender in the jail even after the expiry of parole. On this complaint, a case was registered under the Haryana Good Conduct Prisoners (Temporary Release) Act at Police Station Sector-7 IMT Manesar, Gurugram. During swift action, the police team led by Sub-Inspector Lalit, Incharge Crime Branch Manesar, Gurugram, nabbed the absconding accused from the India-Nepal border on Wednesday. According to the jail records, about 80 charges were registered against the criminal under burglary, attempt to murder, murder and the criminal and he was sentenced to life imprisonment for killing his wife. "The accused was residing in Nepal to avoid police action. Further action is being taken by the police team as per the rules in the matter. The case is under investigation," Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of the district police said. Apart from this, the Gurugram police have also arrested 6 people from different locations here in the city for possession of illegal liquor.

Will not allow fudging voters list: TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress continued to attack the BJP Government for manipulating elections and warned of adequate counter measures against all efforts to tamper with electoral rolls ahead of next year's Bengal Assembly elections. Questioning the "doubtful appearance or disappearance of names" in and from the electoral rolls in Delhi Assembly seat "which might have been a cause for Aam Aadmi Party's defeat" TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Thursday said that in "Bengal all such moves would be thwarted." "More than 4 Lakh doubtful new names were added in the electoral rolls in the eight months - from June to



Photo: File photo

January - before the Delhi Assembly elections which is unprecedented...four Lakh votes made the difference," Banerjee said. Adding how "in New Delhi seat alone 20,000 names disappeared whereas in some other place 30,000 suspicious names appeared ... this trend has no satisfactory answer and arouses suspicion ... this

election process was not genuine ... and the failure of AAP is that they could not handle it ... but in Bengal such things will not allowed to take place." In Kolkata senior TMC leader and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sobhandeb Chatterjee warned the BJP against trying to make a mess of the electoral rolls.

"They have used this formula in a number of States ... now they are trying to do it in Bengal by allowing online registration of names in the voters' list but we will not allow these names to be finalized until there is a physical verification with relevant credentials ... we are taking this up with utmost priority," Chatterjee said. Earlier Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee too had slammed the BJP for winning elections by fudging electoral rolls. "How will you explain the ghost voters that swell the voters' lists causing you to win elections ... from where 40 Lakh voters came in Maharashtra," Banerjee on Wednesday said alleging that the BJP has been "taking the help of the Election Commission."

Alleging that the voters' lists were manipulated in Haryana and Maharashtra Banerjee said that the Election Commission was made to look the other way. "And if anyone will protest you will send ED and CBI to frighten them ... and here I have reports that the voters' lists are being fudged thousands of names are being added from Bihar we have alerted our people and the administration ... we will thwart all your attempts and once again you will be defeated here," Banerjee said. The TMC leadership's strong comments not with standing the Opposition came out with a sharp reply saying "fear is gradually settling in their hearts ... the Chief Minister and other TMC leaders are afraid of losing elections in 2026."

Accused arrested for ₹20,000 reward in ₹2 Crore ganja seizure case

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

An accused was arrested from Mathura for allegedly carrying a reward of ₹20,000 in connection with a drug peddling case, police said. The police on August 8, had recovered with more than a tonne of ganja valued at about ₹2 Crore from the suspect hideout from a locked house in Gurugram's Pataudi area. The alleged drug was being transported from Odisha, police said on Thursday. The arrested accused was identified as Deshraj, a resident of Kuni Daulatabad village here in Gurugram. During police interrogation, it was found that the recovered ganja was brought by the accused in a truck from Orissa and was hidden in his closed house. "The estimated cost of the ganja was found to be ₹2 Crore. The ganja was sold in small packets to the customers. Gurugram Police had dealt a tough blow to the smugglers of ganja by seizing such a huge consignment of illegal ganja. Before this drug could be supplied to various places, Gurugram Police had taken major action against the smugglers and recovered

the illegal contraband," Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of the Gurugram police said. The accused has been produced in the court for further interrogation and was taken on 8 days police remand. During the remand period police will ascertain the whereabouts of other members of the accused. Whatever facts emerge in the proceedings being conducted by the police team," the spokesperson said. The investigation team earlier had said that, the crime branch DLF Phase-IV had received secret inputs from their reliable sources that a huge quantity of Ganja was stocked in the Pataudi area. Based on the information a team from the crime branch reached the disclosed spot but found that the house was locked. Meanwhile, the police team somehow manage to trace the owner of the house who gave us in writing to open his house. Police then in the presence of duty magistrate and village head (Sarpanch) opened the house and recovered the huge quantity of illegal contraband. The illegal contraband was stuffed in at least 21 plastic bags.

Arunachal's Tawang district faces power, communication disruptions amidst heavy snowfall

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ ITANAGAR

Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh has been experiencing heavy snowfall since Tuesday evening, throwing life out of gear in the border district. The entire district has been covered under a thick blanket of snow, district officials said. While snowfall is not

uncommon in the region, the prolonged and heavy nature of this spell has led to disruptions in essential services, including electricity, water supply, and communication. Uprooted trees and the accumulation of thick snow on power and communication lines have caused service disruptions in some areas. Although most shops

remained open, footfall is low as residents step out only to purchase daily necessities. Attendance in educational institutions has significantly reduced, as vehicles are not plying. Various departments, including power, public health engineering, Border Roads Organisation, PWD, and rural works department are working

tirelessly to restore and maintain essential services, officials added. Police and army personnel are actively assisting stranded tourists and commuters at Sela and Jaswant Garh areas. According to the latest weather forecasts, snowfall is likely persist for the next few days. "If the situation continues, further disruptions to

normal life may occur. However, as of now, no reports of significant damage or accidents due to snowfall have been received," the officials informed. The district administration has advised citizens of the border district to take necessary precautions, avoid unnecessary travel, and stay updated with official advisories.

MANIPUR UNDER PRESIDENT RULE

From page 1

It further said: "Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by article 356 of the Constitution, and of all other powers enabling me in that behalf, I hereby proclaim that I - assume to myself as President of India all functions of the government of the state of Manipur and all powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor of the that state". The notification said powers of the legislature of the state shall be exercisable by or under the authority of Parliament. It also said any reference in the Constitution to the governor shall, in relation to Manipur be construed as a reference to the President. The decision to impose the President's rule by the BJP-led Centre came as the party failed to have a consensus chief ministerial candidate despite having several rounds of discussions between party's northeast in-charge Sambit Patra and party legislators. Patra had met Bhalla a few times before Thursday's decision by the central government that comes at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in the US. The governor has already declared the seventh session of the 12th Manipur Legislative

Assembly, which was set to commence on February 10, as null and void. Singh's resignation came amidst dwindling support among BJP MLAs, many of whom have met party leaders in Delhi to convey their unhappiness with his continuation and had expressed the hope that his stepping down will help boost the central government's efforts to broker peace between the two main ethnic communities in the state. Meanwhile, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) said President's rule will give a ray of hope to the Kuki-Zo community. "The Kuki-Zo do not trust Meiteis anymore, so a new Meitei chief minister is still far from comforting. President's Rule will give a ray of hope to the Kuki-Zo, and we believe that it will be one step closer to our political solution," ITLF leader Ginza Vualzong said. The last session of the Assembly in the north eastern State concluded on August 12, 2024. Singh's tenure as chief minister was marked by a number of controversies, primarily centered on his handling of ethnic violence, allegations of instigating conflict, and questions regarding his governance. Singh, who started as a

footballer and then became a journalist before entering politics, served as the chief minister for two terms - 2017 and 2022. He represents the Heingang Assembly constituency in Imphal East district. In 2022, he managed to win the approval of his party to get a second term as chief minister. The journey since then has been not without hiccups. One of the most significant controversies of Singh's tenure was the ethnic violence that erupted in May 2023, that finally cost him the key post. The ethnic strife, which saw brutal clashes between the majority Meitei community in the Imphal Valley and the Kuki-Zo tribal groups in the surrounding hills, resulted in over 250 deaths and displaced thousands of people. The state's inability to contain it raised serious concerns about Singh's leadership. Singh's response to the violence, however, included a public apology in December 2023, where he expressed regret for the deaths and displacement caused by the unrest. He called for reconciliation, urging the various communities to forgive past mistakes and work toward rebuilding a peaceful Manipur. In February, a new controversy erupted

New I-Tax bill to be simpler

From page 1

The chapter for not-for-profit organisations has been made comprehensive with use of plain language. As a result of this, the word count has come down by 34,547. "While undertaking simplification exercise, a conscious attempt has been made to minimise the scope of litigation and fresh interpretations," it said to a query on whether principles of Tax Certainty were followed in drafting of the new bill. Key words/phrases, especially where courts have given rulings, have been retained with minimal modifications. Provisions have been made clear to minimise scope of multiple interpretations and tax certainty has been ensured with regard to various sections of international taxation. The FAQ further said that while "no major policy-related changes" or tax rates changes have been made in the I-T bill, "material" changes are being proposed in the existing law. The bill consolidated provisions pertaining to salary at one place for ease of understanding so that the

taxpayer does not have to refer to separate chapters for filing return of income. Deductions, like gratuity, leave encashment, commutation of pension, compensation on VRS and retirement compensation, are now part of the salary chapter itself. "The drafting style of the new bill is straightforward and clear, making the provisions easier to understand... This (Tables) minimises cross-references and conflict by aggregating all applicable provisions related to a single scenario in one place," the FAQ said. A significant aspect of the bill is the elimination of the concepts of "previous year" and "assessment year". As a taxpayer had to track two different periods, it presented difficulties in complying with the provisions of the Act, especially for a new taxpayer who had to keep track of "previous year", "assessment year" as well as the "financial year", the FAQ said. It said provisions involving the same issues, which were present in different chapters in the current Act, have now been consolidated. In case of provisions

relating to non-profit organisations (NPOs), it has been consolidated and structured into seven sub-parts. The FAQ further said the current Income Tax Act was enacted in 1961 and came into existence with effect from April 1, 1962. It has been amended nearly 65 times with more than 4,000 amendments. Concerns were expressed over the accumulation of amendments, intricate language, detailed provisions, redundancies and the heavy structure of the I-T Act and hence the government decided to come out with a new law. Consultations were held with various stakeholders, including Australia and the UK where tax laws were rewritten in the past. A total of 20,976 online suggestions were received. Also, references were drawn from the 2009 Direct Taxes Code as also the 2019 report of the government constituted six-member committee to redraft the I-T law. The FAQ said 150 officials of the I-T department were involved in drafting of the Income Tax Bill, 2025, and more than 60,000 man hours were dedicated in its drafting.

Captain Bakshi cremated with full honours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HAZARIBAG/JHARKHAND

The mortal remains of Captain Karamjit Singh Bakshi, an army man who was killed in Jammu and Kashmir, were consigned to flames in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh on Thursday. The 27-year-old army man who belonged to Punjab Regimental Centre was among two defence personnel killed after suspected terrorists set off an improvised explosive device (IED) near the Line of Control (LoC) in Akhnoor sector on Tuesday. The air was thick with grief as the body of the man was cremated at the burning ghat in Khirgaon here in the presence of his teary-eyed parents and other people. Bakshi's fiancée, an Army doctor stationed in Jammu, whom he was supposed to marry in April, also stood silently among the crowd. Earlier, Captain Bakshi's body was received by his family. His parents, Sardar Ajinder Singh Bakshi and Neelu Bakshi stood still as they watched their only son embark on his final journey

wrapped in a tricolour. The streets were lined with mourners, many of whom knew Captain Bakshi since his childhood. The town that had celebrated Karamjit's engagement a few days ago. His uncle Sardar Amarjit Singh Bakshi told PTT, "Karamjit was like Kohinoor for family and friends. A very charming youth who was always there for people. He had come to Hazaribag for a week and left on January 24 for Akhnoor where he was posted." The uncle said the deceased was due to be married in Jammu on April 5. "When we were expecting a celebration, we received such a setback," his other uncle Sardar Devinder Singh said. The Army Captain is survived by his mother, father and sister. Jharkhand Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Finance Minister Radha Krishna Kishore and a large number of Army and Civil officials paid tributes to the fallen soldier at the Birsu Munda Airport on Wednesday. Chief Minister Hemant Soren condole the death of Bakshi and an army jawan in the IED blast.

Over 28 hurt as driver rams into demonstration in Germany

AP ■ BERLIN

A driver drove a car into a union demonstration in central Munich on Thursday, injuring at least 28 people including children, authorities said. Authorities said it was believed to be an attack. The suspect, an Afghan asylum-seeker, was arrested. The incident follows a series of attacks involving immigrants in recent months that have pushed migration to the forefront of the campaign for Germany's February 23 election. Participants in a demonstration by the service workers' union ver.di were walking along a street at about 10.30 am when the car overtook a police vehicle following the gathering, accelerated and plowed into the back of the group, police said. Officers arrested the suspect after firing a shot at the car, deputy police chief Christian Huber said. He added that at least 28 people were believed to be injured, some of them seri-

ously. A damaged Mini could be seen at the scene, along with debris including shoes. The suspect was a 24-year-old Afghan asylum-seeker, Huber said. Bavaria's state interior minister, Joachim Herrmann, said he was known to authorities in connection with theft and drug offenses, but didn't give further details. "It is simply terrible," Bavarian governor Markus Soder told reporters at the scene. "We feel with the victims, we are praying for the victims — we hope very much that they all make it." "It is suspected to be an attack — a lot points to that," Soder added. Mayor Dieter Reiter said he was "deeply shocked" by the incident. He said that children were among those injured. The Munich incident comes three weeks after a two-year-old boy and a man were killed in a knife attack in Aschaffenburg, also in Bavaria. An Afghan whose asylum application was rejected was the suspect in that attack,

which propelled migration to the centre of the German election campaign. The Aschaffenburg attack followed knife attacks in Mannheim and in Solingen last year in which the suspects were immigrants from Afghanistan and Syria, respectively — in the latter case, also a rejected asylum-seeker who was supposed to have left the country. In the December Christmas market car ramming in Magdeburg, the suspect was a Saudi doctor who previously had come to various regional authorities' attention. Germany's main opposition conservative bloc, in which Soder is a prominent figure, has demanded a tougher approach to irregular migration, calling for many more people to be turned back at the country's borders and for an increase in deportations. Curbing migration is also a core issue for the far-right Alternative for Germany, which polls put in second place

behind the conservatives. "This is more evidence that we can't go from attack to attack and show dismay, thank police for their deployment," Soder said. "We actually have to change something. This is not the first such act; so, we feel with the people today, but at the same time we are determined that something much change in Germany, and quickly." Centre-left Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government said it already has done a lot to reduce irregular migration, and that the opposition's plans are incompatible with German and European Union law. The Bavarian capital will see heavy security in the coming days because the three-day Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of international foreign and security policy officials, opens on Friday. Herrmann said authorities do not believe the car ramming was connected to the conference, but they still need to determine the motive.

Musk calls for US to 'delete entire agencies' from federal govt

AP ■ DUBAI

Elon Musk called on Thursday for the United States to "delete entire agencies" from the federal government as part of his push under President Donald Trump to radically cut spending and restructure its priorities. Musk offered a wide-ranging survey via a video call to the World Government Summit in Dubai, of what he described as the priorities of the Trump administration interspersed with multiple references to "thermonuclear warfare" and the possible dangers of artificial intelligence. "We really have here rule of the bureaucracy as opposed to rule of the people — democracy," Musk said, wearing a black T-shirt that read: "Tech Support." He also joked that he was the "White House's tech support," borrowing from his profile on the social platform X, which he owns. "I think we do need to delete entire agencies as opposed to leave a lot of them behind," Musk said. "If we

don't remove the roots of the weed, then it's easy for the weed to grow back." While Musk has spoken to the summit in the past, his appearance on Thursday comes as he has consolidated control over large swaths of the government with Trump's blessing since assuming leadership of the Department of Government Efficiency. That's included sidelining career officials, gaining access to sensitive databases and inviting a constitutional clash over the limits of presidential authority. Musk's new role imbued his comments with more weight beyond being the world's wealthiest person through his investments in SpaceX and electric carmaker Tesla. His remarks also offered a more-isolationist view of American power in the Middle East, where the US has fought wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq since the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. "A lot of attention has been on USAID for example," Musk said, referring to Trump's dismantling of the US Agency for

International Development. "There's like the National Endowment for Democracy. But I'm like, Okay, well, how much democracy have they achieved lately?" He added that the US under Trump is "less interested in interfering with the affairs of other countries." There are "times the United States has been kind of pushy in international affairs, which may resonate with some members of the audience," Musk said, speaking to the crowd in the UAE, an autocratically ruled nation of seven sheikhdoms. "Basically, America should mind its own business, rather than push for regime change all over the place," he said. He also noted the Trump administration's focus on eliminating diversity, equity and inclusion work, at one point linking it to AI. "If hypothetically, AI is designed for DEI, you know, diversity at all costs, it could decide that there's too many men in power and execute them," Musk said.

Musk may withdraw \$97.4 bn bid for OpenAI

Washington (AP): Elon Musk says he will abandon his USD 97.4 billion offer to buy the nonprofit behind OpenAI if the ChatGPT maker drops its plan to convert into a for-profit company. "If OpenAI, Inc.'s Board is prepared to preserve the charity's mission and stipulate to take the for sale sign off its assets by halting its conversion, Musk will withdraw the bid," lawyers for the billionaire said in a filing to a California court on Wednesday. "Otherwise, the charity must be compensated by what an arms-length buyer will pay for its assets." Musk and a group of investors made their offer earlier this week, in the latest twist to a dispute with the artificial intelligence company that he helped found a decade ago. OpenAI is controlled by a nonprofit board bound to its original mission of safely building better-than-human AI for public benefit. Now a fast-growing business, it unveiled plans last year to formally change its corporate structure. Musk and his own AI start-up, xAI, and a consortium of investment firms want to acquire OpenAI so they can revert it back to its original charitable mission as a nonprofit research lab. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman quickly rejected the unsolicited bid in a post on social media and told questioners at a Paris summit on AI that the company is not for sale. Musk and Altman helped start OpenAI in 2015 and later competed over who should lead it. They've been in a long-running feud over the startup's direction since Musk resigned from its board in 2018.

Hamas to release more hostages as planned

AP ■ CAIRO

Hamas said Thursday it would release the next group of Israeli hostages as planned, paving the way toward resolving a major dispute that threatened the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. The militant group said Egyptian and Qatari mediators have affirmed that they will work to "remove all hurdles," and that it would implement the truce deal. The statement indicated three more Israeli hostages would be freed Saturday. There was no immediate comment from Israel on Hamas' announcement. Hamas' move should allow the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip to continue for now, but its future remains in doubt. Hamas had threatened to delay the next release of Israeli hostages, accusing Israel of failing to meet its obligations to allow in tents and shelters, among other alleged violations of the truce. Israel, with the support of U.S. President Donald Trump, had threatened to renew its offensive if hostages were not freed. Hamas said its delegation held talks in Cairo with Egyptian officials and was in contact with Qatar's prime minister about increasing the entry of shelters, medical supplies, fuel and heavy equipment for clearing rubble into Gaza. Egypt's state-run Qahera TV, which is close to the country's security services, reported that Egypt and Qatar had succeeded in resolving the dispute. The two Arab countries have served as key mediators with Hamas and helped broker the ceasefire, which took effect in January, 15 months into the war. Egyptian media also aired footage showing trucks carrying temporary housing and bulldozers on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing with Gaza. They reported that the trucks were heading to an Israeli inspection area before crossing into Gaza. The truce faces a much bigger challenge in the coming weeks. The first phase is set to conclude at the beginning of March, and there have not yet been substantive negotiations over the second phase, in which Hamas would release dozens of remaining

hostages in return for an end to the war. A Trump proposal to remove some 2 million Palestinians from Gaza and settle them in other countries has thrown the truce's future into further doubt. The plan has been welcomed by Israel but vehemently rejected by Palestinians and Arab countries, which have refused to accept an influx of refugees. Human rights groups say it could amount to a war crime under international law. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right allies are already calling for a resumption of the war after the first phase with the goal of implementing Trump's plan and annihilating Hamas, which remains in control of the territory after surviving one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history. The war began on Oct 7, 2023, when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and abducting around 250 people. More than half have been released in deals with Hamas or other agreements, eight have been rescued and dozens of bodies have been recovered. The captives are among the only bargaining chips Hamas has left, and it may be difficult to get the group to commit to further releases if it believes the war will resume. Trump has given mixed signals about what he wants to see in Gaza. He took credit for brokering the ceasefire, which was reached days before he took office after more than a year of negotiations mediated by the Biden administration. But he has also expressed misgivings about how the agreement is unfolding and says it's up to Israel whether to resume the war or not, while pledging continued U.S. military support. Seventy-three hostages have not yet been released, around half of whom are believed to be dead. Nearly all the remaining hostages are men, including Israeli soldiers. The war has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to

Gaza's health Ministry, which does not say how many were fighters. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. Israel's offensive has obliterated large parts of Gaza. At its height, the fighting had displaced 90% of the territory's population of 2.3 million. Hundreds of thousands have returned to their homes since the ceasefire took hold, though many have found only mounds of rubble and buried human remains and unexploded ordnance. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz, echoing Trump, said Wednesday that "all hell will break loose" if Hamas stops releasing hostages. He said a "new Gaza war" wouldn't end until Hamas was defeated, which would allow for Trump's vision of mass displacement to be carried out. With far fewer hostages remaining in Gaza, Israel would have more freedom of action militarily. It would also face far fewer constraints from the United States, its main military patron. The Biden administration, while providing crucial military and diplomatic support, had occasionally pressed Israel to allow in more aid and at one point suspended some weapons shipments. It had also said there should be no permanent displacement of its Palestinian population. Trump has lifted restrictions on arms transfers, and his administration is pressing ahead with the sale of \$7 billion worth of weapons approved under President Joe Biden. Trump has said Gaza's population should be resettled elsewhere in the region, with wealthy Arab countries paying for it. He has suggested that once the fighting ends, Israel would transfer control of Gaza to the United States, which would then redevelop it as the "Riviera of the Middle East." Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a key partner in Netanyahu's fragile governing coalition, has called for a resumption of the war, the "voluntary migration" of large numbers of Palestinians from Gaza and the reestablishment of Jewish settlements there.

Italy denies spying on journalists, with spyware

Rome (AP): The Italian government denied Wednesday that it had spied on journalists and migrant activists using spyware but said it would cooperate with an investigation into "vulnerabilities" after at least seven Italian cellphones were apparently hacked with military-grade surveillance technology. Meta's WhatsApp messaging service informed dozens of people across the European Union on January 31 that they had been targeted in a spyware attack using technology from Israeli cyber firm Paragon Solutions. In a statement provided by Meta's Italy press office, WhatsApp said it had disrupted what it called "a spyware campaign by Paragon that targeted several users, including journalists and members of civil society."

After The Guardian newspaper reported the story, the Italian government confirmed on February 5 that at least seven Italian cellphones were involved and that it had activated the National Cybersecurity Agency, which reports to the premier's office, to investigate. It said other targeted phones had numbers from Belgium, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Speaking to parliament's lower chamber Wednesday, Cabinet Minister Luca Ciriaco confirmed that the Italian government for many years has had a contract with Paragon Solutions to provide intelligence-gathering capabilities to fight terrorism and other threats to national security. But he insisted that the law was "rigorously respected" and denied the government had used the technology to spy on journalists illegally. He threatened legal action against any claims to the contrary. "Regardless, it's up to judicial authorities to ascertain the source of the vulnerabilities that have been claimed," he said, adding that Italian intelligence services "are ready to provide full support."



U.S. Vice President JD Vance, second lady Usha Vance, and their children Ewan, Vivek, and Mirabel, arrive at the Munich airport, in Munich, Germany, Thursday. AP/PTI

Western allies, Arab countries gather in Paris to discuss Syria's future amid US aid freeze

AP ■ PARIS

Western allies and Arab countries are gathering in Paris on Thursday for an international conference on Syria to discuss the country's future after the fall of former Syrian president Bashar Assad and amid uncertainty over the United States' commitment to the region. It's the third conference on Syria since Assad was ousted in December, and the first since President Donald Trump's administration took over in the US. Trump's controversial decision to freeze foreign assistance has raised concerns in Syria, a country that had depended on hundreds of millions of dollars in aid from the US and now left in ruins by a civil war. The Trump administration is pulling almost all USAID workers out of the field worldwide, all but ending a six-decade mission meant to shore up American security by fighting starvation,

funding education and working to end epidemics. While many Syrians were happy to see the rule of Assad come to an abrupt end in December, analysts have warned that the honeymoon period for the country's new rulers may be short-lived if they are not able to jumpstart the country's battered economy. An end to the sanctions imposed during Assad's time will be key to that, but sanctions are not the only issue. More aid is crucial to achieve a peaceful reconstruction during the post-Assad transition. The country needs massive investment to rebuild housing, electricity, water and transportation infrastructure after nearly 14 years of war. The United Nations in 2017 estimated that it would cost at least \$250 billion, while some experts now say the number could reach at least \$400 billion. With few productive sectors and government employees making

wages equivalent to about \$20 per month, Syria has grown increasingly dependent on remittances and humanitarian aid. But the flow of aid was throttled after the Trump administration halted US foreign assistance last month. The effects were particularly dire in the country's northwest, a formerly rebel-held enclave that hosts millions of people displaced from other areas by the country's civil war. Many of them live in sprawling tent camps. The freeze on USAID funding forced clinics serving many of those camps to shut down, and nonprofits laid off local staff. In northeastern Syria, a camp housing thousands of family members of Islamic State fighters was thrown into chaos when the group providing services there was forced to briefly stop work. A workshop bringing together key donors from the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations, the United Nations and key agencies from Arab countries will be held alongside

the conference to coordinate international aid to Syria. Uncertainty also surrounds the future of U.S. military support in the region. In 2019 during his first term, Trump decided on a partial withdrawal of US troops from the northeast of Syria before he halted the plans. And in December last year, when rebels were on their way to topple Assad, Trump said the United States should not "dive into the middle of a Syrian civil war." Now that Syria's new leader Ahmad al-Sharaa is trying to consolidate his power, the US intentions in the region remain unclear. A French diplomatic official confirmed the presence of a US representative at the conference, but said "our understanding is that the new US administration is still in the review process regarding Syria, it does not seem (the US position) will be clarified at that conference." The official spoke anonymously in line with the French presidency's customary practices.

Google hub in Poland to develop AI use in energy, cybersecurity sectors

AP ■ WARSAW

Google and Poland on Thursday signed a memorandum for developing the use of artificial intelligence in the country's energy, cybersecurity and other sectors. Poland has largely cut its previous dependence on Russian fuels, and is being targeted by various forms of cyberattacks and sabotage actions believed to be sponsored by Russia. Google and Alphabet Chief Executive Officer Sundar Pichai and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk met to discuss expanding Google operations in Poland that were launched in 2014. Pichai said that Poland is Google's biggest engineering hub with more than 2,000 employ-



Google and Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai, left, and Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk, right, meet for talks about involving artificial intelligence into the energy and cybersecurity sectors in Poland, at the Google Startup Campus in Warsaw, Poland, on Thursday. AP/PTI

ees. Apart from getting AI involved in the strategic sectors in Poland, Google is also dedicating USD 5 million over the next five years to expand training programmes and increase digital skills among young Poles. It is to reach about 1 million young Poles, Pichai said. Tusk said the plans will increase Poland's security and will contribute to the country's economic development. Earlier this week he said that Google and Microsoft will be among international businesses that will invest some 650 billion zlotys (USD 160 billion) in Poland in 2025. Tusk also invited Google to contribute to the deregulating efforts in Poland that aim to cut on red tape and regulations and give businesses more space for development.

Gas explosion in Taiwan kills 4, injures 26

Taipei (AP): A gas explosion at a department store in Taiwan on Thursday killed four people and injured 26, fire authorities said. The blast occurred at the food court on the 12th floor of the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi department store in Taichung city, the Taichung Fire Bureau said. Among the dead were two people visiting from Macau, Macao's Tourism Office confirmed Thursday. Local media reported that they were part of a family of seven who were there for tourism. The other five were also injured are now being treated at local hospitals in Taichung. Dozens of firefighters were deployed to the scene at about 11:30 a.m. Parts of the building's exterior were damaged and scattered fragments were strewn on the streets.



First responders survey the damage in the aftermath of an explosion at the Shin Kong Mitsukoshi department store in Taichung city in Taiwan on Thursday.

Taichung Mayor Lu Shiow-yeen told reporters at the scene that she felt the shock at her office nearby. She said the fire bureau would focus

on a rescue operation first, but an investigation was also underway and officers were checking whether there were other sources of

danger. Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te said he had asked all relevant government agencies to investigate the cause of the accident.

Income Tax Bill aims to achieve tax certainty: IT dept

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The simplified Income Tax Bill, which is half the size of the 1961 Income Tax Act, seeks to achieve tax certainty by minimising the scope of litigation and fresh interpretation, the Income Tax department said on Thursday. The new bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha, has a word count of 2.6 Lakh, lower than 5.12 Lakh in the IT Act. The number of sections is 536, as against 819 effective sections in the existing law.

The number of chapters has also been halved to 23 from 47, according to the FAQ issued by the I-T department.

The Income Tax Bill 2025, has 57 tables, compared to 18 in the existing Act and removed 1,200 provisions and 900 explanations.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while introducing the Bill in the Lok Sabha, had said that "substantial changes" have been made in the Bill. The number of words have been halved from 5.12 Lakh, and sections reduced from 819 to 536. Following introduction, the Bill was referred to the select committee of the Lok Sabha and mandated to submit its report by March 10.

Provisions relating to exemptions, and TDS, TCS have been made crisper in the Bill by putting them in a tabular format, while the



chapter for not-for-profit organisations has been made comprehensive with use of plain language. As a result of this, the word count has come down by 34,547.

"While undertaking simplification exercise, a conscious attempt has been made to minimise the scope of litigation and fresh interpretations," it said to a query on whether principles of Tax Certainty were followed in drafting of the new bill. Key words, phrases, especially where courts have given rulings, have been retained with minimal modifications. Provisions have been made clear to minimise scope of multiple interpretations and

tax certainty has been ensured with regard to various sections of international taxation.

The FAQ further said that while "no major policy-related changes" or tax rates changes have been made in the IT Bill, "material" changes are being proposed in the existing law. The bill consolidated provisions pertaining to salary at one place for ease of understanding so that the taxpayer does not have to refer to separate chapters for filing return of income.

Deductions, like gratuity, leave encashment, commutation of pension, compensation on VRS and retrenchment compensation, are now part of the salary chapter itself.

"The drafting style of the new bill is straightforward and clear, making the provisions easier to understand... This (Tables) minimises cross-references and conflict by aggregating all applicable provisions related to a single scenario in one place," the FAQ said.

A significant aspect of the bill is the elimination of the concepts of "previous year" and "assessment year". As a taxpayer had to track two different periods, it presented difficulties in complying with the provisions of the Act, especially for a new taxpayer who had to keep track of "previous year", "assessment year" as well as the "financial

year", the FAQ said. It said provisions involving the same issues, which were present in different chapters in the current Act, have now been consolidated.

In case of provisions relating to non-profit organisations (NPOs), it has been consolidated and structured into seven sub-parts.

The FAQ further said the current Income Tax Act was enacted in 1961 and came into existence with effect from April 1, 1962. It has been amended nearly 65 times with more than 4,000 amendments. Concerns were expressed over the accumulation of amendments, intricate language, detailed provisions, redundancies and the heavy structure of the IT Act and hence the government decided to come out with a new law.

Consultations were held with various stakeholders, including Australia and the UK where tax laws were rewritten in the past. A total of 20,976 online suggestions were received.

Also, references were drawn from the 2009 Direct Taxes Code as also the 2019 report of the government constituted six-member committee to redraft the IT law. The FAQ said 150 officials of the IT department were involved in drafting of the Income Tax Bill, 2025, and more than 60,000 man hours were dedicated in its drafting.

India's white-collar hiring grows by 32 per cent: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Hiring for white-collar jobs witnessed a 32 per cent year-on-year surge in January, driven by industries such as semiconductors, energy, waste management and manufacturing in India, a report said on Thursday.

The growth in hiring is attributed to surging consumer demand, strategic incentives outlined in the Union Budget 2025-26 and an increased focus on sustainability initiatives, according to foundit Insights Tracker. There was a 32 per cent year-on-year jump in hiring for January 2025, signalling renewed confidence in the market, it said.

The report revealed that green jobs stood out in January, witnessing a 41 per cent increase over the last two years led by expanding clean energy initiatives.

Sectors like semiconductors, energy, and waste management are leading this growth, fuelled by global net-zero emission targets, the report said. Bengaluru, Delhi and Pune are emerging as key hubs for these roles, which demand specialised skills in areas like energy auditing and sustainability strategy, it added. Demand for green jobs is



projected to rise another 11 per cent in 2025, driven by renewable energy, EVs, and green hydrogen initiatives.

"India's job market continues to grow at a strong pace, with hiring surging across key industries. Sectors like travel, retail, and green jobs are seeing sustained momentum, reflecting business confidence and evolving industry priorities," foundit Chief Revenue and Growth Officer Pranay Kale said. Government policies, including key budget provisions, are accelerating this shift - especially in renewable energy, EVs, and sustainability-focused industries.

"As hiring expands beyond metro cities, Tier II hubs are also emerging as key employment centres, reinforcing India's transition to a future-ready, greener

economy," Kale said. Further, the report added that the travel and tourism sector recorded a 17 per cent increase in hiring growth in January 2025, driven by strong consumer demand and favourable government initiatives.

This trend is evident across aviation, luxury, and e-commerce segments, and new roles emerging in travel technology that leverage AI and data analytics, the report said.

Similarly, the retail sector saw a 24 per cent year-on-year surge, driven by rising consumer spending and digital transformation, it added. Consequently, demand for skilled professionals in supply chain management, customer experience, and AI-driven retail analytics is rising, according to the report.

Rupee settles three paise higher at 86.92 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee settled almost flat with a gain of just 3 paise at 86.92 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday as the support from soft American currency and easing crude oil prices overseas was negated by a lacklustre trend in domestic equities.

According to forex traders, the unabated outflow of foreign funds weighed on the Indian currency and capped its recovery even though the greenback weakened after the US data showed higher-than-expected inflation, trimming hopes of a rate cut by the Federal Reserve.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened stronger at 86.82, touched a high of 86.77 during intraday trade. However, the unit pared its most gains and touched the day's low of 86.94 before ending the session at 86.92 (provisional) against the American currency, higher by just three paise from its previous close.

On Wednesday, the domestic unit closed 16 paise lower at 86.95 against the dollar. In the preceding session on Tuesday, the rupee had



appreciated 66 paise, logging the maximum single-day gain since March 3, 2023, to close at 86.79 against the greenback.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee traded flat to positive on Thursday amid weak US dollar index and selling pressure from FIIs.

He said the rupee is expected to trade with negative bias amid overall weakness in the domestic equities and underlying strength in the US dollar. "FII selling may also weigh on the rupee. However, any further intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from PPI data from the US," Choudhary said and

projected the \$-INR spot price in a range of ₹86.60 to ₹87.30. Meanwhile, the US dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.33 per cent lower at 107.47. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dropped 1.17 per cent to \$ 74.30 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 32.11 points, or 0.04 per cent, to settle at 76,138.97, while the Nifty fell 13.85 points, or 0.06 per cent, to 23,031.40 points.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹4,969.30 crore on net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

IOC signs long-term LNG import deal with UAE firm

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC), the nation's largest oil firm, has signed a \$7.9 Billion deal to import LNG from UAE on a long-term 14-year contract.

IOC signed a long-term deal to receive 1.2 Million tonnes per year of LNG from the United Arab Emirates beginning 2026 for 14 years. "ADNOC Gas has signed a 14-year sales and purchase agreement with Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOC) for the export of up to 1.2 Million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to India's largest integrated and diversified energy company which will be supplied from Das Island liquefaction facility," ADNOC Gas said in a statement.

The deal was signed on the sidelines of India Energy Week here. "The agreement, valued in the range of \$7 Billion to \$9 billion over its 14-year term signifies a major step forward in the partnership with IOC and we look forward to supporting India's plans to make gas 15 per cent of its primary energy basket by 2030," it added.

The deal with IOC is the second LNG supply deal that the UAE giant signed with an Indian firm at the IEW. It

signed a deal with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) to supply 2.4 Million tonnes of LNG over a period of 5 years, starting April 2025. The agreement is extendable by another 5 years with mutual consent.

Separately, French energy giant TotalEnergies signed a deal to sell 4,00,000 tonnes a year of LNG to Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation Ltd (GSPC) for 10 years starting 2026.

The LNG, sourced from TotalEnergies' global portfolio and delivered to terminals on India's west coast, will primarily serve GSPC's industrial customers. It will also supply Indian households for domestic use, businesses, and service stations for vehicles running on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), such as auto-rickshaws.

TotalEnergies had in June last year signed a deal to sell 8,00,000 tonnes a year of LNG to state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) for 10 years starting 2026.

While GSPC has an LNG import facility at Mundra in Gujarat, IOC can import the LNG at Dahej in Gujarat or at its Ennore terminal in Tamil Nadu.

ADNOC Gas plc and its subsidiaries signed a 14-year sales and purchase agreement



(SPA) with IOC which converts the last year's Heads of Agreement signed by them. First deliveries will begin in 2026.

Fatema Al Nuaimi, ADNOC Gas CEO, said, "This agreement strengthens our long-standing partnership with IOC and is a testament to the dynamic and robust energy ties between the UAE and India. As a reliable and responsible supplier of lower-carbon gas, ADNOC Gas looks forward to supporting India's plans to make gas 15 per cent of its primary energy basket by 2030."

The agreement builds on ADNOC Gas' strategy to expand its customer base, following a series of LNG agreements signed over the past two years. These deals range from 0.4 Million tonnes

per annum to 1.2 Million tonnes. They are for periods ranging up to 14 years and reinforce its position as a leading supplier of reliable, lower-carbon LNG to key growth markets in Asia, such as India.

The LNG will be supplied from ADNOC Gas' Das Island liquefaction facility, which has a production capacity of up to 6 million tonnes per annum. As the world's third longest-operating LNG plant, Das Island has shipped over 3,500 LNG cargoes worldwide since starting operations.

Other agreements signed at IEW include BPCL inking an optional term contract with Brazil's Petrobras for the import of Brazilian crude grades up to 6 Million barrels. This is another milestone

towards India's energy security and diversification of its sources.

Also, India signed its first LNG export agreement when the IOC signed a sales agreement with Yogya Holdings Nepal for the export of around 1,000 tonnes of LNG to Nepal. It will be the first-ever sale of LNG to Nepal from India by cryogenic trucks through Dhamra Terminal in Odisha. Contract for 5 years with an annual quantity of 240 tonnes per annum.

BPCL has also partnered with Eco Wave Power to develop India's first wave energy pilot project, leveraging the nation's substantial wave energy potential as a sustainable and commercially viable renewable resource.

The proposed system for BPCL will utilise Eco Wave Power's proven wave energy converter technology, demonstrating wave energy in Mumbai through a 100 kW pilot installation.

BPCL also signed a MoU with the National Sugar Institute (NSI), Kanpur, UP. The National Sugar Institute (NSI), Kanpur, renowned for its expertise in sugar and allied industries, has successfully demonstrated the potential of sweet sorghum for bioethanol production at its in-house facility.



Gold rises ₹140 to reclaim ₹88,000 per 10 grams

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose ₹140 to ₹88,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong trends in the international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹87,960 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity went up ₹140 to ₹87,700 per 10 grams from the previous close of ₹87,560 per 10 grams.

"Gold recovered from a recent swing bottom and traded higher on Thursday, as haven demand remains intact in response to multiple disruptive tariff announcements by President Trump that are scheduled to be implemented shortly," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Silver prices also jumped ₹800

to ₹98,000 per kg on Thursday. The white metal had settled at ₹97,200 per kg in the previous trading session.

Investors remain worried that US President's trade tariffs might trigger a global trade war, which continues to act as a tailwind for safe-haven metals like gold, Gandhi said. In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery climbed ₹364 to trade at ₹85,845 per 10 grams. "Gold prices gained once again despite the US CPI (Consumer Price Index) data not rising significantly and the US Federal Reserve indicating no urgency in cutting rates," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. The safe-haven appeal of gold continues to support its strength, keeping the broader bullish sentiment intact, Trivedi added.

NSDC plans to set up 50 new Future Skills Centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) on Thursday announced a significant expansion in its skilling footprint across India with plans to set up 50 new Future Skills Centres and 10 NSDC International Academies to advance skill development and training programs.

Addressing the annual press conference, Ved Mani Tiwari, CEO, NSDC and MD, NSDC International, shared his roadmap to skill and upskill the Indian youth for domestic and global job markets.

"The number of industry-aligned programs will increase beyond 300, covering 12 major emerging technologies. The goal is to train over 2 lakh candidates and establish over 2.70 Lakh square feet of training infrastructure, further strengthening employability and workforce readiness," he said.

The industry aligned programs aim to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills by aligning education with emerging technologies and industry needs. So far, 33 global corporations have partnered, and 21 Future Skills Centres have been established in



Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Over 200 industry-aligned programs have been assessed and certified by corporations, covering 9 major emerging technologies. More than 27,000 candidates have been trained, with over 1.20 lakh square feet of training space developed.

NSDC aims to make quality education accessible to students from tier 2 and 3 colleges by addressing challenges in emerging technologies through collaborations with Institutes of National Importance. So far, 11 premium institutions have partnered to launch 17 micro-credential programs, awarding more than 75,000 credits and training over 5,000 candidates. Looking forward, NSDC plans to collaborate with 15 premium institutions, introduce over 30 micro-credential programs, and

award around 1,80,000 credits, further enhancing access to quality education and skill development. Students will receive specialised training in emerging technologies across key industry verticals such as aerospace, automotive, mining, and infrastructure. The OEMs' tools and curriculum will be integrated into structured guided pathways, supporting different proficiency levels and leading to job opportunities across various domains.

As part of the Job-as-Skills model, Tiwari said, "There are plans to onboard 1 million students, establish MoUs with leading OEMs, bring in training partners, select industry-specific tools, design career progression pathways, implement joint certification with NSDC and OEMs, and introduce new industry verticals in a phased manner."



Ensure fair treatment to customers: RBI Governor to NBFCs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Thursday asked NBFCs to ensure customers are treated fairly and put in place a mechanism for quick redressal of grievances.

The governor met with managing directors and chief executive officers of select non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) across all layers, including government NBFCs, housing finance companies and micro-finance institutions. These NBFCs constitute nearly 50 per cent of the total assets of the NBFC sector. Malhotra, in his opening remarks, underscored the role played by NBFCs in credit intermediation, particularly in making credit available for small businesses

and niche segments, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in a statement.

Highlighting the collaborative efforts required between the Reserve Bank and the NBFCs, the Governor stressed upon balancing growth aspirations with sound practices for ensuring inclusive development, customer protection and financial stability.

"He also underscored the significance of ensuring fair treatment to customers and putting in place a prompt grievance redress mechanism," the RBI said. Urging the NBFCs to further their contribution towards financial inclusion, the Governor requested them to become part of Unified Lending Interface (ULI) being put in place by the Reserve Bank.

Paytm Money settle market norms violation case with Sebi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paytm Money, an arm of fintech firm One97 Communications, on Thursday settled with markets regulator Sebi a case pertaining to alleged violation of norms after paying ₹45.50 Lakh in settlement amount.

The case stemmed from alleged violations of Sebi's technical glitch framework outlined in its circular dated November 25, 2022.

The order came after Paytm Money filed a settlement application in September last year, proposing to settle the instant proceedings initiated against it, without "admitting or denying the findings of facts and conclusions of law".

"The instant adjudication proceedings initiated against the noticee vide SCN dated July 24, 2024, is disposed of in terms of the settlement regulations," SEBI's adjudicating officer Asha Shetty said in the order.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) initiated adjudication proceedings against Paytm Money Ltd for the alleged violation.



Exploring the Magic of Childhood

Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Anup Soni bring Vani Tripathi Tikoo's imagination to life, says TEAM VIVA



At the heart of every child's world lies a boundless imagination, a place where reality and dreams take flight. It's this magic that Vani Tripathi Tikoo's book *Kyon Nahi Ho Sakte Haathi Lal* brings to life.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui, reflecting on his time at NSD with Vani Tripathi Tikoo, shared how their theatre journey shaped their understanding of narrative and imagination. He highlighted the book's core message, adults should embrace a child's creativity and view the world through their eyes, full of possibility.

Anup Soni's captivating reading added to the evening's charm, drawing the audience into the whimsical story.

Kyon Nahi Ho Sakte Haathi Lal captures the playful spirit of childhood, offering a reminder that some of the most meaningful lessons come from the stories we tell our children.

The book is a tribute to the boundless imagination of childhood, celebrating art, creativity and the magic of storytelling. It encourages readers to embrace curiosity, cherish the joy in small moments and never lose sight of the wonder that makes childhood and every new idea, so special.



@patcummins30



Pat Cummins, Beyond the Game

RELEASING TOMORROW



CHAPTERS IN CONVERSATION WITH



(Clockwise) Julia Gillard, Elizabeth Day, John Bertrand, Dennis Lillee, Ronnie Screwvala, Rob Sitch, Richard Scobler and more. All the 11 invited guests or the people in conversation with Pat in the book have a story to tell about the life lived, decisions made be it big or small.

Australian cricket captain steps off the pitch into the world of storytelling with his book *Tested*, writes ABHI SINGHAL

In life, every decision, big or small, plays a role in shaping our journey. It is in the moments of choice that our true character is revealed, and our ability to navigate challenges determines our growth. Australian Test captain Pat Cummins, known for his fearless leadership on the cricket field, now brings this philosophy to the pages of his book, *Tested*. Releasing tomorrow, *Tested* is an analysis into the trials of leadership, resilience, and the defining moments that shape individuals.

Pat Cummins, widely regarded as one of the finest fast bowlers and a leader par excellence, has faced his own share of trials, both on and off the field. From injuries that threatened his career to the immense responsibility of captaining one of the most scrutinised cricket teams in the world, he has learned firsthand the value of resolve. In this book, he turns the spotlight away from himself and onto eleven extraordinary individuals who have inspired him with their ability to rise above adversity.

Through *Tested*, Cummins explores the stories of a diverse set of personalities, ranging from Australia's first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard to a groundbreaking scientist, an indigenous leader to a cricketer legend, and more. These individuals also have one common thread, an unbreakable spirit that allows them to push through moments of doubt, seize opportunities, and create meaningful impact. Their journeys serve as powerful testaments to the idea that resilience is not just about bouncing back but about pushing forward with intent and purpose.

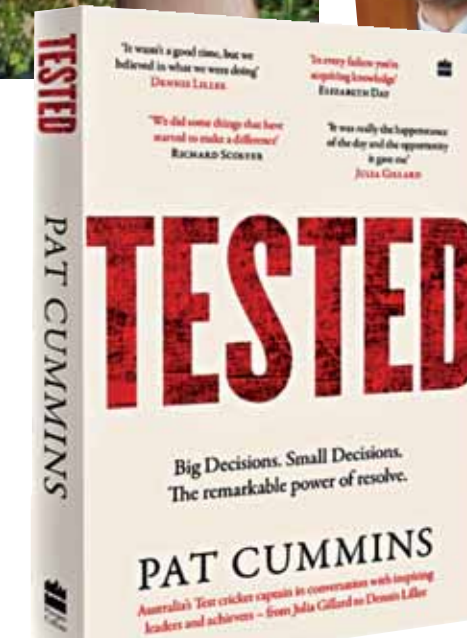
ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: *Tested*
Author: Pat Cummins
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹499/-

Tested has been divided into 11 different conversations as chapters, like Beyond all of the noise and glory of leadership is the work, which can be a harbour when you need on which is a conversation with Julia Gillard, Every inspired person has stood on the shoulders of giants which is a conversation with Richard Scobler and many more.

MOMENT OF CHALLENGES IN PAT'S LIFE

When Pat Cummins unexpectedly became Australia's 47th Test captain at age 28, it was the beginning of a personal leadership journey for him, a unique moment of challenge and pressure that would see him become a seasoned captain and, in his private life, become a father and husband but also lose his mother to cancer.



Cummins himself describes *Tested* as a deeply personal project, shaped by his own experiences of seeking guidance in moments of uncertainty.

Pat Cummins was offered the Australian captaincy shortly after his wife, Becky, gave birth to their first child, during a time when players lived under strict pandemic restrictions, resembling caged circus animals.

To this Pat wrote in the book, "I didn't feel prepared. I'd recently captained New South Wales in a handful of one-day matches, but before that I hadn't captained a side since I was fifteen. I hadn't

even really thought that much about being the captain, even though I'd been a vice-captain for sometime. I was a bowler, after all; there hadn't been a bowler who'd captained the Test team for generations."

Talks like these have made the book interesting wanting to know more about his life both as a cricketer fan and an inspiration.

With a blend of inspiration, insight, and thought-provoking narratives, *Tested* is a master class in overcoming adversity. As it hits bookshelves tomorrow, it promises to be an essential read for anyone and everyone looking to understand the true essence of resilience and leadership.

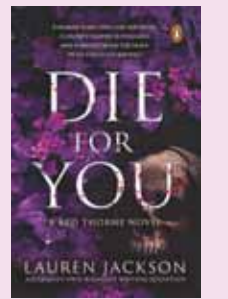
SOULFUL READS



Book: *A Year of Celebration and Spectacle*
Author: Ruskin bond
Publisher: Rupa
Price: ₹295



Book: *Dating Dr. Dil*
Author: Nisha Sharma
Publisher: HarperCollins India
Price: ₹250



Book: *Die For You*
Author: Lauren Jackson
Publisher: India Penguin
Price: ₹499



Book: *Everyone Has A Story*
Author: Savi Sharma
Publisher: HarperCollins India
Price: ₹499



Book: *Izmirli, My Last Love*
Author: Firat Sunel, Feza Howell
Publisher: India Penguin
Price: ₹599

NEW LAUNCH

The Ramayana in Art



BY TEAM VIVA

Ramayana in World Art and Thought – An Anthology of Perspectives, edited by Padmasri Shovana Narayan, features contributions from sixteen respected writers, scholars and thought leaders, including Sharon Lowen, Lady Kishwar Desai, Amb. (Retd.) Sangeeta

Bahadur, Dr. K.K. Mishra, Dr. Abira Bhattacharya, Rear Admiral (Retd.) Dr. S. Kulshreshtha and Rana Safvi. Produced by Shubhi Publication, this coffee table book examines ethics, spirituality and morality within the Ramayana. It offers readers insightful perspectives on the epic's influence on art, culture and history across the world.

A Call to Protect the Earth

Our Potpourri Planet' by Ranjit Lal is both a wake-up call and a guide to understanding the environmental crisis. With a blend of personal anecdotes, facts and sharp observations, Lal highlights urgent solutions ranging from lifestyle changes to policy reforms. The book also confronts our changing world: rising temperatures, melting glaciers, vanishing forests and polluted cities. Blending personal anecdotes with sharp facts, Lal highlights environmental crises and actionable solutions, criticising profit-driven policies. Engaging and hopeful, this book urges societal change, reminding us that while challenges are immense, the power to shape our future remains in our hands.



A Story of Unseen Affection forever

"On the Banks of the Mayyazhi", A moving saga of Mahe's people under French rule, says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Way back in the 1960s, in the neighbourhood of Kanjirakkadu where we have our house, lived a Tamil Nadu-born woman named Pappamma. She was one of the early migrants to Perumbavoor who came there as a sanitary worker. Pappamma, tall and lean with a dark complexion, spoke only Tamil and covered herself in a sari sans blouse/jacket. The sanitary workers from Tamil Nadu, numbering around a dozen, were "herded" into a colony set up by the municipal authorities. They were given small tiled houses to stay in. While mornings were peaceful, the silence gave way to a kind of cacophony in the evenings when the workers returned home fully drunk.

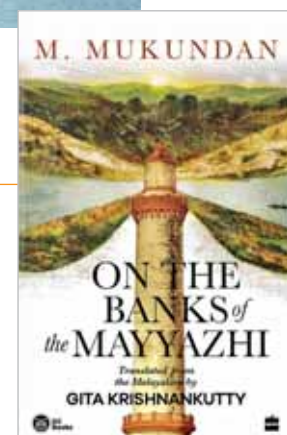
Pappamma was an exception and kept away from the merry-makers. She developed an instant friendship with my mother and was always ready with a helping hand, whether it was drawing water from the well or washing utensils. In return for a couple of dosa and idli, my mother would get all the local news from Pappamma. Her friendship extended to me as well, and I still remember her bringing home coconut burfi from the local bakery. She was an embodiment of love and affection and would always scold my mother whenever she thrashed me for my childhood mischief.

When a person living at the far end of the alley bought an old Ambassador car, we children were thrilled because cars were a rare sight in our area. This was the first four-wheeler to join the neighbourhood and we would gather around it, watching the driver trying to kick-start the engine. One day, Pappamma told me, "Kumar, you should buy a car of your own so that I too can travel in it." I had no reply to her comment, but it was she who instilled in me a craving for an Ambassador car, a wish that remains unfulfilled even today.



Memories of Pappamma always haunt me, as she was like a member of our family, though the residents of the locality treated her and others in the colony as "untouchables." Pappamma passed away long ago, but her descendants continue living in the same colony. Interestingly, many of them now own cars, both used and brand new.

What brought Pappamma to my mind all of a sudden was the novel *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi* by M Mukundan, an avant-garde Malayalam writer. Mukundan was born in Mahe, a former French enclave in Kerala, now administered by the Union Territory of Puducherry. The novel, published in 1974, tells the story of the agitation launched by a section of people in this enclave for freedom from French rule and integration with India. However, there was an older genera-



Book: *On the Banks of the Mayyazhi*
Author: M Mukundan
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹399/-

tion in the French colony for whom Europeans remained the real masters. It was Kurambi Amma, grandmother of Dasan, the protagonist of the story, who reminded me of Pappamma.

Kurambi Amma, a staunch French loyalist, held the Sayivis (Malayalam term for Europeans) in high esteem. Leslie Sayiv, a half-French man, was an icon for Kurambi. Every evening, he would visit her for a pinch of snuff. One evening, Kurambi asked him to buy a car, one similar to that of the local French administrator. The interactions between Kurambi Amma and Leslie Sayiv, though described briefly, reveal much about the people who lived in the French colony in those days.

The story revolves around Kurambi's grandson Dasan and his love interest, Chandrika. Dasan, a revolutionary, was imprisoned by the French government for his Communist ideology. He later escaped to India and returned to Mahe after the French flag was lowered. Though the French authorities offered him the opportunity for higher education and a government job in Paris, Dasan rejected it, as he could not reconcile with the bourgeois system. This forms the core of the novel, but what makes it truly engaging is Mukundan's ability to create relatable characters. The story flows like the Mayyazhi River taking the readers along with it in its journey in search of the Arabian Sea.

On the Banks of the Mayyazhi placed Mukundan in the league of top writers. Gita Krishnankutty's translation of the novel is commendable. The usual hitches and awkwardness that plague translated works are absent, making this book a delight to read.

Shreyas was never supposed to be benched: Gambhir

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India head coach Gautam Gambhir has rubbished speculation that Shreyas Iyer was being side-lined from the ODI set-up despite his brilliant form, saying that the consistent right-hander was always in the "scheme of things" and will be an important player in this month's Champions Trophy (CT). Iyer displayed excellent form during the just-concluded 3-0 ODI series sweep against England, hitting a counter-attacking 36-ball 59 in the opener when India were 19/2 chasing 249 in Nagpur, and scoring 44 and 78 in the next two games. After the opening match, he created quite a stir by stating that he got into the side only after Virat Kohli had to sit out of the game because of a sore knee. This led to speculation that he would be dropped for Kohli in the next two games. "He was not supposed to be benched throughout the series. We wanted to give Yashasvi (Jaiswal) a go in the first game and see what he can bring on the table because he was in (a) really good form in Australia," Gambhir said after the third and final match here on

Wednesday. Iyer was preferred over Jaiswal eventually and Gambhir described him as an "important player" in the side. "I know that you cannot judge someone (Jaiswal) by one innings. But we always knew that Shreyas was going to be an important player for us. Sometimes when you've only got three games, you want to try and rotate your squad as well," the coach reasoned. "(And) when you have got Champions Trophy around the corner, you want to try and maximise these three games and try and give everyone an opportunity. But Shreyas was always in the scheme of things (and it is) good that he played all the three games," Gambhir added. The Champions Trophy gets underway on February 19 with India talking Bangladesh on February 20 in Dubai. **Harshit and Arshdeep will have to step up** Someone's missed opportunity is another person's golden chance, believes Gambhir, who expects the likes of Harshit Rana and Arshdeep Singh to step up and fill the void created by pace tactician Jasprit Bumrah's injury-forced absence from the Champions



Trophy. Bumrah, who played a decisive role in India's T20 World Cup win last year with 15 wickets including a vital spell in the final, has been ruled out of the eight-team event which begins on February 19 owing to a nagging back problem. "Someone missing out opportunity could be a great opportunity for someone else as well, that is how sport goes. Hopefully, these guys (Rana, Arshdeep and Mohammed Shami) can deliver and put their hand up and do the job for the team," he said. "It's a great opportunity for them

to try and deliver for the country, (it is) as simple as it can get. What we don't have, we do not have. What we have is what we have, and we are going to try and go with a very clear mind," he added. Bumrah's replacement, Rana, has done reasonably well and was drafted into the Champions Trophy squad on Tuesday night. "I think guys have shown some really good signs. Harshit has come along really well. Arsh (Arshdeep) was really good today (Wednesday) as well. Obviously, you would always miss a bowler like Jasprit Bumrah," Gambhir said. "But then, it is always good to have someone like Mohammed Shami back with his experience and quality." When asked if Bumrah's absence will give opposition teams any psychological advantage over India, Gambhir said, "We can't help it." "If he's not available, he's not available. If he's injured, he's injured," Gambhir said. "Whether it's me, (or) whether it's the captain, we can't do much about it. We know that he's an important factor, but as I just mentioned, people like Harshit, Arsh (and) Mohammed Shami, all

these guys will put their hand up." **Axar's elevation to No.5** Gambhir said the promotion of all-rounder Axar Patel at No 5 in the first two ODIs was largely to ensure a left-handed batter in the mix. "That's the way cricket is meant to be played. I know a lot of people talk about it but that's the way we've got to play the game and that's the way cricket should be played," he said. "It's not about the batting order, it's about who can create what (kind of) impact. If you have the option of putting a quality left-hander in the middle, why won't you do that? Why would you want to have top five as right-handers?" he asked. Gambhir said he the only criteria for deciding the order is the impact assessment of a player, which he believes, cannot be done purely through statistics. "We don't look at averages and stats and all that stuff, we look at who can deliver more at that number and Axar has done fabulously well, (in) both the games he got the opportunity, (and) he delivered for us," he said. "I know there will always be people talking about it but I think that's the way we want to go in the future as well," he added.



Families not to travel with Team India for ICC Champions Trophy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Families will not be accompanying the Indian cricket players heading to Dubai on February 15 for the ICC Champions Trophy (CT) as the BCCI's new travel policy comes into effect for the first time with this tournament. The Indian team starts its campaign in Dubai against Bangladesh on February 20, followed by the marquee clash against arch-rivals Pakistan (February 23) and the final preliminary face-off with New Zealand on March 2. The Rohit Sharma-led squad will play its games in Dubai while the rest of the tournament unfolds from February 19 in Pakistan across three venues. Given that the duration of the tour is just over three weeks even if the final on March 9 is taken into consideration, the BCCI will not allow families to accompany the players. As per the new policy, families can be with players for a maximum of two weeks during a tour which is of 45 days or more. "If anything changes then it is different but as of now, the players are unlikely to be accompanied by their wives or partners for this tour. One of the senior players had enquired about it and he was told that the policy decision will be followed," a senior

BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. "Since the tour is of less than one month, families won't be accompanying the players. But if exceptions are made, I think that individual will have to bear the full expenses as BCCI won't be covering any cost," he added. The BCCI policy document states: "Players absent from India for more than 45 days during overseas tours can be joined by their partners and children (under 18) for one visit per series (format wise) of up to a two-week period. "Any deviation from this policy must be pre-approved by the coach, captain and GM Operations. Additional expenses outside the visitors' period will not be covered by the BCCI." However, families will be there with the team during the five-Test tour of England in June-July-August as the five-Test. The window for their two-week stay during the trip will be worked out later. The new rules were drafted after India's horror tour of Australia during which the team was outplayed 1-3, leading to speculation about lack of discipline and cohesion in the dressing room. **Rules already put into effect** The senior official said that most of the rules have already been enforced by the BCCI.

"If you look at it, already no player can ask for a private vehicle to come for practice. All state units have been notified. Similarly once the players assembled in Kolkata (for the T20I series against England) and Nagpur (for the ODI series against the same side), the team has travelled together," he confirmed. The stars have also adhered to the new regulations of playing domestic cricket when they get time off from their international assignments. Accordingly, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and Shivam Dube turned up for Mumbai. Virat Kohli played his first game for Delhi in more than 12 years amid a lot of fanfare. So did Rishabh Pant while KL Rahul represented Karnataka. Ravindra Jadeja played for Saurashtra. **Personal staff to stay at different hotel** Restrictions have also been imposed on personal staff (managers, agents, chefs), who were accompanying the team and the coaching group earlier. Accordingly, the personal secretary of a member of the coaching staff, who was regularly seen staying at the team hotel, now stays at a different facility even though he has been seen at every venue during the England home series.

RCB names Rajat Patidar as captain for IPL 2025

PTI ■ BENGALURU

IPL franchise Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Thursday named Rajat Patidar as its captain for the upcoming season starting March 21, replacing South African Faf du Plessis who was released from the squad last year. Patidar was among RCB's retained players before the mega auction in November, 2024 and has the experience of leading Madhya Pradesh in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (T20) and the Vijay Hazare Trophy (ODI). The 31-year-old, who signed up with the franchise in 2022, guided Madhya Pradesh to the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy final where his side lost to Mumbai by five wickets last year. "Rajat has the simplicity, (he) cares about the people around him, we have closely seen how he has led Madhya Pradesh, we really liked it," RCB chief coach Andy Flower said at the franchise event to announce



Patidar's elevation. The right-hander was also the second highest run-getter in the premier domestic T20 tournament, behind Ajinkya Rahane, scoring 428 from 10 matches at an average of 61 and a strike-rate of 186.08. Patidar takes over from du Plessis, who was released after captaining the team from 2022 to 2024. The 40-year-old South African will play for Delhi Capitals this season. Prior to the announcement on Thursday, there was some

speculation about Virat Kohli returning as captain of the franchise. Kohli was the RCB captain from 2013 to 2021 and has a fine record though he could not land them the title. The 36-year-old led RCB in 143 matches, the second longest stint as captain after the legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni for Chennai Super Kings. He congratulated Patidar on the appointment. "Myself and the other team members will be right behind

you, Rajat," Kohli said in a video statement shared by the franchise. "The way you have grown in this franchise and the way you have performed, you've made a place in the hearts of all RCB fans. This is very well deserved," he added. Kohli had a fine run as RCB captain, though he could not land them the title. The 36-year-old led RCB in 143 matches, the second longest stint as captain after the legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni for Chennai Super Kings. Under him, the team won 68 games, and logged 70 losses and four no-results. In 2016, Kohli had led the franchise to the IPL final, and made 973 runs, to date the highest for a batter in a single IPL season. In IPL 2024, Kohli was the top run-getter with 741 runs at a strike-rate of 154. The franchise conceded that Kohli's name was also discussed for the leadership role.

Bahutule appointed Rajasthan Royals spin-bowling coach

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Former India cricketer Sairaj Bahutule was on Thursday appointed Rajasthan Royals' spin-bowling coach for the upcoming IPL season, adding to the long list of support staff led by head coach Rahul Dravid. Bahutule, a former leg-spinner and left-hand batter, played two Tests and eight ODIs taking a total of five wickets but his exploits in first-class cricket put him in the league of domestic greats. Bahutule, 52, scored over 6,000 runs and took 630 wickets, besides 197 scalps in List A games. "The 52-year-old returns to the Royals having been a part of the setup from 2018-21. He represented India in two Tests and eight ODIs and has since transitioned into a successful coaching career, mentoring teams such as Mumbai, Bengal, Kerala and the Indian national men's team where he has been instrumental in developing emerging talents," said Rajasthan Royals in a statement. Head coach Dravid said Bahutule would bring a wealth of experience to the side that won the inaugural edition of the IPL in 2008 under the legendary Shane Warne. "Sairaj's deep understanding of spin bowling and his extensive coaching experience make him an invaluable addition to our team. His proven ability to mentor young bowlers aligns perfectly with our vision at Rajasthan Royals. "Having worked with him before, I am confident that his insights and guidance will significantly benefit our players as we strive for excellence in the upcoming season," said Dravid. Bahutule said he was looking forward to working with Dravid. "I am eager to work alongside Rahul and the rest of the coaching staff to develop our bowling attack and contribute to the team's success," said Bahutule.

Three Pakistan players fined for breaching ICC Code of Conduct

PTI ■ KARACHI

International Cricket Council (ICC) has slapped Pakistan's Shaheen Afridi, Saud Shakeel and Kamran Gulam with fines and a demerit point each for their belligerent behaviour during the tri-series match against South Africa here. Shaheen was fined 25 per cent of his match fee for breaching Article 2.12 of the Code, which pertains to "inappropriate physical contact with a Player, Player Support Personnel, Umpire, Match Referee or any other person (including a spectator) during an International Match." The incident occurred in the 28th over of South Africa's



innings when Shaheen deliberately obstructed batter Matthew Breetzke as he ran a single, resulting in physical contact and a heated exchange between the two players on Wednesday. The ICC had imposed a similar 20 percent match fees

fine and one demerit point on Indian star Virat Kohli for barging into Australia's Sam Konstas during the Border Gavaskar Trophy series. Interestingly, while Kohli got a lot of flak for his action, Shaheen has hardly been criticised in Pakistan for his

behaviour. The tall fast bowler admitted after the match that he had been trying to rile up and disturb Breetzke for a while in the match but once it was over everything was forgotten and both shook hands. In another incident, Shakeel and substitute fielder Gulam were fined 10 percent of their match fees for celebrating too closely to batter Temba Bavuma following his run-out in the 29th over. Both players were found guilty of breaching Article 2.5 of the Code, which relates to "using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from a batter upon his/her dismissal during an International Match."

Kane lifts Bayern to beat Celtic in Champions League playoffs

PTI ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich looks set to survive the new Champions League playoffs round. AC Milan joined Atalanta and Monaco losing their first-leg games Wednesday. Bayern got high-class strikes from Michael Olise and Harry Kane either side of half-time in a 2-1 win at Scottish champion Celtic. The return game is Tuesday in Munich. "The (Celtic) fans haven't seen many losses here, especially in Europe, so we appreciate the importance of the game and the victory," Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said. Bayern had joined Real

Madrid and Manchester City as Champions League title winners in the past five years who surprisingly found themselves in the playoffs because they finished outside the top eight in the new 36-team single standings format. Madrid won 3-2 in Manchester on Tuesday. Feyenoord's goal in a rain-soaked 1-0 win over Milan came in the third minute and relied in France goalkeeper Mike Maignan spilling Igor Paixão's shot into the net. Feyenoord's Brazilian winger gave Milan new signing Kyle Walker a tough first game in the competition for the seven-time European champion. It also was a quick winning

start for Feyenoord's interim coach Pascal Bosschaart in his first game after the firing Monday of Brian Priske. Benfica won 1-0 at Monaco with another goal from Vangelis Pavlidis, a delicate chip shot in the 48th. Monaco had Al Musrati sent off four minutes later. Club Brugge scored with a disputed penalty kick in stoppage time to beat Atalanta 2-1. That was a meeting of teams that finished 24th and ninth, respectively, in the 36-team standings two weeks ago. The top eight teams in those standings advanced direct to the round of 16 in March, leaving Nos. 9 to 24 to compete this month for eight



more entries in playoffs over back-to-back midweeks. **Kane vs Schmeichel** Harry Kane loves scoring against Kasper Schmeichel, his

longtime rival in Tottenham vs Leicester and England vs Denmark games. Bayern star Kane's sharp volley in the 49th, when left

unmarked at the back post at a corner, was his 19th career goal past Schmeichel, more than any other goalkeeper he has faced. It was a second impressive goal conceded by Schmeichel, who was helpless against Michael Olise's rising left-footed shot in the 45th. On a tough evening for Celtic's all-American central defense of Cameron Carter-Vickers and Auston Trusty, the Scottish champion has more hope next Tuesday thanks to Japan forward Daizen Maeda cutting the deficit late on. "At 2-1, Bayern are hanging on," Celtic coach Brendan Rodgers said. "Let's go and have no regrets and see where

it takes us. We've shown we can play football and be a threat." Pavlidis hot streak Benfica's Greece forward might be the most in-form striker in the Champions League. It is now six goals in the competition and five in the past three games including a hat trick against Barcelona. The 26-year-old Pavlidis latched onto a pass from the half-line and shrugged off defender Mohammed Salisu before neatly clipping the ball over goalkeeper Radoslaw Majecki in the 48th minute. Benfica's win was soured by another injury for veteran winger Angel Di Maria. The 2022 World Cup winner with

Argentina lasted 20 minutes as a substitute before sustaining a left hamstring injury. He pulled up near the penalty area and immediately lay on the ground. It was Benfica's second win in Monaco, adding to a 3-2 victory in November in the league phase. **Atalanta anger in Brugge** A late light-touch clash between two Sweden teammates was decisive in Club Brugge's 2-1 win over Atalanta. Entering stoppage time, Atalanta defender Isak Hien was judged to have raised a hand into the face of Brugge forward Gustaf Nilsson as they chased a loose ball.

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is based on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Lucknow only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.