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INSIDE



MONEY 10
ECONOMY EXPECTED TO GROW
6.4 PER CENT IN Q3: ICRA

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RAHUL DISSENTS POLL PANEL, BJP DEFENDS



File photo: PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition (LoP) in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday attacked Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi and Home Minister (HM) Amit Shah for the midnight decision to select the new Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), when the process of selection is being challenged in the Supreme Court (SC). While Rahul who said it was "disrespectful" and "discourteous" on part of the Centre to ignore his dissent note to the CEC selection panel comprising of PM and HM, the BJP dismissed the Congress leader's criticism and accused the LoP of undermining an elected

government's constitutional mandate through "malicious" judicial activism.

The government late on Monday night appointed Gyanesh Kumar as the new CEC hours after the meeting of the PM-led selection committee in which the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha asked the government to defer the meeting in view of the SC hearing in the matter. Meanwhile the SC on Tuesday said it would take up on February 19 on "priority basis" the pleas against the appointments of the CEC and election commissioners (EC) under the 2023 law.

"During the meeting of the committee to select the next Election Commissioner, I presented a dissent note to the PM and HM, that stated: The most fundamental aspect of an independent Election Commission, free from executive interference, is the process of choosing the Election Commissioner and Chief Election Commissioner," Rahul said in a social media post.

"By violating the Supreme Court order and removing the Chief Justice of India from the committee, the Modi Government has exacerbated the concerns of hundreds of millions of voters over the integrity of our electoral process," he also said in his post while sharing his dissent note.

Rahul said as the LoP, it is his duty to uphold the ideals of Babasaheb Ambedkar and the founding leaders of the nation while holding the government to account. In his dissent note presented before the panel, the Congress leader cited a speech of BR Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly in June 1949 to discuss the setting up of an independent Election Commission, where he had warned about executive interference in India's democracy and the affairs of the Election Commission.

Rahul said in a judgement on March 2, 2023, the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court ordered the appointment of the CEC and election commissioners should be undertaken by a committee comprising the PM, the LoP and the Chief Justice of India.

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SC comes to rescue of 'pervert' Allahabadia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court (SC) on Tuesday protected influencer Ranveer Allahbadia from arrest over his distasteful comments during a YouTube show while severely castigating him for the remarks it described as "showing a perverted mind". Several FIRs have been filed against Allahbadia, popularly known as BeerBiceps, for the comment on parents and sex on comedian Samay Raina's YouTube show "India's Got Latent". A furious court at the outset berated Allahbadia for his "unacceptable comments" on the

show and said, "... There is something dirty in his mind which has been vomited on the YouTube show."

"The words you have used will make daughters, sisters, parents and even the society feel ashamed. It shows a perverted mind. If this is not obscenity, what is it? Why should we quash or club the FIRs against you?" asked Justice Surya Kant, who was on the bench along with Justice N Kotiswar Singh.

However, the bench agreed to the submissions of senior advocate Abhinav Chandrachud, representing the influencer, that Allahbadia be protected from arrest keeping in

mind the filing of multiple FIRs on the same issue as well as the death threats against him.

"Are you defending the kind of language he has used?" Justice Surya Kant asked Chandrachud, who conceded that he himself was "disgusted". The senior lawyer, however, said the question was whether the remarks constituted a criminal offence as profanity per se would not amount to obscenity. "If you can try to attain cheap publicity by saying these kinds of things, there might be others also who might want to get cheap publicity by making threats," the bench said.

The bench directed that no further FIRs shall be lodged against him for his comments during the YouTube show, "India's Got Latent". The top court also restrained Allahbadia and his associate influencers on the controversial YouTube show from airing any other episode till further orders. It directed Allahbadia to deposit his passport at the Thane police station and said he shall not leave the country without the prior permission of the court.

The bench directed Allahbadia to cooperate in the probe of the FIRs lodged at Maharashtra and Assam.

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Preparations underway for the oath ceremony of the new Delhi Government, at the Ramlila Maidan Photo: Ranjan Dimri

Oath final for 'suspense' CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Almost a fortnight after the BJP emerged victorious in the Delhi Assembly elections, the suspense over the chief minister of Delhi still remains as the party has yet to make an announcement. Insiders say the new Delhi Chief Minister and the council of ministers are set to take oath at the Ramlila Maidan on Thursday evening. The decision is likely to be announced on Wednesday, when the new BJP legislature party is scheduled to meet, as per the party sources.

As the iconic Ramlila Maidan is being spruced up with its boundary walls receiving a fresh coat of paint, tents for the grand oath

taking ceremony, sources said the legislature party meeting will take place around 3:30 pm following which final name of candidate will be announced. Earlier, the oath ceremony was scheduled around 4 pm at Ramlila Maidan but it has been rescheduled to 11 am due to some unknown reasons. Party sources said that arrangements have been speeded up accordingly. For the BJP leaders, it was hectic schedule throughout the day on Tuesday as many senior leaders including Vinod Tavde, Tarun Chugh, etc were seen taking stock of preparations on the ground by visiting with the BJP leaders.

Continued on page 8

Nepal embassy visits Odisha institute over suicide uproar



Family members of a Nepal's girl student who died by suicide reach the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), in Bhubaneswa PTI

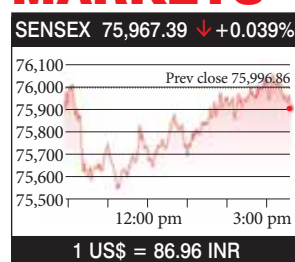
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR/NEW DELHI

Officers from the Nepal Embassy visited the engineering institute in Bhubaneswar after a student from the neighbouring country was found dead in her hostel on the campus. The officers are also expected to meet a group of students who were allegedly evicted from their hostel, amid tension on

the institute campus. While Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli offered some relief to the distressed students, Odisha Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj said the state government has been monitoring the situation and will facilitate the Nepali students, who have allegedly been evicted from their hostel, to return to the KIIT campus.

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MARKETS



WEATHER



SP MLAs disrupt Gov's address in UP assembly

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh assembly witnessed a ruckus on the inaugural day of the budget session during the address of Governor Anandiben Patel on Tuesday. The SP MLAs indulged in loud sloganeering, forcing the governor to end her speech in 10 minutes. Samajwadi Party MLAs held a protest against the government over the Maha Kumbh stampede, unemployment, law and order, inflation, and other issues.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, seeking order in the House, said the government was ready for discussion on all issues. Later, while addressing the House, Yogi stated that his government was ready to answer every question posed by the opposition. "The SP has a habit of protesting every work done by the state government," Yogi said. A notable moment during the protest saw an SP leader symbolically carrying the 'ashes' of the government's ethics to criticise the ruling administration's handling of the incident. "The Uttar Pradesh government organised the Maha Kumbh, but the mismanagement was such that many people lost their lives. The government is not even disclosing the exact number of deaths. They provide daily figures on the number of devotees who took a holy dip but refuse to release the death toll," SP MLA Atul

Continued on page 8

Prosecution seeks death penalty for Sajjan Kumar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The prosecution has sought the death penalty for former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar who was convicted by a Delhi court last week over the killings of two Sikhs in the national capital during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots saying the crime was committed in a "brutal and diabolical manner". The prosecution said the case was "graver than the Nirbhaya case" of 2012 in a written submission filed before special judge Kaveri Baweja. "The present case is graver than the Nirbhaya case as in the Nirbhaya case, a young woman was targeted but in the present case, people of a particular community were targeted," it said.

Arguments on the quantum of sentencing will take place on February 20 as the lawyers were on strike on Tuesday.

While describing the case as rare of the rarest, Additional Public prosecutor (APP) Manish Rawat in his written submissions has pressed for death penalty for the convict in view of the guidelines issued in Nirbhaya and other cases.

Asking the convict and the victims to file their written submissions, Special Judge Kaveri Baweja has listed the matter for hearing arguments on sentence on February 21. The minimum punishment for murder is life imprisonment. Senior advocate H S Phoolka, appearing for the complainant, supported the prosecution's demand of death penalty and sought time to



File photo: PTI

argue the matter. The judge deferred the matter to February 21 after Kumar's counsel sought time to argue the matter, saying lawyers were abstaining from work on Tuesday in protest of the Advocate Amendment Bill, 2025.

Continued on page 8

Child's drawing raises doubts over mother's death in Jhansi

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ JHANSI

What initially appeared to be a case of suicide had taken a shocking turn after a four-year-old girl's drawing cast doubt on the circumstances surrounding her mother's death. Sonali Budholia, 27, was found dead at her home in Panchavati Shiv Parivar Colony on Monday, with her in-laws claiming she had taken her own life. However, her daughter Darshita's unsettling illustration and statements to the media have pointed to possible foul play, implicating her father, Sandeep Budholia, in the tragedy. Darshita's drawing depicted a violent assault on her mother. She later told reporters that her father had

physically attacked Sonali before staging her death. "Papa assaulted and killed Mummy and said, 'Die if you want to.' He hanged her body and hit her head with a stone. Later, he brought down the body and put it in a sack," the child revealed. Her statements also suggested a history of domestic abuse, alleging that Sandeep often threatened to kill her mother. "I once warned him that if he hurt my mother, I would break his hand. He would hit her and say she should die, and that I should meet the same fate," Darshita recounted. Sonali's father, Sanjeev Tripathi, who lives in Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh, described a troubled marriage marred by alleged dowry demands and mistreatment. He claimed

that despite giving Rs 20 lakh in dowry, the demands continued. A previous dowry harassment case was lodged against Sonali's husband, Sandeep Budholiya, but was later settled based on alleged false assurances from his family. He claimed that after Sonali gave birth to a daughter in 2020 the abuse intensified. "After the delivery, Sandeep and his family abandoned her in the hospital. I had to clear the bill and take her home. A month later, Sandeep returned to take Sonali and Darshita back," he said. Sanjeev further stated that just days before her death, Sandeep insisted Sonali return home from a cousin's wedding, despite her reluctance.

Continued on page 8

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Thrashed by husband, woman dies in hosp

Lucknow (PNS): A 30-year old woman, who was allegedly thrashed by her husband on Monday night, succumbed to injuries during treatment at hospital on Tuesday. The deceased was identified as Kanchan, wife of Raj Kumar, a resident of Anandpur Majra, under the Mohanlalganj police station limits. The accused who fled the

scene, leaving his wife profusely bleeding, was arrested. However, the police are working to ascertain the motive. Neighbours told the police that Raj Kumar was a liquor addict, and his wife always tried her best to help him quit drinking. They said Raj Kumar failed to give money to his wife to run the kitchen, which led to frequent tiffs between the couple. As per reports, there was a heated exchange between the couple on Monday night as Kanchan demanded money for daily expenses. In a fit of rage, Raj Kumar allegedly beat his wife with a stick. Neighbours rushed to her rescue, but the accused continued to thrash his his. After he left the scene, neighbours took Kanchan to the community health centre, where she succumbed to injuries at around 5 am on Tuesday. Police said the couple married 12 years ago and had three children.

50% of India's Sanatan followers take holy dip

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj has etched its place in history, with over 55 crore devotees taking part in the holy dip at the Triveni Sangam, marking the largest participation in any religious, cultural, or social event. This extraordinary turnout is a testament to the meticulous planning of the Uttar Pradesh government under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, reflecting the grandeur of India's ancient spiritual traditions, an official said. India, a land of diverse faiths, is home to the largest group of Sanatan Dharma followers. According to Pew Research, India's population stands at approximately 143 crore, with 110 crore adherents of Sanatan Dharma. The turnout at the Triveni Sangam has already reached 50 per cent of India's Sanatan followers, and this number is expected to exceed 60 crore by the final bathing ritual on February 26, the official said.



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

Nashik team studies mgmt strategies for Kumbh-2027

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A high-level delegation from Nashik visited the Mahakumbh Nagar on Tuesday to study the management strategies and new initiatives implemented by the Uttar Pradesh government for the Maha Kumbh 2025. The delegation, consisting of 20 members, led by Divisional Commissioner Dr Praveen Gedam, toured key locations such as ghats, akhadas, and the Integrated Command Control Centre (ICCC) to observe and gather insights on effective event management practices. The visit is part of preparations for the Nashik Kumbh Mela in 2027. The delegation aimed to learn from the Maha Kumbh 2025, with a focus on key aspects like traffic management, crowd control, sanitation, security, and public health provisions.

On Tuesday, after taking a holy dip at Sangam, the Nashik team attended a presentation at the Mela Authority, where they were briefed on the extensive planning behind the event. The presentation included detailed discussions on traffic regulation, emergency response strategies, and digital connectivity systems. They also visited the Digital Experience Centre and inspected various corridors, which are part of the infrastructure built to accommodate the large number of devotees.

On Wednesday, the delegation will meet officials from different departments to dive deeper into the logistical and operational frameworks of the Maha Kumbh 2025. The goal is to adopt best practices for Nashik's upcoming Kumbh Mela. Dr Praveen Gedam emphasised that the visit was part of Nashik's effort to make its Kumbh Mela as grand as the ongoing Maha Kumbh. He praised the efforts of the Prayagraj administration in managing such a large-scale event and mentioned that Nashik's team will use the insights gathered to strengthen their own preparations for 2027.

Divine experience, says Pralhad Joshi

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi and Rajya Sabha MP Dr K Laxman, who visited the Maha Kumbh on Tuesday, expressed their admiration for the event after taking a holy dip at the Sangam. They also addressed the criticism from some quarters, highlighting that the common people truly recognise the significance of the event.

Joshi described the Maha Kumbh as a divine experience for followers of Sanatan Dharma. Joshi emphasised that the massive gathering of crores of devotees symbolises the strength of India's Sanatan heritage. He pointed out that every day, millions of people visit the Sangam, underscoring the event's position as a symbol of the enduring power of India's Sanatan Dharma. Joshi further affirmed that India, as one of the best countries in the world, continues to foster peace and happiness, with the Maha Kumbh reinforcing this belief. Laxman also praised the arrangements and commended CM Yogi for his leadership in organising the Maha Kumbh. He noted that thousands of devotees from South



Pralhad Joshi with wife Jyothi Joshi performs rituals while taking the holy dip at Sangam

India are participating in the event daily. Laxman called the Maha Kumbh the biggest holy festival of Sanatan Dharma, adding that after 144 years, the opportunity to experience it has become a cherished memory for many. He addressed the "negative propaganda" surrounding the event but emphasised that the true driving force behind the Maha Kumbh's success is the unwavering faith and enthusiasm of the devotees.

Laxman credited the Yogi Adityanath government for making the Maha Kumbh an extraordinary and grand event that attracts devotees from both India and abroad. He highlighted the deep sense of pride that participants feel in attending such a significant event, which symbolizes Sanatan Dharma and faith. Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan also took the

holy dip and described it as one of the most unforgettable experiences of anyone's life. He called the Maha Kumbh a historic event for all who believe in Hinduism. Radhakrishnan emphasised that the holy dip has the power to cleanse sins and inspire individuals to contribute more to society. He also praised the efforts of both the Central and state governments for their arrangements.

CLASSIFIEDS

सूचना

अपने पुत्री का नाम सांची से बदलकर हिमांशी भारद्वाज (HIMANSI BHARDWAJ) कर दिया है अब भविष्य में मेरी पुत्री को सस्क. एी और गैर सरकारी अभिलेखों में हिमांशी भारद्वाज (HIMANSI BHARDWAJ) के नाम से ही जाना और पहचाना जायेगा। रवीन्द्र विक्रम सिंह पुत्र राजवन्त सिंह निवासी-श्रीशारदा सदन, आर०के० कालोनी दिवानगंज रोड, मोहनलालगंज जिला लखनऊ

NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that the correct name of my son is Vaidik Kumar Shukla which is mentioned in his birth certificate. Due to mistake, my son's name has been mentioned as VEDANT SHUKLA in his Aadhaar card (number-832172682806), which is wrong. It is certified that information are correct given by me. Rajiv Shukla son of Shri Ram Abhilakh Shukla, resident- Ward No. 10, Paharpur, Shivgarh, Raebareli, Uttar Pradesh-229308

AUCTION NOTICE

दिनांक 25-02-2025 अपराह्न 12:00 बजे परिसमापक पीपुल्स कोऑपरेटिव बैंक लि. आर्यनगर, कानपुर नगर (परिसमापनाधीन) से सम्बन्धित निष्प्रयोज्य सामग्रियों/डेडस्टॉक की नीलामी जहाँ - जैसी है स्थिति में होगी, सिक्वोरिटी रु० 15,000/- बैंकड्राफ्ट परिसमापक पीपुल्स कोऑपरेटिव बैंक लि. के नाम जी.एस.टी. पंजीकरण, बैंककार्ड के साथ जमा होगी। आई०पी० सिंह एण्ड सन्स. -9919503110.

AUCTION NOTICE

दिनांक 03-03-2025 अपराह्न 12:00 बजे कार्यालय अध्यक्ष एवं प्रशासक, ग्रेटर शारदा सहायक समादेश क्षेत्र विकास प्राधिकारी/परियोजना, 23-सी, गोखले मार्ग, लखनऊ में निष्प्रयोज्य घोषित सामग्रियों की नीलामी जहाँ - जैसी है स्थिति में होगी, सिक्वोरिटी रु० 10,000/- बैंकड्राफ्ट ग्रेटर शारदा सहायक क्षेत्र विकास प्राधिकारी परियोजना, लखनऊ के नाम, जी. एस. टी. पंजीकरण, बैंककार्ड के साथ जमा होगी। आई०पी० सिंह एण्ड सन्स.

आवश्यकता है

आवश्यकता है इरम कालेज, दुर्गा रोड, गुडम्बा, लखनऊ. (सम्बद्ध-लखनऊ विश्वविद्यालय) में प्राचार्य 01 पद हेतु योग्य अभ्यर्थी की आवश्यकता है। 15 वर्ष का शैक्षिक अनुभव, मानदेय एवं योग्यता एन०सी०टी०ई०/राज्य सरकार/यू०सी०टी०/लखनऊ विश्वविद्यालय के मानकानुसार। इच्छुक अभ्यर्थी विज्ञापन के प्रथम प्रकाशन के 21 दिन के अन्दर दो रंगीन पासपोर्ट साइज फोटो एवं समस्त शैक्षिक अभिलेखों की प्रमाणित छायाप्रति सहित प्रबंधक, इरम एजुकेशनल सोसाइटी सी-ब्लॉक, इन्दिरानगर, लखनऊ-226016 के पते पर प्रेषित करें। 0522-2310712 Email: info@eramedu.org +eramedu@gmail.com प्रबंधक

NOTICE

On behalf of my client, I inform that agriculture land Khasra No. 45 (0.0810 Hect), Khasra No. 238kha (0.2000 Hect), and Khasra No. 239kha (0.2800 Hect), located at Village Shahnewajpur Manjha, Pargana Haveli Avadh, Tehsil Sadar, District Ayodhya, is solely owned by Smt. Phool Singh W/o Shri Shiv Kumar Singh, purchased through a registered sale deed No. 3412/2005 Dated 06/08/2005. A registered agreement (18/07/2014, Reg. No. 5288, Page No.165) with Shri Arvind Kumar, Surendernath S/o Sankha Prasad and Vijay Shyam S/o Ram Narayan Pandey was previously executed. My Client is purchasing this land. Objections, if any, may be raised within 7 days of this notice at Advocate Ayush Chaurasia, Office Addressing Shop No.206, 2nd Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Near Lekhraj Metro Station, Indira Nagar, Lucknow - 226016 or Contact (Mobile No: +91-9455096914). No Claims will be valid after the given period.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I Have Changed My Name From Tabassum To Tabassum Amir. Tabassum Amir W/O Mohammad Asad R/o 373 D defence colony jaimau kanpur

NOTICE

I Have Changed My Name Spelling From Firdaus Jahan To Firdosh Jahan. W/o Parvez Alam R/o Plot No.73 Ganga Vihar KDA Colony Jaimau Kanpur Nagar

सूचना

आप सभी को अवगत कराना है कि मेरे पुत्र अंश राजपूत का नाम इंग्लिश में ANSH RAJPOOT से अब ANSH RAJUT हो गया है आज से इसी स्पेलिंग के नाम से जाना जाएगा और मेरा नाम अमित सिंह से अमित प्रताप सिंह हो गया है आज से हमें और मेरे पुत्र को अंश राजपूत S/O अमित प्रताप सिंह (Ansh Rajput S/O AMIT PRATAP SINGH) के नाम से जाना जाएगा सभी अभिलेखों में भी इसी नाम से दर्ज किया जाएगा.

NOTICE

I, Pallav Kumar Omar, S/o Satish Chandra Omar, have my name incorrectly recorded as "Pallav Omar" in my high school certificate and marksheet. My correct name is Pallav Kumar Omar, R/o 325/4 N.L.C. Babu Purwa Colony, Kidwai Nagar, Kanpur.

NOTICE

I, Khushboo, D/O Sachchidanand, residing at M-13/2 Parikalp Nagar Colony, Kanpur Road Lucknow, U.P., hereby declare that I have changed my name from Khushboo to Khushboo Chaturvedi vide affidavit no. IN-UP00854961289723X dated 15.02.2025 and shall hereafter be known and identified as Khushboo Chaturvedi, D/O Sachchidanand.

NOTICE

I, Shristi, D/O Gyaneshwar Prasad, residing at Saonghat, Post Kodra Pandey, Karanpur, PO Purani Basti, Basti, U.P., hereby declare that I have changed my name from Shristi to Shristi Chaturvedi vide affidavit no. IN-UP00846529904478X dated 15.02.2025 and shall hereafter be known and identified as Shristi Chaturvedi, D/O Gyaneshwar Prasad.

NOTICE

I, Siddharth, S/O Gyaneshwar Prasad, residing at Saonghat, Post Kodra Pandey, Karanpur, PO Purani Basti, Basti, U.P., hereby declare that I have changed my name from Siddharth to Siddharth Chaturvedi vide affidavit no. IN-UP00828778752925X dated 15.02.2025 and shall hereafter be known and identified as Siddharth Chaturvedi, S/O Gyaneshwar Prasad.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, hitherto known as Hariom Dubey S/o Braj Kishor Dubey R/o 1/30, Baag Brindavan, Karhal, Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh-205264 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Arun Prakash. PD(1540)C

Maha Kumbh boosts Prayagraj's tourism, hospitality industries

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The ongoing Maha Kumbh there has significantly boosted the city's tourism, travel, and hospitality industries, the Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday said on Tuesday. Even after the completion of the 'amrit snans', millions of devotees continue to visit daily with demand for hotels, lodges and luxury cottages remaining high, it said. On Tuesday, the footfall for the holy dip at Triveni Sangam crossed past the 55 crore mark, the UP government said in a statement. Being held after 12 years, the Maha Kumbh started on January 13 and will continue till February 26. The mega fair had three 'amrit snan' dates and three special bathing dates

- the six auspicious Hindu days which draw the maximum number of pilgrims. While all three 'amrit snan' dates are over and two other special bathing days are gone, only the special occasion of Mahashivratri (February 26) remains. Hotel and guest house bookings took a sudden dip after the January 29 stampede, which left multiple pilgrims dead and injured. According to officials, 30 people died and 60 were injured in the stampede. On Tuesday, the UP government said that hotel occupancy rates have risen sharply, particularly in the fair area, where pre-bookings for accommodations post-February 26 remain strong. The city's hotel and restaurant industry has recorded a 20-30 per cent growth, with profit

Prayagraj DM scotches Maha Kumbh extension rumours

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Prayagraj District Magistrate Ravindra Mandar on Tuesday refuted rumours circulating on social media regarding the extension of Maha Kumbh 2025 until March due to the overwhelming crowd. He clarified that the event follows a strict schedule based on auspicious timings, and the fair will conclude as planned on February 26. Mandar assured that the administration, under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, is closely monitoring all arrangements to ensure the smooth movement of devotees and a hassle-free experience until the end of the Maha Kumbh. He emphasised that there are no plans to extend the fair and urged the public not to believe

HE CLARIFIED THAT THE EVENT FOLLOWS A STRICT SCHEDULE BASED ON AUSPICIOUS TIMINGS, AND THE FAIR WILL CONCLUDE AS PLANNED ON FEB 26

in the baseless rumours. Regarding logistical matters, the DM reassured that provisions for bathing at Sangam are well-organised, and measures are in place to facilitate the return of devotees to their destinations without any disruption. Traffic management remains a priority, ensuring that the movement of pilgrims does not affect the daily life of Prayagraj residents, he added. Mandar also

addressed rumours about the closure of railway stations. He confirmed that no station has been shut down without prior notice. He explained that Prayag Sangam station in Daraganj, located near the fairgrounds, has been permanently closed to prevent overcrowding, but all other stations are operational, ensuring smooth travel for pilgrims. The DM also highlighted the smooth execution of the fair, assuring that no students had missed their board exams due to the Maha Kumbh. Authorities had previously advised students to reach exam centres well in advance, and the guidance was followed effectively. Both CBSE and ICSE boards have confirmed that students who missed exams would be given another opportunity at the end of the examination cycle.

3 LMC employees suspended for poor sanitation

Lucknow (PNS):

Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh on Tuesday carried out a surprise inspection as part of the mayor's 'Healthy City Clean City' campaign. During the visit, he reviewed the cleanliness in various zones of the city, particularly focusing on the best areas. During the inspection, the cleaning of drains in Yadunath Sanyal ward was found to be unsatisfactory. As a result, beat incharge Mahesh Kumar and contractual sanitation worker Pintu were suspended. Supervisor Mukesh was also suspended after garbage was found in JC Bose ward. The municipal commissioner instructed officers in all zones to begin inspecting their best areas from 7 am daily. He emphasised that any issues should be addressed promptly, and any required construction or patchwork should be completed quickly.

Focus on 200 congestion points in city to improve traffic flow

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

The traffic police department has identified 200 major congestion points in the city. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Prabal Pratap explained that work is already underway at these locations, and traffic flow is expected to improve in the coming months as the projects are completed by various agencies, including the PWD and the Lucknow Development Authority. Of the 200 congestion points, 73 are situated at major intersections including PGI, Utretia, Telibagh, Rahimnagar, Vijaynagar underpass, Kamta, Chhajpur, Kathauta, Matiyari, Tewariganj, Ravindralaya, Ashok Latt, areas near Ekana Stadium, Neelmatha, and Medanta underpass. These locations require road improvements to ease traffic movement. "These points were identified

through consultations with traffic constables and surveys, and detailed project reports (DPRs) have been prepared for the work to begin," said the DCP. Pratap pointed out that several crossings are major trouble spots, including Daliganj, Chowk, Charak, Pucca Pul, IT, Nishatganj, and Awadh crossings. "At Awadh Crossing, a tunnel is being constructed to allow traffic to flow underneath. This crossing is crucial as it handles heavy traffic from expressways and Kanpur Road, bringing both in-city and out-of-city traffic. Decongestion work is also underway here," he added. He also mentioned that Hazratganj, being a central hub, experiences heavy congestion. To address this, a diversion strategy has been put in place. "People prefer to go to Hazratganj as it is the heart of the city. However, providing alternative routes will help them

become accustomed to these routes and save time," he said. The department has proposed freeing left turns at 40 crossings to reduce traffic jams. Additionally, 16 traffic lights that were not functioning under the ITMS have been identified, and the nagar nigam has been informed. Obstructions like unused electric poles in the middle of roads have also been identified and will be removed. The DCP acknowledged that the Munshipulia and Khurram Nagar flyovers, which have been recently constructed, have significantly helped ease traffic flow. "We have also submitted proposals for changes at the Engineering College Crossing, which will further improve traffic. For the new flyovers at Kamta and Matiyari, we have suggested the construction of slip roads, which have been approved, and DPRs have been prepared for them," he added.

Docs give new lease of life to critically ill obese patient

Lucknow (PNS):

Doctors at the Trauma Ventilatory Unit (TVU), KGMU Trauma Centre, have saved the life of a critically ill patient, an official said here on Tuesday. Dr Zia Arshad from the TVU explained that the case was challenging because the patient weighed over 130 kg and had several health issues. "The main problem was heart disease, hypertrophic obstructive cardiomyopathy, which causes the heart muscle to thicken abnormally. The patient also had breathing problems due to obstructive sleep apnea. On top of that, the patient was in shock and could not control blood pressure, even with strong medication," Dr Arshad pointed out. The patient was first treated in the cardiology department at

KGMU before being transferred to the emergency medicine department. The patient was intubated and kept on a ventilator because of the low oxygen levels. Later, the patient was moved to the TVU, where he stayed on the ventilator for six days while receiving cardiac treatment. "After that, the patient was taken off the ventilator and was given non-invasive ventilation (NIV) for three days and high-flow nasal cannula (HFNC) for two days. This helped reduce the need for oxygen. The patient's condition improved over time, and by February 17, he was discharged with stable vital signs, heart medications, and advice to use BiPAP at home," Dr Arshad explained.

Guv expresses grief over stampede, praises government for Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel addressed the joint session of the state legislature in the first session of 2025 on Tuesday. During her address, the governor expressed grief over the stampede that led to the casualties of Maha Kumbh pilgrims. Expressing sorrow over the fatal stampede on Mauni Amavasya, the governor said, "We are deeply saddened by this tragedy." She extended her condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and wished a speedy recovery for the injured. However, she praised the grand Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, describing the event as one that embodies the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat'. "The UP government has had the honour of organising the Maha Kumbh 2025. This year's event has set new benchmarks in cleanliness, security, and management. Maha Kumbh 2025 is a unique blend of faith and modernity, showcasing both tradition and progress." So far, over 50 crore devotees have taken a holy dip in the sacred Triveni Sangam. The governor also mentioned the historic cabinet meeting held on January 22, 2025, at the Triveni Sangam during Maha Kumbh. She highlighted that several key decisions were taken in the interest of the state during this significant occasion. The governor emphasised the importance of law and order, calling security essential for a civilised society. She highlighted the government's commitment to maintaining peace and stability, asserting, "Under my government, there have been no incidents of communal riots or caste-based conflicts." She highlighted that the government adopted a 'zero tolerance policy towards crime and criminals' and consistently improved policing standards.



Samajwadi Party leaders protest during the joint sitting of both Houses addressed by Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel, marking the beginning of the state Assembly Budget session in Lucknow on Tuesday. PTI

"These efforts have created a crime and fear-free environment as the government continues to work towards realising the vision of Ram Rajya—a state of justice, peace, and good governance," she stated. The governor highlighted the achievements of 'Operation Conviction', stating that from July 2023 to December 2024, the initiative led to 51 criminals being sentenced to death, 6,287 to life imprisonment, 1,091 to over 20 years in prison, 3,868 to 10-19 years, 5,788 to 5-9 years, and 51,748 to less than five years in jail. Highlighting initiatives for women and child safety, she mentioned that campaigns such as Mission Shakti 5.0, Operation Garuda, Operation Shield, Operation Destroy, Operation Bachpan, Operation Khoj, Operation Eagle, and Operation Raksha are being carried out across the state. The governor highlighted the state's progress in connectivity, calling Uttar Pradesh the 'Expressway State' of India. She noted the operational

Yamuna, Agra-Lucknow, Purvanchal, and Bundelkhand Expressways, along with the under-construction Ganga and Gorakhpur Link Expressways. "Uttar Pradesh now boasts the highest share of the nation's expressway network," she stated. The governor highlighted key developments in the UP Defence Industrial Corridor, including Bharat Dynamics Limited in Jhansi, Anchor Research Labs in Aligarh, and DRDO BrahMos Aerospace in Lucknow, with a potential investment of around Rs 9,500 crores. She also mentioned the creation of a semiconductor park, data centre park, and electronics system design and manufacturing cluster in the Yamuna Expressway Authority area. "The state government distributed free textbooks to 1.5 crore children and upgraded 680 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas. As part of the state's commitment to improving school infrastructure, 6,481 dilapidated schools have been reconstructed. Additionally, 680 Kasturba Gandhi Balika

Vidyalayas have been upgraded to provide free residential education for girls from weaker sections up to class 12," Patel noted. In line with improving educational access, financial assistance for uniforms, school bags, shoes, socks, and stationery is being directly transferred to parents' accounts through DBT, amounting to Rs 1,200 per child, she added. The governor said that 36 government polytechnics are nearing completion. Additionally, language labs and 251 smart classrooms have been set up across 89 polytechnic institutions to enhance the quality of education. The governor emphasised Uttar Pradesh's leadership in employment generation. She highlighted the creation of 1.65 crore jobs through 96 lakh MSME units and the Chief Minister Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan, which offers guaranteed, interest-free loans to young entrepreneurs to establish micro-enterprises, with a goal of creating one lakh new enterprises annually.

Their agenda is to make children 'maulvis': CM Yogi hits out at SP

Lucknow (PNS): Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath launched a scathing attack on the opposition Samajwadi Party for opposing the introduction of four regional languages of the state and English for the conduct of the proceedings of the state assembly.

Yogi also announced the establishment of Language Academies for Bhojpur, Braj, Bundeli, and the Sant Tulsidas Academy for the Awadhi Language. "These people will educate their children in English-medium schools, but if the government wants to provide the same opportunity to others, they say no—teach them Urdu instead. Their agenda is to make children 'kathmulla' and 'maulvis' and push the country towards fundamentalism. This double standard cannot continue," the CM said on Tuesday. Yogi unveiled a new policy allowing legislators to express their views in regional dialects, including Awadhi, Bhojpur, Bundeli, and Braj, during assembly proceedings.

The announcement, made in the legislative assembly, emphasises the state's rich linguistic diversity and aims to ensure that all members, irrespective of their fluency in Hindi, can actively participate in discussions. He highlighted the significance of these dialects in Uttar Pradesh, stressing their growing recognition. He stated, "Different dialects of the state—Bhojpur, Awadhi, Braj, and Bundelkhandi—are gaining recognition in this House. Our government is also working towards establishing academies for each of these languages. This House is not meant only for literary and grammar scholars."

He criticised the opposition from the SP to the government's initiatives and stated, "This is the problem with you people, and you (Samajwadi Party) will oppose every good work which is in the interest of the state. This



CM Yogi Adityanath speaks in the House during the Budget session of UP Assembly in Lucknow on Tuesday. PTI

type of opposition should be condemned." Welcoming the inclusion of local dialects in assembly proceedings, the chief minister emphasised the government's commitment to preserving and promoting these languages, recognising them as sub-languages of Hindi. "Our government is establishing separate academies for these languages to ensure their growth. They are daughters of Hindi and deserve their rightful respect. This House is not just for scholars; every section of society must have its voice heard," CM Yogi stated. Criticising those opposing Bhojpur, Awadhi, Braj, and Bundelkhandi, he said they are, in essence, against Uttar Pradesh's cultural heritage. Taking aim at the Samajwadi Party, he asserted that their character has become duplicitous. Emphasising the richness of Braj language, Yogi highlighted that Sant Surdas composed his divine verses in this language, while Sant Tulsidas composed the Ramcharitmanas in Awadhi, which became a spiritual guide not only for North India but also for NRIs in times of crisis. "It is unfortunate that at a time when these languages are receiving the respect they deserve, some people are protesting against it," he added. He pointed out that when the assembly secretariat recognised

Engage constructively in proceedings: CM to opp

Lucknow (PNS): Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath urged the opposition to engage constructively in legislative proceedings, instead of causing disruptions in the proceedings of the House "prompted by the recent electoral setbacks." He emphasised that the governor's address and budget discussion offer a vital platform for all members to voice their views effectively. The budget for the financial year 2025-26 will be presented in the state assembly by Finance Minister Suresh Khanna on Thursday. The chief minister reaffirmed the government's readiness to address any opposition-raised issues with facts, hoping that the House would serve as a forum for meaningful debate rather than allegations and disruptive conduct. He emphasised that responsible conduct from all members would uphold public trust in democracy. Welcoming legislators, he called for a productive and respectful session. Welcoming all members to the legislative session, CM Yogi highlighted the significance of the proceedings,

which commenced with the governor's address. Yogi underscored the rarity of such an extended legislative session in Uttar Pradesh's history and stressed the shared responsibility of the ruling party and the opposition to ensure productive and orderly discussions.

He hoped the House would serve as a meaningful platform for debate, reflecting the unprecedented development achieved under the BJP-led double-engine government over the past approximately eight years. These achievements, he stated, would be evident in the speeches and discussions within the House. The CM said that UP has undergone a remarkable transformation, gaining national and global recognition as a hub of growth and opportunity. He criticised the opposition for attempting to evade discussions on these achievements and disrupting proceedings. However, he expressed optimism that this Budget session could be productive if the opposition engages in constructive debate.

local languages, the SP opposed even that decision. He added that the public is fully aware of SP's double standards, and such hypocrisy should be exposed before society. "It is our responsibility to preserve our mother tongues and promote them. The opposition's stand clearly shows they are not just against development but also against our culture," he remarked. Contradicting the opposition's charge that the English language is being imposed on the assembly, the CM said, "There is no question of imposition of any language;

only an enabling provision has been made." The leader of opposition, Mata Prasad, however, countered the CM, saying, "Yogi Adityanath is misleading the House by twisting the issue and giving it a communal turn." "We are not against the introduction of regional languages of UP; Urdu and Sanskrit should also be added as it would enhance harmony. Many Muslim members speak in Urdu, and there should be simultaneous translation in Urdu and Sanskrit as planned for four regional languages and English," Pandey said.

Cong can never be true to Babasaheb's policies: Maya on Udit Raj remarks

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Tuesday slammed the Congress, saying the party could never be true and trustworthy to Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar's thinking and policies. Mayawati's remarks came after Congress leader and former MP Udit Raj made some controversial comments and alleged death threats against her. The party workers also staged a protest against Udit Raj here in the state capital. In a post on X, she said Congress has never respected Ambedkar, and no matter how many programmes the party claims to run in his honour, they are meaningless as these are only for political gains. She wrote in Hindi on X: "The Congress party, especially, which has disdained at every level the humanitarian struggle of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar for self-respect and self-esteem of millions of exploited and oppressed Dalits/Bahujans, even during his lifetime and after his death, can never be true and trustworthy to his thinking and policies. Therefore, no matter how many programmes the Congress organises in the name of 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Mandal, Jai Samvidhan' etc, for purely political and electoral gains, the followers of Baba

Saheb are not going to be misled by them. They are aware and alert and are struggling to stand on their own feet." The BSP chief also cautioned the Dalits against those within the community who misuse the cause for personal benefits. She said, "Along with this, the Bahujan Samaj needs to be cautious of some party-changing opportunists and selfish Dalits who keep making baseless statements, etc, to please their masters, and should not take them seriously because they are ignorant and unfamiliar with the 'social change and economic liberation' movement." Congress leader Udit Raj, during an event in Lucknow on Monday, had allegedly made a controversial statement. Udit Raj, who was a BJP MP from North West Delhi from 2014 to 2019, told the media, "How will you kill your own relatives? So Shri Krishna said that there are no close relatives, fight for justice and kill your own people." He further said, "Today our Shri Krishna has said at that very point that first of all kill your enemy." He added, "The one who is the enemy of social justice, I have mentioned him in my press release. Mayawati has strangled the social movement, so now the time has come to strangle her." Reacting to Udit Raj's statement, Mayawati's nephew and

BSP leader Akash Anand, in a post on X on Monday, demanded legal action against Udit Raj. "I want to clearly tell @uppolice that these criminals should be arrested within 24 hours and strict action should be taken under the law. Otherwise, the Bahujan youth of the country are not going to sit quietly. I know very well how to teach them a lesson." "Udit Raj is notorious for looking for opportunities in other parties for his selfish interests. He is concerned about the Bahujan Movement only so that he can become an MP or MLA from some party. This has nothing to do with the uplift of the Bahujan society," Anand said. He said that the language used was unacceptable. "I am a young soldier of the Bahujan Mission, but I understand the mission of Baba Saheb and Manjiv Saheb more than him. The kind of threat that is in his language today is absolutely unacceptable to us, to crores of soldiers of the Bahujan Mission... Forgetting the mission of Saheb in his selfishness, this scyphant is today threatening to 'strangle' our Mayawati, who has given social and economic freedom to millions of Dalits, exploited, deprived the poor of the country with political power," Anand said. Meanwhile, after the controver-

sy deepened, Raj posted a clarification on X on Tuesday. He wrote: "First of all, I would like to clarify that my statement should not be linked to Congress. Mayawati ji has misled people for 4 decades by spreading lies, propaganda, and calling Congress anti-Dalit. Using Dr Ambedkar as a shield, she cut the throat of Congress and enjoyed power. Crores of Bahujan workers created the movement by staying hungry and thirsty. Their donations, hard work, and sacrifice were suffocated. BSP never opened a front against RSS. Even today, they keep targeting Congress by making some reason or the other so that Dalits do not join. The time has come to send home the one who cut the throat of the entire Bahujan movement." "The conference and press conference were organised by the Dalit, OBC, Minority, and Adivasi Parishad. By attacking Congress again with the support of BJP, it has been shown that BSP is BJP's 'B' team." "Please do not drag Congress into this controversy. We are committed to saving the Bahujan movement, no matter what sacrifices we have to make. Udit Raj is a person who has never lied to anyone nor done any dishonesty. I have never compromised on principles and I will never do so," Udit Raj added.

Rai demands judicial probe against Nishad

Lucknow (PNS): Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai on Tuesday demanded a judicial enquiry against minister Sanjay Nishad and others against whom serious allegations were made by their own party leader Dharmatma Nishad, who allegedly ended his life recently. The party also demanded the removal of the minister from Yogi Adityanath's cabinet until the inquiry is completed. Expressing grief over the death, Ajay Rai on Tuesday wrote a letter to CM Yogi Adityanath, demanding that a judicial enquiry be conducted into the incident, as this matter concerns the purity of the political conduct of the accused minister, as well as his personal behaviour. Until an impartial enquiry is conducted into this matter, the minister has no right to remain in the cabinet, he said. Through the letter, Rai also demanded that the CM provide a sum of ₹1 crore as humanitarian assistance to the family of Dharmatma Nishad and offer an appointment in government service to his closest successor. Rai urged the chief minister to take the incident seriously.

इण्डियन ओवरसीज बैंक (भारत सरकार का उपक्रम) **INDIAN OVERSEAS BANK** (A GOVERNMENT OF INDIA UNDERTAKING)

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Branch - Sarvodaya Nagar, Kanpur-208005

PUBLIC NOTICE (FOR BREAK OPENING OF LOCKER)

Whereas, each of you mentioned below availed/hired locked facility from the Bank's Branch and committed default in payment of the locker rent as detailed below:

Sr. No.	Name and Address	Locker No.	Period from which locker rent is due and payable	Amt of Rent due and payable as on 01 October 2024
1.	Pradeep Shukla, 119/220, Jawahar Nagar Kanpur-208012	010045	01.10.2015	Rs. 12479/- + GST

In spite of service of notice demanding payment of the locker rent dues, each one of you failed to repay. Under the circumstances, it has been decided to break open the lockers on 03.03.2025 and thereby each of you are hereby called upon to contact the respective branch manager on or before 03.03.2025 during business hours and to pay the arrears of locker rent and other expenses, failing which the lockers will be break opened as proposed all at your risk/cost and consequences. You are also hereby informed that upon break open of lockers, the contents of the lockers, if any, shall be lying in the Branch at your risk, cost and consequences and bank shall not be liable or made responsible for any loss/damage to the contents of the locker. In case you fail to claim the contents of the locker within a period of 60 days from the Date of this notice by paying the arrears of locker rent, expenses incurred for break opening of locker, storing of the contents of the locker and other expenses the contents of the locker will be sold in public auction at your risk, costs and consequences without any notice to you and the resultant, costs and other charges will be recovered out of auction sale proceeds.

Place : Kanpur Authorised Officer, Indian Overseas Bank

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Public Auction/Sale Notice For Immovable Assets

Whereas, The Authorised Officer of Baroda U.P. Bank under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets Act 2002 (54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with rules 8 (6) of the Security Interest Demand Notices to borrowers and Authorised Officer has taken possession of the Properties described herein below. Off under the said Act by holding Auction on the date, place and time mentioned. Public at large and borrowers and guarant that Auction under SARFAESI Act 2002 in respect of Under noted properties will be conducted for sale on the terms and conditions of "AS IS WHERE IS" & "AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" "WHATEVER THERE IS BASIS" at Baroda U.P. Bank, Fatehpur. The sale is subject to the conditions mentioned in the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 and to the following fur Notice is again hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s)/Mortgagor(s) to invite BID/tenders for the Immovable properties mentioned below under SARFAESI Act 2002. So, the interested persons by fulfilling all terms & conditions mentioned below, in a sealed envelope on or before **Date 18.03.2025 at Baroda U.P. I Date 20.03.2025, Time: 12.00 PM.** The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub section (8) of section 13 o redeem the secured assets.

Sl. No.	Name of Borrowers/ Mortgagors/Guarantors/ Legal Heirs & Address	Details of Property/ Name of the Owner	Demand Notice Date/ Possession Date/ Possession Type
1.	Borrower (s): M/s Shri A.K. Enterprises, Prop. Mr. Kuldeep Kumar Gupta Guarantor (s): Mr. Anil Kumar S/o Shyam Gopal, Mrs. Shanti Devi W/o Ram Khelawan and Mr. Ram Khelawan S/o Shreepal Gupta, All R/o: House No. 376/337, Mohalla-Abunagar, Tehsil & Distt. - Fatehpur, Pin Code - 212601.	Equitable Mortgage of Land & Building in the name of Smt. Shanti Devi W/o Sri Ram Khelawan Gupta & Sri Ram Khelawan S/o Sri Shreepal , Situated at - House No. 376/337, Mohalla-Abunagar, Tehsil & Distt. - Fatehpur, Pin Code - 212601, Area: 27 Sq. Mtr. at present Area: 9.43 Sq. Mtr., Boundary of Property : East- House of Ramkhelawan, West- Vikrit House Door after Gali T/A House of Vishal Singh, North- Vikrit House Door After Road, South- House of Ramkhelawan	07.06.2024 22.08.2024 Symbolic Possession
2.	Borrower (s): Mr. Sunil Kumar Gupta S/o Sri Ram Kumar Gupta and Smt. Shashi Kiran Gupta W/o Mr. Sunil Kumar Gupta Guarantor (s): Shri Gulab S/o Shri Ram Das and Shri Awdhesh Kumar S/o Shri Ram Dayal, All R/o: Gram-Jhaupur, City, Pargana & Distt. - Fatehpur, Pin Code - 212601.	Equitable Mortgage of Open Land with Boundary in the name of Sri Sunil Kumar Gupta S/o Sri Ram Kumar Gupta , Situated at - Gram-Jhaupur, City, Pargana & Distt. - Fatehpur, Pin Code - 212601, Area: 28 Sq. Mtr. + 95 Sq. Mtr. + 84 Sq. Mtr. + 105 Sq. Mtr. = 312 Sq. Mtr., Boundary : East- 12 Feet Wide Rasta, West- House of Gupta Ji & Others, North- House of A. Singh & Others, South- House of Sahu Ji & Others.	28.06.2023 17.10.2023 Symbolic Possession

Terms & Conditions of Sale - 1. Interested Bidders have to submit their BID in sealed envelopes (Clear & Readable BIL favoring "Authorised Officer, Baroda U.P. Bank" & payable at Fatehpur, in advance along with the BID. The highest BID val price) will be considered as successful Bidder & rest EMD of unsuccessful Bidder/s will be refunded without interest within a deposit 15% of the BID amount (excluding EMD) on the same day in form of Cash and rest amount will have to be paid stri sale. If he fails to do so, the amounts previously deposited by him will be forfeited. **4.** Authorised Officer reserves the ric

Drone flying in Ayodhya shot down, probe on

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A drone flying amidst the crowd in the Ram temple complex in Ayodhya was brought down by the security forces. The drone had reached Gate No. 3 on Monday evening, at a time when there was a large crowd present to see Ram Lalla. According to sources, the anti-drone system shot down the drone. Following this, security personnel became alert, and a bomb squad team was called in to examine the drone. The individual responsible for flying the drone is currently being searched for. The Ayodhya police suspect that this could be part of a conspiracy to cause a stampede, as flying drones in the Ram temple area is strictly prohibited. Even airplanes are not allowed to fly over the temple. An FIR



Rush of devotees at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on Tuesday. PTI

has been filed by the police, stating that this could be an attempt to carry out subversive activities. Ayodhya's Katra Chowki Incharge, Sunil Kumar, has filed an FIR at the Ram Janmabhoomi police station. The FIR mentions that, on February 17 at 7 pm, an unknown person deliberately dropped the drone camera while

flying it in the restricted area near the duty point and batching plant in the Ram temple complex. The report suggests that the drone may have been brought down due to the large number of devotees present in the temple premises, possibly with the intention of causing a stampede and resulting in loss of life. This is particularly concerning during the ongoing Maha Kumbh, which has seen a large influx of devotees to Ayodhya. Meanwhile, Circle Officer of Ayodhya, Ashutosh Tiwari, stated that the drone may be related to a wedding ceremony nearby. The anti-drone system at the Ram temple pulls in any flying drone within a radius of two and a half kilometres. The situation is currently under investigation. It should be noted that drones are banned in and around the Ram temple, and

permission must be obtained from the administration to fly one. Even aircraft are prohibited from flying over the temple. The Special Security Force (SSF) is responsible for the temple's security, with 200 jawans deployed for the task. Since the consecration of Ram Lalla on January 22, 2024, around 1.5 lakh devotees visit the temple daily. There are also concerns regarding potential terrorist attacks on the temple. In response, preparations are underway to set up an NSG hub to enhance the security of Ayodhya. This unit will be equipped with special weapons and anti-drone technology. An integrated control centre is also being built in the temple complex at a cost of Rs 11 crore, with seating arrangements for the police, CRPF, SSF, and intelligence organisations.

KTS a historic cultural event: Minister



Union Minister of Tourism and Culture GS Shekhawat addressing KTS 3.0 at Namoh Ghat in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Union Minister of Tourism and Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat participated in the cultural programme organised at Namoh Ghat on Monday evening on the third day of the third edition of Kashi-Tamil Sangamam (KTS) under the joint aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, North Central Zone Cultural Centre (Prayagraj) and South Zone Cultural Centre (Thanjavur). The union minister said KTS is a historic cultural event realising the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'. "The cultural and spiritual connection between Kashi and Tamil Nadu is thousands of years old. This connection is a symbol of the unity and diversity of Indian civilisation. Tamil language is

one of the oldest languages in the world and Tamil culture is famous for its rich literature, music, dance, folk arts and architecture", Shekhawat said. "PM Modi has worked to revive the closeness between north and south India through events like KTS", he said, adding that Kashi is the spiritual capital of India, while Tamil Nadu is the pride of Indian culture and a similar stream of faith, devotion and art flows in the culture of both. The union minister said through this event, the countrymen are getting an opportunity to get acquainted with the folk arts, traditions and richness of language and literature of Tamil Nadu. He said this programme not only encourages cultural exchange, but also strengthens the spirit of integrity and unity of Indian society.

Audience experience grandeur of south India's rural fests, temples

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The third day's programme of the third edition of Kashi-Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0 under the joint aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, NCZCC, Prayagraj, and SZCC, Thanjavur, at Namoh Ghat on Monday evening featured various presentations depicting the rich cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu, which mesmerised the audience.

performance of Periyamelam, Damuku and Sattimela, in which resonating sounds of drums, nagadas and traditional instruments made the audience experience the grandeur of rural festivals and temples of South India. Senthil Velkumar and his team from Madurai presented excerpts from the Tamil epic Kamba Ramayana. In this performance, the Maryada Purushottam image of Lord Rama and war scenes with Ravana were depicted in an



Bharatnatyam was presented by Mala Hombal and her team, in which the praise of gods and goddesses, devotion and various emotions of human life were brought alive through expressions, melody and rhythm. After this, P Annadurai and his team performed Therukootu, the traditional folk drama style of Tamil Nadu. Presented with masks, colourful costumes and storytelling, this drama art brought the mythological stories alive on the stage. K Ashok Kumar and his team gave an instrumental

impressive manner. After this, there were captivating performances of Kattaikal, Kargam, Thappattam and folk songs. In Kargam dance, the dancers displayed their amazing art while balancing with a pot on their head, while Thappattam dance presented a glimpse of Tamil life with folk music and rhythm. This cultural festival of Kashi Tamil Sangam will continue till February 24 in which a grand glimpse of Tamil folk arts, classical dance and music, folk drama and traditions of Tamil Nadu will be seen.

DM: Wear of helmets compulsory

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate S Rajalingam has directed all officers and employees of government and semi-government offices who come to office by two-wheelers as well as pillion rider to compulsorily wear helmets.

Similarly, all officers/employees who come to office by four-wheelers, should wear seat belts compulsorily and not use mobile phones while driving. The district magistrate gave these instructions on Tuesday. He further said that use of seat belt is compulsory for all passengers in four wheelers. If the security personnel at the entrance of offices checks the compliance of helmet and seat belt and finds violation of the above instructions, then their entry in the office should be banned. Also, action as per rules will be considered against the officers/employees who violate the rules. The DM has also directed all heads of offices to ensure strict compliance of the above instructions by the subordinate officers and employees.

AWARD: The Team AVERERA from the Indian Institute of Technology (BHU) has emerged victorious at the Shell Eco-Marathon 2025, securing first place in the prestigious Carbon Footprint Reduction Award and Technical Innovation Award. The team outperformed more than 60 teams from 15 countries, making them the best in the entire Asia-Pacific and Middle East region.



Sadhus of 'Avahan Akhara' taking part in a procession in Varanasi on Tuesday.

PTI

Workshop on promoting Indian languages held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Former professor of Tamil Nadu Teachers Education University S Mani said multilingual education is helpful in preserving and promoting Indian languages, increasing inclusiveness and bridging the language gap created due to the dominance of English. "Despite its importance in the global perspective, there is a lack of technical means like language laboratories and multilingual assessment facilities. Challenges are hindering the

availability of equal education", he said, while addressing the second day of the five-day workshop on 'Training of Trainers: Promoting Indian Languages and Integrating Indian Knowledge Tradition in Higher Education Curricula' being organised on Tuesday under the joint aegis of Inter-University Teacher Education Centre (IUCTE), BHU, Vidya Bharati Higher Education Institute, Tamil Nadu and Bharatiya Bhasha Samiti, New Delhi. Prof Mani said inclusion of

multilingual education in the curriculum can enhance the cognitive ability of students, strengthen employment opportunities and encourage educational collaboration, research and social harmony. He also emphasised the need for context-based, interactive and technology integrated methods to make language teaching effective. In this session, traditional and modern teaching methods were discussed, which emphasised on improving the participation and understanding of the students.

A divine, delightful experience!

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A group of Tamil delegates comprising farmers and artisans who came here to participate in the Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0 with an aim to revive the cultural and educational ties between Varanasi and Tamil Nadu took a holy dip in Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Tuesday. Meanwhile, the first Tamil group of students and teachers visited the Ram Lalla Temple in Ayodhya to have the divine darshan there. A group of farmers and artisans from Tamil Nadu arrived at the Maha Kumbh after visiting Varanasi, where they took a holy dip in the Sangam. The delegates were warmly welcomed by the organisers and district administration at the Tent City in Sector 22. After taking their ceremonial bath in the Sangam, they continued their journey to Ayodhya



Dham. This event is being organised by the Union Ministry of Education as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat'. Ramdas, who attended the Maha Kumbh, expressed his joy after taking a dip in the Sangam. He mentioned that the event organised by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is truly wonderful. "We never imagined that we would have the opportunity to visit three

sacred places together. We are beyond happy. It was very nice to visit the Sangam area", he said. Hemraj Giri praised the arrangements at the Maha Kumbh, stating that despite the large crowd such a grand event is being organised smoothly. He expressed his happiness, saying, "It feels wonderful, we had the darshan of Baba in Kashi and now we are on our way to have the darshan of Lord Ram." The delegates also collected water from the Mahakumbh to offer it at temples in South India. Meanwhile, the first group of students and teachers who arrived for the KTS 3.0 visited the Ram Lalla Temple to have the divine darshan of Shri Ram Lala. Upon their arrival in Ayodhya, SDM Sandeep Srivastava welcomed the delegates with garlands. Following this, the delegates were briefed about the grandeur and spirituality of Ayodhya. In the morn-

ing, all delegates boarded buses and set off for the darshan of Lord Ram. As soon as they reached the temple premises, they began chanting 'Jai Shri Ram'. The Tamil delegates were deeply moved on seeing the magnificent Ram Lalla Temple after 500 years. After the darshan, they expressed immense joy. Ajit Kumar from IIT Madras said "The journey was wonderful. We visited the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi and learned about the history of the temples there. Following this, we visited the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh, where the arrangements were excellent. We had a divine experience taking a sacred dip at the Sangam. We travelled to Ayodhya and had the privilege of darshan at Lord Ram Temple. Our journey was delightful because of the government's initiative. This effort will further promote the civilisation and culture of both states".

Stress on reducing neonatal mortality rate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

With the goal of bringing the neonatal mortality rate to single digit, the district has been selected by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Government of India and National Health Mission, Government of Uttar Pradesh to develop it as a model under the Sankalp project. Along with the Health Department, experts from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and the Community Empowerment Lab (CEL) are collaborating in this campaign. In this direction, continuous efforts are being made to achieve the goal of reducing the infant mortality rate by involving government and private health facilities, child development department, key stakeholders, and other institutions, said Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary, adding that currently this research is being done under the Sankalp



CMO Dr S Chaudhary giving instructions to health personnel on Sankalp Project in Varanasi on Tuesday

Project in four development blocks of the district — Cholapur, Chirgaon, Pindra and Urban Community Health Centre (UCHC) Sarnath. He said all medical and paramedical staff of all CHCs and PHCs under Cholapur block and 21 CHOs and 110 ASHA workers of all Ayushman Arogya Mandirs have been trained for management of respiratory tube during normal delivery. "As many as 142 normal deliveries have taken place in the health centres from January 1 till now. In which 49

deliveries have taken place under the supervision of the technical team of CEL institution", he added. Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Programme Nodal Officer Dr HC Maurya said in this campaign, complete assessment of newborn birth and death, initiative of 'normal delivery' to reduce post-birth deaths (encourage natural delivery), increasing the capacity of service providers to save the lives of newborns and community participation and empowerment is being done on all aspects of

health from pregnancy to newborn. He said sensitisation workshops are being organised for mutual coordination of all facility providers, in which Sankalp helpline number 0522-3517566 and 8810757266 has also been issued for monitoring better health from pregnancy to newborn. Anyone can get help as per need on this number. Sick New Born Care Units (SNCUs) and New Born Stabilisation Units (NBSUs) are being strengthened for the facilities of sick babies. Meanwhile CMO Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said under the 100-day active TB detection campaign, health examination of 150 construction workers was done and necessary medicines were provided. Out of these, samples of four people have been taken and sent for examination. He said TB is treatable if it is treated at the right time and medicines are taken on time.

AI's transformative role in driving future research emphasised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The 29th International Conference on 'Global Issues in Multidisciplinary Research for a Digital Future' (ICGIMRDF 2025), jointly organised by the School of Basic Sciences, CSJM University, and the Forum for Advanced Training in Education and Research Academy (FATER), concluded successfully. The second day of the conference was marked by poster and paper presentation sessions, along with seven keynote lectures delivered by



Dr. Namita Tiwari and Dr. Anju Dixit being awarded the certificate of appreciation.

eminent researchers from diverse fields. Experts emphasised the transformative role of

artificial intelligence in driving future research and innovation, reinforcing its impact across

various disciplines. In recognition of their outstanding efforts in organising the conference, Dr Namita Tiwari and Dr Anju Dixit (conveners) were awarded the Certificate of Appreciation by Dr Yuriy Sharylo, Director of the State Establishment Methodological and Technological Centre of Aquaculture, State Agency of Ukraine. The award was presented by Prof Natalia, acknowledging the conveners' dedication and commitment to academic excellence. The valedictory session was graced by Partho Kar, Joint Managing Director of

Jaykay Enterprises Ltd, New Delhi, as the chief guest. Prof RK Dwivedi welcomed the Chief Guest while Dr Namita Tiwari delivered concluding remarks, emphasizing the importance of sustained research collaborations. A key milestone of the conference was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sir Padampat Singhania Education Centre (SPSEC) to introduce a Vedic Mathematics Certificate Course. This initiative aims to integrate traditional mathematical wisdom with modern education, enriching learning methodologies.

Man, son meet tragic end

Prayagraj (PNS): A man and his son who were travelling in a car died in a road accident on the Handia-Kokharaj highway under Tharwai police station area. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem. The injured are being treated in the hospital. Manoj Kumar Gupta (58) of Bawanganj in Katihar (Bihar) had gone come to Sangam for taking a bath with his wife Ruby and son Raja Gupta (30) and two other relatives by car. After taking a dip they went to Ayodhya and from there were returning to Delhi. A tanker hit the car near Berui village as a result of

which all the people travelling in the car were injured. Manoj and his son Raja died while being taken to the hospital. Ruby and other two relatives were admitted to the the PHC in Gani for treatment. Driver Ganesh of Delhi was admitted to the PHC in Soraoon. Later Ruby was referred to Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital. The police sent the bodies of both the deceased for post-mortem. Meanwhile one person died while fours were injured in a collision between two cars in Bani village under Sarai Inayat area. The police sent all the injured to the community

health centre for treatment. Meanwhile two students died after they were being hit by a fourwheeler in Saidabad town. Mohammad Samsher (18) and Mohammad Rehan (19) were waiting for their friend in front of a shop when the Bolero carrying devotees hit them. Police said the Bolero driver fell asleep and the vehicle went out of control. Half-a-dozen devotees in the Bolero also suffered minor injuries. Saidabad outpost in charge reached the spot with the police team. The injured were immediately sent to the hospital, where both the youths died as soon as they reached the hospital.

NSI wins prize



Prof Seema Paroha (right) and Mallika Dwivedi (left) of NSI Kanpur receiving the award.

Kanpur (PNS): National Sugar Institute (NSI), Kanpur, was adjudged the third winner for its outstanding work in Hindi in the Rajbhasha Sammelan of four zones of the country organised by the Union Home Ministry in Jaipur. Director, NSI, Prof Seema Paroha and Assistant Director (Rajbhasha) Mallika Dwivedi were felicitated with the award by Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai and

Chief Minister of Rajasthan Bhajan Lal Sharma. NSI Director Prof Seema Paroha said in the one-day joint zonal Rajbhasha Sammelan of North Zone 1, North Zone 2, Central and Western Zones organised in Jaipur, Secretary and Joint Secretary of Rajbhasha Vibhag along with senior officials of 16 states and union territories, central government offices, banks and PSUs were present.

Progress of Indian universities highlighted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

"India's digital culture and technological innovations in higher education are becoming a centre of attraction for the world. Indian universities have rapidly set new benchmarks in rankings, grading and research. Indian universities are continuously progressing in digitization, innovation and research. They are swiftly adopting digital technologies, enhancing the quality of education, and providing students with access to the latest resources. Universities in India are promoting new research programmes and startups, giving students and researchers opportunities to transform their ideas into practical solutions. Indian universities are striving to compete globally and set new standards in the field of education". These thoughts were shared by Prof. Vinay Kumar Pathak, President of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) and Vice-Chancellor of Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU), while repre-



sending Indian universities at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. The event saw participation from representatives of several Scottish universities, including Robert Gordon University, University of Glasgow, University of Aberdeen, and University of Edinburgh. Prof. Pathak began his address by referring to Swami Vivekananda and highlighted the progress of Indian universities. He emphasised that Indian and Scottish universities can collaborate in various fields of research and innovation. He suggested that both countries can work together in technology and innovation, particularly in

areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, quantum computing, data science, and health-care biotechnology. **DRIVER DIES IN MISHAP:** A mini bus driver died and 22 pilgrims were injured when their vehicle rammed into a truck ahead of it on Bahera overbridge in Mahewa on Agra-Kanpur national highway in Etawah late on Monday night. All the pilgrims were going to take dip in Prayagraj Maha Kumbh from Delhi. SHO Bhpendra Singh said the mishap took place around 1 am. The truck driver escaped by leaving the vehicle behind, he added.

NTPC Northern Electron Quiz regional round held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The NTPC Northern Regional Headquarters in Lucknow successfully hosted the NTPC Northern Electron Quiz regional round on Monday, with an impressive participation of 148 teams from 21 engineering and management institutes across Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand participating in it. In this quiz competition, IIM Lucknow emerged victorious, securing both first and second place, while IIT-BHU claimed the third position in a closely contested contest that remained intense till the final moments. The winners of the competition were: Vibhav Tripathi & Prasant Singh Chauhan (IIM Lucknow), runners-up: Faheem Shanavas & Deepak Kumar Saha (IIM Lucknow) and third position: Sanjeev VA & S Vigneshswaram (IIT-BHU). Regional Executive Director (NR) NS Rao, congratulated



the winners and participants, commending NTPC's initiative to foster a culture of quizzing among young minds. He highlighted the significance of this year's edition, coinciding with NTPC's 50th anniversary, a milestone celebrating five decades of commitment to nation-building. Since its inception in 2004, the NTPC Electron Quiz has evolved into a prestigious platform this year's theme, was 'The World of Business and Management'. The winners were felicitated by Rao in the presence of President of Uttara Club Vijaya

Rao along with senior NTPC officials, including GM (OS), GM (HR) and members of the Uttara Club. Marking its 50th anniversary this year, NTPC, India's largest integrated power utility, is organising the Electron Quiz 2025 across nine regional locations, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Ranchi, Noida, Raipur, and Patna, between February 1 and 28. The top two teams from each region will advance to the national semi-finals with best teams progressing to the national finals.

India, Qatar to double trade to USD 28 Billion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Qatar on Tuesday here agreed to double bilateral trade to USD 28 Billion over the next five years and announced elevation of their relationship to the level of strategic partnership as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani.

The two sides also signed two agreements - one on establishing strategic partnership and another on Revised Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement and signed five memoranda of understanding to strengthen economic partnership, step up ties in areas such as management of archives, and cooperation in youth affairs and sports.

"The strategic partnership agreement actually elevates the present state of bilateral relationship to a strategic level. What we are looking at is deepening cooperation in fields of trade, energy security, as well as in regional and international fora," Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, told reporters here. He said Modi and the Qatari



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani shake hands before a meeting at Hyderabad House, in New Delhi, Tuesday. Photos by: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Amir also decided to set a target to double bilateral trade from the current USD 14 billion to USD 28 Billion over the next five years. Last year, during Modi's visit to

Qatar, India had signed a USD 78 billion deal to extend LNG imports from the Gulf nation by another 20 years till 2048 at rates lower than the then prevailing prices.

Modi and the Amir held wide-ranging talks with focus on trade, investments, technology, energy and people-to-people ties, further cementing the "deep and traditional relation-

ship" between the two countries. They also exchanged views on "regional and global issues" of mutual interest, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

Earlier in the day, the Amir of Qatar was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as President Droupadi Murmu welcomed the visiting leader. Modi was also present on the occasion.

India and Qatar have deep-rooted historical ties of friendship, trust and mutual respect. In recent years, the ties between the two countries, including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, technology, culture and people-to-people relations, have continued to strengthen, the MEA earlier said.

The Amir of Qatar arrived here on Monday evening, his visit coming almost a year after Modi had visited the Gulf nation in February 2024.

Extending a rare gesture of hospitality, Modi received the Amir at the Delhi airport on Monday evening. He welcomed him with a warm handshake and hug, displaying the bonhomie between the two leaders.

Gyanesh Kumar to take over as 26th CEC on Wednesday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Gyanesh Kumar, who as a Senior Union Home Ministry official played a key role in the government's move to abrogate provisions of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and setting up the Ram temple trust, will assume the office of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) on Wednesday.

Kumar retired as Secretary in the Cooperation ministry in January 2024 and was appointed as an election commissioner in March 2024. He will become the 26th CEC, a day after incumbent Rajiv Kumar demitted office on Tuesday evening.

Kumar along with fellow election commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu was appointed on the same day and was part of the Commission when the 2024 Lok Sabha polls were held. He is the first CEC to be appointed under a new law on the appointment of the members of the Election Commission (EC). His term will run till January 26, 2029, days



Newly appointed Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar with his wife poses for picture at the Election Commission's office, in New Delhi

before the EC is expected to announce the schedule of the next Lok Sabha election. According to law, CEC and ECs demit office on attaining the age of 65 years or completing six years in the poll panel, whichever is earlier. Gyanesh Kumar will turn 65 on January 27, 2029.

During his tenure as the CEC, Kumar will oversee the Bihar Assembly polls later this year, and the Kerala and Puducherry Assembly polls in 2026. Similarly, he will oversee the assembly polls in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, which are also due in 2026. Besides the vari-

ous assembly polls, he will also oversee the elections for President and Vice-President in 2027.

Kumar played a key role in implementing decisions following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution in Jammu and Kashmir during his stint in the Union home ministry.

During his tenure in the ministry, he had also played a key role in setting up the Ram Temple trust post the Supreme Court verdict. He is also learnt to have closely monitored the SC hearings on Ram temple on a regular basis.

SC grants bail to Christian Michel James in Augusta Westland case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to alleged middleman Christian Michel James deported to India six years ago from Dubai in the controversial ₹3,600 Crore Augusta Westland helicopter purchase case being probed by the CBI. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta observed James was in custody for the past six years while the investigation in the matter was still underway. James, however, cannot walk out of jail as he faces a related money laundering case by ED and his bail plea is pending in the Delhi High Court. "Petitioner was extradited in 2018 and has been in custody for more than 6 years now. According to CBI despite filing two chargesheets and a supplementary chargesheet, the investigation is still ongoing. We are inclined to grant bail on such terms and conditions as determined by the trial court. The CBI will make appropriate request to the trial court for imposing necessary conditions," said the bench.

The top court said James would be released on bail, subject to terms and conditions decided by the trial court. The counsel for the CBI sought time saying the additional Solicitor General was unavailable for arguments. When the bench showed its inclination to grant bail, the CBI's lawyer said the plea was filed only in terms of seeking bail on medical grounds. The court subsequently questioned the delay in the investigation and the trial in the case. It said given the speed, the trial would not conclude in 25 years. Advocates Aljo K Joseph and Vishnu Shankar, representing James, referred

to his six-year long incarceration. The chopper purchase scam relates to the irregularities following the purchase of 12 VVIP helicopters from chopper design and manufacturing company Augusta Westland. James moved the apex court challenging the Delhi High Court's September 25, 2024 order refusing him bail in the case. British national James was extradited from Dubai in December, 2018, and arrested subsequently. He is one among three alleged middlemen in the case. Guido Haschke and Carlo Gerosa are the other two. The CBI chargesheet alleged an estimated loss of 398.21 million euros (about ₹2,666 Crore) to the exchequer due to the deal signed on February 8, 2010, for the supply of VVIP choppers worth 556.262 Million Euros.

UN report highlights alarming data gaps in Asia-Pacific

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Data gaps persist and leave some of the most vulnerable populations invisible in official statistics, limiting policymakers' ability to address their needs effectively across Asia and the Pacific, according to a new UN report.

The report also highlighted that how efforts from surveying hundreds of nomadic tribal households across Rajasthan to health-monitoring mobile applications in Indonesia are transforming sustainable development in the region. The new report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) released on Tuesday demonstrated that by amplifying the voices of under-represented communities, these solutions are not only making policies more inclusive but also making sustainable development monitoring more representative across Asia and the Pacific.

However, the Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025 also stressed that urgent action is still needed in order to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

"Data gaps persist and leave some of the most vulnerable populations invisible in official statistics, limiting policymakers' ability to address their needs effectively," underscored United Nations Under-Secretary-General and ESCAP Executive Secretary Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana. She added, "Constrained resources to modernize statistical systems pose additional hurdles. Without urgent action to accelerate progress, many of the Goals will remain out of reach."

The report said across Asia and the Pacific, communities are pioneering innovative solutions to bridge critical data gaps, ensuring that marginalized populations are no longer invisible in policymaking. "From surveying hundreds of

nomadic tribal households across Rajasthan State in India to health-monitoring mobile applications in Indonesia, these efforts are transforming sustainable development in the region," the report said.

The report said in India, the Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion conducted a household survey of 400 nomadic tribal households across eight locations in Rajasthan, with strong collaboration and support from community-based organizations and volunteers. The aim was to assess the development challenges of these tribal households and map community access to social protection.

The initiative highlighted the power of community-level information for localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"Additionally, it strengthened community volunteers' capacity to collect and analyse data, enabling them to identify local challenges and advocate for solutions through meaningful

dialogues," the report said. The report highlighted several SDG targets where Asia and the Pacific leads globally such as reducing income poverty (Goal 1), addressing under-nourishment (Goal 2), supporting small-scale industries (Goal 9), reducing hazardous waste (Goal 12), mitigating land degradation (Goal 15), and combating human trafficking and intentional homicide (Goal 16).

Despite these strides, slow progress or setbacks in critical goals such as quality education (Goal 4), decent work and economic growth (Goal 8), and responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) threaten regional efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Rising fossil fuel subsidies, low literacy and numeracy rates, and unsustainable production patterns further compound these challenges, the report said. Meanwhile, environmental degradation, increasing vul-

nerability to natural disasters, and persistent greenhouse gas emissions are exacerbating setbacks on climate action (Goal 13), life below water (Goal 14) and life on land (Goal 15). The report further found that development benefits often bypass vulnerable groups, with intersecting factors like age, gender, education, location and wealth exacerbating inequalities.

"Poverty and education level are the two most significant factors contributing to inequality of opportunity. Poorer households in rural areas with lower levels of education are the most disadvantaged in accessing basic services such as water, sanitation and clean energy," the report said.

To bridge these gaps, ESCAP called for innovative and inclusive data collection and analysis. Nuanced and granular data will provide policymakers a clearer understanding of the realities of specific population groups especially those most at risk of being left behind.

CENJOWS unveils publications on information warfare and Russia-Ukraine conflict



Centre for Joint Warfare Studies releases two critical publications on Contemporary Security Challenges, New Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS), under the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS), Ministry of Defence, in a significant step towards advancing strategic thought and policy discourse, unveiled two critical publications here on Tuesday.

Chief of Integrated Defence Staff & Chairman CENJOWS Lt General J P Mathew launched the February 2025 issue of the flagship journal Synergy, themed 'Information Warfare Impacting Joint Warfighting' and a monograph titled 'Russia-Ukraine War: Navigating the Ramifications for Europe and India', provides an in-depth analysis of the geopolitical, economic and security implications of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.

It examines the role of Information Warfare in Joint Warfighting in modern conflicts, including cyber, psychological, and electronic warfare. It explores Technological Disruption, assessing AI, cyber tools and digital deception in shaping the future of warfare and evaluates Strategic & National Security Impact and

India's challenges, particularly in response to adversarial IW tactics. It further discusses Operational Convergence while exploring the integration of IW within Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems to enhance joint force effectiveness. The monograph, titled 'Russia-Ukraine War: Navigating the Ramifications for Europe and India', provides an in-depth analysis of the geopolitical, economic and security implications of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.

It assesses the war's impact on European stability, Indo-Russian relations and India's strategic positioning in a rapidly evolving global order. The study explores key aspects such as geopolitical realignments, energy security challenges, India's diplomatic balance, NATO's Indo-Pacific expansion, EU-India collaboration and long-term global security implications.

With the release of these two significant publications, CENJOWS reaffirms its commitment to fostering intellectual engagement on contemporary strategic issues. Both the monograph and Synergy journal are now available, serving as essential resources for the policymakers, military professionals, researchers and academic institutions.

Amit Shah reviews new criminal laws in J and K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday here reviewed the status of the implementation of the new criminal laws in Jammu and Kashmir in the presence of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

Abdullah attended the meeting though law and order is directly handled by the Central government since the erstwhile state was bifurcated into the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh in 2019. Besides Abdullah and Sinha, top officials of the Central government and Jammu and Kashmir government attended the meeting at North Block, officials said.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam replaced the colonial era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal



Amit Shah reviews status of the implementation of new criminal laws in Jammu and Kashmir in the presence of CM Omar Abdullah and LG Manoj Sinha, New Delhi

Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872, respectively. The new laws came into effect from July 1 last year. The home minister has already reviewed the status of the implementation of the new criminal laws in several states, including Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Abdullah said the three new criminal laws have been "by and large" implemented successfully in the

Union Territory and it was important that the citizens are made aware about the provisions of the new Acts. He was speaking to reporters outside the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) office after participating in a review meeting of the three laws that was chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. "The meeting discussed the shortcomings and the areas to work upon for the smooth implementation of the three

laws in Jammu and Kashmir," Abdullah said.

The home minister (Shah) said in the meeting that so far a similar exercise has been completed for 11 states and UTs, he added. "In case of Jammu and Kashmir, so far, the implementation of the new laws has been by and large successful except a few instances. These issues will be addressed," Abdullah said.

The chief minister added that while the implementation of the new laws was "not the responsibility" of the elected government, but it was important that people were made aware about their contents and proceedings as these are new laws. We will have to make efforts for making people aware about these three criminal laws, be it colleges, universities or other places, he said. Abdullah said there was no discussion on the law and order issue in the UT, adding that this done when he met Shah at the Parliament recently.

PM Modi's PPC 2025: Toppers share success secrets

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Not stressing about volume of syllabus, prioritisation of topics and revision are among the tips shared by toppers of various exams during the last episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's annual Pariksha Pe Charcha broadcast on Tuesday. From topper of NDA to UPSC, alumni of previous editions of Pariksha Pe Charcha shared their experience during a special session of PPC - an annual event in which Prime Minister Modi interacts with students appearing for the board examinations. In a shift from the traditional town hall format, Modi preferred a more informal setting this time and took students to Delhi's iconic Sunder Nursery for his annual interaction.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with students on different aspects of stress-free exams under Pariksha Pe Charcha programme, New Delhi

Eminent personalities such as Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone and Bhumi Pednekar, actor Vikrant Massey and spiritual leader Sadhguru have also shared their experiences and knowledge on key aspects of life and learning in different episodes of "Pariksha Pe Charcha". Chidvilas Reddy, a student of IIT

Bombay, said "there cannot be any fixed formula, what works for everyone is personalised preparation". Armanpreet Singh, who was topper of the National Defence Academy (NDA) entrance exam last year, said one should not be bothered about the volume of syllabus.

"We usually have a habit of counting the number of pages of the chapter before we begin reading or learning it. This impacts our psychology. I believe one should not be bothered about the volume at first and should divide everything into parts. Prioritise the topics and revise," he added.

Nutrition and health experts Shonali Sabherwal, Rujuta Diwekar and Revant Himatsingka, YouTuber Gaurav Chaudhary popularly known as "TechGuruji" and Radhika Gupta, MD and CEO, Edelweiss Mutual Fund, are among the other guests who have been part of the programme so far. Pariksha Pe Charcha is an annual event in which Modi interacts with students appearing for the board examinations. During this, he also answers the students' queries related to exam stress and other issues.

India eyes greener future with shift to renewable energy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Housing and Urban Affairs minister Manohar Lal on Tuesday said transitioning from thermal to renewable energy, utilising solar rooftops, and implementing regenerative braking in metros exemplify the shift toward a greener future.

CII Indian Green Building Council (CII IGBC), in partnership with the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), inaugurated the 5th international conference on Green Metro Systems - The Future of Urban Mobility. Addressing the conference, the minister said, "As humanity progresses, our innovations often clash with nature, bringing both advancement and risk. The rise in global temperatures beyond 1.5°C has become a cause for global concern, prompting nations to unite under agreements like the Paris Accord."

India, too, has committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, aligning its growth with sustainability. Urbanisation and industrialisation have increased pollution, but initiatives such as the Delhi Metro have significantly reduced environmental impact, demonstrating that thoughtful infrastructure can drive progress while protecting nature, the minister said. Energy efficiency and clean power are the need of the hour. Transitioning from thermal to renewable energy, utilising solar rooftops, and implementing regenerative braking in metros exemplify the shift toward a greener future. Technological advancements, like vertical solar panels and energy-efficient LED systems, pave the way for sustainable urban living. Furthermore, responsible consumption - whether in

air-conditioning usage or minimising wastage - can have a profound impact on energy conservation, he said.

"When metro started in Delhi, it has saved the national capital. Imagine, if the metro had not been there, Delhi would not have been able to develop this type of mobility system today. Around 70 lakh people are travelling daily in the metro," he said.

The minister also noted that the next thing is that the industrial revolution depends on power. Pollution also occurs in the generation of power because the traditional method is thermal, following which hydro also came. More thermal use will lead to pollution and global warming, he stated.

Then the renewable energy came and how the responsibility the Delhi Metro has taken to contribute into the transfer of renewable energy through solar or wind is highly commendable, the minister said.

"At least the power requirement for our metro should come from renewable energy. We do not have to take any fossil power, and if we do this then we will make a huge contribution," he said. According to a statement, Indian metro rail corporations are contributing to the green building movement by offering energy-efficient, low-emission public transportation thereby reducing urban pollution and traffic congestion.

Many metro stations, throughout India, are designed with energy-efficient technologies and use solar power systems which help reduce energy consumption. The DMRC is a pioneer in integrating solar power which helps meet a significant portion of its needs, it said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

New CEC takes over

Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the next Chief Election Commissioner by the PM-led selection committee amid criticism

The senior Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). The decision was made by the Prime Minister-led selection committee, which also named Haryana Chief Secretary Vivek Joshi as an Election Commissioner. However, the appointment has sparked controversy, with the Congress party questioning the process and alleging a lack of transparency. For decades, the Government held the power to appoint the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. However, in 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that appointments should be made by a panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) and the Leader of the Opposition (LoP). Despite this ruling, the new CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, replaced the CJI with a cabinet minister, a change that has been challenged in court. Gyanesh Kumar, is a seasoned bureaucrat and was appointed as an Election Commissioner in March 2023. He has a tenure extending until January 26, 2029, meaning he will oversee critical elections, including the 2029 general elections. His selection follows the convention of appointing the senior-most Election Commissioner to the role of CEC. Gyanesh Kumar replaces Rajiv Kumar, whose term concluded recently.



The Congress party, led by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, has strongly opposed the appointment process. Gandhi submitted a dissent note during the selection committee meeting, urging the Government to defer the decision until the Supreme Court rules on the validity of the selection panel's composition.

Congress leaders Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Ajay Maken have argued that proceeding with the appointment while the court is hearing a challenge to the new selection law undermines democratic principles. The government's decision to exclude the CJI from the selection panel and desperation to elect the CEC before the judgement indeed creates an impression that the Government wants to have its way in the election of Chief Election Commissioner. Ensuring transparency and balance in selecting election officials is crucial to maintaining a fair democratic process. Meanwhile, Vivek Joshi, a 1989 batch IAS officer, is set to serve as an Election Commissioner until February 2030. The Supreme Court has yet to issue a final verdict on the legality of the new selection process. The outcome of this legal battle could shape the future of India's electoral governance for years to come. To put things in perspective, the Election Commission plays a crucial role in the government machinery during elections and can significantly impact their outcomes. However, it is often influenced by the government through the appointment of favorable officials. It was, in fact, TN Seshan who, as Chief Election Commissioner, challenged government control and brought a sense of independence to the Commission.

PICTALK



A squirrel enjoys palash flowers, in Nadia

Bangladesh wipes out history, shuns India at its own peril



ASHOK K MEHTA

With opposition forces emboldened, Bangladesh appears to be at a turning point, grappling with a shifting political landscape and growing internal discord

As a Mukti Jodha (freedom fighter – that's what Bangladeshis call Indian Army personnel who fought the Liberation War), I'm appalled at the recent turn of events, the mayhem in Dhaka and many parts of Bangladesh following Sheikh Hasina's virtual address to her party supporters from somewhere near Delhi which provided the pretext for the students of the protest movement and parties opposed to Awami League to set ablaze 32 Dhanmondi residence of Mujibur Rehman and a museum in his name.

Perhaps nothing 'physical' remains of Mujib's legacy even as Hasina said: "History cannot be wiped out". Mahfuz Alam, one of the student advisors to Mohammad Yunus, noted that symbols of fascism were being dismantled. Surprisingly BNP Secretary General Faqurul Aslam Alamgir protested the disorder and violence at a meeting with Yunus where he sought early elections. Later, he asked India to hand over Hasina and her accomplices to the government in Dhaka for trial.

Army Chief, Gen Waqar uz Zaman also commented on the negative effect on internal stability by adverse law and order situation but significantly noting that India is a big country and important neighbour. It is important for good relations for the security interests of both countries, he added. India has called the violence as 'regrettable' attracting a summoning of its acting High Commissioner in Dhaka. India-Bangladesh relations will get a lot worse before they get any better despite Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Dhaka in November and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's meeting with Touheed Hasan, acting advisor to the interim government in Bangladesh last Sunday in Delhi. One thing is becoming clear: a new Bangladesh is evolving and this is the real one, unlike the new Nepal expected after the 10-year civil war. Last August in one week the face of Bangladesh changed and is changing by the day by design.

The Americans were being blamed for regime change. The US and India were never on the same page in the last many



decades here. In an interview with The Hindustan Times, Lisa Curtis, a Trump 1.0 White House NSC chief of South and Central Asia, has dismissed any US role in Hasina's ouster. Last week, PM Modi raised concerns about Bangladesh with President Trump who denied any role of US Deep State in it. But for India, there are lessons from events in Bangladesh that the establishment is silent about because there was non-partisan support for Hasina and Awami League with the country's liberation linked to Mujib and India.

After Mujib's assassination in 1975, Hasina and her sister Rehana were provided refuge in India; history repeated itself in 2024. I was invited in November 2023, two months before the elections, to speak at the Liberation War Museum on the role of Chancellor Willy Brandt of Germany. One of the trustees of the museum, Dr Mofidul Hoque, took me around the museum. There was a section completely devoted to the political movement against Rawalpindi led by Sheikh Mujib called Story of Liberation Under a Genocide. The accent of the display depicted the liberation war fought by Bengali Mukti Jodhas with India in a support role. But it did have a gallery



AFTER MUJIB'S ASSASSINATION IN 1975, HASINA AND HER SISTER REHANA WERE PROVIDED REFUGE IN INDIA; HISTORY REPEATED ITSELF IN 2024

Bahini by the Indian Army. During my five-day visit, the BNP was out of the streets every other day coupling with garment factory workers and their unions demanding higher wages. A virtual war was being fought on the streets with the dominant Awami League counter-protestors unleashed.

Most people I spoke to said if there was a free and fair election BNP would win. This was one view I received even from our High Commission. While people were angry with India for supporting Hasina, the media was scared of the government. Despite the negative vibes of the Hasina regime, Delhi was reluctant to abandon her. I wonder what inputs Indian intelligence agencies had provided. They likely failed to read the mood of the people which led to a students' revolt.

One other truth and for me, the most significant was that the goodwill dividend of India's support to the liberation war and attainment of nationhood has dissipated – to put it crudely, the use-by date was long over. The 1970 military vintage soldier had disappeared nearly two decades ago from all three armed forces – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In any case, very few units from East Pakistan Rifles and still fewer Bengalis

in the Pakistan Army were deployed in East Pakistan. The war effort was predominantly India with Mukti Bahini in support; that was the ground reality. As far as the Liberation War is concerned, Bangladesh had changed the narrative (history) as was evident from the Liberation War Museum. For India though, it was an iconic, once-in-a-thousand-year victory (over arch-enemy Pakistan) which became a landmark event for the Indian political and military leadership to celebrate and commemorate.

Yunus's Law Advisor, Arif Nazrul has said: "India was only an ally in the 1971 war victory, nothing more", a sentiment that was endorsed by the office of the interim government. Hasina's second spell of refuge in India is a matter of immense resentment in Bangladesh, but Delhi will not let down a friend and ally. India has opened its doors to several leaders fleeing from Nepal, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Maldives. But for housing Hasina, there will be costs for India.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KHELO INDIA WINTER GAMES POSTPONED

Madam — Climate change has finally made its presence felt by disrupting the 'Khelo India' to be held in Gulmarg. The second and final stage of the Khelo India Winter Games 2025, scheduled to be held in Gulmarg, Jammu and Kashmir from Saturday, has been postponed due to insufficient snowfall. The revised schedule will be announced when the weather conditions are favourable for the competitions. But now it does not seem that this will happen because now the spring season is going to enter the country. This is the second consecutive year that the event has been rescheduled due to insufficient snowfall. Last year, the Games had to be postponed till February after there was no rain in January.

The lack of snowfall in many areas is mainly due to climate change, as rising temperatures lead to more precipitation in the form of rain rather than snow, leading to a decrease in snow piles and snow cover, especially in mountainous areas. This phenomenon is often called "snow drought." It is not just India that is being affected by climate; it is a global problem. The whole world is grappling with it. I think the way temperatures are rising and the problem of forest fires, not only in developing countries but also in developed countries, are making people feel helpless. It is quite possible that after the next few years, it will be difficult to even host the Winter Olympic Games. In the future, sports like ice hockey and ice skating will disappear into the pages of history.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshepur

SC QUESTIONS GOVERNOR'S ACTIONS

Madam— The Supreme Court, while reserving its judgment on the writ petition filed by the Tamil Nadu Government, stated in unambiguous terms that Governor Ravindra Narayana Ravi's action of transferring the nine bills to the President of India after their re-enactment and re-submission was not in accordance with the provisions in the Constitution. The court noted that Governor Ravi had

Earthquake jolts Delhi



Residents of Delhi and its adjoining areas woke up to strong tremors caused by an earthquake of magnitude 4.0 on Monday morning. According to the National Centre of Seismology, the quake hit at a depth of about 5 km. Videos showed the ground and buildings shaking, forcing people to rush out of their homes. There have been no reports of casualties or damage to properties, but many residents claimed

that the tremors were so strong that it felt like a bridge was collapsing. However, the quake itself was not of a high-intensity magnitude. The gravity of the situation soon gave way to humour as social media users began sharing their reactions to the unexpected jolt. Memes and jokes flooded various platforms, with many poking fun at the situation while still conveying their fear and disbelief. While the suddenness of the earthquake understandably caused concern among residents, the quick wit and resilience of the people of Delhi-NCR were on full display as they found ways to cope with the unexpected turn of events. Like Mumbai rains, the Delhi tremor gave a tough time to people there, but it was business as usual once the tremor settled.

Aarohi Gupta | Ujjain

INDUSTRY STATUS FOR TOURISM

Madam — The Kerala government is planning to grant industry status to its tourism sector and cleared the way for the long-pending demand of the state tourism and hospitality sector of a specific area. Granting industry status to that specific area will encourage investment and development in that sector. Although it has been estimated that the Kerala tourism sector is providing direct or indirect employment to 25 lakh people since 2018, rapid urbanisation, infrastructural development, and natural calamities and catastrophes could possibly lead to an all-time low. The step initiated by the government authority for turning Kerala tourism into an industry-specific area could benefit the mass audience and also help with better employment opportunities in the near future.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Cracking CUET: A step-by-step guide to smart preparation



PANKAJ DHINGRA

By understanding the exam format, setting clear goals, and following an organised study schedule, students can cover the syllabus while boosting confidence

Preparing for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) can feel overwhelming, especially when juggling schoolwork and other responsibilities. However, CUET has transformed the university admissions process and a well-structured preparation plan can help you cover the syllabus effectively while boosting your confidence. By following a strategic approach over a few months, you can significantly enhance your chances of success.



self whether you have covered the syllabus for all sections, how confident you feel about scoring well on a scale of 1 to 5, and which section you find most challenging. **Step 3: Set Clear Goals** Define your objectives based on your preferred university and course. Research the CUET score requirements for institutions like Delhi University, Banaras Hindu University and JNU. Having a clear goal will keep you motivated and focused throughout your preparation journey.

Step 4: Allocate Study Time Using insights from your self-assessment, create a balanced study plan. If you are strong in certain subjects, spend less time on them but focus on regular revision. Dedicate more time to weaker subjects to better understand concepts and solve practice ques-

tions. For example, if the General Test is particularly challenging, allocate 1.5–2 hours daily to this section while spending an hour on Language or Domain-Specific Subjects.

Step 5: Weekly Study Schedule A well-structured timetable ensures consistency. A practical approach is to focus on one major subject per day from Monday to Friday. Saturday can be dedicated to taking mock tests and analysing performance, while Sunday should be reserved for reviewing the week's progress, revising difficult topics, and taking time to relax and recharge. Using time-blocking techniques by dividing the day into study, practice, and relaxation slots can be highly effective.

Step 6: Right Study Resources Relying on quality study materials is essential. NCERT textbooks provide conceptual clarity, while CUET-specific guides and reference books offer targeted preparation. Online platforms that provide mock tests and video lectures can be valuable resources. Practicing with previous years' question papers helps in identifying

important topics and understanding question trends.

Step 7: Regular Mock Tests Mock tests play a crucial role in CUET preparation. Aim to take at least one full-length test per week and gradually increase the frequency as the exam approaches.

Step 8: Exam Logistics Since CUET is a computer-based test, familiarising yourself with the technical requirements is necessary. Marking significant dates on a calendar will help in avoiding last-minute surprises.

Step 9: Maintain a Balance Avoiding burnout is vital for effective preparation. Incorporate short breaks into your study routine and engage in activities like exercise or meditation to stay refreshed. Ensuring you get seven to eight hours of sleep daily will help in maintaining focus and energy levels.

Step 10: Stay Positive Consistency is the key to achieving success in CUET. Sticking to your study plan while remaining adaptable to changes will be beneficial.

(The writer is Managing Partner, FinTram Global LLP; views are personal)

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode



FIRST COLUMN

THE SELECTIVE NARRATIVES THAT SHAPE OUR LEGACY

History is often told from the perspective of the victors, shaping collective memory in ways that serve those in power



A P S MALHOTRA

It is a well-established fact that History, often, is written from the perspective of the victor, making it a one-dimensional testimony of what transpired. Thus, while for the British Imperial power, the tumultuous events of 1857 were an unsuccessful mutiny by sepoys from across the subcontinent, for us, it is the celebrated 1st War of Independence. Before being put down with unprecedented vengeance and ferocity, it ignited a spark of 'freedom' which continued to inspire generations to come, although, in the process, they sowed venomous seeds of communal discord, deftly using their devious policy of divide and rule, which continue to rile us to this day.

Not surprisingly, the events instilled such fear in the minds of our forefathers that it was several decades before any credible stirrings for a fight to overthrow the yoke of imperialism were felt. To take this forward, while Bhagat Singh & his young comrades might have been treated as terrorists/ militants/ extremists by the British, their cohorts and courts, we extoll them as valiant freedom fighters and martyrs, so much so, that more than a century after Bhagat Singh sacrificed his life for the liberation of the motherland, we are witnessing a massive surge in his following, especially in the youth.

It is not difficult to gauge this- there is a proliferation of his photographs - on the rear of cabs and auto-rickshaws, trucks and buses, emblazoned on T-shirts, and so on. Given all this, what startled me, and raised my hackles was Rajmohan Gandhi's book, Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten.

Otherwise, a well-researched and thoughtfully written book, his treat-



ment of the life and times of Bhagat Singh is rather disappointing- in a tome of more than 400 pages, there are just a few lines- a cursory mention of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Sadly, even in these lines, they are not feted as freedom fighters, but rather disparagingly, as delinquent and misguided youth, militant in their approach, hellbent on derailing the course of the freedom struggle. Well, while all of us have the liberty or freedom to form our opinion, in a broader sense, it needs to be noted that sensitivities of a significant mass of our population don't get hurt. Because, if the Butcher of Amritsar became a celebrated hero among a section of his countrymen, hailed as "the man who saved India" and a beneficiary of a fund of over ₹26,000, then, we need serious introspection as to how we portray our martyrs for the generations to come, because, as I repeatedly quote the words of George Santayana- "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The way history is written shapes how future generations perceive their past. The events of 1857 and Bhagat Singh's sacrifices remain crucial in our national consciousness, inspiring countless individuals. Yet, the selective representation of these figures in historical narratives raises concerns. When colonial figures like Dyer are glorified, while our martyrs are downplayed or misrepresented, it calls for reflection. As a society, we must ensure that our heroes are remembered with the respect they deserve. After all, history is not just about the past—it is a guide for the future, reminding us never to forget our hard-fought struggles.

(The author is a freelance writer; views are personal)

Balancing growth with fiscal discipline



UTTAM GUPTA

Key measures, including tax reliefs and incentives for private sector, reflect a balanced approach to making India a developed economy by 2047



A theme that reverberates in the Union Budget for FY 2025-26 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2025, is 'sustaining the momentum of high economic growth alongside sticking to fiscal consolidation'. During FY 2024-25, the GDP growth (gross domestic product) is estimated at 6.4 per cent which is more or less close to the 6.5 per cent - 7 per cent projected in the Economic Survey (ES) for 2023-24 presented by Sitharaman in the Parliament on February 1, 2024. For FY 2025-26, according to the Economic Survey presented by her on February 1, 2025, the GDP is projected to expand between 6.3 per cent - 6.8 per cent. On top of a growth of 8 per cent plus for three consecutive years beginning FY 2021-22 and 6.4 per cent during FY 2024-25, this is a fairly impressive number in sync with the overarching goal of making India a 'developed economy' by 2047. As for fiscal deficit or FD (excess of total expenditure over total receipts), in her interim budget presented on February 1, 2024, she had set a target of 5.1 per cent of the nominal GDP (NGDP). Subsequently, in the full budget for FY 2024-25 presented on July 23, 2024, she revised it downward to 4.9 per cent of the GDP taking into account the extra cushion of Rs 130,000 crore in the dividend transferred by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to the Central Government from its operations during the FY 2023-24 (the actual dividend transfer was Rs 210,000 crore against a provision of Rs 80,000 crore made in the interim budget).

Going by the revised estimate (RE) presented by the FM on February 1, 2025, the FD for FY 2024-25 has turned out to be even lower at 4.8 per cent of the NGDP. Even as the total revenue expenditure at Rs 3698,000 crore is only marginally lower than the budget estimate (BE) of Rs 3709,401 crore, the RE for capital expenditure is about Rs 1018,000 crore - a significant Rs 93,000 crore less than the BE of Rs 1111,111 crore. Indeed, this is a major reason behind a reduction of one percentage point in the FD over the BE. In the budget for FY 2025-26, the FM has provided for a total expendi-



THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS NEED TO BE COMPLEMENTED BY THE OWNERS OF BUSINESSES. THEY SHOULD GO FOR BETTER DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME THROUGH MEASURES SUCH AS KEEPING PRICES LOW, INCREASING SALARIES AT THE LOWER RUNGS, REINVESTING PROFITS FOR GROWTH ETC

ture of Rs 5065,000 crore which is a significant increase of 7.4 per cent over the RE for FY 2024-25 at Rs 4716,000 crore.

This includes capital expenditure of Rs 1121,000 crore, the remaining Rs 3944,000 crore being the provision for revenue expenditure. Sitharaman has received flak for going slow on investment. This is unjustified and out of sync with the underlying facts. We need to compare the budget provision with RE for FY 2024-25. On this basis, the provision of Rs 1121,000 crore is 10.1 per cent higher than the actual capital expenditure during 2024-25.

That apart, the position about the government's capital spending has to be viewed in totality. In her Budget for FY 2019-20, Sitharaman had laid a roadmap for catapulting the Indian economy to US \$5 trillion by 2024-25. In sync with this target, she had projected an investment requirement of over Rs 100,00,000 crore to build the infrastructure over five years. Of this, 39 per cent or Rs 39,00,000 crore was to come from the Centre and states each and the balance was Rs 22,00,000 crore from the private sector. The Centre's actual capital expenditure was for 2020-21: Rs 439,000 crore; 2021-22: Rs 554,000 crore; 2022-23: Rs 750,000 crore; 2023-24: Rs 1000,961 crore and Rs 1018,000 crore for 2024-25.

Over five years, the total comes to Rs 3761,000 crore which is more or less close to the amount the Centre intended to contribute. Continuing with the above trend, a substantial allocation of Rs 1121,000 crore for 2025-26 shows the determination of the government to maintain the momentum of investment in building roads, highways, expressways, waterways, ports, airports, railways, irrigation projects, hospitals, schools, technical and research institutions and

so on in symphony with strengthening the foundations of the economy for a VIKSIT BHARAT by 2047.

But, investment by the central government alone won't be enough to give the intended boost to the economy. The States and private sector also need to do their bit. The Centre has been helping the former to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans. During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For FY 2024-25, the transfers were kept at Rs 150,000 crore though the states didn't fully utilize the amount.

For FY 2025-26 also, the budget allocation is kept at Rs 150,000 crore. To promote investment in the private sector, the Centre has given a host of incentives to industries and businesses. Amongst others, these included a reduction in the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises. In 2024-25, the tax rate on foreign firms was reduced from 40 percent to 35 percent. But, the private sector has complained of 'demand constraint'. Team Modi has addressed this as well.

In the budget for FY 2024-25, Sitharaman altered tax slabs under the New Income Tax (IT) regime besides increasing the standard deduction by Rs 25,000. This resulted in a relief of around Rs 17,500 in personal income tax or PIT. In the budget for FY 2025-26, she has given a bonanza by announcing that a person earning Rs 1200,000 per annum need not pay any tax (taking into account the standard deduction of Rs 75,000/- now, the threshold comes to Rs 1275,000). Besides, she has altered the tax slabs to give relief even to persons earning more. Thus, a person earning Rs 2400,000 per annum will pay Rs

110,000 less. Consequent to these changes, the taxpayers will gain Rs 100,000 crore annually.

These savings will be distributed amongst a total of 7 crore persons who won't have to pay any tax. This will give a big boost to demand. However, this by itself won't give the required fillip. The government's efforts need to be complemented by the owners of businesses. They should go for better distribution of income through measures such as keeping prices low, increasing salaries at the lower rungs, reinvesting profits for growth etc.

Coming to FD, apart from lower capital expenditure (than BE), the contribution of buoyant tax collections in containing it at 4.8 per cent of the NGDP during FY 2024-25, can't be brushed aside. The RE of gross tax revenue (GTR) during the year at Rs 3850,000 crore is higher than the BE of Rs 3840,000 crore which itself was 14.6 per cent higher than GTR of Rs 3350,000 crore during 2023-24. For 2025-26, FM has kept the FD target at 4.4 per cent. To achieve it, she has set the GTR collections at still higher Rs 4270,000 crore.

This despite lower tax rates shows that the government's efforts at broadening the tax base and ensuring tax compliance are working. In an interview, Sitharaman cited capital expenditure of 4.3 per cent as being more or less close to FD of 4.4 per cent. From a fiscal consolidation angle, this is a good sign as borrowings are used only for building assets. However, the government needs to go beyond by generating a 'revenue surplus' so that borrowings even for building capital assets can be cut. This is necessary as 'interest payments' alone account for over 25 per cent of total spending by the Centre.

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

BJP sets its sights on West Bengal and Bihar after Delhi triumph

The Aam Aadmi Party's collapse in Delhi and the cracks within the INDIA bloc have emboldened the BJP to win Bengal and Bihar

Buoyed by its sweeping success in Delhi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has now turned its focus towards the crucial state elections in West Bengal in 2026, where it aims to dethrone Mamata Banerjee. What once seemed like an uphill battle is now a tangible possibility for the party. Emboldened by the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) debacle in Delhi, BJP leaders are proclaiming, "Delhi ki jeet hamari ho gayi, ab 2026 main Bengal ki baari hai" (We have won Delhi; now it's Bengal's turn in 2026).

Bihar, too, is set to witness an intense electoral showdown. With recent victories boosting the party's confidence, BJP and its allies plan to enter the battle with renewed aggression to retain power. The frag-



K S TOMAR

mented INDIA alliance, which was evident in Haryana and Delhi, provides the BJP with an additional advantage. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has maintained a strong presence in West Bengal for decades, is expected to play a pivotal role in BJP's bid to oust Mamata in the upcoming assembly elections. **Modi's Appeal:** BJP's Trump

Card Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains the BJP's strongest electoral force. His leadership, credibility, and mass appeal, especially among the middle and lower-income groups, were decisive in Delhi's outcome. Welfare schemes like free ration under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana directly strengthened BJP's voter base. Modi's ability to project governance stability ensured that BJP's campaign resonated powerfully across the capital.

Modi's credibility as a vote magnet and his guarantee to implement manifesto promises worked like magic for the BJP, which continues to heavily rely on him even for state elections. In his characteristic style, Modi remarked, "Congress has achieved a dou-

ble hat-trick of defeats with zero seats," predicting its further decline. Meanwhile, he celebrated BJP's string of victories in Haryana, Maharashtra, and Delhi, reinforcing his status as the party's ultimate campaigner. **Decoding BJP's Triumph in Delhi:** The Modi Factor Several key factors contributed to BJP's victory in Delhi, with Modi playing a central role. His strong stance on national security, Hindutva, and governance stability shaped the electoral landscape, particularly among urban and middle-class voters.

Modi's National Security & Hindutva Image As the national capital, Delhi is heavily influenced by nationalistic narratives. Modi's firm policies on Pakistan, terrorism,



and Hindutva solidified BJP's core voter base. By framing the election as Modi vs. Kejriwal rather than a contest over local governance, BJP ensured that Modi's persona resonated strongly with voters. **PM's Welfare Schemes vs. AAP's Freebies** While AAP is known for its populist freebies, the Modi

government strategically countered this with large-scale welfare initiatives such as PM Awas Yojana (housing for the poor), Ujjwala Yojana (free LPG connections), and Ayushman Bharat (health insurance). By shifting the narrative from Kejriwal's localized welfare model to Modi's broader national schemes, the BJP successfully attracted lower-income and migrant voters.

A masterstroke was Modi's assurance that AAP's welfare schemes would not be discontinued but rather enhanced, promising to elevate Delhi into a world-class city. This neutralized Kejriwal's traditional advantage and reassured voters. BJP also aggressively targeted AAP over corruption allegations, particular-

ly the liquor scam, altering voter perception. Modi's leadership was positioned as a guarantee of cleaner governance, contrasting sharply with AAP's tainted image. **Impact of BJP's Victories in Other States:** BJP's recent wins in Haryana, Maharashtra, and other key states created a momentum effect, reinforcing voter confidence in Delhi. Haryana's proximity made its results particularly influential, given the shared demographics.

The party's national winning streak also boosted cadre morale, creating a perception of electoral invincibility, which further weakened AAP's positioning as an alternative force. **Why AAP Lost:** AAP's defeat was not solely due to BJP's strategic campaign

but also its political miscalculations. Kejriwal underestimated Congress's relevance, assuming it was a non-factor. This resulted in AAP's defeat in 14 assembly segments where the victory margin was lower than the votes secured by Congress candidates. AAP had previously employed a similar strategy in Haryana, splitting Congress's votes and aiding BJP's gains. However, this tactic backfired in Delhi, as the ignored Congress vote share ended up damaging AAP more than BJP. One of the biggest takeaways from AAP's crushing defeat is the blow to Arvind Kejriwal's national ambitions.

(The writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)

SC to take up CEC, ECs appointments case today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it would on February 19 take up on "priority basis" the pleas against the appointments of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (EC) under the 2023 law. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiwar Singh was informed by advocate Prashant Bhusan, appearing for an NGO, that despite the Constitution bench verdict of 2023 directing selection and appointment of the CEC and ECs through a panel including the Chief Justice of India, the Government excluded the CJ and made a "mockery of democracy". He said, "The matter is listed on February 19 but it is listed as item number 41. The government has appointed the CEC and EC as per 2023 law disregarding the view taken by a constitution bench. Kindly take up on top of the board as the matter requires urgent consideration." Advocate Varun Thakur, appearing for petitioner Jaya Thakur, said three appointments were made by the government under the new law, which was under challenge. The bench assured Bhusan and other parties that after some urgent listed matters, it would take up the petitions for hearing on February 19. On February 17, the Government appointed EC Gyanesh Kumar as the next CEC and Vivek Joshi as new Election Commissioner. Gyanesh Kumar is the first CEC to be appointed under



Ranjan Dimri

the new law and his term would run till January 26, 2029, days before the EC is expected to announce the schedule of the next Lok Sabha election. Vivek Joshi (58) born in 1966 would serve in the poll panel till 2031. According to the law, a CEC or an EC retires at 65 or can have a tenure in the poll panel for six years. Bhusan argued that the 2023 verdict held that the Election Commissioners have to be selected for appointment by an independent panel comprising the Prime minister, Leader of Opposition and Chief Justice of India. "They have brought an Act by which they have removed the Chief Justice and brought in another minister, effectively making the commissioners appointment only at the pleasure of the government. You need to have an independent committee to appoint the election commissioners," he said. The NGO Association for

Democratic Reforms has challenged the CJT's exclusion and contended the election commission should be insulated from "political" and "executive interference" for maintaining a healthy democracy. ADR's plea alleged the verdict was overruled by the Centre without removing its basis and the composition of the selection committee under the new law which amounted to excessive interference of the executive in the appointments and was detrimental to the independence of the poll panel. Former IAS officers Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Sandhu were recommended to be appointed as ECs in 2024 by a selection panel chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi under the new law. The NGO challenged the validity and sought a stay on the operation of Section 7 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, which excluded the CJ.

Shinde dismisses "cold war" between Sena, BJP

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid reports of a "cold war" between his party and the ruling BJP over the downgrading of security cover given to 20 of his party MLAs, Maharashtra deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde on Tuesday put up a brave face by saying that the relations between the two parties were 'thanda thanda cool cool'. Downplaying the reports that the State Home department held by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had reduced the security cover given to his party MLAs from Y+ category to just one constable, Shinde denied that there was any rift between the ruling MahaYuti allies. "There is no cold war (between the allies) as this is not Maha Vikas Aghadi or INDI alliance. Our war is with the people who are opposing the development of Maharashtra...we are 'thanda thanda cool cool,'" Shinde

said. Shinde -- who is the state Urban Development Minister in the BJP-led MahaYuti government -- said that the MahaYuti constituents were "united" and were working towards the progress of the state. The latest slugfest between the Shinde Sena and BJP should be seen in the light of the reduction in the security cover provided to MLAs belonging to the Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and NCP (Ajit Pawar), made during the recent security review. The security cover of some MLAs of NCP led by Deputy CM Ajit Pawar was also reduced, but in terms of numbers, it was much less as compared to that of the Shinde Sena MLAs. As per the protocols of the Special Protection Unit (SPU), which falls under the State Intelligence Department held by Fadnavis, the Chief Minister and two Deputy

CMs have been given Z-Plus category security, the ministers have been given Y-plus category security. NCP (SP) supremo Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) head Uddhav Thackeray continue to be covered under Z-plus category security. In June-July 2022, some of the Shiv Sena MLAs -- who went Shinde after the latter engineered a split in the Shiv Sena -- were provided enhanced security in view of threat to them. As ministers in MahaYuti-NDA government many of them continue to enjoy the Y+ scrutiny. However, after the recent review, the security of 20-odd MLAs was reduced and they have been given just one constable as security cover, a development that has reportedly miffed Shinde. The downgrading of the security to 20 Sena MLAs is the fourth instance where differences have cropped up between Fadnavis and Shinde.

Former British PM Sunak, family visit Parliament



Former British PM Rishi Sunak was welcomed by Lok Sabha Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh at the Parliament complex. Pioneer Photo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Tuesday visited Parliament House with his spouse and children. They were accompanied by Rajya Sabha MP Sudha Murthy who is Sunak's mother-in-law. On Lok Sabha Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh welcomed them at the Parliament House secretariat said.

During their visit, the Sunak family explored the Parliament House complex and admired its architectural grandeur. They visited the galleries, chambers of the two Houses, Constitution Hall, and the old Parliament building, it said. The visit is part of Sunak's engagements in India. On February 15, the family had visited Taj Mahal. Sunak met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in Delhi on February 17.

Ex-Navy officer Tiwary still in Qatar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A sub-judice case in a Qatar court is leading to the delay in the return of former Indian Navy officer Purnendu Tiwary, who was freed from death-row charges along with seven of his compatriots last year. The Qatari court released eight former Indian Navy officials, who were on death row for unspecified charges. Seven of them returned to India in February last year, while Tiwary continues to

remain in Qatar. "His matter still remains sub-judice in a local court in Qatar," Arun Kumar Chatterjee, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, told reporters here when asked about Tiwary's case. Sources said the sub-judice case in question pertains to another matter and is not connected to the one that had led Tiwary to death row. However, the issue did not figure in Tuesday's talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin

Hamad Al-Thani, who is on a state visit to India. Around 600 Indian nationals are lodged in various jails in Qatar. In 2024, around 85 Indians received pardon. The ordeal of the eight former Navy officials began in August 2022, when Qatari authorities arrested them. The precise charges against the officials, who were employed with Dahra Global, a company that specialised in supplying defence and security-related items to the government of Qatar, were never revealed.

President approves Jain's prosecution

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday sanctioned the prosecution against former Delhi minister and AAP leader Satyendar Jain in a case investigated by the Enforcement Directorate. The case falls under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday sought the President of India's approval to prosecute former Delhi minister and AAP leader Satyendar Jain under Section 218 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Suraksha Sanhita (BNS), 2023 in the alleged disproportionate assets were to the tune of Rs 1.47 crore, about 217 per cent more than Jain's known sources of income during 2015-17. The MHA has claimed that there is adequate evidence against the AAP leader to implicate him on charges of laundering money through four shell companies allegedly linked to him. Based on material received from the Enforcement Directorate, he President found sufficient evidence to grant the request, officials said.

Rahul dissents poll panel, BJP defends

From page 1

Rahul said the government legislation reconstituted the committee to appoint the CEC and Election Commissioners to include the PM, the LoP and a Union Cabinet minister to be appointed by the PM and removing the chief justice from the committee. "This is in flagrant violation of the letter and spirit of the Supreme Court order," he noted. He said this government order was subsequently challenged by a public interest litigant and the SC has indicated its intention to take up this matter on February 19, 2025, which was less than forty-eight hours away. "Therefore, it is the view of the Congress party that the process of choosing the next CEC be deferred until the Supreme Court hearing and this meeting be postponed," he said.

Hitting back, BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya said Rahul Gandhi's dissent on the appointment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) is not just politically motivated but also lacks merit. "It is an attempt to undermine the constitutional mandate of the elected government through malicious judicial activism. Additionally, it conveniently misreads and misinterprets the Supreme Court's judgment on the CEC's appointment," BJP stated. To determine the original intent of the Constitution's framers, Malviya said the court had analysed the 1949 Constituent Assembly debates and noted that it the appointment process was left to Parliament's discretion. He said the President appointed the CEC and election commissioners solely on the prime minister's recommendation before the ruling.

Oath final for 'suspense' CMs

From page 1

A meeting of senior leaders including Tarun Chugh, Virendra Sachdeva and Yogendra Chandolia also took place at BJP office on Tuesday. "Today there was a very important organisational meeting took place at Delhi BJP state headquarters. In this meeting, there was a detailed discussion about the upcoming activities, programs and campaigns of the organisation," said the Delhi BJP President. After inspecting the ground along with Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, BJP National General Secretary Tarun Chugh said Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena is overseeing the preparations and people from across the city have expressed desire to be at the event, likely on Thursday. Talking to reporters, Chugh said the people of Delhi have blessed Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is "trusted by all citizens from Kashmir to Kanyakumari". "On Monday, we ensured the arrival of items for setting up

the stage and sitting arrangements. On Tuesday, items were arranged to give a final shape to the place where gathering of thousands of people will take place. There will be three stages at the ground and entry may take place from all 10 gates of the ground so people could not face any hassle," said a BJP leader. According to party insiders, the names - for CM and Council of Ministers - were likely to include "a mix of experience and youth", with representation from each of the dominant caste and community groupings in the Capital. A colourful musical programme will be held on the stage of Ramlila Maidan before the swearing-in ceremony, in which Kailash Kher will also perform. Chief Ministers and Deputy Chief Ministers of 20 states will attend the mega event. Diplomats of major countries have also been invited. More than 50 film stars and industrialists, will be present. Besides, Farmers of Delhi, beneficiaries of central government schemes

including laadli sisters, and common people from Delhi will also be invited to the ceremony. Over 5,000 security personnel will be deployed in and around the Ramlila Maidan area on the day of the oath-taking ceremony for Delhi's new chief minister, an official said. The officer further stated that over 10 companies of paramilitary forces will also be deployed to maintain law and order and manage traffic during the day. The officer further stated that commandos, quick reaction teams, PCR vans, anti-sabotage checks, and SWAT teams will be deployed at strategic locations at more than 2,500 spots. First-aid kiosks and other facilities will also be set up at the location. Snipers will also be deployed at many strategic spots. Interestingly, internet users have been searching about life, career, age, and other details of BJP leaders they think could be crowned as the New Delhi Chief Minister since February 8. If online user interest is any metric, Parvesh Verma and Rekha Gupta are the top contenders for the chief

minister's post, though interest in them has fluctuated over time. Verma and Gupta have also gained the highest number of followers on social media. He was followed by more than 80,100 people on Instagram and nearly 17,800 people on X (formerly Twitter). On other hand, Gupta, who emerged victorious from Shalimar Bagh, has added 632 followers on X and 975 on Instagram in this period, as per social media analytics firm Social Blade. In the assembly poll results announced on February 8, the BJP secured 48 seats in the 70-member Assembly, returning to power in the city after 26 years. The AAP won only 22 seats. With the saffron party going into the polls without announcing a chief ministerial candidate, speculations have intensified over who could be the chief minister. Many within the party believe that the BJP leadership could choose a "dark horse" as Delhi's next chief minister, a strategy the party opted in Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh.

SP MLAs disrupt Gov's address in UP assembly

From page 1

Pradhan said. "We have brought the asthi (ashes) of the government's ethics because their moral integrity is dead. We have placed these ashes at the temple of politics -- the state legislative assembly," Pradhan said. "This government has looted the people. They have manipulated elections, mismanaged the Maha Kumbh, and failed to deliver on their promises. We are protesting against all of this," he said. "The government made grand claims about the Maha Kumbh, but it has ultimately failed. The stampeche that took place during Mauni Amavasya exposed their inefficiency. They touted this as a 'Digital Kumbh,' but even now, they have not disclosed the number of lives lost," he added. Another SP leader, Ravidas Mehrotra, voiced concerns about the governor's address, stating, "We will protest during

the governor's speech because it will be full of false praise for the government. This administration has previously leaked exam papers, and now even the governor's speech has been leaked. The government has failed on all fronts," Mehrotra said. Meanwhile, BJP ministers in Uttar Pradesh praised the budget ahead of its introduction in the assembly. UP Cabinet Minister OP Rajbhar said, "This will be the biggest budget in the state's history. The Union government presented a budget aimed at prosperity for every section, including farmers, youth, and the unemployed. Similarly, Uttar Pradesh's budget will focus on prosperity and rapid development." Regarding the opposition's protest, Rajbhar dismissed their actions, stating, "The opposition's job is to oppose, while the government's job is to focus on development. Let them protest; we are committed to our work."

Prosecution seeks death penalty for Sajjan Kumar

From page 1

The prosecution said there was something uncommon in the case, arguing the "aggravated circumstances outweighed the mitigating circumstances" and the case fell in the "rarest of rare case" category. Kumar, along with the mob, targeted the particular community people without provocation, it added. The prosecution argued four "helpless women" without any provocation were badly beaten and a young man aged about 18 and a man aged about 50 years showed no provocation but were burnt alive in front of their family members. The murders of Jaswant Singh and Tarundeep Singh, said the prosecution, were committed in an "extremely brutal, diabolical manner so as to shock the collective conscience of the society". "The impact on the psychology of the survivor victims can be seen from their demeanor recorded during their testimonies, even after

39 years, they were inconsolably weeping. Serious bodily and mental harm were caused to such women... There was forced and traumatised displacement of all survivor victims," it said. The court was informed by the prosecution that the impact and magnitude of the crime was so enormous that it was a crime against community and involved genocide of the members of a particular community. "The incident of this kind, break entire fibre of trust and harmony amongst communities, thereby, severely affecting the knitting and assimilation of different religious or social groups," it added. Kumar was said to be a people representative, someone who supposed to help people but "he openly broke the rule of law", argued the prosecution. It pointed out Kumar was convicted for a similar crime. Kumar is currently lodged in Tihar jail. Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh were killed on November 1-2, 1984, and a gurdwara were burnt down in Raj Nagar part II.

Station registered the case, a special investigation team later took over the investigation. On December 16, 2021, the court framed charges against Kumar, finding a "prima facie" case against him. The prosecution has alleged a huge mob, armed with deadly weapons, resorted to large-scale looting, arson and destruction of properties of Sikhs to avenge the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Kumar (79) is already serving life imprisonment in another anti-Sikh riots related case and the Supreme Court has refused to grant him bail. He has been in jail since December 31, 2018 when he surrendered after being convicted and awarded life imprisonment by the Delhi High Court in a case relating to 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Raj Nagar part-I area in Palam Colony in South West Delhi in which five Sikhs were killed on November 1-2, 1984, and a gurdwara were burnt down in Raj Nagar part II.

SC comes to rescue of 'pervert' Allahabadi

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Chandrachud referred to Allahabadi's right to life and said he cannot be prosecuted at several places for the same act. "What are the values of society? What are these parameters, do you even know? Society has some evolved values. You need to respect them...In the name of freedom of speech, no one has a licence to speak whatever they want against the norms of the society," the bench observed. Beside granting him protection from any coercive

action in FIRs lodged in Mumbai and Guwahati, the bench also sought responses from the Centre, Maharashtra and Assam governments on Allahabadi's plea seeking clubbing and quashing of multiple FIRs against him. An Assam police team was in Pune to issue summons to Raina in connection with a case filed in the northeastern state over his now deleted YouTube show. Raina has a house in Balewadi in Pune. On Monday, a case was registered in Guwahati by a resident for alleged promotion of obscenity in a

publicly accessible online show. Besides Allahabadi and Raina, others named in the case in Assam are Ashish Chanchlani, Jaspreet Singh and Apoorva Makhija. Earlier, Allahabadi was asked to remain present at Mumbai's Khar police station by the Mumbai police. The YouTube is also facing a police complaint in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. The Maharashtra Cyber Department has registered the case under relevant sections of the IT Act and sought the removal of all 18 episodes of the comedy show.

Child's drawing raises...

From page 1

On the morning of her death, Sanjeev received a call from her in-laws, claiming she was unwell. Hours later, another call informed him that she had died by suicide. The Kotwali City Police have launched an investigation and sent Sonali's body for an autopsy to determine the exact cause of death. Authorities are also examining Darshita's claims and other evidence to uncover the truth behind the

incident. According to circle officer (CO) City Rameer Singh, an FIR has been registered against Sandeep, his mother Vineeta, his elder brother Krishna Kumar, his sister-in-law Manisha, and five unidentified persons under sections 80 (dowry death) and 85 (cruelty against a woman by her husband) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, along with Sections 3 and 4 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. Sandeep has been detained for interrogation.

Nepal embassy visits Odisha institute over suicide uproar

From page 1

The deceased, identified as Prakriti Lamsal, was a third-year B Tech student studying at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), the institute's registrar said. As the situation escalated on the campus, KIIT authorities allegedly evicted several Nepali students from the hostel and dropped them at Cuttack railway station without making any arrangements for their travel. The incident gained attention

after the deceased's cousin filed a complaint at Infocity Police Station in Bhubaneswar, alleging that his sister hanged herself in her hostel room on Sunday. He claimed that a boy student at the university had been blackmailing his sister, which, he believed, led to her suicide. Legislators cutting across party lines on Tuesday expressed grief in the Odisha assembly over the death of the student and condemned the alleged mistreatment of several other students from

the neighbouring country by the KIIT authorities. In a statement, KIIT said it has always been a home to students from across the world, fostering a culture of inclusivity, respect, and care. "We deeply regret the recent incident and reaffirm our commitment to the safety, dignity, and well-being of all our students, including our dear Nepali students," the institute wrote on social media. BJP MLA Babu Singh also demanded the arrest of

Achyuta Samanta, the founder of KIIT. Singh alleged that Samanta, who was an MP from Kandhamal, was "patronised by the opposition Biju Janata Dal. Several other BJP MLAs also came down heavily on the institute over the Nepali student's death. Father of the deceased alleged that the institute "mistreated" undergraduates from the neighbouring country. Sunil Lamsal, reached the city as the post-mortem examination of his daughter's body was conducted at

AIIMS, Bhubaneswar. "I have lost my daughter. Many other children are studying here. It is known from the media that some students were driven out of their hostel. This is not right. This incident should not be repeated. These people go to Nepal and invite students to study here. The institute mistreated them," Lamsal alleged. He, however, reposed faith in the Odisha government and the police to get justice over the death of her daughter.

Delta jet flips upside down on snowy Toronto runway

All 80 passengers aboard survive

AP ■ TORONTO

A Delta Air Lines jet flipped on its roof while landing Monday at Toronto's Pearson Airport, but all 80 people on board survived and those hurt had relatively minor injuries, the airport's chief executive said.

Snow blown by winds gusting to 40 mph (65 kph) swirled when the flight from Minneapolis carrying 76 passengers and four crew attempted to land at around 2:15 p.m. Communications between the tower and pilot were normal on approach and it's not clear what went so drastically wrong when the plane touched down.

Peter Carlson, a passenger travelling to Toronto for a paramedics conference, said the landing was "very forceful."

"All the sudden everything just kind of went sideways and then next thing I know it's kind of a blink and I'm upside down still strapped in," he told CBC News. Canadian authorities held two brief news conferences but provided no details on the crash. Video posted to social media showed the aftermath with the

Mitsubishi CRJ-900LR overturned, the fuselage seemingly intact and firefighters dousing what was left of the fire as passengers climbed out and walked across the tarmac.

"We are very grateful there was no loss of life and relatively minor injuries," Deborah Flint, CEO of Greater Toronto Airports Authority, told reporters.

Delta CEO Ed Bastian said in a statement that "the hearts of the entire global Delta family are with those affected."

Toronto Pearson Fire Chief Todd Aitken said 18 passengers were taken to the hospital. Earlier in the day, Ornge air ambulance said it was transporting one pediatric patient to Toronto's SickKids hospital and two injured adults to other hospitals in the city.

Emergency personnel reached the plane within a few minutes and Aitken said the response "went as planned." He said "the runway was dry and there was no cross-wind conditions."

The crash was the fourth major aviation accident in North America in the past three weeks. A commercial jetliner and an

Army helicopter collided near Reagan National Airport in Washington, DC, on January 29, killing 67 people.

A medical transportation plane crashed in Philadelphia on January 31, killing the six people on board and another person on the ground. And on February 6, 10 people were killed in a plane crash in Alaska. The last major crash at Pearson was on August 2, 2005, when an Airbus A340 landing from Paris skidded off the runway and burst into flames amid stormy weather. All 309 passengers and crew aboard Air France Flight 358 survived the crash. On Monday, Pearson was experiencing blowing snow and winds of 32 mph (51 kph) gusting to 40 mph (65 kph), according to the Meteorological Service of Canada. The temperature was about 16.5 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 8.6 degrees Celsius). The Delta flight was cleared to land at about 2:10 p.m. Audio recordings show the control tower warned the pilots of a possible air flow "bump" on the approach.

"It sounds to me like a controller trying to be helpful, meaning

the wind is going to give you a bumpy ride coming down, that you're going to be up and down through the glide path," said John Cox, CEO of aviation safety consulting firm Safety Operating Systems in St. Petersburg, Florida.

"So it was windy. But the airplanes are designed and certified to handle that," Cox said. "The pilots are trained and experienced to handle that."

The plane came to a rest at the intersection of Runways 23 and 15L, not far from the start of the runway. Just after the crash, tower controllers spoke with the crew of a medical helicopter that had just left Pearson and was returning to help.

"Just so you're aware, there's people outside walking around the aircraft there," a controller said.

"Yeah, we've got it. The aircraft is upside down and burning," the medical helicopter pilot responded.

Carlson was among those outside the aircraft. He said when he took off his seat belt he crashed onto the ceiling, which had become the floor. He smelled gas, saw aviation fuel



A Delta Air Lines plane heading from Minneapolis to Toronto crashed at Toronto's Pearson Airport.

AP/PTI

cascading down the cabin windows and knew he needed to get out but said his fatherly intuition and paramedic skills kicked in. He looked for those he could help.

Carlson and another man assisted a mother and her young son out of the plane and then Carlson dropped onto the tarmac. Snow was blowing and it "felt like I was stepping onto tundra."

"I didn't care how cold it was, didn't care how far I had to walk, how long I had to stand — all of us just wanted to be out of the

aircraft," he said.

Cox, who flew for US Air for 25 years and has worked on US National Transportation Safety Board investigations, said the CRJ-900 aircraft is a proven aircraft that's been in service for decades and does a good job of handling inclement weather. He said it's unusual for a plane to end up on its roof.

"We've seen a couple of cases of takeoffs where airplanes have ended up inverted, but it's pretty rare," Cox said.

Among the questions that need to be answered, Cox said, is why

the crashed plane was missing its right wing.

"If one wing is missing, it's going to have a tendency to roll over," he said. "Those are going to be central questions as to what happened to the wing and the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder. They will be found, if not today, tomorrow, and the Transportation Safety Board of Canada will read them out and they will have a very good understanding of what actually occurred here."

The US Federal Aviation Administration said in a state-

ment that the Transportation Safety Board of Canada would head up the investigation and provide any updates. The NTSB in the US said it was sending a team to assist in the Canadian investigation.

Endeavor Air, based in Minneapolis, is a subsidiary of Delta Air Lines and the world's largest operator of CRJ-900 aircraft. The airline operates 130 regional jets on 700 daily flights to over 126 cities in the US, Canada and the Caribbean, according to the company's website.

Top Russian, US officials meet for talks on Ukraine war without Kyiv

AP ■ RIYADH

Senior officials from Russia and the US met in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to begin talks on improving ties and negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine.

Delegations led by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met at the Diriyah Palace in Riyadh. The meeting marks another pivotal step by the Trump administration to reverse US policy on isolating Russia and is meant to pave the way for a meeting between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump earlier this month upended US policy toward Ukraine and Russia by saying he and Putin had agreed to begin negotiations on ending the war.

Ukrainian officials aren't taking part in the meeting, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

said Monday that his country won't accept the outcome if Kyiv doesn't take part.

Rubio was accompanied by US national security adviser Mike Waltz and Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, while Lavrov sat next to the Kremlin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and national security adviser Musa'ed al Alban joined Rubio, Lavrov and others for the start of the meeting but were expected to leave early in the talks. Ushakov said Monday the talks would be "purely bilateral" and would not include Ukrainian officials.

The talks mark a significant expansion of US-Russian contacts nearly three years into a war that has seen ties fall to the lowest level in decades. Lavrov and then-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked briefly on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting in India nearly two years ago, and

in the fall of 2022, US and Russian spymasters met in Turkey amid Washington's concerns that Moscow could resort to nuclear weapons amid battlefield setbacks.

The recent US diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Kyiv and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favourable to them.

France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the UK on Monday to decide how to respond.

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday said he spoke by phone to Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy following the meeting.

"We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine," Macron wrote on X. "To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be accompanied by strong and credible secu-

rity guarantees for the Ukrainians," he said and vowed to "work on this together with all Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians."

Ahead of the talks, Kirill Dmitriev, the head of the Russian Direct Investment Fund who the Kremlin said might join the talks, underscored the importance of the meeting in comments to The Associated Press. "Good US-Russia relations are very important for the whole world. Only jointly can Russia and the US address lots of world problems, resolve for global conflicts and offer solutions," Dmitriev, who said he and his team would focus on economic issues at the talks, told AP.

The Saudi-owned satellite channel Al Arabiya, citing the Russian delegation, described Moscow's priority as "real normalisation with Washington."

Diriyah Palace sits across the street from Riyadh's Diplomatic Quarter. It's also just next to the Ritz Carlton

hotel, which became famous in 2017 after de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman detained other princes and the country's elite there as part of what the royal court called a crackdown on corruption, that also sidelined any potential challenge to his taking control of the kingdom.

Hosting the talks is a major step toward a goal Prince Mohammed has pursued throughout the war — putting the kingdom in the middle of diplomatic negotiations. It has helped in prisoner negotiations and hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for an Arab League summit in the kingdom in 2023. Zelenskyy will likely travel to Saudi Arabia later this week.

For Prince Mohammed, once described as a "pariah" by former President Joe Biden over the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, hosting such talks burnish the otherwise-tar-

nished image the West has for him.

Ahead of the summit, the Saudi daily newspaper Okaz described the moment as the "world's eye on Riyadh."

Writing in the London-based Saudi-owned newspaper Asharq Al Awsat, journalist Mishari al-Dhaidi described the summit as "a major step on the international political chess arena, revealing the status of Saudi Arabia and its positive influence for the benefit of the people all the people," he wrote.

The neighbouring United Arab Emirates, the prince also has maintained close relations to Russia throughout its war on Ukraine, both through the OPEC+ oil cartel and diplomatically as well.

Hosting the summit also balances the harsh criticism recently levied by the kingdom's tightly controlled media at President Donald Trump over his repeated comments that he wants the US to "own" the Gaza

Strip, which has been devastated by the Israeli military offensive there since the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack. The Palestinians want Gaza and the West Bank for a future state, something backed by the wider Arab world and nearly all of the international community.

Meanwhile, Russia continued to pummel Ukraine with drones, according to Kyiv's military. The Ukrainian air force said Russian troops launched a barrage of 176 drones at Ukraine overnight, most of which were destroyed or disabled by jamming.

One Russian drone struck a residential building in Dolynska in Kirovohrad region, injuring a mother and her two children and prompting an evacuation of 38 apartments, the regional administration reported. Four more residential buildings were damaged by drone debris in the Cherkasy region of Ukraine, according to local officials.

Hamas says it will free 6 Israeli hostages on Saturday, four bodies before then

AP ■ CAIRO

Top Hamas leader says the militant group will release six living Israeli hostages on Saturday and the bodies of four hostages on Thursday, including the remains of the Bibas family that has become symbols of Israeli suffering in the war.

The fate of Shiri Bibas and her two young sons, Ariel and Kir, reflected the feeling of helplessness as dozens of hostages remain in Gaza after Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack. Israel has said it is extremely concerned about their condition but has not confirmed their deaths.

Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya, in prerecorded remarks on Tuesday, did not elaborate beyond saying that the "Bibas family" would be included in the handover of four bodies. The six to be released on

Saturday are the last living hostages to be freed under the first phase of the ceasefire in Gaza. Three hostages had been expected to be freed on Saturday. It was not clear why Hamas changed the plan.

The warring sides have yet to negotiate the second and more difficult phase, in which Hamas would release dozens more hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal.

The hostage releases have come in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

The ceasefire that began in mid-January has paused the deadliest fighting ever between Israel and Hamas, surged aid into devastated Gaza and allowed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to return to their homes as Israeli forces withdrew from much of the territory.

Villagers in southern Lebanon prepare to return home

AP ■ DEIR MIMAS (LEBANON)

Israeli forces withdrew from border villages in southern Lebanon on Tuesday, under a deadline spelled out in a US-brokered ceasefire agreement that ended the latest Israel-Hezbollah war. Lebanese soldiers moved into the areas from where the Israeli troops pulled out and began clearing roadblocks set up by Israeli forces and checking for unexploded ordnance. They blocked the main road leading to the villages, preventing anyone from entering while the military was looking for any explosives left behind.

Most of the villages waited by the roadside for permission to go and check on their homes.

Egypt developing plan to rebuild Gaza

AP ■ CAIRO

Egypt is developing a plan to rebuild Gaza without forcing Palestinians out of the strip in a counter to President Donald Trump's proposal to depopulate the territory so the US can take it over.

Egypt's state-run Al-Ahram newspaper said the proposal calls for establishing "secure areas" within Gaza where Palestinians can live initially while Egyptian and international construction firms remove and rehabilitate the strip's infrastructure.

Egyptian officials have been discussing the plan with European diplomats as well as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE, according to two Egyptian officials and Arab and Western diplomats. They are also discussing ways to fund the reconstruction, including an international conference on Gaza reconstruction, said one of the Egyptian officials and an Arab diplomat. The officials and diplomats

spoke on condition of anonymity because the proposal is still being negotiated.

The proposal comes after an international uproar over Trump's call for the removal of Gaza's population of some two million Palestinians. Trump said the US would take over the Gaza Strip and rebuild it into a "Riviera of the Middle East," though Palestinians would not be allowed back.

Palestinians have widely said they will not leave their homeland, while Egypt, Jordan — backed by Saudi Arabia — have refused Trump's calls for them to take in Gaza's population. Rights groups have widely said the plan amounts to forced expulsion, a potential war crime. European countries have also largely denounced Trump's plan.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has praised the idea and says Israel is preparing to implement it. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who was in Saudi Arabia

on Monday in a tour of the region, has said the US was up to hearing alternative proposals.

Egypt's Al-Ahram newspaper said the proposal is designed to "refute American President Trump's logic" and counter "any other visions or plans that aim to change the geographic and demographic structure of Gaza Strip."

Gaza is nearing a critical juncture with the first phase of a ceasefire due to run out in early March. Israel and Hamas must still negotiate a second phase meant to bring a release of all remaining hostages held by the militants, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a long-term halt to the war.

Any reconstruction plan will be impossible to implement without a deal on the second phase, including an agreement on who will govern Gaza in the long term.

Israel demands the elimination of Hamas as a political or military force in the territory, and

international donors are unlikely to contribute to any rebuilding if Hamas is in charge.

Central in Egypt's proposal is the establishment of a Palestinian administration that is not aligned with either Hamas or the Palestinian Authority to run the strip and oversee the reconstruction efforts, according to the two Egyptian officials involved in the efforts.

It also calls for a Palestinian police force mainly made up of former Palestinian Authority policemen who remained in Gaza after Hamas took over the enclave in 2007, with reinforcement from Egyptian- and Western-trained forces.

Asked about the possibility of deploying an Arab force in Gaza, one Egyptian official and the Arab diplomat said Arab countries would only agree if there were a "clear path" for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected any Palestinian state as well as any role for Hamas or the Western-backed Palestinian Authority in governing Gaza, though he has not put forward any clear alternative.

Hamas has said it is willing to give up power in Gaza. Hamas spokesman Abdul Latif al-Qanou told AP on Sunday that the group has accepted either a Palestinian unity government without Hamas' participation or a committee of technocrats to run the territory. The Palestinian Authority, which governs pockets of the West Bank, has so far opposed any plans for Gaza that exclude it.

The Western diplomat said France and Germany have backed the idea of Arab countries developing a counterproposal to Trump's plan, and that Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi discussed his government's efforts with the French president in a phone call earlier this month.



People take part in the 'No Kings Day' protest on Presidents Day in Washington, in support of federal workers and against recent actions by President Donald Trump and Elon Musk, by the Capitol in Washington. The protest was organized by the 50501 Movement, which stands for 50 Protests 50 States 1 Movement.

AP/PTI

Elon Musk's DOGE seeks access to taxpayer data at IRS

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency is seeking access to troves of sensitive taxpayer data at the IRS, two people familiar with the inner workings of the plan who were not authorised to discuss the matter publicly told AP on Monday.

If successful, Musk and his group would have access to millions of tightly controlled files that include taxpayer information, bank records and other sensitive records. The people who spoke to the AP and requested anonymity said DOGE is specifically seeking to access the IRS' Integrated Data Retrieval System, which enables employees "to have instantaneous visual access to certain taxpayer accounts," according to the IRS website.

Advocates fear that the potential unlawful release of taxpayer records could be used to maliciously target Americans,

violate their privacy and create other ramifications.

Harrison Fields, a White House spokesman, said in an emailed statement that "waste, fraud, and abuse have been deeply entrenched in our broken system for far too long. It takes direct access to the system to identify and fix it."

"DOGE will continue to shine a light on the fraud they uncover as the American people deserve to know what their government has been spending their hard-earned tax dollars on," he said.

Democratic lawmakers are trying to fight against DOGE plans to access IRS data. Senators Ron Wyden, D-Ore, and Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass, sent a letter to acting IRS Commissioner Douglas O'Donnell, demanding copies of any memos that would grant IRS system access to Musk or DOGE. The senators are also seeking justifications for DOGE efforts to inspect tax returns and

private bank records.

Along with fears that DOGE access to taxpayer data may not be legal, "we are also extremely concerned that DOGE personnel meddling with IRS systems in the middle of tax filing season could, inadvertently or otherwise, cause breakdowns that may delay the issuance of tax refunds indefinitely," the letter reads.

"Any delay in refunds could be financially devastating to millions of Americans who plan their budgets around timely refunds every spring." January 27 was the official start date of the 2025 tax season, and the IRS expects more than 140 million tax returns to be filed by the April 15 deadline.

The Washington Post on Sunday first reported on DOGE's plans to access taxpayer data.

The news comes as the IRS plans to lay off thousands of probationary workers

in the middle of tax season, according to two sources familiar with the agency's plans who were unauthorised to discuss them publicly. Cuts could happen as soon as this week.

Previously, IRS employees involved in the 2025 tax season were told they will not be allowed to accept a buyout offer from the Trump administration until after the taxpayer filing deadline, according to a letter sent recently to IRS employees.

Additionally, attorneys general from 14 states challenged the authority of DOGE to access sensitive government data housed at Treasury and exercise "virtually unchecked power" in a lawsuit. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Washington, says the actions taken by Musk at the helm of DOGE can only be taken by a nominated and Senate-confirmed official. It cites constitutional provisions that delineate the powers of Congress and the president.

Tesla starts recruitment in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

American electric carmaker Tesla has opened recruitments for various roles in India, including business operations analyst and customer support specialist, in what could be a precursor for the company's entry into the country.

As per the job postings on the company's website, the posts are for the 'Mumbai Suburban' area.

These roles include service advisor, parts advisor, service technician, service manager, sales and customer support, store manager, sales and customer support, business operations analyst, customer support supervisor, customer support specialist, delivery operations specialist, order operations specialist, inside sales advisor, and consumer engagement manager.

A mailed query to confirm if the recruitments are part of the company's plans to enter the Indian market and the possible timeline for starting sales in India remained



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting with SpaceX CEO Elon Musk at the Blair House, in Washington PTI

unanswered. The hiring by Tesla in India comes close after the recent meeting of company founder and American tech billionaire Elon Musk with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi

during the latter's recent United States (US) visit. Tesla's possible entry into the Indian market has been keenly awaited. Last April, company founder and American tech billionaire Elon Musk had

postponed his proposed visit to India at the last minute citing "very heavy Tesla obligations" but the proposed visit had raised expectations of Musk announcing plans for the way forward for selling

Tesla electric cars in India at the earliest. His planned visit to India came weeks after the government announced a new electric vehicle policy under which import duty concessions will be given to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of \$500 Million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like Tesla. An advisor representing Tesla - The Asia Group (TAG) had even attended a stakeholders' meeting on the new EV policy along with those from Vietnam's EV maker VinFast and all the major manufacturers in India, including Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata, Mahindra, Kia, Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, Renault, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi. Musk had said in 2022 that Tesla, which was earlier seeking a reduction in import duties to sell its vehicles in India, would not manufacture its products unless it is allowed to first sell and service its cars in the country.

Economy expected to grow 6.4 per cent in Q3: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency (ICRA) on Tuesday projected India's GDP to grow 6.4 per cent in the December quarter on account of enhanced government spending amid uneven consumption. The Indian economy grew at 6.7 per cent in April-June, but it slowed to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent in September quarter on sluggish government capital expenditure due to general elections and weak consumption demand. ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said India's economic performance in Q3 FY2025 benefitted from a sharp ramp-up in aggregate government spending (Centre and state) on capital and revenue expenditure, high growth in services exports, a turnaround in merchandise exports, healthy output of

major kharif crops etc, which would have buffered rural sentiment. Some consumer-focused sectors saw a pick-up during the festive season, even as urban consumer sentiment dipped slightly, and other sectors such as mining and electricity saw an improvement after weather-related challenges in the previous quarter. "Overall, while we expect the pace of GDP and the GVA expansion to rise in Q3 FY2025 relative to the seven-quarter low prints for the previous quarter, marking an upturn, the performance may remain inferior to the NSO's initial estimates for Q1 FY2025," Nayar said. The National Statistical Office (NSO) will release the October-December growth estimates on February 28. It will also release the second advance estimates of GDP for the current fiscal. In the first advance estimates

released in January, NSO projected GDP growth at a four-year low pace of 6.4 per cent in the current fiscal. The RBI expects growth to be 6.6 per cent. ICRA has projected the economy to grow at 6.4 per cent in Q3 from 5.4 per cent in Q2, benefitting from enhanced government spending amid uneven consumption, it said in a statement. India's investment activity improved in Q3, as reflected in the uptick in the YoY growth in several investment-related indicators vis-a-vis Q2, the rating agency said. This includes capital and infrastructure goods' output, cement production, engineering goods' exports, and capital spending of the Centre and state governments. The YoY expansion in the government's capex surged to a six-quarter high of 47.7 per cent in Q3 from 10.3 per cent in the previous quarter.

Reliance Group enters renewable energy manufacturing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Infrastructure (RInfra) is entering into the renewable energy (RE) equipment manufacturing space to increase its business portfolio, industry sources said.

The Reliance Group company has already appointed Ivan Saha as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Renewable Manufacturing, and Mushtaq Hussain as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Battery Manufacturing, they said. "RInfra is making strategic entry into the renewable energy manufacturing industry," sources said. The company would set up an integrated solar manufacturing unit with the objective to boost the production of solar panels and components in India, promoting self-sufficiency in clean energy. Solar manufacturing will be led by Saha, who comes with over 30 years of experience in semiconductors and solar technology and device design. He has served organisations like Vikram Solar and

ReNew Power. Its integrated battery manufacturing unit will focus on developing advanced energy storage solutions for grid applications and electric mobility. Hussain, who would lead this business, brings over 25 years of expertise in the automotive, renewable energy, consumer electronics, and power tools sectors. He has held key leadership roles in major organisations such as Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) and Tesla. RInfra is an infrastructure player that operates in the business of metro rails, toll roads and power distribution. With the company's entry into solar equipment and battery manufacturing business, the Reliance Group aims to cover the entire spectrum of renewable energy value chain, enabling the group to offer end-to-end solutions - from renewable energy equipment manufacturing to solar power generation. This move complements the efforts of Reliance Power,

focused on renewable energy generation, further strengthening the group's overall presence in the sector. Reliance Power, another Reliance Group company, had already announced expansion plans in renewable energy generation space. Its subsidiary Reliance NU Energies Private Limited appointed Mayank Bansal as CEO and Rakesh Swaroop as COO. Another Reliance Power subsidiary Reliance Nu Suntech Private Ltd recently secured a 930 Mw solar energy project with a battery energy storage system (BESS) from the Solar Energy Corporation Of India (SECI) through an e-auction. The project, which is the largest single-location integrated solar power and BESS Project in Asia, includes a minimum storage capacity of 465 MW/1,860 Mwh, charged by solar power. The company is also developing 1,270 MW of renewable energy projects in Bhutan.

India, US aim for \$500 Billion trade in 6-8 months: Goyal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and the United States (US) are committed to increasing bilateral trade to \$500 Billion and negotiating a "strong" trade agreement within the next six-eight months, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday. During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced to more than double the two-way commerce to \$500 Billion by 2030 and negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector bilateral trade agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025. Goyal said once his US counterpart takes charge, both countries will discuss the contours of the pact. "In the next six-eight months, by establishing a strong trade agreement, we are committed to increasing trade to \$500 Billion," Goyal said on the sidelines of CII's India-Qatar Business Forum meet. He added businesses of both the countries are excited about the



Union Minister Piyush Goyal addresses during the India-Qatar Joint Business Forum PTI

agreement. When asked if the pact would have chapters related to goods, services and investments, he said, "My counterpart has not yet confirmed in the US. After the (confirmation), we will do talks and then only we can decide the way forward". Normally in a free trade agreement, two trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded

between them. Besides, they ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments. During the first term of US President Donald Trump, the two countries had discussed a mini-trade deal, but it was shelved by the Joe Biden administration as they were not in favour of such pacts. In 2023, the US and India bilateral trade in goods and services stood at \$190.08 Billion (\$123.89 Billion in goods and \$66.19 Billion in services trade).

IPO-bound NSE's valuation jumps 200 per cent

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The IPO-bound NSE's valuation jumped 201 per cent in 2024 to ₹4.7 Lakh Crore, a report said on Tuesday. The largest India equity bourse, which is reported to have restarted its listing process by applying for a no-objection from markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), is already the 10th-most valuable private company in the country, as per the 2024 Burgundy Private Huron India 500 list of listed as well as unlisted companies. The valuation was pegged at ₹3.12 Lakh Crore, as per a September 2024 report. Another media report said the company, which also runs the world's largest derivatives exchange, aims to sell 10 per cent of holding in the IPO. The overall revenues jumped 28 per cent to ₹16,352 Crore in FY24, and the post-tax profit surged 51 per cent to ₹8,306 Crore. The stock bourse had moved on the listing plans after getting some clarity on allegations of not allowing

equitable access to its members. Huron said it has travelled across the country and spoken with industry experts, journalists, bankers and accessed publicly available data sources while arriving at the valuation for private or unlisted companies. The list of companies is led by Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries with a ₹17.5 Lakh Crore valuation, while Tata Consultancy Services came second at ₹16.1 Lakh Crore with a 30 per cent growth. Billionaire Gautam Adani's flagship Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone was valued at ₹2,73,530 Crore as on December 13, which was used as the cut-off date for the list. The Adani Group, which includes nine listed companies, was valued at ₹13.40 Lakh Crore, while the Ambani-led Reliance Group's overall valuation was pegged at ₹19.71 Lakh Crore. The salt-to-software Tata Sons led among the industrial groups in valuation, with a 37 per cent jump in valuation to Rs 32.27 Lakh Crore.

India's Defence industry poised for massive expansion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The defence industry in India is at the "cusp of a massive expansion", Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh has said even as he suggested that public-private-partnership would be "critical" in making the country a hub for advanced manufacturing in the sector. In his address at a defence conclave here late Monday evening, he also said the intention of the government is to build a "technologically advanced" and "combat-ready force" that can effectively address the "complexities of modern warfare". The event was hosted by Axis Bank to bring together different stakeholders, including government officials, industry members, financial institutions, among others under one roof. Singh said the conclave fosters collaboration among different stakeholders from

the defence industry ecosystem, including those who would finance them. Creating a unified platform for discussions on "Atmanirbhar Bharat", empowering the defence ecosystem is a "critical issue" right now, he added. "It is an ongoing effort which we sort of need to continue to focus on. It is also in line with our priorities of modernising and reforming the defence ecosystem in our quest for 'Atmanirbharta' or strategic self-reliance," the defence secretary said. He recalled that Ministry of Defence recently declared 2025 as the "year of reforms", saying the objective is to make systems and procedures more efficient, streamlined in order to deliver timely outcomes. "The intention is to build a technologically advanced and combat-ready force that can effectively address the complexities of modern

warfare," he said. In his address, Singh emphasised about working together with different stakeholders to create a robust defence ecosystem. Relaxation in the FDI policies and industrial licensing procedures are other elements that will propel the growth in the Indian domestic defence industry, he said. "Our exports have increased to ₹21,000 Crore, almost a 30 times jump in the last ten years. It is very obvious that the defence industry in India is at the cusp of a massive expansion," the defence secretary said. The current industrial ecosystem of India, which comprises various defence PSUs, licensed companies and MSMEs are the "pillars of this expanding industrial base", he added. "Our focus has to be on reducing industry barriers for new players and new

technologies. So that our defence industrial ecosystem becomes adaptive, agile, and capable of responding quickly to the changing nature of warfare, as we have seen in recent geopolitical conflicts," he said. Citing the defence budget figures, Singh said, it was ₹6.21 Lakh Crore that will go up by 9.5 per cent to 6.81 Lakh Crore in 2025-26. And we should be spending over the next decade, something between \$20-25 Billion, perhaps even USD 30 Billion per annum, "as per our modernisation initiatives", he added. Earlier in his address, the top official in the ministry underlined that an industrial ecosystem is being envisioned where "incubency advantage would not prevail over the ability of start-ups of agile private sector entrepreneurs," to bring into the ecosystem and to bring in disruptive technologies.

Rupee falls eight paise against USD

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rupee depreciated eight paise to close at 86.96 (provisional) against US dollar weighed down by sustained foreign fund outflows and an uptick in the US Dollar index. Forex traders said there is a negative bias for the USD and INR pair as foreign investors continue to sell domestic equities and the RBI support is tapering off slowly. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.94 and touched the high of 86.91 against the greenback during intraday. It also touched the low of 86.98 before ending the session at 86.96 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a loss of 8 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee depreciated 17 paise to close at 86.88 against the US dollar. Traders said disappointing trade deficit data from the domestic markets too

pressurised the rupee. India's exports declined for the third month in a row in January, falling by 2.38 per cent year-on-year to \$36.43 Billion, while the trade deficit widened to \$22.99 Billion in the month. Imports rose by 10.28 per cent year-on-year to \$59.42 Billion in January due to an increase in gold shipments, according to the Commerce Ministry data. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 106.95, higher by 0.35 per cent. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was quoted 0.77 per cent higher at \$75.80 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 29.47 points, or 0.04 per cent, to settle at 75,967.39, while the Nifty fell 14.20 points, or 0.06 per cent, to 22,945.30 points. Foreign Institutional

Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹3,937.83 Crore in the capital markets on net basis on Monday, according to exchange data. "We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias amid weak domestic equities and a recovery in the US dollar. FII outflows 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 speeches by the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) members," Choudhary said, adding that "the USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 86.75 to 87.20." On the global front, Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday asked business leaders to unleash their talents in a rare meeting with billionaires including Jack Ma, founder of e-commerce giant Alibaba, in a bid to shore up sagging business confidence and reverse economic slowdown.

NTPC pays interim dividend of ₹2,424 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned NTPC on Tuesday said it has paid an additional ₹2,424 Crore of interim dividend to its shareholders in the financial year ending March 2025. This is in addition to the first interim dividend of ₹2,424 Crore paid in November 2024, NTPC said in a statement. The ₹2,424 Crore dividend paid on February 18 is 25 per cent of the paid-up equity share capital of the company. The total dividend paid by the company during the ongoing fiscal has reached ₹8,000 Crore, which includes the final dividend of ₹3,152 Crore for the financial year 2023-24 paid in September 2024.

Markets end slightly lower as foreign fund outflow persists

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower on Tuesday as uninterrupted foreign fund outflows and lower-than-expected corporate earnings continued to hit investors' sentiment. After a day's breather, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex ended 29.47 points or 0.04 per cent lower at 75,967.39. Intraday, it dropped 465.85 points or 0.61 per cent to 75,531.01. The NSE Nifty dipped 14.20 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 22,945.30. "On Tuesday, the Indian blue-chip equity indices, Sensex and Nifty-50, closed with a slight decline, primarily due to a slowdown in earnings and concerns over ongoing foreign selling, which affected market

sentiment," Ameya Ranadive, Chartered Market Technician, CFTe, Sr Technical Analyst, StoxBox, said. From the Sensex pack, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharma, Tata Consultancy Services, ITC and Asian Paints were among the biggest laggards. NTPC, Zomato, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and HCL Tech were among the gainers. The BSE smallcap gauge dropped 1.71 per cent and midcap index declined 0.19 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, industrials dropped 1.51 per cent, consumer durables (1.19 per cent), telecommunication (1.06 per cent), capital goods (0.91 per cent), auto (0.65 per

cent) and consumer discretionary (0.55 per cent). BSE utilities climbed 1.03 per cent, BSE Focused IT (0.86 per cent), oil and gas (0.70 per cent) and energy (0.38 per cent). As many as 2,918 stocks declined while 1,032 advanced and 114 remained unchanged on the BSE. "The domestic market has experienced both profit-taking and bottom-fishing amid persistent concerns over FII outflows and pressure on the INR. Small and midcap stocks continue to lag due to apprehensions about premium valuations. Meanwhile, India's trade deficit has widened beyond expectations, driven by rising imports due to depreciating domestic currency and surging commodity prices,"

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹3,937.83 Crore on Monday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were quoting mostly lower. US markets were closed on Monday in observance of 'President's Day'. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.73 per cent to \$75.77 a barrel. The Sensex climbed 57.65 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at 75,996.86 on Monday, ending an eight-day losing run. The Nifty rebounded 30.25 points or 0.13 per cent to 22,959.50.

Unemployment rate dips to 6.4 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The unemployment rate for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas dipped to 6.4 per cent in the October-December quarter, according to the National Sample Survey Survey (NSSO). Joblessness, or unemployment rate, is defined as the percentage of unemployed people in the labour force. The unemployment rate in the December quarter of FY24 was 6.5 per cent. However, the rate stayed flat when compared sequentially. In the preceding July-September quarter of FY25, the rate of unemployment for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas was at

the same level of 6.4 per cent, the 25th Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) showed. The unemployment rate among females (aged 15 years and above) in urban areas declined to 8.1 per cent in October-December 2024 from 8.6 per cent in the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 8.4 per cent in July-September, 2024. Among males, the unemployment rate in urban areas remained flat at 5.8 per cent in October-December 2024 as compared to the rate of the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 5.7 per cent in July-September, 2024. Labour force participation rate in Current Weekly Status (CWS) in urban areas for people aged 15 years and above increased to 50.4 per

cent in October-December from 49.9 per cent in the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 50.4 per cent in the July-September 2024. Labour force refers to the part of the population, which supplies or offers to supply labour for pursuing economic activities for the production of goods and services and, therefore, includes both employed and unemployed persons. The NSSO had launched PLFS in April 2017. On the basis of PLFS, a quarterly bulletin is brought out giving estimates of labour force indicators namely unemployment rate, worker population ratio (WPR), labour force participation rate (LFPR), distribution of workers by broad status in

employment and industry of work in CWS. The estimates of unemployed persons in CWS give an average picture of unemployment in a short span of seven days during the survey period. In the CWS approach, a person is considered unemployed if he/she did not work even for one hour on any day during the week but sought or was available for work at least for one hour on any day during the period. Labour force, according to CWS, is the number of persons either employed or unemployed on average in a week preceding the date of the survey. LFPR is defined as the percentage of the population in the labour force.

Zelezny's tweaks will take me to 90m mark soon: Neeraj

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medal-winning javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra has revealed that his new coach Jan Zelezny has figured out mistakes in his technique and would now make some adjustments to his throwing routine to achieve the 90m mark that the Indian star is pursuing for a while. The 26-year-old, while speaking to India Today, also opened up about his hush-hush wedding to former tennis player Himani Mor last month, saying that their relationship was a casual friendship at first "but slowly we fell in love". Chopra has been trying hard to hit the 90m mark. His personal best stands at 89.94m which was achieved in 2022. His season begins in May with the Diamond League and would mark the competitive start of his partnership with Zelezny, a former Olympic and world champion who also holds the

world record (98.48m). "I believe a 90+ throw is happening soon. He (Jan Zelezny) has made some technical adjustments in my game," said Chopra. "He (Zelezny) feels that his tweaks would help me. I've been able to understand what he expects from me. One of the mistakes that he told me about was how I was throwing very low even in Paris and that I was leaning towards the left. "If I am able to incorporate those changes, I think I will get a lot better," he added. But the Panipat-lad insisted that the milestone is still not as important as winning medals for the country. "I want to do it myself. But, going to a competition and winning a medal against people who have previously thrown 90 meters is even more important. There's no point in throwing 90 meters and not winning. "What if everyone throws 90+ there and despite throwing 90, you don't win? I want to throw more than 90



He also spoke about the groin injury that marred his season last year. Chopra has consulted a doctor recommended by Zelezny in Prague. "Groin injury has been an issue for a long time. I wasn't able to give 100 percent in my technique because of my injury. I went to Zelezny's doctor in Prague, and he suggested some exercises. I am working on that, so hopefully it helps, and I am able to give my 100 percent," he said. "We slowly fell in love" Opening up about his marriage that stunned everyone, Chopra said both he and Mor wanted it to be an intimate affair and that's why they chose a town near Solan. "I knew her. She also comes from a family with a sports background, and so do we. Her father and mother were kabaddi players. Her brothers were boxers and wrestlers," Chopra said. "She herself was a tennis player, but after picking up injuries, she focused more on her studies," he added. Shedding light on how their relationship developed over a period of time, Chopra said being athletes, they could connect easily. "Because our families had a sports background, we had the opportunity to meet. Our conversations began like that -- just two athletes talking. It was casual at first, but slowly, we fell in love," he said. Their wedding pictures, which Chopra shared on social media a couple of days after the ceremony, took the internet by storm. Although only family members were invited for the nuptials, Chopra said most of his close circle of friends was aware that he was tying the knot and he would soon be planning a celebration with those who couldn't be a part of the function. "...Families and friends knew. I wanted to return to training because the season was about to start. I thought it would only be possible after the season. Inviting everyone would have taken time," he explained.



I have not resigned, will complete tenure, says Mary Kom

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association's athletes commission chairperson and boxing legend M C Mary Kom on Tuesday denied reports that she has resigned from her position, insisting that she has been misunderstood and will complete her tenure in the panel. The 42-year-old Manipuri, who is also a 2012 Olympics bronze-winner, had travelled to Haldwani for the National Games closing ceremony last week where she expressed her displeasure over being lodged at an "inferior hotel". Speaking to PTI, Mary Kom said her outburst has been misconstrued as resignation. "I have not resigned, I will complete my tenure (which ends in 2026)," she asserted. "I was merely telling my fellow (athletes commission) members that if this kind of treatment happens again, I will consider resigning. I never said that I am resigning. IOA is my family and if I am unhappy over something, I have every right to express it. "This does not mean that I am resigning," she went on. Mary Kom was elected to the panel in 2022 with table tennis stalwart A Sharath Kamal as vice-chairperson. The commission also features two-time Olympic medal-winning shuttler PV Sindhu, former shot putter Om Prakash Karhana, Winter

Olympian Shiva Keshavan, London Olympics bronze-winning shooter Gagan Narang, rower Bajrang Lal, fencer Bhavani Devi, former women's hockey captain Rani Rampal, and Tokyo Olympics silver-winning weightlifter Mirabai Chanu. "I don't know why it is that every time I raise my voice for something, it is misunderstood like this? Lot of my fellow athletes speak their mind on so many issues but nobody gets misunderstood," Mary Kom said. "I was put up in a bad hotel when I went for the National Games closing ceremony despite the fact that a better hotel was available. If others could be accommodated, why not me? That was the only question I asked," she insisted. "Next thing I know, people are saying I have resigned. Where is the resignation? Has anyone seen it?" she asked. Asked if she has had a word with IOA President P T Usha on this matter, Mary Kom said, "I haven't been able to connect with her because my phone was misplaced. But I will speak to her, I have good communication with her." One of the most decorated Indian athletes, Mary Kom has been on the athletes forum of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in the past and has a fairly good experience of the administrative side of sports.

Parth Rekhade puts Vidarbha in firm control against Mumbai

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Left-arm spinner Parth Rekhade struck thrice in an over as Mumbai slipped to a precarious 188 for 7 in reply to Vidarbha's first innings total of 383, trailing by 195 runs at stumps on Day Two of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Tuesday. Mumbai opener Akash Anand was battling at one end, unbeaten on 67, with the last recognised batter, Tanush Kotian, on 5 not out at the other, as their title defence came under intense pressure from a disciplined and persistent Vidarbha side on their home ground at the VCA Stadium here. Mumbai were steady at 113 for two at one stage but Rekhade, playing only his second First-Class match, ripped open the Ranji champions' batting line-up, first with an innocuous delivery which claimed the prized scalp of Ajinkya Rahane in the 41st over. Rahane's defensive prod had the ball rolling back to his stumps and knock off the bails, ending his stay for a 24-ball 18 which also had an outside edge flying between



the wicketkeeper and the first slip. Two deliveries later, Suryakumar Yadav (0) then paid a heavy price for a hard-handed frontfoot prod as an inside edge was sharply collected by Danish Malewar at silly point over his head. Another couple of deliveries later, Shivam Dube (0), who had claimed 5/49 in Vidarbha's first innings, was also caught for a two-ball duck like his India T20I teammate Suryakumar as Mumbai slipped from 113/2 to 113/5. It soon became 118/6 for the Rahane-led side, losing four wickets for a mere five runs, when Shams Mulani was trapped leg-before by Harsh Dubey for his first wicket. Anand then forged a crucial 60-run stand with Shardul Thakur but their partnership did not last long. Thakur, who has persistently come to Mumbai's rescue with the bat this season, did produce a fightback but could not push on for a big knock, perishing for a 41-ball 37 with four fours and a six with his knock having all the elements of his trademark counterattack. He was bounced out by Yash Thakur (2), who had cleaned up Siddhesh Lad (35) for a vital breakthrough earlier in the day to break his stubborn second-wicket partnership with Anand.

Mumbai had begun rather shakily in reply to Vidarbha's first innings total when opener Ayush Mhatre played one in the air early on to find Malewar at cover, following which the pair of Lad and Anand had done well to see off the threat from the new ball there on. On his part, wicketkeeper-batter Anand batted extremely well, reaching a solid 67 off 171 balls, including six fours — most of them coming on the off-side. But once again it was Vidarbha who walked away with the bragging rights after another dominant show, having earlier added 75 runs to their overnight total of 308 for five. Rathod brought up his fifty shortly after play resumed on the second day but like his teammates, could not push on and fell for 54 off 113 balls with seven fours. **Brief scores:** Vidarbha 383 in 107.5 overs (Dhruv Shorey 74, Danish Malewar 79, Yash Thakur 54; Shivam Dube 5/49, Shams Mulani 2/62) lead Mumbai 188/7 in 59 overs (Akash Anand 67*; Yash Thakur 2/56, Parth Rekhade 3/16) by 195 runs.

Mumbai City FC meet Hyderabad FC

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Mumbai City FC will look to continue their promising form away from home when they take on hosts Hyderabad FC in their Indian Super League match here on Wednesday. Mumbai City FC are currently positioned at the sixth place in the points table. They have 31 points to their name from 20 games, on the back of two victories and draws each in their previous five matches. Hyderabad FC are at the penultimate spot, with 16 points from 20 encounters on the back of four wins and draws each — with two of those victories coming in their last four games. The Islanders have been doing well on the road in the current campaign, winning four and drawing thrice in their last seven away matches. A victory in this fixture would propel them to their maiden league double over Hyderabad FC, which would make Mumbai City FC the team with the most league doubles (13) over different opponents in the ISL. However, Mumbai City FC faced a 1-3 setback to FC Goa in their last match, at home. Still, under Petr Kratky,

Mumbai City FC have not yet faced consecutive losses and they will look to sustain that record with a positive outcome in the forthcoming match. Contrastingly, Hyderabad FC have been on an encouraging run at home, winning their last two matches there — by 3-2 against Jamshedpur FC and 3-1 vs Mohammedan SC. A third straight home win will equal the feat that they scaled in October-November 2022, when all triumphs had come with a 1-0 scoreline. In the last match between these two sides on November 30, 2024, Mumbai City FC had edged past by a slender 1-0 margin. Hyderabad FC have been found on the back-foot defensively, giving away nine headed goals in 2024-25, which is the joint-highest in the competition. The team has kept the least clean sheets (2) in the ISL 2024-25, conceding the most goals (41) amongst all 13 teams. Ramhlunchunga won possession four times in the final third against Odisha FC in their last game, the joint-highest by any player in a single game this season. He has won possession 17 times in the final third this term, the most by any Indian player.

Alcaraz beats Cilic in straight sets to advance at Qatar Open



PTI ■ DOHA

Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz overcame Croatian veteran Marin Cilic 6-4, 6-4 to reach the round of 16 at the Qatar Open. The 36-year-old Cilic, the 2014 U.S. Open champion who has fallen to No. 192 in the rankings, was on Monday playing his first match of the season after recovering from a long-term knee injury. The Croatian led 4-3 and 0-40 on Alcaraz's

serve in the second set, but the Spanish four-time major winner managed to recover and then broke in the next game. "I am just really happy that I stayed calm at that moment, breathing, going through my routines, making good points," Alcaraz said. "That's why I was able to win in two sets." Alcaraz will play either Zhang Zhizhen of China or Italy's Luca Nardi next. Earlier, seventh-seeded Grigor Dimitrov lost 6-4, 6-4 to Jiri Lehecka. Also on Monday, eighth-seeded Jack Draper beat Alexei Popyrin 6-2, 7-6 (4) to set up a meeting with another Australian, Christopher O'Connell. Several other top players will play their first matches on Tuesday. Second-seeded Alex de Minaur will face Roman Safiullin. Novak Djokovic, who had to pull out of his Australian Open semifinal with a hamstring injury, will take on Matteo Berrettini.

Barcelona 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano

PTI ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona returned to the top of the Spanish league on goal difference after Robert Lewandowski's first-half penalty secured a 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano. The Catalan club on Monday took advantage of weekend slip-ups by Real Madrid and Atlético Madrid to move onto 51 points, the same as Madrid and a point clear of Atlético. Madrid drew 1-1 at Osasuna on Saturday and Atletico was held by the same score at home by Celta Vigo. Barcelona took the lead after 27 minutes when Pathe Ciss brought down Iñigo Martínez in the box, and a penalty was awarded after a video review. Lewandowski sent the keeper the wrong way from the spot. Both sides had chances to



score after that. Augusto Batalla saved well from Lamine Yamal, who was playing the 100th game of his career, while at the other end Jorge De Frutos had the ball in the net for Rayo only to see it ruled out for offside.

De Frutos was always dangerous for Rayo but as the game went on the home side took control as it extended its unbeaten run to 12 matches. The defeat ended Rayo nine-game unbeaten streak that stretched back to December 7.

Tennis players have lost faith in doping agencies: Novak Djokovic

PTI ■ DOHA

Novak Djokovic says a majority of tennis players have lost faith in the anti-doping authorities following Yannik Sinner's three-month ban, and there's a widespread feeling that "favoritism" is being shown to the sport's biggest stars. The 24-time major winner called on the World Anti-Doping Agency and the International Tennis Integrity Agency to overhaul their processes for dealing with doping cases "because the system and the structure obviously doesn't work." "Right now there is a lack of trust generally from the tennis players, both male and female, toward WADA and ITIA and the whole process," Djokovic said at the Qatar

Open. Top-ranked Sinner reached a deal with WADA on Saturday to accept a ban that will have him back playing in time for the French Open in May without having to miss a single Grand Slam tournament. That came after the International Tennis Integrity Agency had decided not to suspend Sinner for what it judged was accidental contamination by a banned anabolic steroid last March. The short ban for Sinner came after five-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek accepted a one-month suspension in November after testing positive for a banned substance that she said was accidentally consumed because of a contaminated

nonprescription medication. Both bans are much shorter than what other athletes in tennis and in other sports have normally received in similar cases. "It's not a good image for our sport, that's for sure," Djokovic, the long-time No. 1 in men's tennis, said. "There's a majority of the players that I've talked to in the locker room, not just in the last few days, but also last few months, that are not happy with the way this whole process (for Sinner) has been handled. "A majority of the players don't feel that it's fair. A majority of the players feel like there is favoritism happening. It appears that you can almost affect the outcome if you are a top player, if you have access to



the top lawyers and whatnot." Sinner had been scheduled to play in Qatar before accepting the ban.

The handling of Sinner's case had already raised questions about double standards, and when the ban was

announced it was widely criticized by other players. The positive tests weren't publicly revealed until

August because Sinner successfully appealed against being provisionally banned from playing. He then won the U.S. Open in September and the Australian Open in January. Sinner's explanation for the positive test was that trace amounts of Clostebol in his doping sample was due to a massage from a trainer who used the substance after cutting his own finger, which WADA accepted. Djokovic said he didn't question Sinner's and Swiatek's innocence but that he and other players are frustrated about the inconsistent handling of doping cases. He pointed to the case of former women's No. 1 Simona Halep — who was given a four-year ban by the

ITIA in 2022 after a positive test before it was later reduced to nine months — and British player Tara Moore, who was suspended in May 2022 while an investigation lasted 18 months before an independent tribunal determined that her positive test for a banned substance was caused by contaminated meat. "Right now it's a ripe time for us to really address the system, because the system and the structure obviously doesn't work, it's obvious," Djokovic said. "So, I hope that in the ... Near future that the governing bodies are going to come together of our tours and the tennis ecosystem and try to find a more effective way to deal with these processes.

India will feel Bumrah's absence very strongly: Dhawan

PTI ■ DUBAI

India will feel Jasprit Bumrah's absence "very strongly" in the Champions Trophy but they still have a great chance to win the tournament considering their recent form and a host of match-winners at their disposal, reckons former opener Shikhar Dhawan. While the event starts in Pakistan on Wednesday, India start their campaign a day later with a match against neighbours Bangladesh at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. Pace spearhead Bumrah was ruled out of the tournament due to a lower back injury, having taken the maximum load during India's five-match Test series against Australia. "My concern is they are going to miss Jasprit Bumrah, there is no doubt he will be a big absence and I think they will feel it very strongly," Dhawan wrote in an ICC column published on Tuesday. "For me, he is the best bowler in the world, and his accuracy is hard to replicate. He is also a very calm character and that is crucial in a huge ICC event like this." Dhawan is, however, backing Shubman Gill and Harshit Rana to sizzle in the tournament. "At the same time, Harshit Rana has



come into the side and I think that is really exciting - keep an eye on him, I think he could have a breakout tournament. "I like his attitude, he is a go-getter and he is not afraid of anything. He accepts challenges and we have seen in the England series that he is in

form. I am sure he will look to seize this opportunity and, if he does, he could provide a real X-factor for India." Going by recent form and team strength, Dhawan found it hard to look beyond India when the discussion turned to title contenders.

"There are a lot of reasons to be optimistic for India. They have a very balanced side, especially with the bat - there is a nice blend of experience and youth. Shubman Gill, in particular, is so consistent and he has a big role to play. I think he will have a great tournament.

"Rohit Sharma has found form, Virat Kohli is there; they are a top side and will take some stopping." Dhawan is also not ruling out teams such as South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and hosts Pakistan, to whom India lost in the title clash in the last edition in the UK. "I really like South Africa in this tournament as well. They have played consistent cricket and have everything you need to win such a huge tournament - experience, strength-in-depth and X-factor players like Kagiso Rabada. "I also like Pakistan, they will be hard to beat in home conditions, and also New Zealand - who are just always there or thereabouts. "Australia have struggled in their series with Sri Lanka but they some great batters; Travis Head is in great form, and I'm really excited to see Steve Smith." Dhawan is one of the most successful batters in the tournament's history having scored 701 runs in 10 innings at an average of 77.88. He hit three centuries in the tournament, with his best being 125 against Sri Lanka in 2017. "The ICC Champions Trophy means a great deal to me. We won in 2013 and then reached the final in 2017, and both times I finished as leading run-scorer," he added.



WPL: Delhi Capitals, UP Warriorz eye improved batting effort

PTI ■ VADODARA

Delhi Capitals and UP Warriorz will be aiming for an improved batting effort on Wednesday after floundering in their previous Women's Premier League matches. Their clash is also the last match here at the Kotambi Stadium before the WPL action shifts to Bengaluru from February 21. The Capitals are yet to match the pre-tournament favourite billing with performances. Their batting has failed to fire in two matches, even in their victory over the Mumbai Indians. They made heavy weather of the chase of a 165-run target before winning by two wickets, and folded for 141 against the Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday during the eight-wicket defeat. The trouble starts from the top as skipper Meg Lanning has not been able to produce a big knock yet. It has seemed that international retirement has taken a toll on the Australian. There have been occasional fireworks by Shafali Varma, Jemimah Rodrigues or Sarah Bryce, but they have not been able to convert into a substantial innings. Their bowling has been in much better shape with veteran Shikha Pandey leading from the front, but she needs some more support from others, particularly from fellow pacer Arundhati Reddy. The UP outfit too is in a similar place. Grace Harris and Tahlia McGrath, their middle-order powerhouses, looked uneasy against spin

and the Capitals have a capable bunch in Minnu Mani, Jess Jonassen and Radha Yadav. The Warriorz have invested heavily in skipper Deepti Sharma, young wicketkeeper batter Uma Chhetri and openers Vrinda Dinesh and Kiran Navgire. It's not often that a WPL team fills their top four with Indian players, and the quartet will have to repay the faith of the management sooner than later. The absence of an injured Alyssa Healy has reduced the firepower in their top order. They would also expect leg-spinner Alana King to make an impression against Delhi, as the Aussie spinner, who bowled that extraordinary Shane Warne-esque delivery in the Women's Ashes, was quite expensive against Gujarat. **Teams (from):** UP Warriorz: Deepti Sharma (captain), Alana King, Gouher Sultana, Saima Thakor, Grace Harris, Shweta Sehrawat, Anjali Sarvani, Kiran Navgire, Sophie Ecclestone, Arushi Goel, Kranti Goud, Tahlia McGrath, Chamari Athapaththu, Poonam Khemnar, Uma Chetry, Rajeshwari Gajakwad, Vrinda Dinesh. Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning (captain), Harleen Deol, Prakashika Naik, Beth Mooney, Kashvee Gautam, Priya Mishra, Bharti Fulmali, Laura Wolvaardt, Sayali Satghare, Danielle Gibson, Mannat Kashyap, Shabnam Shakil, Dayalan Hemalatha, Meghna Singh, Simran Shaikh, Deandra Dottin, Phoebe Litchfield, Tanuja Kanwar.



Best leaders that I know have always empowered colleagues: Cummins

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leadership is all about having faith in the strengths of colleagues, believes Australia's talismanic captain Pat Cummins, who is busy promoting his new book after being forced out of the Champions Trophy due to an ankle injury. At the age of 28, Cummins became Australia's 47th Test captain and since then he has led his country to the 50-over World Cup and the World Test Championship triumph apart from retaining the Ashes and regaining the coveted Border-Gavaskar Trophy just last month. The 31-year-old, who has 503 international wickets across formats with 294 in Tests alone, donned the hat of an interviewer to speak to 11 achievers-cum-leaders from around the world for his new book 'Tested: The remarkable power of resolve' published by Harper Collins. Asked about his idea of leadership and to what extent should the captain assert his authority, Cummins told PTI: "The best leaders I've played under always made me feel empowered, brought the best out of myself and made me feel a sense of freedom. "I think it's important to lean into the individual strengths of each team member rather than trying to make everyone

assimilate," the pacer further stated. While he has a handsome USD two million-plus contract with IPL franchise Sunrisers Hyderabad, whom he captained last year in the cash-rich league, the traditional format remains his No.1 priority. This despite the fact that more and more cricketers are veering towards a freelance career in T20 leagues. "I love Test cricket so much so its always been an easy decision to keep that as my number one priority. Especially in Australia, we are lucky to have Test cricket so well-supported." Cummins also spoke about the respect he has for his fellow speed merchants Indian talisman Jasprit Bumrah and Kagiso Rabada of South Africa. "Those two guys (Bumrah and Rabada) are bowlers I enjoy watching and admire. They have been taking wickets consistently for many years and we've had some wonderful contests." Talking about the book, Cummins also revealed the process he followed while deciding the list of interviewees for his new book. "I started with a list of people I knew and admired and whose life stories exemplified resilience, leadership and the power of resolve," he said.

Delighted to see ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan, says Wasim

PTI ■ KARACHI

Former captain Wasim Bari is glad to see the return of a global cricketing event to Pakistan through the ICC Champions Trophy, and hopes that the nightmarish days after the militant attack on Sri Lankan team in 2009 are forgotten forever. Pakistan could not host international cricket for 10 years after that gruesome day, and were forced to play their home matches in the UAE. Bari was serving as the Director in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) under the Chairmanship of late Ejaz Butt when the attack took place on March 3 near the Liberty roundabout close to the Gaddafi stadium. "It was the worst day in my life when news came through of what had happened. Everyone was numb and most of us in our offices realised



immediately this was going to put Pakistan cricket back by a few years," Bari said. Bari said there was disbelief followed by sorrow the governments of both the nations and the ICC got involved, and later a chartered flight was arranged to send the Lankan team back home. Six policemen and two others were killed in the attack and several were injured including Pakistani umpire Ahsan Raza, who later had to undergo a life-saving operation.

Bari recalled that when pictures of the bullet-ridden bus and vans carrying the match officials and umpires in blood stained shirts went viral, it became obvious that Pakistan's hopes of staging the Champions Trophy or even the 2011 World Cup matches had vanished. Without putting blame on anyone, Bari said: "It should never have happened and the result was Pakistan cricket couldn't properly grow for the next 10 years, as all teams

refused to play in Pakistan for security reasons." Bari said he is delighted to see the ICC Champions Trophy being held in Pakistan now and multiple teams landing in the country. "To see England, Australian, South African, New Zealand and Afghanistan teams in Karachi and Lahore means so much to all Pakistani cricketers, board officials and the fans," he said. The 75-year-old said it was a tribute to the singleminded effort of all the stakeholders involved in Pakistan cricket. "I think it is also a time to pay tribute to the resilience of Pakistan cricket while hosting the Champions Trophy, after all that has happened in the last 10 years." Bari said Pakistan have some very good players, who are capable of helping the team defend the Champions Trophy title.

India's bowling coach Morkel returns home

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's bowling coach Morne Morkel has left for his home in South Africa due to a family emergency. Morkel, who was appointed for the job in September last year, had travelled to Dubai with the Indian team on Saturday, and also attended the side's first practice session ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy beginning on Wednesday. The 40-year-old former South African pacer was, however, not around for the Indian team's second practice session on Monday, it has been learned. The development comes just as India geared up to began their campaign with a match

against Bangladesh at Dubai International Cricket Stadium here on Thursday. The Indian bowling attack for the ICC tournament comprises specialist pacers and one fast-bowling all-rounder in Hardik Pandya. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was ruled out of the event due to lower back injury, leaving the task of shouldering the fast-bowling responsibility on Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana and Mohammed Shami, with Pandya being the fourth option. Pakistan is the host nation of the tournament, but India will be playing all their matches in Dubai as per the hybrid model agreed by the concerned stakeholders.

Jaspal Rana will continue as my coach: Manu Bhaker

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Eying glory in next World Championship, double Olympic medallist shooter Manu Bhaker said Jaspal Rana will continue to be her "coach" despite the Dronacharya awardee being roped in as the High Performance trainer for pistol discipline by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI). Rana, a four-time Asian Games gold medallist, had a very bitter and public fallout with Manu before the Tokyo Olympics but they reconciled before last year's Paris Games, where the latter made history by bagging two bronze medals. "Honestly, I only have to say one thing that he (Rana) is my coach all I know and he is very good at what he does. He is very, very talented and



he has been a great coach for me. "All I know and all I can say is that he is my coach. Of course, he can be anyone else's coach as well but for me he is my coach," Manu said after winning the BBC Sportswomen of the Year 2024 award at a glittering function here on Monday night. Under Rana's personal guidance, Manu, who was

struggling after the Tokyo Games, made a remarkable comeback and became the first Indian to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics since Independence. She won bronze medals in 10m air pistol and 10m air pistol mixed team events in Paris to create history. Talking about her future plans, Manu said: "We will be going for World Cups in April, and then we have some domestic competitions in June. "It will be followed by another World Cup in Munich. Then we will have the World Championships, probably in late October or November. My target is the World Championships. I want to peak at the right time for the World Championships," she added. The season-ending World Championships will be held in Cairo, Egypt, from November 6-16. Her unprecedented success in Paris wouldn't have been possible without Rana's guidance and Manu agrees to it. Manu, who turned 23 on Tuesday, considers Rana as her father figure, while the coach gives her the courage and confidence to seek and achieve great things in her sport.

Champions Trophy set to start amid debate on relevance of 50-over cricket

PTI ■ DUBAI/KARACHI

Intrigue, uncertainty, backstage drama. The ICC Champions Trophy has seen it all even before the curtains go up on the tournament and it would only get more stirring over the next three weeks, starting with the opening clash between Pakistan and New Zealand in Karachi. Eight teams will vie for a trophy, often talked up as tougher to win than the World Cup, and also to script a new chapter in their own cricketing story. While India will fight it out in Dubai, others will be primarily based in Pakistan, which would get to host its first ICC event since the 1996 World Cup.

Several barriers had to be hurdled over to cobble this tournament together after eight years. The tournament is also crucial amid the raging debate on the relevance of ODI cricket, which is struggling to find its space amid the rage for T20 cricket and the devotion for Test format. Perhaps, no other cricketing event in the recent past has been harried so much by long-standing geopolitical tensions, stubbornness by administrative boards of two important participants, and the nail-biting anxiety over the readiness of venues in the main hosting nation. The chaos has been an enduring throwback to the

90s when cricket in the sub-continent resembled a hastily organised party. But all these pre-tournament jitters will be forgotten once the teams enter the field, and the first of them will be Pakistan and New Zealand. If anyone needs a reminder, then Pakistan had won the last edition of the Champions Trophy in 2017. The opening match in itself is a curious clash -- a talented-yet-volatile Pakistan unsure of its own destiny against a team for which order is everything. But the blue riband match of the tournament will be on February 23 when India take on Pakistan, ushering in customary waves of nostalgia, emotions, political grand-



standing, and the social media battle. That marquee showdown will be in Dubai as India remained steadfast in its refusal to set foot on Pakistani soil owing to security concerns.

Last dance of Kohli, Rohit? But beyond such team equations, certain individual players would want this tournament to be a memorable one. On top of the list are India's

batting talismans Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. They have been magnificent servants of the game over the last decade and half. Few in modern era were able to match their achievements and aura. But now, these two titans have reached the last lap of a long race, and would want to bow out in a blaze of glory. It's tough to imagine Kohli and Rohit being part of India's ODI set-up after the Champions Trophy irrespective of the outcome. It might even impact their future in Test cricket, as a lukewarm outing here might force the selectors to mull over their role ahead of India's tour to England in June.

Similarly, a failure to win the Champions Trophy will bring the role of head coach Gautam Gambhir under scrutiny. Gambhir might have received a temporary relief after India's domination over England in the recent home series, but not it wouldn't be enough to brush under the carpet, India's recent travails against New Zealand and Australia. But a global trophy will certainly give him a much better ground to stand. From a team perspective, India will be eager to wrest their first ICC trophy in the 50-over format after their triumph in the 2013 Champions Trophy under the enigmatic Mahendra Singh

Dhoni. It will be a perfect parting gift to Kohli and Rohit and a welcome carpet to some young names such as Shubman Gill who are set to take India into the future. **The challengers** India are playing a brand of ODI cricket that makes them instant favourites to win the tournament. They have adopted an aggressive approach and have a varied line-up, brimming with talent. But such calculations can go wrong because of a bad moment or session, as it happened in the 2023 World Cup final when India succumbed to Australia after a middling batting effort.

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