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## VIRAT VICTORY FOR INDIA

PTI ■ DUBAI

Virat Kohli showcased his penchant to lord over Pakistan in ICC tournaments once more as the batting icon's glittering unbeaten 100 helped India claim an authoritative six-wicket win over their traditional rivals and all but seal a semifinal spot in the Champions Trophy here on Sunday. The victory should be enough for India, who are now on top of Group A with four points, to make the last four. However, Pakistan are staring at early elimination from the eight-team event after their second successive loss. Chasing a tricky 242, India rode on Kohli's 51st ODI ton, Shreyas Iyer's classy 67-ball 56 and Shubman Gill's brilliant start of 46 off 52 balls to overhaul the target with more than seven overs to spare. Kohli rebelled against his own modest recent form and a dangerous opposition to peel off a memorable knock that took 111 balls and was punctuated with seven fours. Pakistan, on the other hand, are on their way out of the tournament of which they are the hosts. Once again, they ran into their old nemesis - Kohli. The 36-year-old had several demons of his own to tame - a lean run, recurring form of dismissals and struggles against spin. But he slayed each one of them, in a manner befitting a batter who also became the quickest to 14,000 ODI runs during the course of the knock. Pakistan might have hoped to hustle him a bit through pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf. But Kohli drove them on the up with elan or pulled them with audacity as Pakistan's premier pacers transformed into dejected figures after the early high of Afridi casting Rohit Sharma (20 off 15 balls) with a peach of a yorker. Perhaps, the biggest hope Pakistan harboured against Kohli would have been leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed, considering the Indian's recent



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

travails against England's Adil Rashid. Kohli did have a couple of tough moments against Ahmed but none big enough to put him in distress. He largely dealt with him in singles, cutting down risks. But the Pakistan quicks offered him enough chances to free his arms. At the other end, Iyer flowed with a variety of shots but a 103 metre six off spinner Salman Agha was the standout hit during his tenure, in which he assisted Kohli to raise 114 runs for the third wicket. Iyer had to walk back to the hut after Imam-ul-Haq pulled off a stunner at covers off spinner Khushdil Shah although replays suggested that the ball might have been grounded. But by then, India had already shut the door on Pakistan. A large chunk of credit for this win can also be rightfully claimed by Indian bowlers, who were stunningly accurate while limiting Pakistan to 241. That total was made possible by Saud Shakeel's polished fifty and Khushdil's cameo. Shakeel (62, 76b, 5x4) was largely untroubled and added 104 runs for the third wicket with skipper Mohammad Rizwan (46), but Pakistan never really managed to break the shackles after opting to bat. The pitch expectedly grew slow once the match entered the middle passage, and the precision of Indian bowlers made run-making a laboured task with left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav leading the way (3/40). There was a period in Pakistan innings when both Rizwan and Shakeel failed to find the boundary rope for 55 consecutive deliveries. They were forced to traverse a cautious path because of the early departure of Babar Azam (23) and Imam (10). Azam looked million dollars while playing those trademark cover drives for a few boundaries off Harshit Rana and Hardik Pandya.

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

## Deportees continue to arrive in Capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

collaborating with the US to manage the repatriation of deported migrants. As part of this initiative, the US is relocating undocumented migrants from various Asian nations-those unwilling to return or whose home countries have refused to accept them-to these Central American nations. The first round of deportation took place on February 5, when a US military plane transported 104 Indians to Amritsar. The second and the third round of deportation were also in US military planes, which landed in Amritsar. The deportees were shackled and restrained throughout the flight, only to be freed upon arrival in India-a move that triggered a political storm in the country and led to an uproar in both Houses of Parliament during the then-ongoing Budget session.

## Telangana tunnel collapse: Rescue inches closer

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD

As eight persons got trapped around 14 km inside the tunnel of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal project after part of its roof collapsed on Saturday, a rescue team made headway and reached the spot where a tunnel boring machine was working during the incident. However, silt poses a challenge to move further to reach the spot where the people are believed to have been trapped, he added. Nagarkurnool District Collector B Santhosh who is supervising the rescue operation, on Sunday said four NDRF teams - one from Hyderabad and three from Vijayawada, comprising 138 members, 24 personnel of the army, personnel of SDRF, 23 members from SCCL with equipment besides members of the infra firm are engaged in the rescue operations. The rescuers have reached the point where the tunnel boring machine is there. As there is silt after that point, the NDRF team is making plans to go forward. Oxygen and power supply has been made available in the tunnel and dewatering and the desilting operation is also underway.

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## WEATHER

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MAX 26.8°C(-1.0)  
MIN 13.5°C(+1.6)

## Delhi government sets up CAG trap for AAP



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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

## Atishi to face off Gupta in Assembly

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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## USAID row deepens as Congress attack Centre, BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the USAID funding row, the Congress on Sunday accused the BJP of indulging in "anti-national work" by spreading "fake news from America" and demanded that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will also have to answer as to why the government is silent when US President Donald Trump and Elon Musk are "insulting" India repeatedly. Countering the attack from Congress, the BJP has rejected all allegations and called Rahul Gandhi a "traitor", accusing him of colluding with foreign forces in his bid to weaken India. Congress general secretary in-charge Jairam Ramesh said, "BJP is a procession of liars and illiterates. The news about USD 21 million, on which the BJP and their bootlickers were jumping on, turned out to be fake. The USD 21 million in 2022 was not for 'voter turnout' in India, but for Bangladesh." "Elon Musk made a fake claim, Trump got confused between Dhaka and Delhi, Amit Malviya spread the lie further, then the rest of BJP's bootlickers seized on it," he charged. Ever since the Trump administration's DOGE said on February 16 that USAID has cancelled the USD 21 million funding for "voting in India", the BJP has been making fabricated allegations against the Congress,



Ramesh said in his post in Hindi on X. "But now it is coming to light that this entire news is fake. When the money has not even reached India, then what would be the cancellation?" he said. The controversy is actually about two USAID grants on DOGE's list that were given through the Washington-based Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), the Congress leader said. The CEPPS was supposed to receive a total of USD 486 million from USAID, he said, adding that according to DOGE, the funds included USD 22 million for Moldova and USD 21 million for "voter turnout in India", he said. "The first fund USAID gave to CEPPS for Moldova was in 2016 with the ID AID117LA1600001. But the USAID USD 21 million grant for India marked by DOGE is completely fake. Because it was for Bangladesh, not India," he

claimed. And the reality is that of the USD 21 million earmarked for Bangladesh, USD 13.4 million has already been disbursed before the January 2024 elections, Ramesh said. "Every federal grant specifies the country in which it is to be used. According to US federal spending, there have been no USAID-funded CEPPS projects in India since 2008. The only ongoing USD 21 million USAID grant to CEPPS, ID 72038822LA00001, was approved in July 2022 for Bangladesh's 'Amar Vote Amar' (My Vote Is Mine)," he pointed out. "In November 2022, the purpose of the grant was changed to 'USAID's Nagorik Programme'. A USAID official in Dhaka also confirmed this on social media during his US visit in December 2024: 'I manage the USD 21 million CEPPS/Nagorik project funded by USAID,'" Ramesh said.

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

The Congress leader said "Is it the case that the country's self-respect has been compromised in the process of begging for mercy for Adani?" Trump for the fourth time in recent days has claimed that the Biden administration allocated USD 21 million funding to India for voter turnout, evoking a sharp response from the Congress which urged Prime Minister Modi to talk to his friend and strongly refute the allegation. The opposition party has demanded a white paper on the funds received in India from developmental agencies, aid mechanisms and multilateral forums. It also sought legal action against the RSS-BJP and their ecosystem for making wild allegations against credible civil society members, NGOs and political parties.

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## Rural women in Bihar are fighting changing climate

PTI ■ MUZAFFARPUR

In the heart of rural Bihar, where groundwater depletion, extreme heat and erratic weather have caused havoc for farmers, a quiet transformation is underway. A group of women, once confined to their homes despite their education, have emerged as agri-entrepreneurs, transforming not only their own lives but also helping their communities adapt to the growing threats of climate change. Each agri-entrepreneur (AE) works with at least 150-200 small and marginal farmers, who are hit the most by these worsening climate challenges. They provide solutions to farmers on irrigation, provide climate-resilient seeds, help out with crop diversification, and act as a helpdesk for digital work-essentially a one-stop centre for all problems they may encounter. Their remuneration is proportional to

the range of services they provide farmers within a panchayat. Soni Kumari from Hajipur, for instance, began her journey as an



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

agri-entrepreneur last year by registering a farmer for a farmer card. She then prepared a detailed business proposal based on the farmer's

profile-his social indicators, finances and cropping patterns. She then entered the farmer's requirements into a Management Information System, creating a database of her customers to understand demand and create a business plan for her enterprise. Once a homemaker, Soni who is a science graduate said she never imagined she would one day be at the forefront of promoting sustainable farming practices. "I opened a shop with a micro-financing loan, where I stock everything from climate-resilient seeds to organic manure and fertilisers. We even have a drone for irrigation," Soni said. The drone technology Soni uses has been a game-changer for her, she added. It sprays water evenly across fields, ensuring efficient water use and reducing labour costs.

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## Accent unfairly impacts English language test score, Indians believe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Over 62 per cent of English test-takers in India believe that their Indian accent would negatively impact their speaking test outcomes while over 74 per cent feel that their appearance might impact their test score when a human examiner is involved, according to a Pearson survey. The report revealed insights from a social perception survey conducted by the Pearson Test of English for study, work and migration visas. Revealing stark insights about test-takers' perceptions of biases - particularly those

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

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

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# Yogi to youth: Be job creators, not seekers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, asked youth to be job creators, not seekers. He was in Agra on Sunday to strategise investment promotion in Uttar Pradesh and turn proposals into reality. Addressing a conclave of 100 unicorns, the chief minister emphasised the need for UP's youth to become job creators, highlighting the global impact of these innovative companies in the digital economy. He noted that UP once lacked opportunities, but driven students turned ideas into reality. He added that those leading in technology had also taken the lead in startups. Praising the youth as a growth engine and a source of inspiration, Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that monumental success is possible in every field. Sharing an example from Bundelkhand, he recalled how five women approached him in 2019 seeking jobs. Upon learning they had only studied up to class five, the state government took the initiative to train them and establish a milk producers' network. "Today, their venture boasts a Rs 1,500 crore turnover and supports 42,000 women. Agra's milk producers are achieving even greater success," he remarked. The chief minister said that UP was not only the land of agriculture but also of Sanatan knowledge and tradition. A conclave has been organised here to promote investment in UP, he noted, adding that "in this, people from unicorn companies across the country exchange ideas. No unicorn company moves forward without investors." He highlighted that the tradition of exchanging ideas dates back to ancient times. Citing the Valmiki Ramayana, he attributed its timeless appeal to Maharishi Valmiki's practical wisdom.



The chief minister stated: "Before composing the epic, Valmiki had a shloka in mind but sought guidance from Narad Ji, who advised him to centre it around Lord Shri Ram. This exchange of ideas led to the creation of the Ramayana." Drawing a parallel, Chief Minister Yogi remarked that the discussions among entrepreneurs today serve as the foundation stone for a new-age Ramayana of innovation and progress. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to making Uttar Pradesh a \$1 trillion economy, highlighting the transformative impact of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiatives in fostering a robust startup ecosystem. He credited Prime Minister Modi for redefining entrepreneurial culture through Startup India, Standup India, and Make in India, which have instilled confidence in the system and propelled India's startup revolution. Addressing the gathering, Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that India's startup ecosystem has gained global recognition, with numerous unicorns emerging across various sectors. He said, "Uttar Pradesh, too, has made significant strides, now home to over 14,000 startups, of which women entrepreneurs lead 7,000."

He applauded their contributions across diverse fields, citing the example of 'Physics Wallah', a startup that has achieved unicorn status by leveraging technology and innovation. He noted that even in regions where technological awareness was once limited, startups have successfully harnessed digital advancements to create impactful solutions. Drawing a parallel with the Maha Kumbh, Chief Minister Yogi showcased the power of technology in social welfare. He highlighted the success of the Khoya-Paya initiative, which helped reunite 28,000 missing individuals with their families through a digital tracking system. In contrast, he criticised statements by the Congress leadership, which painted an inaccurate picture of the Maha Kumbh. The chief minister underscored the meticulous planning that enabled crores of devotees to attend Maha Kumbh, with seamless transport, accommodation and communication facilities ensuring their safe return. Sharing a real-life incident from Prayagraj, the chief minister narrated how a man who had gone for a dip at the Sangam was presumed dead after going missing for several days. His family even performed his last rites. However, thanks to the community food services at the Maha Kumbh, he survived and returned home on the very day of his 'Terahvin'. He emphasised how faith, perseverance and technology can work together to create remarkable outcomes. Chief Minister Yogi said that experiencing the Maha Kumbh firsthand was the only way to truly understand its scale and logistics. Drawing a parallel with innovation, he highlighted how UP fosters a thriving startup ecosystem. He said, "The state has successfully introduced electric buses across all major cities, expanding their numbers in Gorakhpur from just five to 40.

These buses are now being deployed to connect villages with urban centres. The government has introduced a grant policy for electric bus manufacturers to promote sustainable transportation further, attracting numerous investment proposals. With a demand for nearly 1.5 lakh buses, Uttar Pradesh presents a vast market with opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs." Regarding agriculture, Chief Minister Yogi underscored UP's leadership in food grain and sugarcane production. He noted that the state has the potential to triple its current agricultural output with the proper support. He said, "Key challenges must be addressed, such as access to high-quality seeds and storage infrastructure. The agricultural sector could grow threefold by strengthening warehousing facilities and linking production with food processing and exports." Reflecting on his involvement in farming in Gorakhpur, Yogi Adityanath shared how his reduced attention after becoming chief minister led to a dip in output. Still, upon resuming oversight, productivity surged once again. The chief minister also highlighted advancements in healthcare, particularly the expansion of teleconsultation services. If virtual coaching can revolutionise education, he noted, similar digital solutions can transform healthcare access. Recalling the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, he pointed out that UP ramped its testing capacity from 1,000 to five lakh tests per day. Additionally, while 36 districts previously lacked ICU beds, the state has since made significant strides in upgrading medical infrastructure. Encouraging the youth, Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that UP was full of opportunities across multiple sectors. With innovation, dedication, and the right policies, the state is on a path to a remarkable transformation, he added.

# CM: Over half of world's Sanatan devotees have taken holy dip

**Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS):** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath visited Mahakumbh Nagar on Sunday, where he met saints and seers and emphasised the global significance of Sanatan dharma. He said that more than half of the world's Sanatan followers had already taken the holy dip at Prayagraj Maha Kumbh. Chief Minister Yogi first visited Satua Baba Peeth of the Vishnuwami sect, where he met Mahamandaleshwar Santoshacharya Maharaj (Satua Baba). He then proceeded to the Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Peeth, where he received blessings from Shankaracharya Shri Shankar Vijayendra Saraswati. During his visit, he also paid floral tributes to the former shankaracharya of Kanchi Peeth, Jayendra Saraswati, and performed aarti. Shankaracharya Shri Shankar Vijayendra Saraswati appreciated the grand arrangements for the Maha Kumbh and lauded the participation of over 60 crore Sanatan devotees in the sacred event. Praising the contributions of Kanchi Kamakoti Peeth, Chief Minister Yogi highlighted its pivotal role in preserving and strengthening Sanatan dharma. He said, "Whenever Sanatan dharma faced challenges, Kanchi Peeth stepped forward to resolve them, be it the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi movement or the Nepal crisis." The chief minister said 62 crore devotees had already bathed at Triveni Sangam, with numbers set to rise. He emphasised that no other faith sees such a vast gathering of devotion and called



UP CM Yogi Adityanath with Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham Jagadguru Shankara Vijayendra Saraswati Swamigal during Maha Kumbh Mela Mahotsav programme at Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Sunday PTI

Maha Kumbh a symbol of Sanatan dharma's grandeur and divinity. Chief Minister Yogi affirmed his government's commitment to making Sanatan dharma and Maha Kumbh events even more grand. He pledged to work with dedication and devotion to elevate their success to new heights. Shankaracharya Shankar Vijayendra Saraswati praised the arrangements at Maha Kumbh, calling it an excellent example of collaboration between the government and the people. He highlighted that Sanatan culture is the ideal culture of the world, and Maha Kumbh stands as living proof of its greatness. He also appreciated Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for restoring the ancient name of Prayagraj, emphasising that each Kumbh plays a crucial role in shaping the nation's direction. "Whether it is the construction of the Shri Ram temple or the rise of a government dedicated to strengthening Sanatan dharma, Kumbh has always guided the nation," he said, describing Maha Kumbh as a celebration of unity and a representation of Advaita (oneness). On this occasion, Shri Shankarpur Peethadhiswar Jagadguru Shri Krishnanand Tirth, Mahamandaleshwar Santoshacharya Ji Maharaj (Satua Baba), and many other revered saints were present.

# Uttarakhand Gov, Odisha CM, among others take holy dip

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Crores of devotees continue to take a sacred dip at the Triveni Sangam, joined by prominent leaders, saints and dignitaries in the grand Maha Kumbh celebrations. On Sunday, Uttarakhand Governor Lt General (Retired) Gurmit Singh, Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Bharatiya Janata Party leader Sambit Patra, and renowned Sufi singer Kailash Kher participated in the holy ritual, immersing themselves in faith. Uttarakhand Governor Gurmit Singh praised the arrangements at the Mahakumbh Nagar, stating, "I extend my congratulations to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and all officials for the impeccable management. This experience is beyond words - it can only be felt." Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, who arrived in Prayagraj with his family, also lauded the efforts of the UP government. "The arrangements are outstanding. I thank the administration for ensuring such a smooth experience for millions of devotees," he remarked. BJP leader Sambit Patra, after taking a dip at the Sangam, called it a divine moment. "I have travelled from Puri to Prayagraj today. The management here is truly commendable," he said. Renowned devotional singer Kailash Kher, too, immersed himself in the sacred waters, expressing deep reverence.



Uttarakhand Governor Lieutenant General Gurmit Singh (Retd) prays after taking a holy dip at Triveni Sangam during Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Sunday PTI

"India is a land of faith. Devotees may arrive with heavy bags, but their hearts are filled with devotion," he shared. Renowned filmmaker Boney Kapoor and Jagadguru Shankaracharya Shri Shri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji also participated in the ritual bath, sharing their profound experiences. Boney Kapoor, reflecting on his visit, said, "I came here during a difficult time to immerse my grandfather's ashes, but I have never witnessed such a magnificent sight before. The sheer number of people present here is overwhelming."

He added, "The atmosphere here feels heavenly. I pray to Maa Ganga to bless me with a long life so I can attend the next two Kumbh melas. I also prayed for my family, children, mother, and friends." Jagadguru Shankaracharya Shri Shri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamiji also took the holy dip at Triveni Sangam and expressed his joy, stating, "Bathing in the Maha Kumbh has always been a dream of mine, but I never had the opportunity. Today, I feel truly blessed and overjoyed to have experienced this divine moment."

# MBF leads in water conservation, Ganga purity campaign

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

On the auspicious occasion of Maha Kumbh 2025, as crores of devotees take a holy dip at the Sangam, Mangal Bhumi Foundation (MBF) has launched a special campaign to promote water conservation and the purity of the Ganga. Over one lakh devotees in the Maha Kumbh meal area have been directly sensitised about water conservation through this initiative. Volunteers of Mangal Bhumi Foundation spread awareness through pamphlet distribution, street plays, plastic bottle collection, prabhat pheris, and stage programmes in Mahakumbh Nagar, inspiring people to contribute to environmental preservation. MBF president Rambu Tiwari highlighted the significance of the 'Ek Thali-Thela Abhiyan', an initiative under the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's environmental protection drive, which played a crucial role in making Green Maha Kumbh a success. Similarly, Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan Nyas reinforced the message of environmental protection through its two-day Green Maha Kumbh event. A team of 30 interns from MBF actively documents environmental activities across different regions while contributing to Green Maha Kumbh through awareness campaigns, cleanliness drives and research-based travel. MBF intern Yashi Rajput emphasised the need for collective action. "To preserve the Ganga's purity and uninterrupted flow, we must also focus on conserving its tributaries. Every institution should take a pledge to keep their regional rivers clean," he stated.

**Digital Experience Centre steals spotlight** Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): Maha Kumbh, the grand festival of faith and spirituality, was transformed into a digital maha kumbh this year under the guidance and inspiration of CM Yogi Adityanath. A key highlight of this transformation is the Digital Experience Centre, built in Sector 4 of the mela grounds. Blending tradition with cutting-edge technology, the Digital Experience Centre offers devotees an immersive experience of Sanatan dharma's ancient mythological tales through AI, virtual reality (VR), and holograms. It especially captivated young visitors and international tourists, attracting over 3.5 lakh visitors, including President Droupadi Murmu and Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel, who praised the initiative. The 12-gallery Centre brings Maha Kumbh, Samudra Manthan, Yamuna river, and Prayag Mahatma to life through AI, VR, and holographic displays.

# Cleanliness pioneer Sant Gadge continues to inspire us: Yogi

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A grand function was held at the Ganga Pandal in Sector 1 of Mahakumbh Nagar on Sunday to mark the 149th birth anniversary of saintly social reformer Gadge Maharaj. Paying tribute to Sant Gadge on this occasion, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath hailed him as a pioneer of social justice who spearheaded public awareness against caste discrimination, superstition and uncleanness. He emphasised that Sant Gadge's life has been a beacon of inspiration for societal reform and awareness. He said, "Wherever he travelled, he spread the message of education and cleanliness through kirtans, always carrying a broom as a symbol of his mission." Chief Minister Yogi recalled Sant Gadge's belief that "God resides where there is cleanliness" and noted how Prime Minister Narendra Modi furthered this very vision through the launch of the Swachhata Abhiyan on October 2, 2014, which has now become a global movement. The chief minister remarked that the message of cleanliness propagated by Sant Gadge a century ago continues to inspire millions today. Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, the Swachh Bharat Mission has facilitated the construction of toilets in crores of households, safeguarding women's dignity and preventing diseases, he added.



UP CM Yogi Adityanath attends a programme organised to mark Sant Gadge's 149th birth anniversary at Maha Kumbh mela in Prayagraj on Sunday PTI

Lauding the people of Prayagraj, Chief Minister Yogi commended their exemplary role in maintaining cleanliness and ensuring the seamless organisation of the Maha Kumbh. He also praised the city's improved traffic management and the spirit of hospitality shown by its residents, who have embraced the Maha Kumbh as their own. Looking ahead, Chief Minister Yogi announced that the 150th birth anniversary of Sant Gadge Maharaj will be celebrated on an even grander scale next year. He reiterated the double-engine government's commitment to social welfare and vowed to further amplify the message of cleanliness. Chief Minister Yogi also praised MLC Surendra Chaudhary for

organising the grand event. He emphasised that the celebration not only honoured Sant Gadge's legacy but also reinforced public awareness of vital social reforms. On this occasion, Saint Santosh Acharya Ji Maharaj of Jagadguru Satua Baba Ashram, Cabinet Minister Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi', former Minister Siddharth Nath Singh, Mayor Umesh Chandra Ganesh Kesarwani, saint Ashok Maharaj of Jwala Mata temple, MLAs Harsh Vardhan Bajpai, Deepak Patel, Guru Prasad Maurya, Piyush Ranjan Nishad, MLC Surendra Chaudhary, former MP Rita Bahuguna Joshi, many Bharatiya Janata Party leaders and followers of Saint Gadge Maharaj were present among others.

# Free medical checkups, assistive devices offered at Shraavan Kumbh

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR/LUCKNOW

In line with the Uttar Pradesh government's commitment to the well-being of senior citizens, the Social Welfare Department has organised Shraavan Kumbh in Sector 7 of the Maha Kumbh mela area, providing free medical check-ups and assistive devices. So far, 1,847 assistive devices have been distributed, including hearing aids, lumbar belts, knee support belts, walking sticks, wheelchairs, spinal support and cervical collars. Under the guidance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the directions of Social Welfare Minister Asim Arun, the Social Welfare Department is running a dedicated camp in the Maha Kumbh mela area. Deputy Director of Social Welfare department AK Singh said doctors from AIIMS Delhi, PGI Lucknow, PGI Chandigarh and Jharkhand are providing their services at Shraavan Kumbh. Additionally, medical professionals from Kerala, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Punjab are also conducting free health check-ups. An OPD facility has been set up at the department's pavilion for comprehensive health examinations. The Social Welfare Department has established a 100-bed temporary old age home in the Maha Kumbh mela area. This facility accommodates destitute senior citizens residing in government-run old age homes, bringing them to the holy site for a sacred bath at the Sangam as part of their spiritual experience.

# Examinees to receive first aid, psychiatric support

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Board examinations are set to commence on Monday, with the Yogi Adityanath government implementing comprehensive measures to ensure a transparent, secure and cheating-free process. This year, along with enhanced security at examination centres, special attention has been paid to physical and mental well-being of students. Following Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's directive, first aid facilities will be available at all examination centres to handle emergencies. Health kits, medical equipment and trained personnel will be on standby to provide immediate assistance. Acknowledging the stress students face during exams, the government has also introduced psychiatric counselling services. Trained psychiatrists will be available at each centre to help students manage anxiety and

## UP BOARD EXAMS FROM TODAY

mental pressure, ensuring they perform at their best. Regular counselling sessions will be held to boost the confidence of students and alleviate their concerns. Additionally, special help desks have been set up to assist female candidates. The Yogi government has devised a strategy involving media representatives in the monitoring process to strengthen transparency further. Live coverage and reporting from examination centres will deter unfair practices and ensure immediate action against irregularities. This proactive approach underscores the government's commitment to conducting fair and smooth examinations while prioritising well-being of students. The Yogi government is taking the following strict measures for security and

transparency: The examination centres will be monitored by CCTVs, a live feed of the examination centres can be seen from the control room and static magistrates and sector magistrates have been appointed. Besides, special vigilance will be maintained at high-risk examination centres. The Electricity department has been instructed to ensure uninterrupted power supply during the examination. The examination will be transparent with digital technology and an online verification system has been implemented to identify fake candidates. All examination centres are connected to the strong room where question papers will be monitored 24x7 and watermarks and QR codes have been arranged on answer sheets to prevent incidents like paper leak.

# 2 killed, minor injured as speeding truck hits bike

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 60-year-old man and his nephew were killed while his 10-year-old granddaughter sustained serious injuries after the motorcycle they were riding was hit by a speeding truck in Muzaffarnagar on Sunday. The victims were on their way from Shamli to Satheri village to attend the funeral of a relative when the accident occurred, police said. The tragic incident took place on the Khatoli-Budhana road near the Kali river bridge under Ratapur police station. Station House Officer Tej Singh said Noor Mohammad and his nephew Faizan (32) were killed in the incident while Mohammad's 10-year-old granddaughter was injured. The truck driver fled the scene, abandoning his vehicle after the accident. The bodies were sent for post-mortem and an investigation is underway. In Sultanpur, an elderly man was run over by a speeding bus on

the Prayagraj-Ayodhya national highway. Police said on Sunday that 74-year-old Janeshwar Kumar Tyagi was hit by a speeding bus while crossing the road near a hotel on Saturday night. Station House of Kotwali Dehat police station, Naradmoni Singh, said the locals rushed Tyagi to a hospital where doctors pronounced him dead. A native of Thane, Maharashtra, Tyagi along with his wife, son and daughter-in-law, had checked in a hotel in Sultanpur after visiting the Maha Kumbh mela in Prayagraj. The family had stopped at the hotel en route to Ayodhya. In a separate incident, two men were killed and another was injured in a head-on collision between two trucks in the Sumerpur area of Hamirpur. Police said the accident occurred around 11 pm on Saturday. The two trucks collided head-on, leading to injuries to all three men in the vehicles. The injured were admitted to the district hospital in a critical condition

where Sanjeet (45) and Rohit (40) - the drivers of the two trucks - succumbed to their injuries early on Sunday while Kali (40), the cleaner of one of the vehicles, was referred to a higher medical facility in Kanpur. Meanwhile, the death-toll in the motorcycle-rickshaw accident near Badar village of Hathras has risen to four. Three teenage girls, including two sisters, died on Saturday evening when their motorcycle lost control and rammed into the rickshaw near Badar village in Saadabad police station area when Shahzad (24) was returning after taking his sisters Nargis (14) and Shahnaz (16) and their friend Pihu Sharma (17) from a school in Aligarh. The four were returning to Agra when the motorcycle lost control on Agra Road and rammed into a rickshaw and fell. While the three girls died on the spot, Shahzad was referred to a hospital in Agra where he succumbed to his injuries.

# Kashi a cultural magnet: Jaishankar

ER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar said India shows the world a way of co-existence and cohesiveness, especially at a time when it is witnessing conflicts arising out of clashes of regional interests. In an enlightening interaction with Tamil delegates and 45 ambassadors from across the world, Dr Jaishankar described Kashi as a cultural magnet for the entire India, with which people from all parts of the country deeply connect. The session, as part of Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0, provided a unique opportunity to the global representatives to not only witness the confluence of two great cultures of Kashi and Kanchi but also deepen their understanding about India beyond the geography of New Delhi.

Gracing the session as the chief guest, he said people of Tamil Nadu enjoy a special affinity with Kashi and KTS is the celebration of this unique bond. The minister said India is a land of diversity which often makes people wonder how the country holds together despite so many languages, traditions and beliefs. Dr Jaishankar stated this diversity and the underlying unity in it keeps all Indians together as one nation. The minister said KTS presents a perfect example of celebration of this unity in diversity as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said celebrating the glorious legacy of India is important because that is how we take it to future generations and make the world know about the greatness of India's golden past and roots. Praising the efforts in this regard, he said cultures are refreshed by celebrating them and the Government of India is making significant strides in that direction. He was responding to a question from Rajgopalan, who asked about



External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar during an interaction with Tamil delegates and foreign diplomats at BHU in Varanasi on Sunday.

the key aspects the minister would like to highlight as Kashi witnesses this special celebration. Dr Jaishankar said tradition helps in advancing technology and this is where the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) comes into picture. He stated Indian universities are undertaking advanced scientific studies in drone technologies, space technologies and other crucial areas and hoped that the institutions will come up with many more promising ventures in future. The minister was responding to a question from a Tamil delegate Kuthran who mentioned that India had been a technology leader in the past and many of these technologies were shared with the world. He sought to know whether there were any plans to conduct studies in this regard. A question from another Tamil delegate, Rajesh Kumar underscored India's growing role on the global stage. Kumar asked

how ambassadors view India considering its immense diversity in language, beliefs and traditions. The ambassador from Somalia responded by saying that homogeneity is not the solution. He added that India sets a unique example of how one billion people with diverse ways to perceive things can coexist in harmony. Referring to conflicts in Africa, he noted that India's rich and diverse culture unites the country as one nation, where people share values while respecting and caring for one another with humility. The Eritrean diplomat hailed the special opportunity to visit Kashi and witness the integration of two great cultures. He recalled his Indian teachers who used to talk about India's culture, its people and legacy. He acknowledged the bond between people from different parts of the country that makes them one. The Deputy High

Commissioner of Rwanda reiterated the sentiments echoed by his counterparts and said the cohesion enjoyed by Indians is something that people across the globe should take lessons from. Expressing concern over wars and conflicts ravaging various parts of the world, he said harmony as practiced by Indians is exemplary. The ambassador from Iceland emphasised that India's diversity is its strength which is reflected in its shared values and culture. The High Commissioner of Jamaica, while noting that this year marks 108th year of the arrival of Indians to Jamaica, said that there are a number of untold stories about the people of India and Jamaica. He said both countries should work together to highlight these stories of struggle and success that underline the unique bond between the two nations. He also suggested setting up a Centre for Caribbean

Studies in India. A Tamil delegate Meenakshi suggested that more efforts be made to raise awareness among people in Tamil Nadu about the Government of India's initiatives to support start-ups and innovators.

Welcoming the guests, Prof Sanjay Kumar, Vice-Chancellor (I/C), Banaras Hindu University (BHU), said the presence of various mission heads from across the globe is a testament of India's deepening global engagement and the timeless connections that knowledge and culture forge across civilisations. He said that BHU, founded by Madan Mohan Malaviya in 1916, has been a beacon of knowledge and national integration and academic excellence. He highlighted the university's global outreach as well as presence in terms of international experts engaging in teaching and research activities at BHU while students and faculty members from the varsity undertake academic and research endeavours in other countries.

Highlighting a number of innovative initiatives in this connection, he said BHU has been positioned as a truly global institution, attracting scholars, researchers and students from across the world, making it a hub of multicultural learning and international collaboration. The V-C informed that the university has registered a significant increase in the international enrolments, probably the highest among public educational institutions in India. The session, conducted by Prof V Ramanathan from IIT-BHU, witnessed a rich exchange of ideas on celebrating India's shared legacy, which has set the country apart from its counterparts—not only as a global leader but also as a strong democracy, setting an example for the world to learn from.

# Importance of unity in India's cultural diversity underlined

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The cultural evening of Kashi-Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0, being organised between February 15 and 24 by the Union Ministry of Education with the aim of realising the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat', remained the centre of special attraction on the open sky stage at Namo Ghat here on Saturday evening. The day's programme started with the melodious flute playing of Ashish Kumar which mesmerised the audience. After this, the chief guest Pandit Kovinur Narayana Swamy highlighted the deep historical and cultural relations between Hindi and Tamil traditions. Underlining the importance of unity in cultural diversity of India, he said that this event is a powerful medium to understand our shared heritage and pass it on to the coming generations. The cultural evening saw attractive performances of various traditional dances of Tamil Nadu. Thappattam dance mesmerised the audience with its energetic performance. It was performed through drums (Thappu) and this dance is an integral part of Tamil Nadu's folk festivals and rituals. This was followed by a presentation of Kolattam (stick dance), in which dancers danced in coordination with sticks and displayed a rhythmic harmony. This dance is a symbol of Tamil Nadu's ancient cultural heritage and presents an excellent example of group coordination. The main attraction of the cultural evening was the drama based on Kambaramayan, in which episodes of Tamil Ramayana composed by Saint Kamban were presented through live

acting and dance. This theatrical performance introduced the audience to the richness of Tamil literature and its deep cultural roots. As the city continues to immerse itself in the confluence of the great cultures and civilisations of Kashi and Kanchi, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) is celebrating this momentous occasion by putting up a special exhibition at Namo Ghat. The university is displaying its glorious legacy, scientific achievements, research and innovation as well as knowledge traditions at the exhibition. The Ayurvedic Pharmacy section of Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS) has set up displays of medicines, while the Dravyaguna Department is exhibiting medicinal plants used in Ayurvedic Medicine formulations. The Kriya Sharir department demonstrated the Prakriti and Nadi Pariksha explaining the diet according to individual's body constitution. The key attraction of the exhibit is the hydrogen stove and hydrogen-powered motorcycle, developed by the Department of Physics, Institute of Science. Representatives of the department are demonstrating the functioning of the stove and motorcycle. The prototype 'H2 Vehicle' utilises advanced hydrogen fuel cell technology, offering zero-carbon emission, bringing Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's dream of Kashi as a 'Hydrogen City' closer to reality. Institute of Agricultural Sciences is also presenting its research innovations and BHU hybrid seeds which have helped the farmers by increasing their agricultural productivity. The Faculty of Dental Sciences, IMS-BHU, is presenting dental care solutions, including all prophylactic treatments such as restorations for dental caries, microsurgical

procedures and scaling and root planning for periodontal diseases. Their exhibition also highlights modern dental procedures such as root canal treatments, dental implants and onlays and inlays. The exhibition features special paintings by the Faculty of Visual Arts, aligned with the theme of KTS3.0, focusing on the sage Agastya. Other highlights of the exhibition are the groundbreaking DNA research by the Department of Zoology and interesting DNA comics created by the scientists and researchers of the Centre for Genetic Disorders. As part of the ongoing KTS 3.0, a two-day national translation workshop was conducted by National Book Trust (NBT), India. T Mathan Raj, Tamil Editor from NBT is the coordinator of this event and Dr Jayanthi Murali from Varanasi attended it as a Hindi-Tamil expert. In this workshop, the teachers and students of BHU worked on the translation of 24 Hindi children's literature books, to be published by NBT later. The translators enthusiastically presented their translations and received valuable feedback. Dr Jayanthi Murali shared her insights to enhance literary beauty and provided the necessary comments to refine these translations. A similar translation workshop was conducted by the NBT and 10 Hindi children's literature books were translated into Tamil by teachers and research scholars from the Tamil section, Department of Indian Languages. These translated books were released recently during the academic programme of KTS 3.0 by Governor of Tamil Nadu RN Ravi and copies were received by Prof Sanjay Kumar, Rector and Vice-Chancellor (in-charge) of BHU.

# Vegetable, fruit & flower exhibition inaugurated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal inaugurated the three-day Divisional Vegetable, Fruit and Flower Exhibition-2025 on Saturday by cutting the ribbon at the Government Garden (Company Bagh), Kachheri. Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya and Vice-Chairman (V-C) of Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) Pulkit Garg were present on the occasion.



UP Minister Ravindra Jaiswal inaugurating a flower exhibition in Varanasi on Saturday.

This divisional exhibition is being organised in two parts. The part-1 includes vegetables, fruits and preserved substances from fruits while part-2 includes roses, best rose of the exhibition, cut seasonal flowers, artistic flower arrangement, dahlia, evergreen leaf plants, cactus, succulents, bonsai, vertical garden, rangoli and terrarium plants. A total of 283 participants took part in the exhibition with 3,527 exhibits mainly from North Eastern Railway (NER), Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Cantonment Board, Central Jail, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), Varanasi Municipal Corporation (VMC), VDA, private nurseries, farmers of Varanasi, Jaunpur, Ghazipur and Chandauli. The best rose of the exhibition was

'King of the Show' Junelia variety (Adarsh Patel from New Globe Nursery), while 'Queen of the Show' Top Secret variety (presented by Heritage Institute of Medical Science Bhadwar Mohansarai, Varanasi). After observing the exhibition, the minister released the booklet published by the Exhibition Committee and also inaugurated the two-day state level farmers seminar under the Integrated Horticulture Development Mission Scheme. About 500 farmers from various divisions participated in the seminar. The exhibition was judged by former scientists of Indian Institute of Vegetable Research (IIVR) Dr Suryanath Singh Chaurasia, Dr AB Singh, Dr Sudarshan Maurya, Dr SK Tiwari,

Dr Swati Sharma, BHU's scientists Prof Anil Kumar Singh, Dr Kalyan Varman, Dr Anjana Sisodia, Dr PK Sharma and Dr Dharmendra Kumar Singh and Dr MP Singh, both of UP College and scientists of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Dr Narendra Raghuvanshi, Dr NK Singh, Principal of Agradas Mahila PG College Dr Mithilesh Singh, Dr Nandani Singh, Dr Priya Bharti, Dr Sarla and Dr Usha Balchandani. The judges of the exhibition were honoured by Deputy Director, Horticulture/Secretary, Divisional Vegetable, Fruit and Flower Exhibition, Varanasi, Digvijay Kumar, by presenting mementos. Subhash Kumar (District Horticulture Officer Varanasi), Shailendra Dubey (DHO Chandauli), Seema Singh Rana (DHO Jaunpur), Ashish Kumar (DHO Ghazipur) Manoj Kumar Singh (technical assistant), Rajesh Kumar Singh (accountant), senior horticulture inspectors, Anurag Kumar Singh, Jyoti Kumar Singh, Nikhil Yadav, horticulture inspectors Sudhanshu Kumar Singh, Pankaj Tiwari and Snehlata Singh (chief assistant) made commendable contribution in organising the exhibition. The exhibition will be open for public viewing till February 24 from 8 am to 9 pm and cultural programmes will also be presented by school children in the evening.

# NDRF saves two lives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A large crowd of devotees and pilgrims gathered at the Ganga ghats in view of the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj and Kashi-Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0 here. The KTS is a symbol of cultural unity of North and South India and devotees are attaining spiritual peace by taking a dip in the holy waters of Ganga. The NDRF team under the guidance of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Manoj Kumar Sharma is committed to ensuring the safety of devotees by carrying out quick and efficient rescue operations during emergencies. Due to this alertness and commitment, Narasimha Raju (40) and Nihar Balaji (13) from Cherla, Andhra Pradesh, were rescued safely at Manikarnika Ghat here on Sunday. While taking bath, they were swept away into the deep waters of the Ganga and started drowning. At this Chandan Kumar, a NDRF rescue worker, jumped into the strong current of the river and displaying amazing courage and spirit, rescued both of them safely. This courageous and skillful operation once again proved that NDRF is always ready to serve and protect humanity in every situation.

# Community museums and heritage initiatives discussed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Department of Museology, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), organised a one-day national seminar titled 'Expanding Dimensions of Museums and Museology: Realities, Possibilities, and Challenges' at the Centre for Vedic Sciences, BHU. The event brought together over 100 academicians, museum professionals, researchers and students to discuss advancements in museology. The inaugural session commenced with the welcome address by Prof Usha Rani Tiwari, Head of the Department of Museology, BHU. She also discussed the aims, objectives and various dimensions of the seminar. Guest of honour Prof Kalyan Krishna emphasised the role of museums in cultural preservation, while chief guest Prof Manvi Seth discussed community museums and heritage initiatives. Prof Ashish Bajpai highlighted museum marketing and visitor engagement strategies for museum accessibility. Dr Abhijit Dixit (IGNCA) emphasised that we are so focused on the medium of preservation that we have forgotten what needs to be preserved. The session covered the implementation and constraints related to recent technologies in museums like Artificial Intelligence (AI), virtual reality, conservation and cultural heritage representation. Dr Achal Pandya (Head, Division of Conservation & Cultural Activities, IGNCA, New Delhi) and Dr Shefalika Awasthi (Curator, Junagadh Museum) elaborated on the role of technology in caring for museum collections and enhancing visitor experience in experimental museum settings. Dr R Ganesan (former photographer and artist, Bharat Kala Bhavan) provided insights into Varanasi. The second session, chaired by Prof Awadhesh Pradhan (Retd, Hindi Department, BHU), focused on the preservation of various heritage buildings located in the BHU campus. Ajay Srivastava (Curator In-charge, Crafts Museum, Varanasi) discussed the making of GI galleries in Crafts Museum, Varanasi, while Dr Vidhi Nagar (HoD, Department

of Dance, BHU) illustrated Indian iconography through a Kathak performance. Amitabh Bhattacharya (senior journalist) highlighted the fading intangible heritage of Varanasi and the need for its immediate preservation. The seminar concluded with a valedictory session led by Emeritus Professors Vibha Tripathi and MNP Tiwari, who emphasised the interconnectedness of archaeology, art history, and museology. The presidential was given address by Dr DP Sharma, Former Director, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU. On the occasion, eminent professors and head of departments of various faculties besides Prof Atul Tripathi, Prof DN Tiwari, Prof ON Singh, Prof Ashok Singh, Prof MP Ahirwar, Prof Arpita Chatterjee, Prof Archana Sharma, Prof DK Ojha, Prof Diwakar Pradhan, Prof Sumita Chatterjee, Prof JS Jha, Prof Saraswati Kumari, Dr Shreya Pathak, along with Prof Sreerup Raychaudhuri, Director, Bharat Kala Bhavan, BHU, and senior curators of the museums, were also present. The seminar's discussions underscored the importance of balancing preservation with modernisation, shaping a more inclusive and engaging future for museums. CALRAV-2025: The Faculty of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (FVAS), BHU, successfully hosted CALRAV-2025 recently, a vibrant celebration that showcased a harmonious blend of talent, culture and academic achievement. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from students, faculty, and distinguished guests, making it a resounding success. The event was inaugurated by Director of the Institute of Agricultural Sciences Prof UP Singh as the chief guest, while Dean of FVAS Prof Naresh Kumar Singh graced the occasion as the guest of honour. Both dignitaries applauded participants for their dedication and creativity, emphasising the importance of holistic development through cultural and academic pursuits. The cultural segment featured captivating performances, including a mesmerising solo musical act that skillfully blended classical and western melodies. The event was meticulously coordinated, ensuring seamless management of performances and logistics.

# KPL Trophy unveiled

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR



Advisor to Chief Minister Awasthi unveiling the KPL Trophy at the Green Park Stadium.

Advisor to Chief Minister Awasthi unveiled the Trophy of Kanpur Premier League (KPL) at the Green Park Stadium here. KPL is all set to commence here from March 2. Speaking on the occasion, Awasthi said like the glittering trophy, the future of budding cricketers will also shine. He said the KPL will prove to be such a platform for the budding cricketers which will pave their way to the IPL and T-20. KPL Governing Council Chairman Dr Sanjay Kapoor said all the six teams named after each assembly seg-

ment of the city will vie for the title. Franchise of all the six teams were also present on the occasion. They included Ashish Chauhan of Cantt Sporting; Kamran Rehman of Sisamau Super Kings, Sachin Gupta of Kanpur Prime Indian, Pranit Agarwal of TSH Blasters and Sunil Gupta of Mayur Miracles. Besides, Regional Sports Officer Vijay Kumar, former international cricketer Gopal Sharma, Gaurav Sethi, Navin Malhotra, Amit Jain, Vineet Rungta, Suresh Puri, Ashwani Kohli, Sanjay Tewari, Dinesh Katiyar and Talib were also present.

# Captivating presentations by students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Hindi Department of Christ Church College organised a huge festival of expression in mother tongues 'Boli Bani' in its Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan auditorium. Not only students but the teachers of the college too participated enthusiastically in the wonderful performances of various genres like songs, dances, poems, speeches, memoirs etc in different dialects and mother tongues. The 'Saraswat Atithi' of this programme was Prof Dinesh Chandra Srivastava, former head of the Department of Philosophy of CC College while special guests were Soofia Shahab of the History Department and the Vice-Principal of the college, Prof Shweta Chand. The programme was presided over by Principal Prof Joseph

Daniel. The guests were welcomed by presenting mementos and the departmental welcome was done by research scholar of Hindi department, Arijit Pandey in Kannaui dialect. Starting the programme, Prof Anindita Bhattacharya explained the importance of celebrating Mother Language Day in Bengali language. After this, a series of captivating presentations were given by the students one after the other. Garima, Shalvi and Sakshi presented Punjabi dance, Aakriti and Ojaswini — R a j a s t h a n i 'Kaalbelia' of this programme was Tanvi performed Marathi 'Lavani'. Tanishka presented Rajasthani dance, Varsha a captivating dance on Bhojपुरी Chhath Puja song and Swastik presented a solo dance on Nepali song. Sharad presented solo song in Rajasthani, Tanishka in Awadhi and Shiva in Bhojपुरी and Neha, Upasana and Anjali presented Bhanwar song in Awadhi.

# Thinking Day observed



Students participating in the Thinking Day observance at Kendriya Vidyalaya IIT Kanpur.

The Thinking Day was observed at Kendriya Vidyalaya IIT Kanpur on birth anniversary of Lord Baden Powell, founder of Scout/Guide movement. The programme started with lighting of lamps and garlanding ceremony by Principal Ravish Chandra Pandey. The theme of the programme for the session was 'Our Story'. In the blessings ceremony, Principal Ravish Chandra Pandey urged the Scout/Guide to do one good work daily. The programme was anchored by Priyanka Tewari, PGT English and Guide Captain. The contribution of Vandana Singh Rathore, Ranjeet Maurya and Anjali Pal was praiseworthy.

# Importance of promoting horticulture emphasised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Sir Padampat Singhania Education Centre (SPSEC) in collaboration with the Kanpur Floriculture Society organised an Art Competition on Saturday at JK Lawn, Kamla Nagar. IG Kanpur Jogender Kumar was the chief guest and renowned artists Sumit Thakur and Ritu Gupta were the judges on the occasion. Divided into multiple categories, the competition catered to around 120 participants of various age groups and from schools across the city, reflecting a spirit of inclusivity and creativity. Students aged between five to 16 years showcased their budding talents alongside seasoned professionals. Usha Jhunjhunwala, Chairperson, Rajshree Dalmia, secretary and Bharti Garg, a key member of the Floriculture Society, emphasised

the importance of promoting horticulture and environmental consciousness through such community-driven initiatives. They also expressed gratitude to SPSEC for their continued support. Principal Bhawna Gupta motivated the participants for their outstanding creativity. IG Kanpur Jogender Kumar felicitated the winners of first, second and third place with trophies and certificates. Participation certificates were given to all. The event was a visual delight and an enriching experience for all visitors.



Winners of Art Competition at JK Lawn, Kamla Nagar.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Sandeep Mehta has said the purpose of a preliminary inquiry is not to verify the veracity of the information received, but merely to ascertain whether the said information revealed the commission of a cognisable offence. "The preliminary inquiry is not mandatory in every case under the PC Act," the bench said in its verdict delivered on February 17. "If



Supreme Court of India

File photo

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

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

said. The top court delivered its verdict on an appeal filed by the Karnataka government, challenging a March 2024 judgment of the state high court. The high court had quashed an FIR lodged by the Karnataka Lokayukta police station against a public servant for alleged offences under the PC Act. The public servant was accused of acquiring assets that were disproportionate to his known sources of income. The apex court dealt with the issue of whether a preliminary inquiry was mandatory before directing registration of an FIR under the PC Act in the facts of the case or whether the source information report could be treated as a substitute for the preliminary inquiry. Referring to previous apex court judgments, the bench said, "Applying these principles to the case at hand,

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

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

The court said the determination of whether a preliminary inquiry was necessary or not would vary according to the facts and circumstances of each case. It said the high court had erred in concluding that the FIR was liable to be quashed on account of the omission to conduct a preliminary inquiry in the case. The bench also referred to section 17 of the PC Act that pertains to persons authorised to investigate.

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

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

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

# Production, export of pain relief drugs halted in West Africa

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

spinal cord to relieve pain. Both Tapentadol and Carisoprodol are approved individually by Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) but not approved as a combination in the country. Also, they are not part of NDPS drugs list in India. "This is in connection with a recent article from BBC whereby, it has been written that the combination drug Tapentadol and Carisoprodol has significant abuse potential and this combination is being exported to West African countries from India," the communication sent by DCGI on Friday said. Looking into the potential to have a harmful impact on people, DCGI requested an immediate withdrawal of all export NOCs and permission to manufacture, issued for all combinations of tapentadol and carisoprodol.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAIPUR

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

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

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

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

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

by a voice vote. The Congress MLAs started 'dharna' in the House after it was adjourned.

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

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

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

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



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

PTI

# Suspended IAS officer claims unjust delay in promotion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is said that 'every file is a life,' but this file has been lying lifeless for years," the latest letter said. He claimed that there has never been any allegation of shortcomings in his professional duties or work performance.

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

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

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

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

# Congress to hold AICC session in Ahmedabad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge will preside over both the meetings,

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

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

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge will preside over both the meetings,

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

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

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

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

# USFDA pulls up Jagsonpal Pharmaceuticals for manufacturing lapses at API plant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

Bhiwadi-based plant in Rajasthan on March 20, March 27, and April 3, 2024. "This warning letter summarises significant deviations from Current Good Manufacturing Practice (CGMP) for APIs. Because the methods, facilities, or controls for manufacturing, processing, packing, or holding do not conform to CGMP, your API is adulterated," the USFDA stated in the warning letter. A warning letter issued by the USFDA usually identifies the violation, such as poor manufacturing practices, problems with claims for what a product can do, or incorrect directions for use.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Based upon the nature of the deviations identified, the company should engage a consultant qualified to evaluate operations and to assist in meeting CGMP requirements, it said.

"FDA may withhold approval of new applications or supplements listing your firm as a drug manufacturer until any deviations are completely addressed and we confirm your compliance with CGMP. We may re-inspect to verify that you have completed corrective actions to any deviations," the USFDA said.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

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

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

"Tamil Nadu is not just a name; it is our identity!" he said. Taking to 'X,' the CM alleged that since 2014, the BJP government has been "systematically undermining the independence of the Judiciary—first by trying to hijack judicial appointments through the NJAC, then by ignoring the collegium's recommendations for judicial appointments and transfers." "Now, by seeking control over Bar Councils, it aims to weaken judicial independence by

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Rise of the Right

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

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



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

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

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

### PICTALK



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

# Prakriti Lamsal tragic death: A wake-up call

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



NAVITA SRIKANT

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

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

It has been alleged that Lamsal complained to the college authorities of harassment by her batchmate but no action was taken. Did willful neglect and cruelty lead to Lamsal committing suicide? Access to emergency medical services and safeguarding evidence after being declared dead did not seem to function as one would expect. Undoubtedly, the basic compliances to safeguard students failed. Several key questions are unanswered to day as the state investigation is under progress and justice is yet to be served. The case is no longer about justice for a deceased Nepali student but leaves a question mark on the capability of India as a nation to assure wellbeing and justice to a foreign student. The authorities did not stop at mere oral refusal of information but abused, used fear and forced eviction of hundreds of Nepali students risking



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

There has to be zero tolerance for actions against the law of the land, the ethos of the nation and the civilisational legacy that India and Nepal take pride in. Every Indian condemned the action of the KIIT Administration and expressed unequivocal solidarity with Nepali Students.

It is at this juncture, recollecting PM Modi's Address to the Constituent Assembly of Nepal in August 2014 "When an adverse wind blows in Nepal, India too feels cold." "How can India be happy if Nepal is unhappy?" One wonders why the Prime Minister has not addressed the people of India and Nepal assuring Nepali Students' safety, security and wellbeing as high priority. Reiterating these words to Nepali parents and students would strengthen relations for times immemorial. Undoubtedly, the Government of India managed the situation diligently, however, it is PM Modi whose personal connection with Nepal reinforces trust among Nepali people. PM Modi has spoken for the rights of Palestinians, Afghans and Bangladeshi minorities. It is even more important that he is seen assuring Nepali Students' concerns.



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

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

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

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

mittee to review education reforms and migration-related safeguards.

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

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

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

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### CORRUPTION CONTINUES TO RISE

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

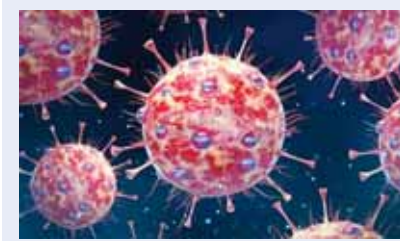
There is a clear disconnect between what we preach and what we practice. Moreover, corruption has gained social acceptance, allowing individuals to amass wealth through dishonest means because they know that society primarily respects and honours the wealthy. Honest government employees, leaders and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

Jitesh Mori | Kutch

### WELFARE SCHEMES FOR DELHIITES

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

## New bat virus identified



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

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

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

Anushka Bohra | Ujjain

### EDUCATION NEEDS REFORM

Madam — Attention must be drawn to the alarming findings of India's Graduate Skill Index 2025 by Mercer-Mettl. The report reveals that only 42.6 per cent of Indian graduates are employable, reflecting a decline from 44.3 per cent in 2023. This downward trend highlights a growing mismatch between academic training and industry requirements. Bridging this gap requires urgent intervention. Academic institutions must align their programmes with industry demands, incorporating skill-based training, internships and technology-driven learning.

Additionally, collaboration between policymakers, educators and businesses is essential to reform the education system and enhance career readiness. The employability crisis, if left unaddressed, will hinder India's economic growth and global competitiveness.

Akash Kumar | Jaagraon

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

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

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

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



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

diplomacy. A mandatory bundled service cannot be justified at an exorbitant price! The proposed model enforces a "Service Fee per application" that requires applicants to pay for a bundled package, including document digitization, fingerprint and facial biometric capture, and four additional services—photocopying, photography, form filling, and courier services. Crucially, this fee is mandatory, even if the applicant does not require all these services. As a result, a simple service that currently costs \$5-\$7 could surge to an alarming \$90-\$100. This hike disproportionately affects Indian workers in Gulf countries, the UK, and beyond, many of whom struggle to make ends meet.

jeopardizing their employment abroad. Many of these workers rely on loans to finance their overseas employment. Higher service fees add financial strain, potentially pushing them into debt or forcing them to return home jobless because they cannot afford visa renewals or work permits. Furthermore, the hike will be a direct hit to India's foreign remittances. India received over \$100 billion in remittances in 2023, much of it from blue-collar workers. If rising service costs force many to return home, the country could see a significant drop in remittances, affecting millions of dependent families and impacting the national economy. The question remains—will India's policymakers stand by their overseas workers, or will they burden them further with unnecessary and exploitative service costs? The government must reconsider this fee structure to prevent further hardship for millions of Indian workers who contribute not only to their families but also to the nation's economy.

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



B K JHA



## FIRST COLUMN

## A KASHMIRI AT MAHA KUMBH

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



JEHANZEB ALLAQABAND

As a Kashmiri Muslim, I, Jehanzeb Allaqaband, had heard of the Maha Kumbh Mela but never imagined experiencing it. In 2025, my friend Yuvraj Srivastava invited me to witness the event in Prayagraj, and what was meant to be a two-day visit turned into an unforgettable week. The spiritual energy and unity of the gathering left me deeply moved, and I didn't want to leave, though prior commitments forced me to return home. The Kumbh Mela was a unique blend of ancient rituals and modern technology.

The event attracted millions of pilgrims and was especially significant due to a rare cosmic alignment. It was more than just a religious event; it was an experience of learning, connection and respect for all cultures. I was struck by the seamless combination of tradition and innovation, such as AI being used to manage crowds and sustainability efforts. The efforts of the Uttar Pradesh government under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were impressive. The cleanliness, security and hospitality were top-notch. I was particularly moved by the creation of a temporary city for the pilgrims, with 150,000 tents, medical camps and free healthcare. When I fell ill, I received prompt treatment without charge.

One remarkable initiative was the "Vidya Kumbh" project, which provided free education to the children of 15,000 sanitation workers. This showed the administration's commitment to both the event and the well-being of the workers' families. As a Kashmiri Muslim, I was warmly welcomed by the pilgrims, and the sense of unity and brotherhood was palpable.

The experience left a lasting impression on me, strengthening my belief in the power of faith and unity. My time at the Maha Kumbh Mela was a life-changing experience. As a social activist, I am com-



mitted to applying the lessons of spirituality, unity, and service to humanity within my community. The event's success under Yogi Adityanath's leadership is a model of effective public administration, showing how large-scale gatherings can honour tradition while embracing progress.

Indeed, Maha Kumbh is not just a religious congregation; it is a symbol of unity, inclusivity and spiritual awakening. Held once every twelve years, this grand event draws millions of people from across the world, transcending barriers of caste, creed, nationality and social status. From ascetics and spiritual seekers to scholars, pilgrims, and tourists, everyone comes together in pursuit of divine blessings, wisdom, and self-discovery.

At its core, Maha Kumbh embodies the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—"the world is one family." It fosters an environment where people from diverse backgrounds coexist in harmony, sharing prayers, knowledge and experiences. The sacred rivers become the melting pot of traditions, where faith unites humanity beyond differences. It is a place where the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlettered, stand side by side, immersed in devotion and introspection. Beyond its spiritual significance, Maha Kumbh serves as a cultural confluence, bringing together art, philosophy, and age-old traditions. It is a global event where seekers of truth and wisdom are welcomed with open arms. Maha Kumbh is for all—an enduring testament to inclusivity, faith, and the boundless spirit of togetherness that defines humanity.

(The writer is an activist; views are personal)

# Agarwood: The golden green tree revives Tripura's economy



V K BAHUGUNA

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



The Agar tree known scientifically as *Aquilaria malaccensis* in India is found primarily in the North-Eastern states of Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. The capital city of Agartala was once full of Agarwood trees and hence named after it by the Tripura Royal family. Myanmar, Sumatra, Laos, Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Borneo and the Philippines. It is a critically endangered tree species due to its heavy demand and illegal trade and is on the Red list of the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN). There are 15 crore Agarwood trees in India and the tree species are making a ripple in Tripura due to proactive actions taken by the state government on its promotion and value addition and providing a platform for its conservation and promotion on private lands. Now farmers from other states are taking seedlings from Tripura and North-East and this species is poised to grow in other suitable localities. I visited Tripura in the second week of this month to study the economic and ecological potential of Agar trees in Tripura and as such for the farmers of the country. The Architecture of Agar tree management especially in Tripura has undergone a sea change for the last eight to ten years and the Dharmanagar area in North Tripura is now becoming an epicentre of Agar tree propagation and value addition.

Earlier the distillation units were raided and destroyed by the forest department now being promoted along with the big push for plantation on farmers' land considering its immense potential for increasing the income of farmers manifold. Considering the demand for Agarwood oil and chips in the international market especially in Middle Eastern countries there is huge scope for its propagation in a big way. The Agarwood market was initially monopolised by a single family of Assam as it thrived also from illegal cutting of trees from Tripura and Assam but now after a major policy thrust by the government and involvement of farmers and traders, Tripura is driving not only the conservation of Agarwood tree but leading the nation in its innovative value addition.



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

Thanks to policy support from the state government the forest department during the last seven years has worked on all fronts of Agar from propagation to marketing to value addition and soon it will be grown in every homestead making its conservation easy and value addition perfect for the farmers to earn big money. Let us discuss the economics of growing Agarwood trees and the steps needed to be further taken by the government of India and the States. Each tree if inoculated artificially or naturally attacked by fungi like *Fusarium*, *Lasiodiplodia*, *Penicillium*, and *Aspergillus* after around seven years of age or more will yield resin in the next 5 to 6 years and the tree shall be felled to extract the resin which then can be distilled to produce around 20 to 25 ml of Agar oil worth Rs 20,000 and worth Rs 80,000 wood chips in the international and national market according to Mr Parvin Agrawal IFS officers who as head of Agar project oversaw the Agarwood revolution in Tripura. The sale price of one litre of Agar oil in the international market is 10 lakhs per litre and of the chips is 1 lakh per kg.

A farmer can earn anything between 15 to 20 lakh per year from around 500 trees in one hectare of Agarwood plantation and thus 2 crores in ten to fifteen years. Agar, therefore, is a Golden Green Tree and a wonderful gift of nature that needs to be promoted on a large scale in India through trials along with a policy push that helps farmers adopt it on a large scale. During my visit, I spoke with Mr Mamon Ali proprietor of 'Momin Enterprise distillery' in Kadamtala in North Tripura and visited his plantations and distillery. He is having a turnover of more than one crore every year. The government of Tripura has also

promoted its diversification in perfume making from the oil of Agar resin. In Middle Eastern countries Agar oil is used directly but a few value addition units for perfume and Agarbatti production had been set up by a few entrepreneurs in Tripura and the quality of the perfume is very pleasing. In yet another example, the forest department had through a public-private partnership initiated a project to artificially inoculate agar plantation near Agartala through chemicals under which nine inoculation supplier firms are participating. The initial results are encouraging after burning the chips for perfume. The chips are sold for religious purposes to Buddhists and other religious groups and for that, the smoke yields a good fragrance.

During my visit to Tripura, I met a senior Priest of Mahakaal Jyotirlinga Ujjain in Agartala on February 11 who is going to invest 5 crore to help farmers grow Agar trees in collaboration with the forest department to produce Agarwood dust for the Mahakaal temple of Ujjain.

The Royal family of Baroda had funded him for this investment. Now the question is what needs to be done at the national level to promote income generation for the farmers. Agar tree is under the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species (CITES) of wild flora and fauna. Therefore, Agar product sales and exports are regulated as per international protocols. For every state, a quota is fixed and recently the Government of India had increased the quota from states. However, if we want to make Agar Tree a household tree the government needs to emulate the example of one trader Mr Habib Chaudhury from Assam. He took his Agar business from Assam to Laos and settled there and is now a very rich and big trader because he

found the Laos government had created a very trader and farmer-friendly quick system of approval for export within a few days.

In India, it is still a big bureaucratic process and involves a lot of paperwork at every stage which discourages the farmers and entrepreneurs. The government apart from promoting Agar plantation trials in suitable agro-climatic zones of the country must first create a customer-friendly business environment. Like in Laos, the DFO office should issue the clearance online and it must have online access with govt of India and the CITES office simultaneously so that clearance is given to traders quickly. With a suitable infrastructure and a friendly regulatory policy framework, the Agarwood business profile has the potential of touching 15,000 to 20,000 crores in the next ten to twelve years.

The tea export of 250.7 million kg during the fiscal year 2023-24 with a value of US\$ 776 million corresponding to around 7,000 crores Rupees. I have been writing to create an Agarwood and Red Sanders Board at the government of India level to promote these two species at the international level and to double the farmer's income as desired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and discussed with PCCF and Principal Secretary RK Samal who is keen on leapfrogging the Agarwood policy framework.

It is, therefore, high time that both Centre and States sit together and chalk out a policy framework for this by creating a National Board for Agarwood and Red Sanders to be housed in the Commerce Ministry.

(The writer is former Director-General of ICFRE and Chancellor FRI Deemed University, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; views are personal)

## The footwear industry takes a step towards sustainability and social empowerment

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

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

**Embracing CSR as a Core Strategy**  
The journey towards sustain-



SUNIL BATRA

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

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

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



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

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

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

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





# Tens of thousands attend funeral of Hezbollah leader Nasrallah

AP ■ BEIRUT

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ QABATIYA (WEST BANK)

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



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

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

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

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

# Four people detained in France after deadly stabbing

AP ■ PARIS

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

# Officer killed after gunman takes hostages at US hosp

AP ■ NEW YORK

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

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

The shooting is part of a wave of gun violence in recent years that has swept through US hospitals and medical centres, which have struggled to adapt to the growing threats. Such attacks have helped make health care one of the nation's most violent fields, with workers suffering more non-fatal injuries from workplace violence than workers in any other profession, according to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2023, a shooter killed a security guard in the lobby of New Hampshire's state psychiatric hospital before being fatally shot by a state trooper. In 2022, a man killed two workers at a Dallas hospital while there to watch his child's birth. In May of that year, a man opened fire in a medical centre waiting room in Atlanta, killing one woman and wounding four. And just one month later, a gunman killed his surgeon and three other people at a Tulsa, Oklahoma, medical office because he blamed the doctor for his continuing pain after an operation.

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

AP ■ ALBUQUERQUE

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

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

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

# Europe leaders attempt to urge Trump not to abandon Ukraine

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

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

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

# Pope conscious, receiving supplemental oxygen

AP ■ ROME

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

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



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

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

# Rural market at inflection point, offers opportunities: Marico CEO

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

# India's coal imports remain flat at 201 Million tonnes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

# Bank of Maharashtra slashes interest rate on retail, car loan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

# IT sector may see cautious salary hikes in FY25: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

# Power engineers' body calls for nationwide strike

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

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

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

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

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

# SEBI mulls expanding pool of investors for angel funds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD



Gautam Adani

File Photo

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Aza Fashions Unveils Flagship Store in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



## Future of Beauty

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

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

### Holistic Skin Therapy

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

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

### Healthy Skin Glow

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

ucts to make their skin shine.

### Sustainability Factor

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



### HEALTHY SKIN GLOW

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

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



### Oxygenation

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



### Virtual Beauty Interaction

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

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

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

## The Truth About Hair Transplants

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

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

### Pros of Hair Transplant

#### Permanent and Natural:

Looking Results: In contrast to temporary options like wigs or hair fibres, a hair transplant is a permanent solution to baldness. Hair transplantation is the sole procedure that provides natural hair growth. Because we use the patient's own follicles, the outcome blends perfectly with the hair that already exists.

Low Maintenance: After the transplanted hair begins to grow, it needs the same maintenance as normal hair like frequent washing, trimming, and styling. No costly upkeep or repeated treatments are necessary.

### Cons of Hair Transplant

High Cost: A hair transplant is an expensive procedure, especially for severe baldness. The cost is based on the number of grafts that need to be done and the expertise of the surgeon. Though it is a long-term investment, the initial cost can be substantial for most patients.

#### Time-Consuming Process:

The whole hair transplant process, right from consultation to complete results, takes a couple of months. New hair starts growing after three



to four months, and full results are observed in 9-12 months. Patients have to be patient during the entire process.

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

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

## Healthy Habits, Radiant Skin

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



### The Skin-Sleep Connection

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

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

### Gut-Skin Axis

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

- By Dr Ameesha Mahajan, Cosmetic Dermatologist

### CONNECTION BETWEEN STRESS AND SKIN AGING

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

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



# Kohli quickest to score 14000 runs in ODIs

PTI ■ DUBAI

India superstar Virat Kohli on Sunday created history as he became the quickest batter to score 14,000 runs in One-Day Internationals during the Champions Trophy clash against Pakistan here.

Kohli is now only the third batter in ODI cricket to have scored 14,000 runs, after the legendary Indian Sachin Tendulkar (18,246 runs) and Sri Lanka's Kumar Sangakkara (14,234 runs).

Kohli is the quickest-ever to the milestone, having completed his 14,000 ODI runs in 287 innings. Before him, Tendulkar had taken 350 innings to reach the feat while Sangakkara took 378 outings.

The India No. 3 needed only 15 runs on Sunday to reach the milestone, which he did with a four through covers off Haris Rauf in the 13th over of the run chase.

The 36-year-old modern day great was also the fastest

to 13,000 runs, which he had completed in September 2023 against Pakistan in Colombo during the Asia Cup.

Kohli already holds the record for scoring most ODI centuries (50), having gone past Tendulkar during the 2023 World Cup semifinal against New Zealand in Mumbai.

Earlier in the game against Pakistan, Kohli had gone past former captain Mohammad Azharuddin's record of most catches by any Indian fielder when he took his 157th catch in his 299th ODI.

Azharuddin had taken 156 catches in his 334 ODIs for India between 1985-2000.

Kohli took a forward diving catch after running in from long on to dismiss Pakistan's Naseem Shah off Kuldeep Yadav. He then took his 158th catch when he grabbed his second of the match at deep midwicket to dismiss Khushdil Shah off Harshit Rana.



## Bumrah receives his ICC awards

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Dubai (PTI): India pacer Jasprit Bumrah on Sunday received his ICC honours, including the Men's Cricketer of the Year and Men's Test Cricketer of the Year awards, before the start of the Champions Trophy match between India and Pakistan here.

Bumrah is not playing in the Champions Trophy as he has been sidelined with a back issue.

The 31-year-old was present here to collect the awards, which also includes a place in the Men's Test and T20I Teams for 2024.

The ICC posted photographs of Bumrah with each of his four awards — including two caps — and wrote on X, "Jasprit Bumrah receives his #ICC Awards and Team Of The Year caps for a stellar 2024."

# India face Dutch in Women's FIH Pro League match



A faltering India would look to halt the slide when they take on reigning champions the Netherlands in their women's FIH Pro League match here on Monday.

India's home leg so far hasn't gone according to script with the team currently placed seventh in the standings with seven points from six games.

They had opened their campaign with a thrilling 3-2 win over England but lost the second game against the same opponents in the shoot-out.

Against Spain, the hosts came agonisingly close but suffered back-to-back defeats, first losing 3-4 and then being edged out 0-1 in a tightly-fought match.

Against Germany, India endured a 0-4 defeat in the first leg but bounced back by securing a 1-0 win in the second leg.

The team would look to forget the dismal run and just carry forward the momentum of defeating Germany in the

previous match and hope the Dutch are not at their menacing best.

The Dutch are in dominant form, having comprehensively defeated England 5-1 and 6-0 in their last two matches. They have recorded five wins and just one loss in their six matches, placing them second in the table with 15 points.

They will be eager to maintain their momentum and continue their impressive run in the competition.

India captain Salima Tete acknowledged that getting past the Dutch would be easier said than done, though she added her team was motivated as they wanted to end the home leg on a high.

"The Netherlands are one of the strongest teams in the world, and we know it's going to be a tough match. But we are motivated to give it our best shot and finish the India leg of the tournament on a high. Our win against Germany gave us a lot of confidence, and we have worked on improving our weaknesses," said Salima.

India and the Netherlands have faced each other seven times since 2013, with the European powerhouse winning five of those matches, while India have secured just one win.

# Inter Milan beats Genoa 1-0

PTI ■ ROME

Lautaro Martinez scored late and Inter Milan beat Genoa 1-0 to take the provisional lead in Serie A on Saturday.

Lautaro met a corner with a header that deflected off a defender's chest before going in to break a deadlock at the San Siro.

The Argentina striker then climbed up on a security fence to celebrate with Inter's fans on the other side.

Inter moved one point ahead of Antonio Conte's Napoli, which can reclaim the lead with a win at Como on Sunday.

Next weekend, Inter visits Napoli. AC Milan falls further into crisis after Champions League exit

Four days after getting eliminated from the Champions League, AC Milan dropped further into crisis with an error-strewn 2-1 loss at Torino.

The mistakes started with an own goal from Malick Thiaw five minutes in when a clearance from Milan



goalkeeper Mike Maignan ricocheted off his own defender into the net.

United States international Christian Pulisic then failed to convert a penalty for the first time in his career when Torino goalkeeper Sergej Milinkovic-Savic lunged to his right to push away the American's low spot kick.

Milinkovic-Savic has saved four of the five penalties he's faced this season.

After a shot from Milan's Joao Felix hit the post, the Rossoneri equalized with a shot from Tijjani Reijnders in the 74th. But Torino

reclaimed the lead two minutes later with a quick shot from Gvidas Gineitis following a free kick that seemed to surprise Milan.

Milan remained seventh while Torino moved up to 11th.

On Tuesday, Milan was eliminated from the Champions League by Feyenoord on 2-1 aggregate.

Earlier, Parma coach Cristian Chivu had a successful debut with a 2-0 win over regional rival Bologna; and fourth-place Lazio was held to a 0-0 draw at relegation-threatened Venezia.

# UP Warriorz to face challenge from Mandhana

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's sturdy middle-order, in-form skipper Smriti Mandhana and a partisan home crowd will be the major challenges UP Warriorz will have to face when the two teams clash in their Women's Premier League match here on Monday.

India vice-captain Mandhana has been in red-hot form, smashing five half-centuries and a ton in the last 10 matches she has played for the country and her franchise.

But the top-order batter would not like to take Deepti Sharma's side, who just picked their maiden win of the season, lightly, knowing well that Australia pace all-rounder Tahlia McGrath's power-hitting could turn tables around anytime in the contest.

However, after having made a confident start with back-to-back victories, and chasing down a 200-plus score against Gujarat Giants with plenty of deliveries to spare, Mandhana



would have oodles of confidence in her side going into the contest.

Though RCB suffered a setback in their previous outing against Harmanpreet Kaur's side Mumbai Indians, it was more on account of the Bengaluru team's middle-order having an off day, though Elyse Perry stood rock-solid with a fine 81.

Overall RCB have performed remarkably well so far this season, one of the reasons they are leading the table with four points from three games and maintaining a healthy net

run rate (NRR) of +0.835.

UP Warriorz, on the other hand, have not enjoyed a great start which is evident as they are placed fourth with two points from three games in the five-team league.

It's partly because of the team dishing out below-par performance despite having ace India spinner Deepti McGrath and England stalwart Sophie Ecclestone in the side.

After consecutive losses to Gujarat Giants and Delhi Capitals, they did manage to defeat the Delhi franchise in

the return match at Bengaluru but it was more on account of individual efforts from the young right-arm pacer Kranti Goud (4/25) and Australian veteran spinner Grace Harris (4/15).

A team like RCB might prove to be a difficult customer for them.

Teams (From)

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Smriti Mandhana (c), Kanika Ahuja, Ekta Bisht, Charlie Dean, Kim Garth, Richa Ghosh (wk), Heather Graham, VJ Joshihitha, Sabbhinini Meghana, Nzhat Parween, Jagravi Pawar, Ellyse Perry, Raghuvi Bist, Sneha Rana, Prema Rawat, Renuka Singh, Georgia Wareham, Danni Wyatt-Hodge.

UP Warriorz: Deepti Sharma (c), Anjali Sarvani, Chamari Athapaththu, Uma Chetry, Sophie Ecclestone, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Arushi Goel, Kranti Goud, Grace Harris, Chinelle Henry, Poonam Khemnar, Alana King, Tahlia McGrath, Kiran Navgire, Shweta Sehrawat, Gouher Sultana, Saima Thakor, Dinesh Vrinda.

# Arsenal loses to West Ham

PTI ■ LONDON

A prolific striker might have cost the team the chance to win the Premier League title. Frequently collecting red cards hasn't helped, either.

Second-place Arsenal was unexpectedly beaten 1-0 at home by West Ham on Saturday to dent its title challenge, just when it seemed Liverpool was starting to look vulnerable.

The result left Liverpool with an eight-point lead, having played the same number of games as Arsenal, and that advantage could grow when the Reds play Manchester City away on Sunday.

Jarrod Bowen's 44th-minute header secured a win for West Ham, which arrived at Emirates Stadium with just one victory in its last eight games. There was worse to come for Arsenal, with left back Myles Lewis-Skelly handed a red card in the 73rd following a video review for his foul on Mohammed Kudus as the last man.

It was Arsenal's fifth red card of the campaign — two more than any other team — and its disciplinary record under Arteta is understandably coming under scrutiny, given it has contributed to valuable dropped points this season.

Maybe a bigger annoyance to fans is the club's decision to not sign a proven out-and-out striker either last offseason or in the winter transfer window.

With forwards Kai Havertz, Bukayo Saka, Gabriel Martinelli and Gabriel Jesus all out injured, Arsenal had only two shots on target against West Ham. "I am very disappointed, and obviously very angry as well," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "Even though we had 20 shots, I never felt that we were at the standard and the level that we needed.

"We have to be (angry), and I hope we are because we didn't hit the levels today, and I am very much responsible for that so I am very, very angry."

# Guirassy scores 4 goals for Dortmund

PTI ■ DORTMUND

Serhou Guirassy became the first player since Erling Haaland to score four goals for Borussia Dortmund in a 6-0 rout of Union Berlin on Saturday in the Bundesliga.

"Four goals, victory, amazing fans," Guirassy told broadcaster Sky after the game. "The first time in my life, I think. Four goals is such a great thing. I'm happy of course, but always, the most important is the team and the victory."

Haaland scored his four in a 5-2 win at Hertha Berlin in November 2020.

"World class," Dortmund coach Нико Kovac said of Guirassy's performance. "There's nothing else to say."

Kovac also praised midfielder Pascal Gross for setting up four goals.



Guirassy had only scored nine in 19 league games prior to Union's visit, far from reaching the 28 goals he scored in 28 Bundesliga appearances for Stuttgart last season.

Altogether he scored 44 goals in 58 games over two seasons at Stuttgart after joining the German club from French team Rennes in 2022.

The Guinea star was the second

player after Germany defender Waldemar Anton to join Dortmund from Bundesliga runner-up Stuttgart last summer, but both struggled to impress as Dortmund made a faltering start to the season.

The club finally fired Nuri Sahin as coach in January, appointing Kovac, the former Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayern Munich coach, in his place. But

Kovac also labored to get the team going as Dortmund lost both of his first two Bundesliga games in charge.

Performances in the Champions League suggested the team was capable of more.

Dortmund won 3-0 at Sporting Lisbon, then drew 0-0 against the Portuguese team on Wednesday to seal progress to the last 16.

Guirassy scored one goal and set up another in Lisbon. He has 10 goals and five assists in the Champions League this season.

At Stuttgart, Guirassy thrived in a strike partnership with Germany forward Deniz Undav. At Dortmund he has been more isolated.

He benefited from Gio Reyna being given a rare start on Saturday as Kovac gave the young American just his second league start this season.

# New Zealand aim for semifinal spot, Bangladesh fight for survival

PTI ■ RAWALPINDI

A confident New Zealand Aside will be eager to seal their semifinal spot when they take on Bangladesh, who will be fighting for survival, in their Champions Trophy (CT) Group A match here on Monday.

The Black Caps started their campaign in dominant fashion, defeating hosts Pakistan by 60 runs. This emphatic victory placed them at the top of Group A with a healthy net run rate of 1.200.

A win on Monday will put them within touching distance of a semifinal berth.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, suffered a six-wicket loss

to India and currently sit third in the group with a net run rate of -0.408. They must secure a victory to stay in contention for the knockout stage.

New Zealand looked clinical in their opening match, and their recent triumph in the tri-series has further helped them adapt to the conditions in Pakistan.

However, they now face a selection dilemma with the potential return of Rachin Ravindra from a head injury.

In his absence, Devon Conway and Will Young opened the innings. Initially, Young was expected to make way for Ravindra, but the right-hander's century against Pakistan has complicated the

decision — in a positive way.

Moreover, Young has consistently proven his ability to handle spin bowling effectively. Dropping him would also disrupt the left-hand-right-hand combination at the top, which could be crucial for New Zealand's batting strategy.

Meanwhile, Conway appears to be regaining his best form.

Apart from this selection call, New Zealand look well-settled and are unlikely to make further changes to their playing XI.

Bangladesh, however, face an uphill task and must regroup quickly after their disappointing defeat against neighbours India.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Legendary cricketer Ian Chappell's insightful writings, critical reviews and anecdotes from his playing days will be missed after the Australian icon called curtains on his more than five-decade-long journalistic career, penning his last piece on Sunday.

The 81-year-old fondly recalled some of the best moments he has written about, including the legendary battle between Sachin Tendulkar and the late spin wizard Shane Warne in the 1998 Chennai Test, as well as VVS Laxman's iconic 281 against Australia in Kolkata, in his last column for 'ESPNCricinfo'.

"There have been many pleasures from writing, notably Sachin Tendulkar combating Shane Warne in Chennai. Other highlights included writing about the genius of Brian Lara, Ricky Ponting's aggression, and VVS Laxman's classic 281 in Kolkata," Chappell wrote.

However, he felt the time was right for him to "put down the pen and pack away the computer", adding that retirement from journalism was as emotional as stepping away from cricket.

"I have been writing for more than 50 years, but the time has come and this will be my last column. Retirement from journalism is similar to cricket — I knew the time was right," said the former top-order

batter, who played 75 Tests, scoring 5,345 runs.

"In my playing days I asked former Australia captain Richie Benaud if retirement was a difficult decision. 'No Ian,' Benaud replied wisely, 'It's easy, you'll know the right time,'"

Chappell said he would miss writing columns and shared an anecdote about how alcohol cannot enhance the quality of a piece, giving his example as a test case.

Chappell added his columns has a 'substantial influence' of American sports writer Walter Wellesley "Red" Smith.

"The influence of Pulitzer-winning writer 'Red' Smith was substantial. He always strove for the right descriptive word, and in the days of the



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

Smith also added, 'No column is enhanced by alcohol.'

"I observed that rule almost

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

journalism. I met a few mates in the bar as the game was interrupted by rain. After having a few beers I suddenly realised the game might be called off but I still had to file a column."

"With a copy-taker exhorting me to hurry, I finally finished the column despite my fingers missing the correct key a number of times. I read it the next morning and it was absolute codswallop, so I decided never to drink again before finishing my column," Chappell wrote.

The Australian said he was a stickler for deadlines and despite coming close to busting them a few times, he managed to avoid the embarrassment.

"Despite that stumble, I never

missed a deadline — came close a couple of times, but was never late. My wife Barbara-Ann has been a positive influence both as an excellent sub-editor and also by telling me.

"However, the time has come to close the writing section of my computer. I wish each and every one who has helped and befriended me along the way all the best in their future endeavours."

"I will miss filing a column, as writing has been a favoured task. A writing career spanning more than 50 years means I surpassed my journey both as a cricketer and a broadcaster. A justifiable part of writing is, it's all your own work — it might be rubbish but at least it's your rubbish."

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