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INSIDE



**MONEY 10**  
INDIA IMPORTED 49 BILLION EURO WORTH OF RUSSIAN OIL IN 2024

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## AAP WIPED DELHI'S MONEY: CAG Stalin accuses Centre fuelling language war

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Exposing a string of wrong decisions and omissions, a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has revealed the Delhi government incurred a massive loss of ₹2,026.91 Crore because of alleged irregularities in the implementation of the now-scrapped excise policy in 2021-22. Titled 'Performance Audit on Regulation and Supply of Liquor in Delhi,' (Audit Report No 1 of the year 2024), the CAG report is one of 14 on the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government's performance, which was tabled in the Delhi Assembly by the new Rekha Gupta-led dispensation. The report also flagged violations in the process of issuing licences. AAP leaders, including then chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, were arrested in the case lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The report estimated a revenue loss of ₹941.53 Crore, citing failure to obtain timely permissions for opening liquor vends in non-conforming municipal wards — areas not designated for liquor sales under zoning laws. This led to a significant financial impact on the Delhi government's earnings. Additionally, the Excise Department lost ₹890.15 Crore due to surrender of licences and the department's failure to re-tender liquor zones. The report also flagged an irregular waiver of ₹144



The CAG report was tabled by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta in the Assembly. It revealed Delhi incurred a loss of ₹2,026.91 Crore because of irregularities in the implementation of the now-scrapped excise policy in 2021-22. Photo: The Pioneer

black deeds' of the previous AAP government in the national capital. The CAG Audit has covered a period of four years from 2017-18 to 2020-21 to examine Regulation and Supply of Indian Made Foreign Liquor and Foreign Liquor in Delhi, in detail. Audit observed several discrepancies in the way Excise Department monitored and regulated the supply of Liquor in NCT of Delhi. The liquor policy was an albatross around the neck of the previous AAP government and had led to several of its leaders, including then chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, landing behind bars. The corruption allegations

surrounding the policy are also seen as having played a key role in the AAP being defeated in this month's Assembly elections and the BJP forming a government in Delhi after a gap of 27 years. The report on the alleged liquor scam, a hot button issue in the run-up to the elections, claimed a loss of revenue to the tune of ₹941.53 Crore, saying timely permissions were not taken for opening the liquor vends in "non-conforming municipal wards". Non-conforming areas are areas which do not conform to land use norms for opening of liquor vends. "The excise department suffered a loss of approximately ₹890.15 Crore on account of licence fee from these zones owing to their surrender and failure of the

department in re-tendering," the report, tabled by the chief minister, added. The CAG report also points to serious violations in policy implementation. It highlights the Delhi Excise Department's failure to enforce Rule 35 of the Delhi Excise Rules, 2010, which prohibits a single entity from holding multiple liquor licences across different categories such as wholesale, retail, and HCR (hotels, clubs, and restaurants). Sources indicate that this lapse benefited select individuals. An increase of wholesaler margin from 5 per cent to 12 per cent was justified as necessary to compensate for a quality checking system involving setting up government-approved labs at warehouses. However, no labs were set up. Thus, the profit margin of wholesale licences increased, while revenue went down, the report noted. The AAP government awarded retail liquor licences without proper checks on solvency, financial statements, and criminal records, the report observed. Running a liquor zone required an initial investment of over ₹100 crore, yet no qualifying financial criteria was set. Thus licences were given to financially weak entities, with multiple bidders reporting minimal to zero income in the last three years. These measures suggest proxy ownership, raising questions about political favouritism and backdoor deals. The AAP government disregarded recommendations of its own Expert Committee while drafting the 2021-22 Excise Policy, with no justification recorded.

Continued on page 8

## Stalin accuses Centre fuelling language war



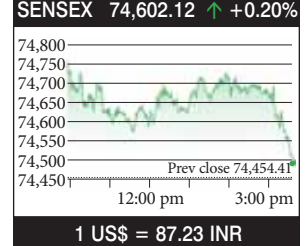
Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin with his deputy Udayanithi Stalin and others at the opening of 'Kalaingar Centenary Boxing Academy' in Chennai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Tuesday accused the Centre of 'sowing the seeds of language war' by thrusting Hindi upon the State and said the domination of that language will not be allowed. Addressing media, Stalin said that DMK is ready for another language war. Though the state was not against any language in particular and would not come in the way of anyone desiring to learn any language, it was determined not to allow any other language to dominate and destroy the mother tongue Tamil, he said. "This is the reason why we are adhering to the bilingual policy (of Tamil and English)," said Stalin in a letter addressed to his party workers. Many states in India including the neighbouring states have realised the path laid down by Tamil Nadu on language policy and its firm stance, and they started to express

their concerns, he claimed. Assuring that the struggle against the domination of Hindi would continue until it was ended, Stalin said. "We are descendants of a movement with a principled army that sacrificed its life to protect Tamil." The DMK has a history of defending the mother tongue from Hindi through numerous sacrifices since 1965. In 1971, at the anti-Hindi conference organised by the DMK students' wing in Coimbatore, he had stated that he was ready to make sacrifices. "Opposing dominance and protecting the mother tongue is a feeling ingrained in the blood of DMK members. That feeling will not subside until the end of my life," Stalin said. Recalling his visit to Cuddalore on February 21 and 22, the Chief Minister said while addressing a parents-teachers conference, he had said that the state would not accept the National Education Policy (NEP) even if the Centre offered to give ₹10,000 crore funds to Tamil Nadu. At this, a little girl from Cuddalore, Nanmukhi, had said, "What if the Union Government does not provide funds? Then I will give it," the CM said and added that the girl sent her savings of ₹10,000. Like her there were one crore young Nanmukhis in Tamil Nadu who were willing to defend their mother tongue, he said accusing the Union Government of sowing seeds of language war. "We are ready for it... We will not allow the domination of any other language," Stalin said. Meanwhile, the DMK members continued their agitation against the imposition of Hindi through the NEP. A few party cadres defaced the Hindi letters on the name board of the Ulundurpet railway station. Reacting to the DMK protest, BJP state chief K Annamalai sought to know from the Chief Minister why the opportunity to learn the third language, provided to students of CBSE and Matriculation schools, was being denied to government school students. "There is no ban on learning the third language. But if you want to learn, is Mr. Stalin saying that you should enroll your children in CBSE or Matriculation schools run by the DMK?" Annamalai asked in a post on the social media platform X.

### MARKETS



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## Sajjan Kumar convicted for life



Congress leader Sajjan Kumar

Former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar has been sentenced to life imprisonment in connection with 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Kumar was convicted in the murder of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh in November 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi's Saraswati Vihar. This marks the second life sentence for Kumar, who is already serving time for his involvement in the Delhi Cantonment riots case. The three-time parliamentarian was found guilty of leading and inciting a mob that targeted Jaswant Singh and his family. Last week, the public prosecutor submitted that the death penalty should be imposed, citing Nirbhaya case and similar rulings. "From the evidence on record, it has been established that the victims in the present case not only witnessed the brutal killings of their family members at the hands of the rioting mob which the Convict was a part of, but they were also witness to the burning and destruction of their dwelling house and looting of their belongings. The helplessness of the victims and the lack of any support whatsoever from the neighbours and also the police has also been established from their uncontroverted depositions. In these circumstances, I am of the considered opinion that this is a fit case where the Convict must also be awarded life imprisonment for the

offence punishable under Section 436 I PC r/w Section 149 IPC in addition to fine," special judge Kaveri Baweja said in the 20 pages order. Pronouncing the order, the judge said his (Kumar) old age and illness weighed in favour of a lesser sentence instead of death penalty. The minimum punishment for murder is life imprisonment whereas the maximum is death. The judge said the offences committed by Kumar were undoubtedly brutal and reprehensible but underscored certain mitigating factors, including his age of 80 years and illnesses that "weigh in favour of imposing a lesser sentence, instead of death penalty". The judge said, though the killings of two innocent persons in the present case is no less an offence, however, the above noted circumstances, in my opinion, do not make this a 'rarest of rare case' warranting imposition of death penalty for the offence punishable under Section 302 r/w Section 149 IPC. The offence of murder attracts a maximum of death penalty whereas the minimum punishment is life imprisonment. The court's verdict came amid intense protests by members of the Sikh community, who gathered outside the court demanding the death penalty for Kumar. Calling the 1984 riots one of the "darkest and most shameful" episodes in India's history, the protesters emphasised the need for justice and accountability. The riots had erupted following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984, leading to widespread violence against Sikhs across the country. The Rouse Avenue Court had reserved its verdict on January 31 after hearing additional arguments from Public Prosecutor Manish Rawat. The court on February 12 convicted Kumar for the offence and sought a report from Tihar Central Jail authorities on his psychiatric and psychological evaluation in view of a Supreme Court order asking for such a report in cases attracting capital punishment.

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## Crowds swell into night at Kumbh on Shivratri eve

PTI ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Pilgrims thronging river banks through the clock, vendors selling 'puja' ware and security staff everywhere to manage the crowds converging at confluence point — the Triveni Sangam is where the lines between day and night blur. From morning till dusk and midnight till dawn, the cycle of spiritual bathing at the mega gathering of humanity in this holy city goes on without a break. The religious festival, billed to be the largest gathering of people in the world, ends on Wednesday with the final



The Sangam area illuminated on the eve of Mahashivratri festival during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj

Around 1.30 am on Tuesday, when much of the country was sleeping, the ghats facing the Sangam nose, where the Yamuna, Ganga and the mythical Saraswati meet, and near the spot were buzzing with life with a surge of humanity rushing in with just one purpose — 'Kumbh Snan'. The crowd swelled hour after hour. Pilgrims jostled with each other to reach the river bank, and those having taken the holy dip struggled to find a spot to change their clothes. The banks were literally choked with devotees, young and old, rural and urban, men and women.

'snan' on Mahashivratri. And to make the most of the time left, a sea of people can be seen going into and out of the Maha Kumbh Mela area at any given time, many choosing the night to avoid the massive rush during the day.

Continued on page 8

# Mahashivratri: Mela area, Prayagraj no-vehicle zone

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The grand Maha Kumbh 2025, taking place on the sacred land of Prayagraj, is now approaching its conclusion. To ensure a smooth and secure experience for devotees during this holy gathering of faith and devotion, the Maha Kumbh mela police have issued special guidelines.

As part of crowd management measures for the final bathing festival on Mahashivratri on Wednesday, a no-vehicle zone has been enforced in the fair area and Prayagraj city from Tuesday. This initiative aims to facilitate seamless sacred bath and darshan for devotees. All citizens have been urged to respect this regulation and cooperate fully.

To streamline crowd movement, devotees have been asked to bathe at the ghat closest to their entry point, ensuring both convenience and safety. The following bathing arrangements have been made in Jhusi and Parade areas. Devotees arriving from south Jhusi will have the opportunity to take a holy dip at Sangam Dwar Airavat Ghat. Devotees coming from north Jhusi can take a sacred bath at Sangam Harishchandra Ghat and Sangam Old GT Ghat.

For devotees arriving from the Parade area, the following ghats have been designated for bathing – Sangam Dwar Bhadravaj Ghat, Sangam Dwar Nagvasuki Ghat, Sangam Dwar Mori Ghat, Sangam Dwar Kali Ghat, Sangam Dwar Ram Ghat, Sangam Dwar Hanuman Ghat.



A devotee with his child takes a holy dip at Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh, in Prayagraj on Tuesday

Devotees from Arail can bathe at Sangam Dwar Arail Ghat. There will be no restriction on vehicles carrying essential items like milk, vegetables, medicines, petrol/diesel, ambulances and vehicles of government employees (doctors, police, administration). All of them will be able to do their work uninterrupted.

As Mahashivratri marks the conclusion of Maha Kumbh on February 26, devotees have been requested to take a quick dip at the nearest ghat, visit the Shivalayas, and proceed towards their destinations in an orderly manner.

To ensure smooth crowd movement, all pontoon bridges will be operated based on crowd pressure. Authorities have reiterated that all ghats hold equal religious significance as Sangam, urging devotees to cooperate by using the nearest available bathing site.

Meanwhile, among the distinguished personalities taking a holy dip on Tuesday were Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Odisha Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati, Reliance Industries' Isha Ambani Piramal, and actress

Raveena Tandon. Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, accompanied by his family, took a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam and prayed for the peace and prosperity of the nation and his state. His wife, Kamlesh Thakur, expressed her reverence for the sacred confluence, calling it the essence of Hindu spirituality.

Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati also took the ritual bath, praising the seamless arrangements made by the Uttar Pradesh government for the grand event. Isha Ambani Piramal and her husband Anand Piramal participated in the sacred Pawan Snan alongside Parmarth Niketan president Swami Chidananda Saraswati. Actress Raveena Tandon too, took a dip in the holy waters, expressing her deep devotion to the Maha Kumbh.

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader Mahua Manjhi also joined the sacred ritual, acknowledging the immense faith surrounding the festival. She noted that with Mahashivratri approaching, the number of pilgrims is set to surge and appreciated the well-executed crowd management efforts.

So far, more than 64 crore devotees have taken the holy dip in the Maha Kumbh, and with Mahashivratri marking a significant spiritual moment, this number is expected to surpass 66 crores. This gathering of Sanatan dharma followers is unparalleled, making Maha Kumbh the largest religious congregation in the world. For the past 10 days, over 1.25 crore devotees have been tak-

## Security on high alert

### 64 cr devotees have taken holy dip so far

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The grand spectacle of Maha Kumbh has reached its peak on the auspicious occasion of Mahashivratri, with crores of devotees gathering on Sangam banks to witness the once-in-144-year spiritual event. Every day, over 1.25 crore devotees have been taking a dip at the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati, praying for peace and salvation.

Amid this unprecedented surge of faith, authorities have implemented strict health and safety measures, ensuring a smooth and secure experience for the devotees.

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ing a holy dip in the Sangam daily, creating an atmosphere of deep devotion in the Maha Kumbh and across the country. Notably, the number of pilgrims completing seven sacred dips in the Ganga has already crossed two crores.

Pilgrims from every corner of the country and abroad have travelled to Prayagraj for Maha Kumbh.

The main snan days alone have witnessed a staggering 17 crore devotees taking a holy dip in the Sangam. The event has also seen a significant presence of foreign visitors, further highlighting its global spiritual significance. Each amrit snan at Maha Kumbh has drawn more than 2.5 crore devotees who immersed themselves in the sacred waters of Triveni to seek blessings.

Also, the event has witnessed 12 occasions where over 1.5 crore devotees took a holy dip on the sands of the Sangam.

With Mahashivratri marking the final snan of Maha Kumbh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has issued special instructions to ensure seamless health and safety arrangements. Senior officials have been directed to remain on high alert 24x7 across the fairgrounds, ensuring that devotees take their holy baths and perform religious rituals without inconvenience.

## Shiva temples decked up in Lucknow

Lucknow (PNS): The city is all set for Mahashivratri celebrate on Wednesday. The Shiva temples have been decorated, with preparations made to manage the expected influx of devotees. Mahant Devya Giri of the Mankameswar temple shared that the temple will open at 2 am on Wednesday, followed by the rituals of 'abhisek', the deity's adornment, and the traditional aarti.

"The gates will then open for the public and darshan will continue without interruption until 7 pm. The temple will close for an hour to allow for cleaning, after which aarti will be held. It will reopen at 9 pm, and worship will continue until midnight. Some devotees will celebrate Shivratri on Thursday night, and the temple's gates will open in the same manner," she explained.

She confirmed that the same rituals as in previous years would be followed, with the Gomti river waters used for the 'jalabhishek' of the deity. She expects no fewer than 300,000 devotees to visit the temple for Mahashivratri. "This year, as a result of the Maha Kumbh, an even greater number of devotees are likely to attend," she said. The temple has been decorated with lights and flowers, and the deity will be adorned with sandalwood paste, flowers, and bhanga. To help manage the crowds, queues will be formed during the aarti.

Mahant Devya Giri also urged devotees not to waste water and to bring their own supply for the puja.

## CLASSIFIEDS

### NOTICE

I, Akhtar Jahan, have lost my land registry (Certificate No. IN-UP 74796286359962X) somewhere between my home and Rajdhani Marg. Therefore, it should not be misused; otherwise, it will be considered illegal. Akhtar Jahan W/o Abdul Rashid R/o Roti Wali Gali, Kanpur.

### NOTICE

Hena Fatima, wife of Shahid Akhtar Zaidi, resident of 450/114/4 Friends Colony Napier Road-2, Thana Thakurganj, Lucknow, hereby declare on oath that my name is mentioned as Hena Fatima on all my documents including school documents, whereas my name has been wrongly registered as Hena Shahid in the savings account of Pradhan Post Office Chowk. My real name is Hena Fatima. I should be known and identified by this name.

### NOTICE

**Ramesh Chandra Jaiswal**  
S/o Late Raja Ram Jaiswal  
Add. 544/615, Baraura Husain Badi, Ekta Nagar, Balaganj, Lucknow

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I, Neeraj Dixit, have lost my land registry (Registration No. 634/2016) somewhere between my home and Rajdhani Marg, Shuklaganj. Therefore, it should not be misused; otherwise, it will be considered illegal. Neeraj Dixit S/o Ram Shankar Dixit R/o Kanchan Nagar A, Shuklaganj, Unnao.

### NOTICE

This is to inform to all that I have lost my original flat buyer agreement and all original receipts and other papers issued by Parsvnath Developers Limited against my booking flat no. T-9/104 Parsvnath Planet project situated at Vibhuti Khand Gomti Nagar Lucknow. Any future use / misuse of this documents shall treat as null and void. Mr. Adil Ehsan, c/o Emron & sons 29, ravindra garden sector E, Aliganj Lucknow UP.

### NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that, I am Dipendra Vaishya son of Ramkumar Vaishya Sushma Vaishya w/o Dipendra Vaishya 43/128 Naval Kishor Rode Hazratganj opposite CBI office, Nivasi, Lucknow. Allotment letter of my plot 5/346 Jankipuram Extension has been lost somewhere. Its use will be considered illegal, whoever has it should contact the branch

### NOTICE

I Awadhesh Narayan Tiwari S/o Rama Pati Tiwari R/o 44A Ganga Vihar Chinhath Lucknow hereby declare that original registry dated 17.11.1997 in the name of Awadhesh Narayan Tiwari is lost. The address of property is 44A Ganga Vihar Chinhath Lucknow. I further state that I wish to create equitable mortgage on said property for loan from SBI home loan (4491) Aliganj Lucknow and FIR has been lodged with the Police in respect of lost of registry on dated 25.02.2025 if any one has any objection kindly contact above mentioned branch of SBI.

### NOTICE

I, Bhavna Rai, W/o Service No-9425182L, Rank: NK, Name: Mahesh Kumar Rai of Unit 6/11 GR, declare that in my husband's Service Record, my date of birth was Inadvertently mentioned as 19.02.1985 while my correct date of birth is 18.02.1985 which is declared vide affidavit dated 19.02.2025 sworn before the Executive Magistrate at Lucknow.

### NOTICE

This is to inform that Original sale deed bearing document no. 7173, dated 26/11/2009, regarding the property house built over Gata no. 572, Situated at Kurreshi Marg, Village Shahjani, Pargana & Tehsil Mahmoodabad, District Sitapur, which was duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar Mahmoodabad, District Sitapur was lost on 20/02/2025 with my client namely Deshraj S/O Late Ram Dulare R/O Village Kedarpur, Post Paittepur, Pargana & Tehsil Mahmoodabad, District Sitapur. If any person has any claim or objection over it, kindly inform within 14 days from the date of publication of this notice and after the completion of above time period, no claim of any kind will be considered. **B.N. Tripathi** Advocate, Res: C-15, Behru Vihar, Kalyanpur, Lucknow, Mob: 9336127853

### NOTICE

I, SITA SUBBA is mother No. 942418M Rank HAV Name Kiran Subba Unit-6/11 GR, hereby declare that in my son's service records my name SILA SUBBA is recorded as inadvertently while my correct name is SITA SUBBA.

### NOTICE

In my son's Mohd. Shazeb's Class X Pass Certificate & Marksheet, Unique ID-7987295, Index Number-1234879/034, names of his father and mother have wrongly been mentioned as Sayed Mukimuddin and Hina Kausar. Their correct names are Sayed Mukeemuddin and Hina Kausar and be recorded accordingly. Mohd. Shazeb S/o Sayed Mukeemuddin, 96/15, Cycle Market, Parade, Kanpur.

## SP chief hits out at Centre over decline in stock markets

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Sakhilesh Yadav, on Tuesday, attacked the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Central government over the continuous decline in Indian stock markets, claiming investments of the middle class had been wiped out.

Akhilesh Yadav, the MP from Kannauj also accused the government of "misleading people" while failing to protect domestic investors. Yadav said in a post on X, "The ongoing decline in the Indian stock markets has devoured the investments of the middle class. The 'double-engine' governments, which are in a race to invite investors from across the world, should first ensure the safety of their own investors before hosting 'deceptive events' to reassure others," he said.

"Due to the continuous poor performance of the Nifty over the past few months, reports have emerged that the Indian stock markets have become the third weakest among emerging markets after Thailand and the Philippines this year," he said.

"On one hand, 80 crore people are forced to survive on government ration and, on the other, those who invested their savings in stocks have been left bankrupt. Even in such dire conditions, the BJP government continues to mislead and manipulate people with false claims. This economic fraud must stop," the former chief



minister of Uttar Pradesh said. "Investors are saying today: No more BJP!" Yadav added. Yadav's comments come amid concerns over the performance of the Indian stock markets, which have seen fluctuations in recent months. The Sensex tanked 1.14 per cent to settle at 74,454.41 points on Monday while the Nifty fell 1.06 per cent to 22,553.35 points. The benchmark equity indices rebounded in early trade on Tuesday amid value buying at lower levels after falling sharply in the last five trading sessions.

### JIBE AT YOGI

Meanwhile, in an apparent jibe at Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over his "vultures got only dead bodies, pigs

got dirt" statement in the state assembly, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav said negative mentality manifested itself in the form of words that ignored the dignity of country, time and place. Chief Minister Yogi, on Monday, slammed the opposition over criticism of the state government's arrangements for the ongoing Maha Kumbh. Reacting to the statement without naming the chief minister, Yadav said, "But those who searched for their loved ones at the Maha Kumbh neither found their names in the list of the dead nor in the lost-and-found register."

Yadav was referring to last month's stampede at the Maha Kumbh that killed at least 30 people and injured several others. "Some people searched for political opportunism in the Maha Kumbh and found a medium for self-promotion. But they lost their morality, integrity and human sensibilities as well as balance in speech. Uttering indecent statements shows that peak negative mentality manifests in the form of words that do not care about the dignity of country, time and place," Yadav said.

"While speaking about a holy religious-spiritual festival like the Maha Kumbh, the choice of words should be in accordance with the honour and prestige of the occasion. Those intelligent people hurt by such statements are requested to have a feeling of sympathy towards such people and not anger," he added.

## 3 women among 5 arrested for robbing e-rickshaw passengers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A gang of three women and two men from Gujarat, who used an e-rickshaw to rob unsuspecting passengers, has been dismantled by the Krishna Nagar police, authorities said here on Tuesday. The gang primarily targeted women, especially the elderly, by posing as fellow passengers before robbing them in isolated locations. The police arrested five accused: Jyoti Kumari (23), who is believed to be the gang leader, along with Pappu Solanki (24), Kishan Kumar (22), Lavinga (48), and Radha (25).

Authorities also recovered a stolen gold chain, Rs 15,950 in cash, a pair of silver anklets, the e-rickshaw used in the crime, and three iron cutters. Additionally, Rs 50,000 from the sale of stolen jewellery was found frozen in a UPI account. Krishna Nagar ACP Saumya Pandey explained that the gang's modus operandi was carefully planned. The two male members, Pappu Solanki and Kishan Kumar, drove the

e-rickshaw, while the three women—Jyoti, Lavinga, and Radha—acted as passengers. They would board the e-rickshaw in crowded areas, waiting for an elderly woman wearing jewelry to get in. Once inside, they would engage in conversation to distract the victim and steal her valuables before dropping her off at her destination.

In some instances, they would take the victims to secluded areas and rob them outright before fleeing. To avoid detection, the gang used an unregistered e-rickshaw and often changed their locations. The investigation began after several complaints, including cases registered on February 17 and 23. Using CCTV footage, call detail records, and local intelligence, police were able to track down the suspects. On February 24, the five accused were arrested near Pal Vihari Pulia, Aliganj Road, Sunhara, under the Krishna Nagar police station.

Meanwhile, Sarojinagar police claimed to have busted a gang of burglars who employed an unusual method to identify potential targets. Three of the six gang members were arrested, while the remaining suspects are still on the run, authorities said. The gang would scout residential areas late at night, placing garbage, polythene bags, cloth scraps, and wooden pieces near the entrances of locked houses. DCP (South) Nipun Agarwal explained that the gang would return around 2 am the next day to check if the items had been disturbed. If untouched, it signaled that the house was unoccupied and became an easy target for burglary.

The gang's leader, Pappu alias Akram alias Chikna, was arrested in a police encounter. Other members, Haroon, Pintu Kashyap, and Amitabh Rastogi alias Vishal Rastogi, were apprehended near Bluedart trisection while on their way to Rickshaw Colony. Two other suspects, Irfan and Abbu Talib, are still at large, and police are searching for them. The gang is believed to have committed 30 burglaries since 2018 in various parts of Lucknow.

## CITYBRIEFS

### LUCKNOW BOOK FAIR TO KICK OFF ON MARCH 1

The Lucknow Book Fair will be held at Ravindralaya, Charbagh, from March 1 to 9, key organizer Manoj Chandel said while addressing media-persons here on Tuesday.

"This year's fair promises to be the biggest and most diverse gathering of literary minds inviting book lovers, authors, publishers, and anyone who loves reading to come together and celebrate the world of books," Chandel said.

The book fair will have over 80 stalls from Hindi, English and Urdu publishers, distributors along with government, social and religious organisations from Delhi, Mumbai,

Kolkata, Raipur, Jharkhand, Noida, Gurugram, Gorakhpur and other places.

### FOUNDATION DAY

Navyug Kanya Mahavidyalaya celebrated its 62nd Foundation Day with an award distribution ceremony on Tuesday. The event marked the 111th birth anniversary of the founder, Babu Deendayal. The guests included Sarojinagar MLA Rajeshwar Singh, and MLC Santosh Singh. A floral tribute was paid to Babu Deendayal. Principal Prof Manjula Upadhyay highlighted the college's achievements. Awards like the 'Navyuga Ratna' were presented to students excelling in academics and extracurriculars.



Foundation Day celebration at Navyug Kanya Mahavidyalaya

### HEAD OF RURAL DEV BODY ALLEGES ₹1.5 CR-FRAUD

Vinod Kumar Shastri, a resident of Malhaur in Chinhath, and the president of Gramin Vikas Seva Sansthan in Lucknow, has alleged Rs 1.5-crore fraud by his acquaintance, Ravi Prakash, a resident of Deoria. A case has been registered at the Cyber Crime police station.

Vinod, who has been running the institute since 2012, stated that its account is held at IDFC Bank in Gomti Nagar, with his mobile number registered on the account. Two months ago, Ravi requested the account details to raise funds for Maha Kumbh. However, without informing Vinod, the accused changed the mobile number linked to the account and registered his own number instead. From January 16 to 18, a total of Rs 1.5 crore was withdrawn from the institute's account via net banking. The bank grew suspicious of such a large transaction and alerted Vinod. Upon further inquiry, Vinod discovered that Ravi had transferred the entire sum to various other accounts.

Vinod suspects that Ravi may have been using the institute's account for cyber fraud transactions and could be plotting to implicate him in the crime. Inspector Brijesh Yadav confirmed that investigations are underway.

**Indian Bank**  
ALLAHABAD  
The Sale Deed No. 2194, dated 29.04.2011, in the name of Anamika Bajpai, pertaining to Arai No. 176, Village Godhrauli, Tehsil Bindki, Fatehpur, has been lost. Despite extensive searches, it has not been found. The said property is to be mortgaged by the applicant, Shwetanshu Dwivedi, at the Indian Bank, Swaroop Nagar branch. If anyone has any objections regarding this matter, they are requested to submit their objection at the bank branch within 15 days. After this period, no objections will be entertained, and any unauthorized use of the said sale deed by any other party will be considered unlawful.  
Authorized Officer,  
Indian Bank, Swaroop Nagar Kanpur

**Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar**  
Advertisement No.2/2025  
Online applications are invited for the various Teaching posts in the University. Online registration of application for these posts will start w.e.f. 26-02-2025 and end on 18-03-2025. Last date for submitting Hard Copy of the online submitted application is 25-03-2025.  
For further details visit University Website: <http://www.gndu.ac.in>  
Amritsar Registrar  
25-02-2025  
NA/12/28316/2023/41999  
Dated CHD :- 2/25/2025

# Prayagraj, Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura, Gorakhpur new panch teerth: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

During his address on the motion of thanks to the governor's address in the UP Legislative Council on the sixth day of the state Budget session, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath strongly countered the opposition's propaganda regarding the organisation of Maha Kumbh and their conduct during the governor's address. Condemning the opposition's behaviour, Chief Minister Yogi stated that disrespect towards the governor is unacceptable in any ideal democracy. Referring to a social media post, he remarked that Maha Kumbh offers a unique experience shaped by individual perspectives. He further emphasised that Maha Kumbh is setting new global records, and with the addition of new panch teerth, devotees are now travelling to Ayodhya, Kashi, Gorakhpur and Mathura from Prayagraj. Chief Minister Yogi reaffirmed that the governor holds a constitutional position, having several responsibilities including addressing both Houses of the legislature in the first session of the year. He stressed that democracy thrives on dialogue, and while differing opinions are natural, maintaining decorum and dignity is essential. Criticising the use of inappropriate language and sloganeer-

## Targets oppn's 'baseless' criticism of Maha Kumbh

ing against the governor, the chief minister asserted that such actions violate democratic values. He reminded all political parties of their duty to uphold the democratic system enshrined in the Constitution framed by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. Chief Minister Yogi firmly stated that the Samajwadi Party's conduct stands against democracy and the Constitution, making it unacceptable in an ideal democratic framework. Chief Minister Yogi, while strongly criticising the opposition's stance in the legislative council, remarked that while the entire world is witnessing the grandeur and divinity of the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh, the opposition remains preoccupied with baseless criticism. He emphasised that this is not just any event but a grand celebration of India's eternal traditions, faith and culture, elevating the nation's prestige on the global stage. Citing statistics, Chief Minister Yogi highlighted that a record-breaking 64 crore devotees have participated in this sacred event, surpassing the attendance of any religious gathering worldwide. He said, "Uttar Pradesh is ushering in a new era, with Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura-



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath speaks in Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council during the Budget Session in Lucknow on Tuesday

and Central Pollution Control Board which affirm that Gangajal is fit for bathing and possesses purity comparable to alkaline water. Scientific studies have confirmed that Ganga's waters have a unique natural ability to maintain their purity, setting them apart from other rivers. According to a January 17 report by the Central Pollution Control Board, the chloroform levels in the Sangam area were within the prescribed limits. The report recorded 780 MPN per 100 ml at the Sangam coast and 280 MPN per 100 ml along the ghats leading to Varanasi. Additionally, the three key indicators of water purity - BOD (Biological Oxygen Demand), COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand), and faecal coliform - were completely balanced in the Sangam area. Chief Minister Yogi asserted that despite the opposition's false propaganda against the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh, the purity and sanctity of the Ganga remain intact, even after crores of devotees took a holy dip. He declared this is yet another testament to the unwavering strength of the Sanatan faith. Chief Minister Yogi accused the opposition of conspiring to malign the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh through false propaganda on social media. He highlighted that misleading

through three phases - ridicule, opposition, and, ultimately, acceptance." He pointed out that the same pattern was observed during the Ram temple's construction and the Maha Kumbh's organisation. Initially, the opposition mocked it and then resisted it, but eventually, they embraced it. Chief Minister Yogi cited the exam-

ple of the Samajwadi Party's national president taking a holy dip in the Sangam. Drawing a comparison between the Maha Kumbh and other major religious gatherings worldwide, Chief Minister Yogi highlighted the unmatched scale of devotion witnessed in India. He pointed out that while 1.4 crore devo-

tees visit Mecca during Hajj and 80 lakh people visit Vatican City annually, 16 crore devotees arrived in Ayodhya Dham in 52 days. He added, "Similarly, crores of devotees thronged Kashi, Mathura-Vrindavan and other sacred sites, proving that India's Sanatan tradition is not merely a matter of faith but the foundation of world culture." Taking a dig at critics, Chief Minister Yogi remarked that some people habitually try to defame the Maha Kumbh, but this sacred event has once again shattered all negative propaganda. He noted that leftists and socialists attempted to tarnish its image, but crores of devotees silenced their negativity by taking a dip of faith. He said, "The world has now witnessed the unparalleled power of Sanatan culture, with devotees themselves delivering a resounding message to its detractors." He emphasised that UP is leading a new era of spiritual tourism, and the world is now acknowledging the immense strength of India's cultural heritage. Chief Minister Yogi also issued a strong rebuttal to those questioning the purity of Gangajal, citing scientific reports from Dr Ajay Sonkar's laboratory, the Uttar Pradesh

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claims were made about 35 people from the Gorakhpur-Basti division going missing, whereas, in reality, they all safely returned home. He further revealed that these devotees stayed in the Kumbh for up to 12 days, participated in religious gatherings, dined at bhandaras, and found shelter in ashrams. Clarifying on misinformation being circulated on social media, Chief Minister Yogi explained that the Prayagraj Medical College serves the entire district, while the Maha Kumbh area is a temporary district during the event. Hence, any accidents or natural deaths are officially recorded in the medical college. "However, specific individuals twisted this fact to spread false rumors of mass casualties at Maha Kumbh. In contrast, the digital Kumbh system successfully reunited 28,000 missing persons with their families, showcasing the event's efficient management," he stated. He further criticised the opposition, stating that their anti-India mentality drives them to oppose not just the Bharatiya Janata Party but the nation's cultural heritage itself. He pointed out the Congress and Samajwadi Party's selective renaming of historical places, accusing them of erasing the names of great personalities despite their claims of championing social justice.

# SP only divided people, never fostered self-reliance: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the Samajwadi Party only focused on dividing the people of the state and never made efforts to make them self-reliant. He added that no meaningful steps were taken for the welfare of the people which forced many to migrate. The chief minister was speaking in the UP Legislative Council on Tuesday. Highlighting the state's rapid infrastructure development, he said, "Many corridors have been constructed in the state. One corridor connects Prayagraj to Kashi via Maa Vindhyavasini Dham, while another has been developed around Gorakhpur. Similar corridors have also been built around Ayodhya, Lucknow, and Nainisharanaya, as well as in the Mathura-Vrindavan region." Chief Minister Yogi mentioned that these developments are attracting crores of devotees from across the country and the world. He remarked that visitors are leaving with a positive impression of Uttar Pradesh. "This is the same Uttar Pradesh where people once hesitated to reveal their identity, but today, they take pride in it," he added. The chief minister stated that there was a time when people from Uttar Pradesh faced discrimination, even in lodging facilities, and young people had to hide their identity. However, under the double-engine government, this identity crisis has ended, and the state's perception has significantly improved, he added, highlighting that the Maha Kumbh has played a major role in elevating Uttar Pradesh's global recognition. Chief Minister Yogi also emphasised the significance of 2025 as the Amrit Mahotsav

year of the Constitution, marking 75 years since its implementation on January 26, 1950. He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for establishing five pilgrimage sites dedicated to Dr BR Ambedkar. "Our government is going to build a state Sanskrit centre in the name of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar in Lucknow," he added. He stated that this year marks the 300th birth anniversary of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, and the government has made special budgetary provisions in her honour. Additionally, it is the 150th birth anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda and the centenary year of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, he added. Furthermore, the government is working on revamping the sacred sites of Sant Ravidas in Kashi, Maharishi Valmiki in Shastri Lalpur, and Sant Tulsidas in Rajapur, giving them a grand new identity, he added. Chief Minister Yogi also reminded that this year marks the centenary of the Kakori Train Action, and the government is paying tribute to the revolutionary freedom fighters who played a key role in India's independence. The chief minister stated that this year is also the Amrit Mahotsav year of Uttar Pradesh's foundation. He highlighted that on January 24, 1950, the official notification for renaming the state as Uttar Pradesh was issued. However, the state's foundation day was never celebrated until January 24, 2018, when his government organised it for the first time, he added. "Our government implemented the One District One Product scheme, which is one of the most successful initiatives in India today. The prime minister has termed it as the foundation stone of self-reliant India. The scheme has created millions of jobs,

strengthened exports and contributed significantly to the state's economy," he added. The chief minister mentioned that the government launched the Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana in 2019 aimed at recognising and supporting artisans and craftsmen who play a vital role in the rural economy. He criticised previous governments for neglecting these workers and forcing them into migration instead of making them self-reliant. He stated that his government provided structured training in 16 categories, facilitated easy bank loans, and ensured skill development. Today, the initiative has expanded at the national level through the PM Vishwakarma scheme, he added. Chief Minister Yogi stated that the government has dedicated each year to a specific cause for the development of Uttar Pradesh. In 2020, the government focused on women empowerment, launching several programmes for women's safety, dignity, and self-reliance. The year 2021 was dedicated to youth development, where efforts were made to enhance technical skills by providing tablets and smartphones to youths. "In 2022, the state celebrated Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and the 100th anniversary of the Chauri Chaura movement, marking a tribute to India's freedom struggle. In 2023, the government prioritised investment and employment, organising the Global Investors Summit, one of India's most successful summits, which attracted ₹40 lakh crore in investment proposals," he added. The chief minister further highlighted that the year 2024 marked a historic milestone with the grand construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, ending a 500-year-long wait. Looking ahead, 2025 is significant for both the Maha

Kumbh and the launch of the Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Yojana on January 24, 2025. He added. He mentioned that this scheme aims to create one lakh young entrepreneurs within a year and in just one month, 96 lakh applications were received, with over 76 lakh cleared and 24,000 loans processed. Under this initiative, ₹5 lakh interest-free loans will be provided in the first phase, followed by ₹10 lakh in the second phase. The entire process is being carried out in a transparent manner to ensure maximum benefit for the youth, he added. The chief minister stated that the government is making rapid progress in establishing a university in every division of Uttar Pradesh. Currently, Maa Shakumbhari University in Saharanpur and Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh University in Aligarh are operational. He highlighted that the government has also initiated universities named after Maa Shakumbhari in Saharanpur, Raja Mahendra Pratap in Aligarh, Maharaja Suheldev in Azamgarh, Maa Vindhyavasini in Mirzapur, Maa Pateshwari in Deevatpan Mandir, and Guru Jambheshwar in Moradabad division. Among these, three universities have already started operations, while the remaining three will commence in the upcoming academic session. "In Kushinagar, an agricultural and technology university is being established in the name of Mahatma Buddha. The Jagadguru Rambhadracharya Divyangan University in Chitrakoot has been recognised as a state university and is now being operated by the government. Along with public universities, the government is also working on a policy to promote private universities, leading to the establishment of several institutions on a large scale," he added.

# SP gave every work 'Samajwadi' name using govt funds: CM

Lucknow (PNS): Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Tuesday, said that during the Samajwadi Party regime, only people connected to the party received financial help for medical treatment.

He added that during the SP rule, every work was given the 'Samajwadi' name, even though the money came from government funds. He also pointed out that the CM's Discretionary Fund was misused in the same way. Addressing a query during the Question Hour in the UP Legislative Council, the chief minister spoke about the state's healthcare facilities. He said, "Getting medical treatment is no longer difficult for the poor. Under the PM Ayushman Bharat and Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Yojana, 10 crore people in the state are receiving free health insurance coverage of up to ₹5 lakh." He further men-

tioned that government employees are benefiting from free medical services through the Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya Cashless Health Scheme. He highlighted that in the past eight years, financial assistance from the CM's Discretionary Fund has been provided to every needy person without any discrimination. The chief minister further mentioned that under the current government, healthcare benefits are being provided to all citizens without any discrimination. Speaking in the legislative council, he stated that unlike the previous SP government, his administration is working sensitively to ensure that no one is deprived of medical aid. The government is also covering additional medical expenses when needed, as every human loss affects not just the family but also society and the state, he added. Chief Minister

Yogi highlighted the rapid expansion of medical facilities, stating that until 2017, there were only 17 government medical colleges in Uttar Pradesh. However, now, efforts are underway to establish a medical college in every district. These colleges are being staffed with qualified professors, and district magistrates have been directed to appoint skilled doctors at district hospitals, community health centres, and primary health centres. Steps are also being taken to develop super-specialty blocks and strengthen faculty in medical colleges, he pointed out. "The government has launched the Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Mela, which is held every Sunday at PHC-level facilities, providing health services under both central and state schemes. Free dialysis services are now available in every district, ensuring accessible treatment for patients across the state," he added. Highlighting

the government's commitment to improving healthcare services across the state, the chief minister mentioned that every district now has a blood bank to ensure easy access to testing facilities for all residents. Alongside the expansion of medical colleges, continuous efforts are being made to enhance paramedical and nursing education, he added. CM Yogi further stated that the government has established eight new departments at the Sanjay Gandhi Post-graduate Institute of Medical Sciences, introducing treatments that were previously unavailable in the state and country. He also mentioned that SGPIMS, initially a 1,200-bed facility, is now operating with 2,200 beds. Recognised as one of North India's premier medical institutions, SGPIMS is playing a crucial role in providing advanced healthcare services. he added.

# 'Govt to provide modern education to minorities'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

While addressing the UP Legislative Council on Tuesday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath criticised the Samajwadi Party's narrow mindset. He emphasised that the Bharatiya Janata Party government is committed to providing modern education to minority children, ensuring they are not confined to traditional madrasas. "Instead of being limited to becoming mullahs and Maulvis, they should have equal opportunities to pursue careers as doctors, engineers, scientists, and litterateurs," he remarked. Citing the example of former President APJ Abdul Kalam, Chief Minister Yogi said that the modernisation of education was essential for the progress of society. He highlighted that schools are being upgraded and free education is being provided, emphasising that the double-engine government is actively

funding these initiatives. He, however, emphasised that "kathmullapan" (rigid orthodox practices) will not be encouraged at all. He reiterated that the government is committed to providing modern and quality education to all students without any discrimination. The chief minister mentioned that the government is committed to providing quality education to every child, ensuring that they are not limited to religious studies but also receive modern education to become valuable members of society. The goal is for every child to progress based on their abilities and contribute to the nation's development, he added. He stated that every child, regardless of background, will receive quality and modern education without discrimination. While those who prefer religious education can pursue it, those aspiring to become great litterateurs, scientists, mathematicians, teach-

ers or engineers must embrace modern education.

### LAW AND ORDER

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath highlighted the sharp contrast in Uttar Pradesh's law and order before 2017 and today. Speaking in the UP Legislative Council, he remarked: "Before 2017, lawlessness prevailed, with riots breaking out every other day. Safety was a major concern - daughters were insecure, and people were forced to migrate. Entire towns were vacated due to deteriorating conditions. However, the post-2017 administration ushered in a transformative change, making Uttar Pradesh a benchmark for law and order in the country." Chief Minister Yogi, while presenting the NCRB data, said, "Compared to the year 2016, currently there has been a reduction of 84.41 per cent in robbery incidents, 77.43 per cent in loot, 41.01 per cent in murder, 66.04 per cent in riot

incidents, 54.72 per cent in kidnapping for ransom, 17.08 per cent in dowry murder, and 26.15 per cent in rape incidents." He emphasised that Uttar Pradesh leads the nation in ensuring swift punishment for criminals involved in crimes against women.

### INVESTMENT

The chief minister pointed out that today Uttar Pradesh has become one of the most favourable states in the country for investment. The Uttar Pradesh government has made several reforms to attract investors and make the state the country's leading investment destination, he added. He said investment was now being approved only through NOC in the state, due to which investors do not need to make rounds of offices and all facilities are easily available to the investors and they get the benefit of incentive schemes without any kind of human hindrance.

**BARODA U.P. BANK**  
Regional Office: 117/N/26, Kakadeo, Kanpur.

**SALE NOTICE**

Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 6(2) & 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured creditor, possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Baroda U.P. Bank, Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" for recovery of below mentioned account/s. The details of Borrower/s/Guarantor/s/Secured Assets/s/Dues/Reserve Price/ Auction date & Time, EMD are mentioned below-

Sl. No.	Name & address of Borrower/s/Guarantor/s	Description of the immovable property with known encumbrances, if any	Account No. & Total Dues (Rs.)	Date & Time of Auction	Reserve Price, EMD	Status of Possession (Symbolic/Physical)	Property Inspection Date & Time
<b>GHATAMPUR BRANCH</b>							
01	<b>Borrower: Mr. Shailendra Singh (Legal heir of borrower Late Sapna Sachan) S/o Mr. Devnarayan Singh R/o Gata No. 66, Vill. Paltapur, Jahanabad Road, Tehsil: Ghatampur, Kanpur Nagar. Guarantors: 1. Mr. Rajjan Lal S/o Mr. Motilal Vill. Bangla Goplapur, Tehsil Ghatampur, Kanpur Nagar. 2. Mrs. Sudha Devi W/o Mr. Ram Singh R/o 25 MIG, Barra-7, Kanpur Nagar.</b>	All that part and parcel of the property situated at Plot/House No.-1 Kha & Plot No. 1/1 & 2/2 on Gata No. 66, Mauza Paltapur, Jahanabad Road, Tehsil Ghatampur, Kanpur Nagar. <b>Area: 67.50 sq.mtr. Owner of the Property: Late Sapna Sachan W/o Mr. Shailendra Sachan</b>	A/c No.: 5166060000 1201 Rs. 12,15,973.95 + Interest + Legal Expenses	28.03.2025 3:00 PM	Rs. 37,80,000/-  EMD- Rs. 3,78,000/-	Symbolic	25.03.2025 3:00 PM

1. For participation in the auction by inviting tenders in sealed cover, the intending bidders will have to submit their offer along with details of deposit of earnest money on date of auction between 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM. and the same will be opened at 3PM. on the same day by the Authorised Officer at our Regional Office. 2. Earnest money 10% of the Reserve Price of the property will be accepted through NEFT/DD (payable at Kanpur/Cash with KYC) in our A/c No. 5671020000290, A/c Name-R.O. Sundry SARFAESI, IFSC-BARBOUPGBX. The earnest money deposited shall not bear any interest. EMD amount of the unsuccessful bidders shall be returned without interest. 3. The successful bidder shall deposit 25% of the sale price (inclusive of EMD) on same day of the acceptance of bid price by the Authorised Officer. Payment to be made in the form of cash or bankers' cheque/DD drawn in favour of Authorised Officer Baroda U.P. Bank, payable at Kanpur, and in the event of default in the deposit of the aforesaid 25% (including EMD) of the amount of the sale price, the earnest deposit shall be forfeited. 4. The balance amount of the purchase price shall be paid by the bidder/purchaser to the Authorised officer on or before fifteen days of confirmation of sale of the immovable property. However in default of payment of the balance amount as aforesaid, the deposit already made shall be forfeited and the property shall be resold, and the defaulting purchaser shall forfeit all claim to the property or to any part of the sum for which it may be subsequently sold. 5. The successful bidder/purchaser would bear the stamp duties, including those of sale certificate, registration charges, all statutory dues payable to Government/any authority, Taxes, GST and rates and outgoing, both existing and future relating to properties. 6. No request for inclusion/substitution of names, other than those mentioned in the bid, in the sale certificate will be entertained. The Sale Certificate will be issued only in the name of the successful bidder. 7. The Authorised Officer will be at liberty to amend/ modify/delete any of the conditions as may be deemed necessary in the light of facts and circumstances of each case. The Bank Authorised Officer has the absolute right and discretion to accept or reject any bid or adjourn/postpone/cancel the sale/modify any terms and conditions of the sale without any prior notice and assigning any reason. Bidders shall be deemed to have read and understood all the conditions of sale and are bound by the same. No counter-offer/conditional offer/conditions by the bidder and/or successful bidder will be entertained. Words and expressions used herein above shall have the same meanings respectively assigned to them in SARFAESI Act, 2002, and the Rules framed thereunder. 8. The Sale Certificate will not be issued pending operation of any stay/injunction/restraint order passed by DRT/DRAT/High Court or any other court against the issue of Sale Certificate. Further no interest will be paid on the amount deposited during this period. The deposit made by the successful bidder, pending execution of Sale Certificate, will be kept in non-interest bearing deposit account. No request for return of deposit either in part or full/cancellation of sale will be entertained. In case of stay of further proceedings by DRT/DRAT/High Court or any other court, the auction may either be deferred or cancelled and persons participating in the sale shall have no right to claim damages, compensation or cost for such postponement or cancellation against Authorised Officer/Bank. 9. The intending purchaser can inspect the property on date & time mentioned above at his/her expense. For inspection about the title document & other documents available with the Bank, the intending bidders may contact Baroda U.P. Bank branch during office hours prior at least two days before auction date. 10. The property is being sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis and the intending bidders should make their own discreet independent inquiries & verify the concerned Registrar/SRO/Revenue Records/ other Statutory authorities regarding the encumbrances and claims/rights/dues/ charges of any authority such as Sales Tax, Excise/GST/Income Tax besides the Bank's charge and shall satisfy themselves regarding the title nature, description, extent, quality, quantity, condition, encumbrance, lien, charge, statutory dues, etc over the property before submitting their bids. The auction advertisement does not constitute and will not be deemed to constitute any commitment or any representation of the Bank. The Authorised Officer/ Secured Creditor shall not be responsible in any way for any third party encumbrances/ claims/rights/dues. No claim of whatsoever nature regarding the property put for sale/charges/encumbrance/ license, NOC, etc. in respect of the property offered for sale. The Authorised Officer/ Secured Creditor shall not be responsible for any dues like outstanding water/service charges, transfer fees, electricity dues, dues to the Municipal Corporation/ local authority/ Co-operative Housing Society or any other dues, taxes, levies, fees, transfer fees if any in respect of and/or in relation to the sale of the said property. Successful Bidder has to comply with the provisions of Income Tax regarding purchase of property & to pay the tax to the authorities as per applicable rates. 11. The sale is subject to confirmation by the Secured Creditor/Bank. 12. The properties are in Symbolic Possession and the bidder(s) is purchasing the property in symbolic possession at his own risk & responsibility. 13. Bank will hand over the possession of the property symbolically only and Successful Auction Bidder/purchaser will not claim physical possession from the Bank. 14. Bank will not be responsible or duty bound for handing over of physical possession. 15. Successful Auction Purchaser will not be entitled to claim any interest, in any case of return of money. 16. Successful Auction Purchaser has to submit the Declaration Cum Undertaking confirming the above terms & condition (point 13-16) immediately after e-Auction. 17. Subsequent to sale if successful bidder fails to submit the Declaration Cum Undertaking, the bid EMD amount will be forfeited. 18. The sale is subject to conditions /Rules/Provisions prescribed in the SARFAESI Act 2002 and Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 Rules framed there under and the terms & conditions mentioned above. 19. This publication will be treated as a notice to related borrower/s or the mortgagor/s, guarantor/s of the above mentioned loan accounts for 30 days to sale the property/ies.

**Date: 25.02.2025 Place: Kanpur Nagar** **Authorised Officer Baroda U.P. Bank**

# Elaborate security at KVT for Mahashivratri

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Elaborate security and other arrangements were made at Dwadasa Jyotirlinga Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT) on Tuesday, on the eve of auspicious occasion of Mahashivratri, the biggest festival of this city of Lord Shiva falling on Wednesday. Tight security arrangements have also been made in all other famous temples of Lord Shiva in the city and its adjoining areas, including Markandey Mahadev at Kaithi, near the confluence of Ganga and Gomti rivers. The devotees will also enter the premises from Ganga Dwar side via ghats apart from the main gate of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham (corridor). Since its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 13, 2021, the corridor is witnessing a heavy rush of devotees and visitors almost daily which was much bigger since the beginning of Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. It is expected that this time the crowd will be heavier on Mahashivratri. Keeping this view in mind, the Varanasi Police Commissionerate chalked out its blueprint declaring that it will be a no-vehicle zone from Maidaganj to Godowlia on Mahashivratri. During the day, no vehicles, even rickshaws will be allowed to go to Godowlia crossing from Luxa police station, Benia Bagh, Sonarpura and Ramapura. Several traffic restrictions have also been imposed for the festival. Meanwhile, Commissioner of Police (CP) Mohit Agarwal held a meeting of senior police officers of Varanasi Police Commissionerate and reviewed the security arrangements on Mahashivratri. He also gave several instructions to the police officers. For keeping the security fool-



CP Mohit Agarwal on Tuesday giving instructions to police officers in view of Mahashivratri in Varanasi

proof, additional police force from other adjoining districts will also be deployed apart from several companies of PAC. Besides, bomb disposal squad, dog squad and fire brigade will also keep a vigil from Dashashwamedh Ghat to the corridor. In addition, Water Police, PAC flood relief team and NDRF personnel will also be deployed at Ganga ghats and mid-stream of the river to keep a watch as many devotees are also expected to take a holy dip in sacred water of the Ganga. As huge crowd of devotees is expected on Mahashivratri, the district administration has issued an advisory. Additional District Magistrate (City) Alok Kumar Verma said due to expected rush of visitors on Mahashivratri there is a possibility of a short time for darshan and the waiting time of the visitors in the queue may increase as Gate Number 4

(Godowlia Side) will be completely blocked for general visitors. Therefore, devotees going to the temple for darshan from Gate-4 should visit via Lalita Ghat or Saraswati Gate. He has appealed to the general public that those coming to Varanasi from far-flung areas should visit other Shiva temples on Mahashivratri day or stay at home and participate in online darshan of KVT via YouTube, Tata Sky etc. The ADM (City) said that there will be diversion due to the programme of Shobha Yatra of Naga Sadhus and their darshan puja. Therefore, till 1 pm, it will not be possible for the general public to enter KVT via Godowlia and Maidaganj. Sadhus, saints and Naga Akharas will take out shobha yatra and do darshan, due to which entry of general public from Gate-4 will be obstructed. Due to the pressure of a

large number of devotees/visitors in KVT, any kind of special request or darshan arrangement will be completely closed till February 27 during Mahashivratri festival. The ADM (City) has appealed to all devotees visiting KVT to avoid standing in line for darshan on an empty stomach as due to huge crowd darshan is likely to take a lot of time. On Mahashivratri the facility of mobile locker etc will not be available in KVT and due to the single direction movement plan, there will be additional inconvenience in taking the goods kept in a shop etc. Therefore, the general public should leave banned items such as mobile, purse, smart watch, keys, earphones, electronics and metal goods etc. at home or hotel. In case of any health problem, the nearest police personnel, temple peraryon or volunteer should be informed immediately.

# NER AGM inspects crowd management

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

North Eastern Railway (NER) Additional General Manager (AGM) Dinesh Kumar Singh inspected crowd management, holding areas, passenger shelters and other passenger facilities at Varanasi division's Banaras, Varanasi City and Sarnath railway stations on Tuesday in view of expected heavy rush on Mahashivratri, the last bathing day of Maha Kumbh Mela-2025. During the inspection, the AGM stressed on proper arrangements for managing crowd of fair passengers and devotees besides providing security and proper amenities to passengers. Additional Divisional Railway Manager (Infrastructure) Roshan Lal Yadav, ADRM (Operations) Rajesh Kumar Singh, Senior Divisional Engineer (SDE/Coordination) Rakesh Ranjan, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (SDCM) Sheikh Rehman, Senior Divisional Signal and Telecommunication Engineer Yashveer Singh and Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (Traction) RN Singh were also present. Singh first reached Banaras railway station and thoroughly inspected various preparations related to Mahashivratri. During his inspection of Banaras station, he thoroughly inspected passenger holding shelters, toilets, drinking water, separate exit gates, separate entrance gates, temporary barricading, deployment of sufficient Railway

Protection Force (RPF) personnel for crowd management, passenger amenities, RRI panel, CCTV monitoring room etc and gave directions to the officials concerned. He instructed ADRM (Operations) to continuously monitor Banaras station till Mahashivratri bathing and return. After this, the additional general manager also inspected Varanasi City and Sarnath stations reaching there by road. During the inspection of Varanasi City station, he inspected the temporary passenger shelter centre built for passenger holding in the station premises, toilets, water booths, foot over bridges, platforms, station master rooms, passenger reservation centres and various counters there, automatic ticket vending machines, separate entry and exit gates, temporary barricading, deployment of adequate security staff for crowd control, passenger safety etc. He directed the officers concerned to ensure all arrangements remain intact till the return of passengers after Mahashivratri. He directed ADRM (Infrastructure) to continuously monitor Varanasi City station till Mahashivratri bathing and return. He also inspected Sarnath station and took cognizance of the passenger amenities available there. He directed to strictly follow the rule of giving entry and exit to passengers from the entry and exit routes built at Banaras and Varanasi City stations.

# KnP Metro: Tunnel construction on 'downline' starts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Under the Kanpur Metro Rail Project, tunnel construction on the 'downline' of Corridor-2 (from CSA to Barra-8) has commenced on Monday. For this, the sixth Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) 'Saraswati' was launched from the launching shaft in Rawatpur. Similar to the 'Gomati' TBM machine on the 'up-line', the 'Saraswati' TBM machine on the 'downline' will also construct a tunnel approximately 620 metres long, moving from Rawatpur towards Company Bagh Chauraha up to the Corridor-2 Depot ramp. On the occasion, UPMRC Managing Director (MD) Sushil Kumar and other senior officials were present. The managing director also reviewed the progress of the under-construction stations of both the corridors with senior officials. The 'Saraswati' TBM machine is the sixth (second of Corridor-2) TBM machine of the entire project. Previously, Kanpur Metro has used 'Nana', 'Tatya', 'Azad' and 'Vidya' TBMs in Corridor-1 and 'Gomati' TBM in Corridor-2. The launching shaft located in Rawatpur, from where this machine was launched, is part of the new Rawatpur underground station being constructed under Corridor-2, connected to the current Rawatpur elevated station. A few days ago, the process of lowering all parts of the 'Saraswati' TBM machine into the launching shaft, approximately 15 metres deep, was completed at the construction site of this underground station. After that, the assembly process of all parts and components of the machine was completed.

This machine was launched in the presence of Managing Director Sushil Kumar and senior officials from UPMRC and contracting agencies. This machine will construct a tunnel approximately 620 metres long from Rawatpur to the Corridor-2 depot ramp located near the Agriculture University on the 'downline'. After the tunnel construction from Rawatpur to the Corridor-2 depot ramp is completed, the tunnel will be constructed on both lines from Rawatpur to the Double Pulia ramp. It may be noted that approximately 8.60 km long Corridor-2 (from CSA to Barra-8) includes about 4.10 km of underground and approximately 4.50 km of elevated sections. The first station is CSA or Agriculture University where it is elevated, followed by three underground stations; Rawatpur, Kakadeo and Double Pulia. The four stations after Double Pulia; Vijayanagar Chauraha, Shastri Chowk, Barra-7 and Barra-8, are also elevated. On the occasion congratulating the entire team of UPMRC, MD Sushil Kumar said, "The tunnel boring machine is the most effective and safe means of tunnel construction. This machine operates under the 'Earth Pressure Balance' system and is capable of constructing underground tunnels with complete safety without affecting the traffic on the roads in the middle of the city. Rapid progress is being made in the civil construction work of Corridor-2 along with the balance section of Corridor-1. In the near future, people on both sides of the railway line will benefit from seamless travel with the opening of this new convenient route."

# Steel plates, cloth bags distributed



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The officials of North Central Railway (NCR) distributed stainless steel plates and cloth bags to the cleaning staff of Subedarganj coach washing line on Tuesday under the leadership of Chief Environment Manager Shivaji Kadam. Environment and Housekeeping Section, NCR headquarters distributed stainless steel plates and cloth bags to reduce the use of plastic/thermo-cool plates and single-use plastic. Shivaji Kadam also explained the importance of cloth bags and plates to cleaning staff and advised them not to use single-use plastic and not to eat tobacco, gutkha etc. The distribution of plates and bags received from the social organisation Paryavaran Sanrakshan

Gatividhi is proving to be very helpful in preventing pollution. Senior Section Engineers (SSEs) Ajay Patel, SS Sharma, Akhilesh Kumar Singh and Jitendra Paswan, had a significant contribution in making the programme successful. More than 80 employees and officers were present in the programme. **SHOT DEAD:** A 24-year-old youth was shot dead by some assailants here. The assailants, who were riding a Scorpio, had an argument with the youth in the Civil Lines market late on Monday night. After this when the youth was running away on his bike the assailants chased him, intercepted him in Mumfordganj area and shot him in the chest. The incident took place at the Fauvara Crossing under Colonelganj police station area.

# KTS festival of integration of culture: Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The grand closing ceremony of Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0 was held at the iconic Namoo Ghat here on Monday evening. On the occasion, Union Minister of State for Education Dr Sukanta Majumdar, Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and many other dignitaries were present. Addressing the function, Union Minister Dr Majumdar said while cherishing the cultural heritage of Kashi and Tamil Nadu, we are moving towards the goal of developed India. "The efforts of the government are promoting youth empowerment, skill development, entrepreneurship and sustainable development, thereby laying the foundation of a prosperous and self-reliant India", he said. He described KTS as a festival of integration of culture and a bond of love and respect. He also said under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, this event is becoming a symbol of India's integrity and 'unity in diversity'. Odisha CM Majhi said deep-rooted Kashi and Tamil Nadu have come together to celebrate cultural richness. He said Kashi is a centre of spirituality, while Tamil Nadu is famous for its rich literature, dance and cultural heritage. Referring to the cultural ties between Odisha and Tamil Nadu, he said that from Odissi to Bharatanatyam, from Ganga to Cauvery, we are



Union minister S Majumdar and Odisha Chief Minister MC Majhi being welcomed at the closing ceremony of KTS 3.0 at Namoo Ghat in Varanasi

all one. He linked this idea to PM Modi's vision of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' and said this event will further strengthen the shared heritage of Indian culture. At the beginning of the programme, Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Education, Sunil Kumar Barnwal delivered the welcome address. He said that India's educational and research system is rapidly strengthening due to the efforts of the Ministry of Education. He mentioned the reforms under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which is making the education system more inclusive, employable and research-oriented. Vice-Chancellor in charge, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) Prof Sanjay Kumar thanked all the institutions,

Ministry of Education, officials, staff, artistes and volunteers for making the event a success. He especially praised the PM Modi and Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who made this event a platform for the exchange of Indian culture and strengthening national unity. He said with the efforts of the PM and the Ministry of Education, India's education and cultural policies are now making their mark on the global stage. Initiatives like NEP-2020 are bringing revolutionary changes in the field of education and promoting research, innovation and cultural heritage. All the dignitaries present at the closing ceremony resolved to further strengthen India's cultural and educational heritage, so that the coming generations

remain connected to their roots and a prosperous, self-reliant and modern India can be built. At the beginning of the cultural programme, a welcome song was sung by a group of girl students of Banaras, followed by traditional dance performances of Tamil Nadu, in which Thappattam, Kummi, Kolattam, Ammanattam and Gramiya Kalai Attam were prominent. In Thappattam dance, artistes use a special type of drum (Thappu), which is mainly performed during festivals and social events in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu. In Kummi dance, women sing songs in a circle while clapping in rhythm, which makes this dance a symbol of collectivity and joy. In Kolattam, also known as 'Lathi Nritya', the dancers dance by holding small sticks in their hands and hitting them against each other, which makes this dance a symbol of team spirit and coordination. Ammanattam dance is performed in the worship of Goddess Shakti, in which the dancers praise the Goddess with devotion, while Gramiya Kalai Attam is a folk dance performed in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu, which displays the culture, tradition and lifestyle of that place. These colourful presentations presented a live example of the unique blend of Varanasi and Tamil culture. In these cultural programmes organised under KTS 3.0, the cultural richness of both the states was seen in these 10 days.

# NER gets many awards



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The State Horticulture and Food Processing Department, Uttar Pradesh, organised a three-day divisional-level flower, fruit and vegetable exhibition at Company Garden, Kachheri, which concluded on Monday evening. On the occasion, chief garden inspector of North Eastern Railway (NER) Mukesh Kumar received 81 awards, including three running shields from chief guest and Mayor Ashok Tiwari at the prize distribution ceremony. NER (Varanasi division) displayed its exhibits in 102 out of 159 categories and gave the best performance in the exhibition, breaking its last year's record of 71 awards by standing first in 30 categories and finishing second in 23 and third in 28 (total 81 prizes) along with three running shields in the categories of evergreen plants in pots, seasonal flowers in pots and cut flowers. The NER Varanasi Division won first prize in pansy, marigold, salvia, dahlia, stock, aster, cycas, succulent, cactus,

welcome bouquet, table decoration, money plant etc second prize in rangoli, petunia etc and third prize in barbina, cineraria etc. On the occasion all the members of the garden unit of Varanasi division of NER, including the participants of various departments, were present. On this achievement, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava and Senior Divisional Engineer (Coordination) Rakesh Ranjan congratulated the garden team of Varanasi division, chief garden inspector Mukesh Kumar and assistant divisional engineer Anil Kumar Singh and also praised the hard work, dedication and commitment of all the employees of the garden unit. **'CYCLE YATRA':** Renowned social and human rights activist Himanshu Kumar, who set out on a cycle yatra from Mahatma Gandhi's Samadhi Sthal Rajghat, Delhi, on January 30, reached Pradhan Mantri Adarsh Gram Nagepur here on Tuesday where he was welcomed by Lok Samiti workers and children of Asha Samajik Vidyalaya by garlanding him.

# Medical procedure performed successfully

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Gastro Unit of Regency Health Kanpur has successfully performed a ground-breaking medical procedure, marking a significant milestone for healthcare in Uttar Pradesh. The team treated an elder patient suffering from relentless itching, jaundice and a rare form of cancer known as distal cholangiocarcinoma or bile duct cancer. After two unsuccessful attempts at endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) at other facilities, the patient was left without options. However, the expert team at Regency Kanpur performed a state-of-the-art endoscopic ultrasound (EUS)-guided cholecholedochostomy via lumen-apposing metal stent (LAMS). This minimally invasive procedure successfully bypassed the blockage caused by the tumour, offering relief from symptoms and improving his quality of life. Distal cholangiocarcinoma is a rare bile duct cancer that can cause severe symptoms, including jaundice, dark urine, pale stools, intense itching and abdominal pain. It is especially challenging to treat when tumours block the flow of bile.

Regency's successful application of this new procedure is a testament to their commitment to adopting the latest advancements in gastroenterological care. "This is a breakthrough moment for healthcare in Uttar Pradesh. Our team's ability to perform a EUS-guided cholecholedochostomy via LAMS represents a new frontier in treating complex cases like distal cholangiocarcinoma. By using cutting-edge technology, we've provided the patient with a new lease on life and demonstrated Regency's commitment to compassionate and innovative care. What makes this procedure especially significant is its minimally invasive nature, which results in faster recovery and fewer complications. This success strengthens our mission of ensuring that every patient, no matter how complex their condition, receives the best possible care", said Dr Gaurav Singh, consultant, Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist Regency Health Kanpur. At the Gastro Unit here every patient's journey is treated with passion and care, advanced technology and relentless dedication. With this milestone, Regency continues to provide hope in even the most challenging cases.

# Cop, two kids killed in road accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A constable and his two children died while 29 others, including his wife, were seriously injured when their car collided with a traveller carrying pilgrims on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway under Bangermau Kotwali police area of Unnao early on Tuesday morning. The incident took place when the car driver dozed off and lost control over the vehicle which collided with the traveller on the other lane across the road divider. As many as 28 pilgrims sustained injuries after their traveller overturned on the spot. Police sent the bodies for autopsy and injured to CHC. In view of the serious condition of 19 people, including constable's wife, they were referred to the district hospital. Police constable Raghendra Singh (38) of Ankan under Aaral police station in Kanpur Dehat, was posted in Lucknow Secretariat. On Tuesday he along with wife Nandini (36), son Shreshtha (3) and daughter (1) was going to Lucknow via Agra-Lucknow Expressway. Raghendra dozed off and lost control over the vehicle which collided with the traveller. In the incident, Raghendra and his two children were killed while wife Nandini along with pilgrims in the traveller were injured.

# JK Cantt Spartans all set for KPL

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

JK Cantt Spartans are all set to make their strong presence felt in the Kanpur Premier League (KPL). Team owner Ashish Singh Chauhan held a special meeting with players at the Kanpur Club, in which he described teamwork as the key to success. During it, he said, "True victory is not achieved only by individual performance, but by the entire team playing together. The contribution of every player will be the basis of our success." Chauhan encouraged the players by laying special emphasis on teamwork, dedication and collective strategy. He interacted with all players, motivated them and stressed that victory is achieved only with strong team spirit. Cantt Station Commander Brigadier Shabbarul Hasan and KPL Chairman Dr Sanjay Kapoor attended the meeting and encouraged the team. Brigadier Shabbarul Hasan



JK Cantt Spartans team ready to participate in KPL.

emphasised on teamwork, discipline and spirit of victory. Dr Sanjay Kapoor inspired the players to enter the field with organised play and a positive mindset. Team owner Ashish Singh Chauhan, Brigadier Shabbarul Hasan and KPL Chairman Dr Sanjay Kapoor announced the name of Manik Beri as the captain. The team is expected to reach new heights under the leadership of Manik Beri. The JK Cantt Spartans team is fully prepared for the upcoming KPL matches. A team anthem ded-

icated to the zeal and passion of JK Cantt Spartans was launched, which is being shared on all social media platforms. All players as well as physiotherapists, coaching staff and senior members of the team management were also present in the meeting. All players expressed their commitment to maintain the spirit of cricket with honesty, discipline and dedication, to keep the spirit of team and sportsmanship paramount and to give their best at every opportunity. Kanpur Premier League

(KPL) 2025 is going to be held for the first time in Kanpur, which is a historic and exciting occasion for city's cricket lovers. Through KPL, the passion and enthusiasm for sports in Kanpur will get a new direction. This grand league, being held for the first time, will see tough competition between six different teams of the city, making every match full of excitement, energy and competition. Meanwhile, TSH Blaster Arya Nagar team, announced by its patron Pranit Agarwal, will be led by Satnam Singh as captain. Wishing the team success, Pranit Agarwal said captain Satnam Singh had performed well in many U-19 and U-23 cricket tournaments. He is an allrounder, left-hand batter and a medium pace bowler. He announced to provide free membership of TSH for a year to all team members subject to its winning the trophy in the KPL.

# India-China relationship entering 'phase of recovery': Chinese envoy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India-China ties are entering the "phase of recovery" and the relationship between the two nations is "one of the most important" bilateral engagement globally, Chinese ambassador Xu Feihong said on Tuesday.

In an address at an event, Xu also said that the recent Special Representatives (SR) dialogue and the talks under Foreign Secretary-Vice Minister mechanism between the two sides produced common understandings on the boundary question and created an opportunity to reboot the ties.

New Delhi and Beijing are in the process of normalising bilateral ties following an understanding last year to end the face-off on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in

eastern Ladakh. National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held the 23rd Special Representative dialogue in Beijing on December 18.

Weeks later, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri travelled to the Chinese capital and held talks with his Chinese counterpart Sun Weidong under the framework of Foreign Secretary-Vice Minister mechanism.

"The 23rd Special Representatives meeting on China-India boundary question and Vice Foreign Minister-Foreign Secretary dialogue were successfully held in Beijing, and reached a series of common understandings on the boundary question and practical cooperation," Xu said.

"This creates an important opportunity for the reboot of China-India relations and

provides a broader platform for exchanges and cooperation between the youth of our two countries," he said.

The ambassador, speaking at the third China-India Youth Dialogue, however did not elaborate on specific outcomes of the talks.

"The China-India relationship is one of the most important bilateral relationships in the world. A sound and stable China-India relationship meets the expectations of the two peoples and the international community," he said.

Xu said both sides should implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, mutually respect each other's core interests and view each other's development as an opportunity besides encouraging exchanges and

visits in various fields. The ambassador added: "China-India relations are entering the phase of recovery. We will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations this year."

India and China completed the disengagement process late last year after firming up a pact for withdrawal of troops from Depsang and Demchok, the last two friction points in eastern Ladakh.

Two days after finalisation of the pact, Prime Minister Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks in Kazan on October 23.

In the meeting, the two sides decided to revive the various dialogue mechanisms. India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

# Land-for-jobs 'scam': Delhi court summons Lalu, family members

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi court on Tuesday summoned former rail minister Lalu Prasad and some of his family members, including his wife, two sons and two daughters, in connection with the land-for-jobs 'scam'.

Special Judge Vishal Gagne summoned the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) supreme's wife and former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, two sons — ex-Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Prasad Yadav and former state minister Tej Pratap Yadav — and daughters Misha Bharti, a member of Parliament, and Hema Yadav, in connection with the case.

The accused have been directed to appear before the court on March 11.

The judge said the allegations and material cited in the chargesheet with respect to the role of Lalu Prasad Yadav, "with the active participation

of his aides Bhola Yadav and RK Mahajan, the transfer of parcels of land in favour of Lalu Prasad's family members — Rabri Devi, Hema Yadav and Tej Pratap Yadav — and the appointment of candidates, who were also arrayed as accused, upon the recommendation of railway officials, also named as accused in the chargesheet, form cogent prima-facie indication of the role of all 76 accused persons in the allegations crystallised in the concluding chargesheet."

"In view of the above allegations and the sanction for prosecution of Lalu Prasad Yadav, Bhola Yadav, RK Mahajan and the railway officials having been granted, the cognisance of the offences in question is taken by the court. The court finds sufficient grounds to summon all the accused," the judge said.

He further noted that "substantial time" was taken

by the CBI in investigating the allegations, and about two years were "consumed" in filing of the multiple chargesheets and supplementary chargesheets, and directed the central probe agency to ensure that the service of the summons be effected expeditiously and by utilising adequate man power.

The case is related to Group D appointments made in the West Central Zone of the Indian Railways based in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, during Lalu Prasad's tenure as the rail minister between 2004 and 2009 in return for land parcels gifted or transferred by the recruits in the name of the RJD supreme's family or associates, officials said.

A case was registered on May 18, 2022, against Lalu Prasad and others, including his wife, two daughters, unidentified public officials and private persons.

# Kharge slams government over 'declining' scholarships for SCs, STs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday alleged that the government has "snatched" the scholarships of the youth of SC, ST, OBC and minority communities, and claimed that its slogan of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" mocks the aspirations of the weaker sections. Kharge asked how will jobs for the youth be increased until the students of weaker sections of the country get opportunities and their skills are encouraged.

"Narendra Modi ji, Your government has snatched the scholarships of the youth of SC, ST, OBC and Minority categories in the country," Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

# Army's DGMO reviews security dynamics on visit to Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Army's Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Lt Gen Rajiv Ghai carried out a comprehensive review of the security dynamics in Manipur as well as the situation along the Indo-Myanmar border during a two-day visit to the strife-torn state. Lt Gen Ghai met Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and several top officials including the state security advisor, the chief secretary and the director general of police, the Army said.

The DGMO's visit highlighted the collaborative approach between the military and state officials to implement strategic initiatives aimed at promoting stability and the welfare of the people of Manipur, it said in a readout of Lt Gen Ghai's visit to the state on February 24 and 25.

Days after the resignation of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on February 9, the state was brought under President's Rule.

The Army said the DGMO visited Manipur to gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation along the Indo-Myanmar Border (IMB) and



File photo

insights into the status of ongoing border infrastructure developments in the state. Manipur's two ethnic groups — the Meitei community and the Kukis — have been locked in a deadly conflict since May, 2023, that killed over 200 people and displaced thousands.

There have been mounting concerns in New Delhi over security implications arising out of fighting between Myanmar's military and rebel forces in areas close to the country's border with India.

"The DGMO focused on the operational preparedness of the Indian Army, carried out an assessment of the security situation along the IMB, and the current security dynamics in the state, including fringe areas," it said in the readout.

"He also emphasised on a 'whole of government approach' during interactions with key stakeholders," it said. The discussions centred around the normalisation of prevailing security situation in the state, particularly the need to enhance border management and strengthen security infrastructure along the IMB, it said.

Myanmar is one of India's strategic neighbours and it shares a 1,640 km-long border with a number of northeastern states including militancy-hit Nagaland and Manipur.

In view of the violence and instability in border areas of Myanmar, Union Home Minister Amit Shah in January last year announced a plan to fence the border.

# Railways to run more than 350 trains from Prayagraj on Mahashivratri: Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Elaborate plans have been put in place for the safe return of pilgrims who have gathered at Prayagraj Maha Kumbh from various parts of the country for the final Amrit Snan on Mahashivratri, the Railway Ministry said on Tuesday.

"As the final Amrit Snan of Maha Kumbh 2025 is scheduled for February 26, a large number of pilgrims from various states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal have gathered in Prayagraj to bathe at the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers," a press statement from the Ministry said. A total of 350 trains have been planned to run for the safe and comfortable return of pilgrims.

According to the Ministry, for the past two days, Sunday and Monday, there were a high number of passengers at stations in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Jharkhand etc who travelled to Prayagraj for final Amrit Snan.

"After the Amrit Snan, a large number of people are expected to return to their hometowns, which will likely lead to a heavy crowd at railway stations," the Ministry said. It added, "Keeping this in mind, North Central Railway, North Eastern Railway, and Northern Railway have made extensive preparations, and all officials and staff have been directed to remain vigilant at their workstations."

The Ministry is expecting a huge rush of pilgrims similar to Mouni Amavasya day for which over 360 trains were run, transporting more than 20 lakh people to their destinations.

"Similarly, special arrangements have been made to run additional trains after the Maha Shivaratri Snan, and extra rakes have been stationed near Prayagraj for use as needed," the Ministry said.

The press note said that the entire railway operation is being closely monitored by Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and the Chairman and CEO of the Railway Board, Satish Kumar along with other senior railway officials.

# India will always advocate 'zero tolerance' for terrorism: Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

There is a clear and urgent need for a new multilateral system that reflects contemporary global realities as past few years "exposed" the "stark inadequacies" of the existing structures, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said.

In a virtual address at the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, he also asserted that India will always advocate "zero tolerance" for terrorism and call out any effort to normalise it.

Delving into geo-political turmoil in various geographies, Jaishankar said the world continues to grapple with conflicts and it is growing more fractured, uncertain, and unstable in the face of emerging challenges.

"There is a clear and urgent need for a multilateral system that reflects contemporary global realities, one that is better equipped to respond to modern challenges, and, in essence, one that is fit for purpose," he said.

"The past few years have exposed the stark inadequacies of existing multilateral



File photo

structures. When the world needed them the most, they were found wanting," he said.

Jaishankar said India has always played an active role in the global promotion and protection of human rights.

"Our approach has been centered on building capacity and strengthening human resources and infrastructure in alignment with the priorities of our partners — always upholding the principles of fiscal responsibility, transparency, and sustainability," he said.

Jaishankar said India's development partnerships with countries across the world reflects this commitment.

"At the same time, we have been firm and uncompromising in combating terrorism. India will always advocate zero tolerance for terrorism and call out any effort to normalise it," he said.

"We do not merely speak of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — the world as one family; we live by it. And today, more than ever, this perspective is urgently needed," he said.

"The world continues to grapple with conflicts and crises, growing more fractured, uncertain, and unstable in the face of emerging challenges, even as it struggles to recover from the recent ones," he added.

# Trust opposes SC over Centre's stand on Halal certification

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind Halal Trust has opposed in the Supreme Court on the Centre's submission over halal certification of non-meat products such as iron bars and cement, calling it "vexatious and scandalous". In a rejoinder filed in the top court, the Muslim certification body said the concept of halal was considered a basic requirement of "behaviour and lifestyle", which included eating habits and consumption in general of a very large community.

It said halal certification related to the religious belief and practice of a large section of Indian citizenry and was protected under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. While Article 25 deals with freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion, Article 26 prescribes freedom to manage religious affairs.

On January 20, the Centre raised the issue of halal certification of non-meat products such as iron bars and cement, asking why non-believers should be made to pay a higher cost for halal-certified products. Denying any such certification, the trust said, "It is submitted, in clear terms, that the petitioner (trust) has not issued any halal certification to iron bars or cement."

The trust further argued the choice of food, components used in preparing it, was the right of an individual or group of people protected by Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. "The state,

whether it is Central government or state government, cannot take away this liberty of an individual as to what material somebody is eating," it said.

It was a matter of an individual's right to be informed about the component used in edible products whether vegetarian or a non-vegetarian food, the trust said. "For instance, Tulsi water, or lipstick or biscuits with or without chocolate, packaged water bottles are projected to be as ridiculous expansion of halal certifications. The said criticism of ridicule is baseless and due to ignorance of fact in general public," the rejoinder added.

The trust said halal certification was also related to international trade and commerce. "As far as the allegation that certifying agencies charging the total collection in few lakh crores is concerned, this allegation again has been reported very widely, the source of which is the baseless oral instruction of the Central Government," it said.

The Centre, the rejoinder said, was aware of the financial statements of the trust as it was filed with the Income Tax and GST authorities. The matter related to the pleas challenging a notification prohibiting the manufacturing, storage, sale and distribution of food products with halal certification within Uttar Pradesh, except for items produced for export. The matter would come up in the week commencing March 24.

# Cong slams Centre over US 'F-16 maintenance plan' for Pakistan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In the wake of US President Donald Trump reportedly allocating USD 397 million for Pakistan's F-16 fleet maintenance, the Congress on Tuesday questioned the Modi government's diplomatic strategy and called for a reassessment of India's foreign policy priorities to safeguard national interests.

Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said the recent decision by President Trump to allocate USD 397 million for Pakistan's F-16 fleet maintenance raises critical questions about the Modi government's diplomatic efficacy. This move, reminiscent of the 2022 Biden administration's USD 450 million package for the same purpose, highlights a pattern of US military support to Pakistan, he said in a post on X.

Such actions potentially

compromise India's security interests, especially given the historical use of F-16s by Pakistan against India, Khera said.

During the UPA years (2004-2014), India and the United States significantly deepened their strategic and defence cooperation across multiple domains, including military modernisation, technology transfer, nuclear energy, and counter-terrorism, he pointed out.

The robust diplomatic and strategic initiatives taken during the UPA years deepened India-US relations, strengthening India's defense capabilities and global influence, Khera asserted. Historically, the Congress has championed a balanced and proactive foreign policy, fostering non-alignment along with strategic autonomy, he said.

"Furthermore, recent defence negotiations have raised concerns. The proposal to acquire F-35 fighter jets from

the US has been met with criticism due to high costs and operational challenges. Elon Musk, for instance, has labelled the F-35 as 'junk', questioning its efficacy.

"Additionally, Russia has offered to produce its advanced Su-57 jets in India, presenting a potentially more viable alternative," the Congress leader said. In light of these developments, it is imperative to question the Modi government's diplomatic strategy, Khera said.

Is there a comprehensive plan to address the implications of US military aid to Pakistan, he asked. How the Government intends to ensure that India's security concerns are not sidelined in the pursuit of high-value defence procurements, Khera further asked.

A reassessment of our foreign policy priorities, drawing from the Congress party's legacy of strategic foresight, is essential to safeguard national

interests, Khera asserted.

In another post, Khera also posed five questions to the Modi government on reciprocal tariffs by the US.

How the government plans to protect the interests of domestic farmers, who make up 45.76 per cent of the workforce, in light of potential increased imports from the US, he asked.

"Will the government now consider changes in domestic policy, particularly the legalisation of MSP, to provide basic income support to Indian farmers? What assurances will the Indian government secure to prevent India from becoming a dumping ground for cheap US agricultural imports?" Khera said.

How does the government plan to safeguard the MSME sector, whose production will be severely impacted by costly exports and increased competition from foreign products, Khera further asked.

# Centre extends concessions, incentives for Kashmir Valley employees for three years

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has extended the package of concession and incentives for its employees working in the Kashmir Valley by three years, according to a personnel ministry order. The Valley comprises 10 districts — Anantnag, Baramulla, Budgam, Kupwara, Pulwama, Srinagar, Kulgam, Shopian, Ganderbal and Bandipora.

It has been decided by the competent authority to extend the package of concessions/incentives to Central government employees working in the Kashmir Valley for a further period of three years with effect from August 1, 2024, the order issued by the ministry on Monday said.

The package of incentives is uniformly applicable to all ministries, departments and public sector undertakings under the government of India, and they should

ensure strict adherence to the rates prescribed in the package, it said. The employees posted in the Valley have an option to move their families to a selected place of their choice in India at government expense, and transport allowance for the families is allowed as admissible in permanent transfer inclusive of the composite transfer grant at the rate of 80 per cent of last month's basic pay, the order said.

Those employees who do not wish to move their families to a selected place of residence are paid per diem allowance of ₹141 per day for each day of attendance to compensate for any additional expense in transportation to and from office etc, it said.

Department arrangements will be made for stay, security and transportation to the place of work for the employees, it said.

# 'Changed circumstances' may see better implementation of plans for Yamuna: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday observed that there might be better implementation of plans, such as cleaning of Yamuna river, in view of the "changed circumstances". The observation by a bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih assumes significance in the wake of the BJP unseating the Aam Aadmi Party government in Delhi in the recently-concluded assembly elections.

The top court is hearing a suo motu case titled 'Remediation of polluted rivers' in which it

is dealing with the issue of contamination of Yamuna river.

"I think with the changed circumstances now, there may be better implementation of plans," Justice Gavai said during the hearing.

Senior advocate Meenakshi Arora, who's assisting the apex court as an amicus curiae, said earlier that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) was monitoring the issue concerning Yamuna river through a committee.

She said after the top court took suo motu cognisance of the matter in January 2021, the tribunal disbanded the



File photo

committee. The bench observed that it appeared there were some other petitions concerning pollution in Yamuna river, which were pending before another bench of the apex court. It asked additional solicitor

general Aishwarya Bhati, who appeared for the Centre, to find out from the authorities as to whether there were any other petitions pending with regard to the same issue. The bench posted the matter for hearing after the Holi vacation.

The amicus said the NGT had passed several orders, giving directions from time to time regarding various compliances to be met with regard to Yamuna river.

She said the monitoring committee constituted by the tribunal was supervising what was being done between Haryana and Delhi regarding the setting up of sewage treatment plants and common effluent treatment plants. "Should we send it back to the NGT," the bench asked.

The amicus suggested this might be better monitored by the NGT.

The bench observed that all

these matters can be consolidated. "You take instructions if the NGT can monitor it or we can get it monitored through a CEC (central empowered committee), if you all agree on that," the bench said.

On January 13, 2021, the apex court took cognisance of contamination of rivers by sewage effluent and observed that pollution-free water forms a basic right under the Constitutional framework and a welfare state is "bound" to ensure the same. The top court had said it would first take up the issue of contamination of Yamuna river.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Liberty is sacrosanct

The Supreme Court's directive affirming bail as the norm and emphasising liberty is a welcome step

The Supreme Court in a recent ruling and observation made a very pertinent precedence that could have far-reaching implications in the functioning of the democracy. The Supreme Court in the case of Kailash Kumar vs State of Himachal Pradesh wherein it set aside a High Court order cancelling the bail of an accused has rooted for individual's liberty. This ruling underscore the judiciary's commitment to protect personal liberty and ensuring that courts do not meddle with individual's right to freedom. Liberty is a cornerstone of the Indian Constitution, protected under Article 21, which states that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law. Bail, in this context, serves as a safeguard against arbitrary detention and ensures that an accused remains free unless proven guilty. The Supreme Court has consistently held that bail should be the norm and jail the exception, especially when the accused does not pose a threat to the legal process. The Supreme Court, while overturning the High Court's decision, made critical observations regarding the protection of personal liberty.

The Supreme Court's ruling aligns with a broader judicial philosophy that bail is a right and should not be treated as a privilege granted at the discretion of the courts. The idea is that pre-trial detention should not be punitive but rather a measure to ensure the accused's presence at trial. In numerous judgements, the Court has clarified that unless there is compelling evidence of misconduct, denying bail would violate an individual's fundamental rights. However, courts must balance the rights of the accused with the interests of justice and the safety of society. The Supreme Court's reaffirmation that bail is a fundamental right serves as a significant reminder to lower courts to uphold personal liberty. The judiciary must ensure that bail decisions are guided by legal principles rather than subjective interpretations of the accused's culpability. This observation is likely to have far-reaching implications and may pave the way for several undertrials, especially political activist who are languishing in the jails. For instance as of February 2025, several individuals accused in connection with the 2020 Delhi riots continue to await bail, leading to prolonged incarceration without trial. Notable among them are activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, as well as a politician Tahir Hussain. Despite multiple bail applications, courts have consistently denied them relief. As of October 2024, Khalid had spent over four years in jail without trial, highlighting concerns about prolonged pre-trial detention. The prolonged detention of these individuals have sparked debates about the use of stringent laws like the UAPA and the rights of undertrials in India. These cases exemplify the challenges within the Indian judicial system regarding prolonged pre-trial detention and the balance between ensuring justice and upholding individual rights.



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### PICTALK



A sadhu performs a yogasana at a Ganga ghat, in Varanasi

## The growing threat of radicalisation of Central Asia



NISHAKANT OJHA

The rise of extremist ideologies among Central Asian youth has become a critical security concern, exacerbated by economic hardship and geopolitical conflicts

In recent years, the increasing attraction of Central Asian youth to extremist and Takfiri groups has become a significant security concern for regional governments and international experts. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has only intensified these concerns, with reports indicating that young migrant workers are being recruited for extremist activities, a pattern reminiscent of the recruitment seen during the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The emergence of the Turan Battalion, a group of Turkic-speaking Central Asians fighting alongside Ukrainian forces against Russia, highlights the pressing need to address radicalisation among young people. At the same time, extremist propaganda spread by figures such as Idas Sadegh has contributed to the rising tide of radicalism, further complicating the region's security landscape. The radicalisation of Central Asian youth stems from a combination of social, economic and political factors that make them vulnerable to extremist narratives. Economic hardship is one of the most significant drivers, particularly in countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where persistent poverty, high unemployment, and limited socio-economic opportunities push young people toward alternative ideologies. Over three decades of independence, Kyrgyzstan has experienced multiple coups, widespread corruption, and growing dissatisfaction with the secular governance model. Many young people, disillusioned with their governments, seek a sense of purpose and community in extremist ideologies that not only provide identity but often come with financial incentives. Migration also plays a critical role in this radicalisation process. Millions of Central Asians migrate to Russia for work, where they frequently face exploitation, legal difficulties and social alienation. The absence of integration programs and social support leaves them vulnerable to extremist recruiters who exploit their grievances and isolation. These recruiters present extremist ideology as a means of empowerment and justice, a dangerous proposition that finds traction



among individuals struggling to navigate foreign environments with little institutional support. Religious education, or the lack thereof, is another crucial factor in the rise of extremism. In countries like Tajikistan, where Islamic teachings are heavily restricted and even prohibited for individuals under 18, a significant knowledge vacuum has emerged. This vacuum is quickly filled by extremist propaganda, often disseminated via social media. Many young Tajik migrant workers in Russia rely on online content to shape their religious understanding, unknowingly consuming distorted interpretations of Islam that align with extremist beliefs. This unchecked exposure to radical ideologies fuels the rapid spread of extremist sentiment within vulnerable communities. Kazakhstan presents a unique case where extremist ideologies have infiltrated even the highest levels of power. Salafi groups, for instance, gained traction with backing from influential figures such as General Kairat Satybaldy, making the fight against radicalisation more challenging. The entrenchment of these ideologies within powerful circles emboldens extremist sympathisers and complicates government efforts to dismantle radical networks. The rise of social media has dramatically accelerated the spread of extremist propa-



THIS UNCHECKED EXPOSURE TO RADICAL IDEOLOGIES FUELS THE RAPID SPREAD OF EXTREMIST SENTIMENT WITHIN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES. KAZAKHSTAN PRESENTS A UNIQUE CASE WHERE EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES HAVE INFILTRATED EVEN THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF POWER

ganda. Extremist groups have mastered the use of digital platforms to reach and recruit young people, leveraging engaging content that is often more accessible and persuasive than state-backed religious teachings. Many of these online materials promise a sense of belonging, purpose, and spiritual rewards, making the path to radicalisation dangerously appealing. Experts emphasise that without a strong digital counter-narrative, governments and moderate religious leaders will continue to struggle in preventing the indoctrination of young minds. The psychological manipulation employed by extremist groups goes beyond simple recruitment, leading some individuals to commit acts of violence, including suicide attacks. The belief that martyrdom ensures a direct path to heaven is a powerful motivator, and extremist groups exploit feelings of injustice, social exclusion, and spiritual ignorance to persuade young people to sacrifice themselves for a perceived greater cause. By manipulating these vulnerabilities, these groups create a mindset in which violence is not only justified but seen as a divine mission. Governments in Central Asia have responded to this growing threat with various strategies, though with mixed success. Initial measures included mass arrests and harsh prison sentences, particularly in

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. However, this approach has often backfired, as prisons have become breeding grounds for further radicalisation. Inmates exposed to extremist ideologies behind bars frequently emerge more radicalised than before, exacerbating the problem rather than solving it. Recognising the limitations of purely repressive measures, some governments have turned to religious reforms as a more effective means of combating extremism. Uzbekistan, for example, has eased restrictions on religious practices, allowing the call to prayer from loudspeakers and providing greater freedom for Islamic education. These initiatives have had a noticeable impact, significantly reducing extremist recruitment within the country by offering legitimate avenues for religious expression. Education is widely regarded as one of the most effective tools in preventing radicalisation. Experts stress the importance of integrating religious education into school curricula to provide young people with a correct understanding of Islamic principles. Only through a holistic and sustained effort can Central Asian nations protect their youth from extremist influences and work toward a more stable and peaceful future.

(The writer is expert in national security, radicalization, and counterterrorism; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### RIGHT IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT

Madam — The editorial, 'Right is Raising' (24-25), presents a balanced fact. The fact is that the Right will collapse due to its own weight and internal contradictions but will manage to overcome the setback for some time. The great economic depression of 1930s, which was saved by applying Keynes theory of equipping the mass with more purchase power. The worst recession in 2008, which marked the collapse of the capitalist order, had to be restored by huge spending of people's money to save the insolvent institutions. The countries are still in the recovery process. But the division Right creates in the society with its unquenching thirst for more and more profits and the avaricious attitude will reach its unbearable stage, compelling the victims to raise their voices for justice and their justified place in the society. This trend is already gaining momentum. The victims are on an active search for an alternate. In some countries, like Sri Lanka, the victims could identify the Left as the right alternate. The process of bringing in a new alternative is too difficult but is still going on. In India, the BJP is given power purely because of the nonavailability of such an alternate national party and not because of the party's communal or far-right policies, as reflected in the last election that denied the party an absolute power. It is inevitable that when the Right reaches its peak it forces the majority to accept Left to be the right choice.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

#### KOHLI HITS 51ST CENTURY

Madam — Kohli came out sensational and passed out in the acid test to prove that he is 'King Kohli' for his brilliant tonne against Pakistan in the Champions Trophy at Dubai. What the experience can deliver during the personal crisis for oneself was Kohli's class act when he hit his 51st ODI tonne with 7 fours to his credit in his century and paved the way for Team India's win. One can observe that this is the innings rated much higher in character because this calls for great perseverance to

#### BSNL turns profitable after 17 years



In its remarkable comeback, the state-run telecom BSNL has posted a Rs 262 crore profit in the quarter ending December 2024. This is the first profitable quarter since 2007. The company's renewed focus on profitability and its future growth strategy have ultimately led it to profit for the first time in the last 17 years. In a cutthroat competition with private players like Airtel and Jio, the revival of chronically ailing BSNL was not

an easy task. But the government kept its trust in its capabilities and announced a Rs 89,047-crore revival package in 2023. Finance and market gurus termed it a waste of taxpayer money and raised doubts on the wisdom of the government. But the company's efforts on network expansion, cost optimisation and customer-centric service enhancements have now borne fruit.

BSNL has successfully reduced its finance costs and overall expenditure, leading to a decline in losses by over Rs 1,800 crore compared to the previous year. The government should be given credit for this achievement of BSNL, which not only allocated spectrum but also granted funds for strengthening network infrastructure.

Manoj Parashar | Ujjain

stay at the wicket with the will to kill to succeed in his important comeback game. When at the time skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill were dismissed, it is Virat's a kind of vengeful vigour and Shreyas Iyer's sensible batting put team India on top to cross Pakistan's target of 242 by six wickets victory. Pakistan's leg spinner Abrar Ahmed was spectacular when he gave the timely breakthrough but Kohli was completely defensive by not scoring a single boundary against the spinners. He showed his shrewd way to play them with a clear focus that he must prove a 'king is always a king' by his historic tonne to help the Indian flag fly high in the stadium.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

#### MELONI EXPOSES GLOBAL HYPOCRISY

Madam — The battle of ideologies has always been a part of the global political stage. But when those who preach neutrality themselves fall into the trap of bias, questions are bound to arise. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni recently made a striking remark on this hypocrisy. She

accurately pointed out - "When I, Trump, and Modi engage in discussions, it is labeled a threat to democracy. But when leftist leaders unite, it is considered a symbol of progress!" This statement is not just an opinion; it exposes the harsh reality of global politics. Why this double standard? Does democracy only mean the acceptance of a single ideology?

Do leaders with differing views not have the right to dialogue and cooperation? If democracy belongs to everyone, then why this discriminatory wall? In today's multipolar world, it is essential to give all perspectives an equal platform. Leaders like Modi, Trump, and Meloni represent the mandates of their respective nations. Ironically, those who claim their dialogue is a threat to democracy are the same people who applaud the alliances of their own ideological counterparts. It is time to recognise this hypocrisy. Democracy is not just for one group-it is for all.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Caught in the middle: The great generational balancing act

Our generation's greatest contribution might be our ability to bridge opposing worldviews. We're creating a new paradigm of family dynamics, blending the two

Remember when we trembled at the sound of our father clearing his throat? When "because I said so" was an unassailable argument, and questioning authority was as foreign as the smartphones that would one day rule our lives? We, the Generation X, find ourselves in an extraordinary position today - delicately balanced between reverential traditions and revolutionary change, between "yes, papa" and "ok, dude." Our generation has witnessed perhaps the most dramatic transformation in human history. We are the last ones who know what it feels like to run home to catch a TV show, to memorise phone numbers, to write letters that took weeks to reach their destination. We're also the first to navigate the brave new world of social media, digital parenting and a workplace that transforms faster than we can update our LinkedIn profiles.



from dinner choices to vacation plans. We find ourselves caught in an amusing dance - instinctively reaching for the authoritarian patterns we inherited, then quickly pivoting to accommodate the more egalitarian expectations of modern parenting. This balancing act becomes even more complex as we care for our aging parents while raising our children. Our parents, products of an era where respect was non-negotiable and tradition was sacrosanct, often struggle to understand why their grandchildren question everything, from religious practices to gender roles.

We become translators of sorts, explaining to our parents why their grandchildren need mental health days, while simultaneously trying to teach our children why touching their grandmother's

feet isn't just an empty ritual. The technological revolution has added another layer to this generational sandwich. While we pride ourselves on mastering email and Facebook, our children roll their eyes at our confused attempts to understand TikTok algorithms or cryptocurrency. Meanwhile, we spend weekends teaching our parents how to make video calls or use digital payment apps. We are the bridge generation, fluent in both analog and digital, traditional and modern, hierarchy and equality.

Our generation has had to rewrite the rulebook of life multiple times. The career advice we received - "join a good company and stay loyal" - seems quaint in an age where our children talk about side hustles and personal branding. The values we were taught - sacrifice, stability, saving for tomorrow - clash with the modern emphasis on self-care, work-life balance, and living in the moment. Perhaps the most challenging aspect is managing the emotional landscape. We were raised to believe that mental health issues were character

flaws, that anxiety was just weakness, and that depression could be cured by "going out for a walk." Now, we find ourselves unlearning these notions, supporting our children's therapy journeys, while also gently helping our parents understand that their grandchild's panic attacks are not just "attention-seeking behaviour." The irony isn't lost on us. The same generation that was told "log kya kahenge" (what will people say) now has to defend their children's right to be themselves, regardless of what people say. We who learned to suppress our emotions now have to validate our children's feelings while managing our parents' disapproval of this "oversensitive" approach. Yet, there's a unique strength in being this sandwich generation. We understand both worlds intimately. We can appreciate our parents' wisdom while embracing our children's progressive ideas. We can see how tradition provides roots while change enables growth.

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



ASHA IYER KUMAR



## FIRST COLUMN

## SHIVARATRI: THE NIGHT OF SHIVA AND SHAKTI

On this sacred night, one can ignite the power of Shiv and Shakti within



ASHWANI GURUJI

Shivratri is the night of Shiv and Shakti, the night of merger, the night of completeness - Understanding this is a sadhana... which can span lifetimes or be accomplished in a moment just, a beautiful journey bestowing myriad siddhis en route... Shiv is an experience. This experience begins at the feet of the Guru and unfolds as per the capacity of the sadhak. Ravan composed the Shiv Tandav Stotram to describe it. Adi Shankaracharya said 'na paapam, na punyam, na saukham, na daukham...' to describe what it's not. These were the Shiv sadhaks of finest quality, a rare phenomenon. What they described was their experience of Shiv; Shiv however is beyond description, for what is limitless cannot be bound in words and meanings. So no amount of reading and writing can grant you the experience, to get that experience you need to tread the path of sadhana, under a Guru.

The first experience of Shiv is the Shakti of Guru. As you walk the path shown by Guru, something that you want manifests in your life. It could be health, relationship, job etc. That becomes your experience of the Shiv tatva - that which has manifested the un-manifested. There are as many examples of such manifestations at Dhyan Ashram in present times as there are narratives from the past of sadhaks who were able to get the boon they desired.

That 'boon' or manifested desire, however, is only an aspect of Shiv. 90 per cent of the people were satisfied with the experience and their focus shifted from Shiv to that 'thing' that they wanted. So the experience of Shiv for them gets limited to that. A thousand names of Shiv, stem from here. Those who don't let their focus shift, move further into the dimension of Shiv. Next, the subtler siddhis of yog start manifesting - clairvoyance, clairaudience, premonition, extrasensory perceptions etc. Many take this to be the ultimate and end their experience here. They immerse themselves in the siddhis and powers so acquired and forget that this too is just an aspect.



The finer sadhaks progress ahead where they start interacting with the energies that run creation, aiding and assisting them in the process of Creation. Mentioned above are just some siddhis, the domain of Shiv however is endless. The key to accessing it is vairagya (detachment). The moment one gets attached to any aspect of Shiv or Siddhi that it bestows, the upward progression stops. Vairagya is possible only when one has the gyan of reality and gyan is possible only when one can sit in dhyan. Dhyan happens only when one has accumulated good karmas, which are acquired from seva or service. Seva is the first step. It is through seva that one increases the size of their container or the experience of Shiv that one can hold.

This Shivratri, embark on the journey to increasing the size of your container... to experience Shiv. Shiv is real, not a myth. Shiv is all-encompassing. All are accepted in the abode of Shiv - bhoot, pret, pisach, yaksh, kinnar, naag, dev, danav and humans. You don't have to be of a special caste to experience the various dimensions of Shiv. Shivratri is the night of Shiv and Shakti, the night of merger, the night of completeness. Guru, on the night of Shivratri, awakens the power of Shiv and Shakti in each and everyone who follows the path shown, without exceptions. In my journey of 25 years,

I have yet to come across a sadhak who under Guru Sanidhya has not experienced Shiv. The seva and sadhana performed on this night grant one the experiences and siddhis of many lifetimes, in just one night. It is a 100 per cent science, not a religion. Try and test it for yourself.

(The writer is a spiritual guru; views are personal)

## Women pioneering change in Indian higher education



SUJATHA KSHIRSAGAR

Women academic leaders and entrepreneurs are not only shaping institutions but also fueling India's socio-economic growth with their grit and determination

Women are leading from the front today - in academics or education, media, healthcare, armed forces and many other fields. The country is witnessing a pivotal shift in how women leaders were perceived before. Indian higher education landscape is also being driven by a strong women-led force, laying the foundation of the nation's progress, unlocking opportunities for socio-economic growth, self-reliance and an improved quality of life. Needless to say, education is essential for women's empowerment in the journey to Viksit Bharat. Educated women drive change, uplift families, strengthen communities and fuel national progress, creating a lasting impact for future generations.

## The current scenario and notable mentions

Indian higher education remains male-dominated when it comes to leadership, even as women are playing a significant role, data suggests. In 2021, women headed just 9.55 per cent of Indian higher educational institutions, whereas men headed 89.57 per cent. This makes more inclusive representation of females in academic leadership extremely important. If we compare India with the international landscape, it still has a huge gap to fill. Internationally, 25 per cent of leadership positions in the top 200 universities globally are occupied by women.

The good news is that the picture is drastically changing, especially over the last few years. Even in the past, the country has seen visionary women leaders like Savitribai Phule, a pioneering social reformer who, alongside her husband Jyotirao Phule, established India's first school for girls in 1848, championing women's education and social justice.

Other notable and pragmatic women leaders who are marking a significant shift in higher education include Ms Rashmi Mittal, Pro-Chancellor, of Lovely Professional University, and Dr Uma Bhardwaj, Vice-Chancellor, of Noida International University. Other honourable mentions include Dr Madhu Chitkara, Pro-Chancellor at Chitkara University and a Higher Education entrepreneur with a vast experience of 42 years, who has built a successful university from scratch; Dr. Ananya Mukherjee, Vice-Chancellor of Shiv Nadar University, Delhi-NCR, recognised as an Institution of Eminence.

Apart from that, women leaders in business and entrepreneurial space have also inspired aspiring Indian youth. Notable mentions include Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and Indra Nooyi. Women leaders are transforming Indian higher education through inclusive environments and innovation. More women in leadership positions increase diversity and bring new perspectives to academia. Through their efforts, they are paving the way for future generations to have a more progressive and equitable educational landscape in India.

## The Challenges Faced by Women Leaders in Academia

The challenges for women leaders include social stereotypes at one end and the barriers of an institution at the other. Several women are even still facing serious prejudices against them regarding their potential as leaders, especially in traditional fields. Women lack opportunities to get mentors and network for their professional advancement.

The chief issues for women leaders world-



APART FROM THAT, WOMEN LEADERS IN BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SPACE HAVE ALSO INSPIRED ASPIRING INDIAN YOUTH. NOTABLE MENTIONS INCLUDE KIRAN MAZUMDAR SHAW AND INDRA NOOYI. WOMEN LEADERS ARE TRANSFORMING INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND INNOVATION

wide relate to work-life balance and insufficient presence in senior leadership positions. India has taken a holistic approach to orient and train women faculty across the country through the University Grants Commission (UGC).

These initiatives are designed to prepare women for leadership roles, equipping them with the right skills and knowledge. Other countries have programs that focus on leadership training and inclusivity to break barriers for women in academia. Some countries have witnessed an impressive increase in the number of women represented in academia, but the world still has a long way to go, including India.

## Women as Educators and Leaders

Empowerment in education is not merely a question of access; it involves equipping women with the role of teachers, leaders, and models. An increased number of women in schools and colleges has acted as a motivating force for girls to achieve excellence in academics. Diverse viewpoints among women in higher education leadership institutions create an inclusive and innovative atmosphere.

Female professors have formed the backbone for progressive educational policy and research quality. Many critical departments and significant research initiatives now have women running them, evidence of their burgeoning influence in university life.

Programmes and fellowships dedicated to providing opportunities for girls and women, especially in these STEM fields, have helped a culture of creativity and excellence flourish within these disciplines. At present, there are some of India's most high-profile universities and institutions, with women at the helm, spearheading the trend of making education more accessible and equitable. Women leaders are

playing an important role in academics.

For instance, women-led institutions, like competitive exam coaching institutions, have been responsible for guiding thousands of students in shaping their aspirations. Thus, it is clear that women leaders can bring transformational change in education and can be great change managers.

## Women as Catalysts or Agents of Change

Women are educators and agents of change. They are innovators who are good leaders in filling knowledge gaps, fostering inclusivity, and empowering communities. Their contribution to a forceful, solution-focused, and responsive workforce is particularly indispensable for the simple reason that it is tantamount to ensuring not only economic prosperity but also social justice.

The most deep-seated effect of women in education has been in adult literacy and skill development. Women educators have led the process of increasing rural and marginalised communities' literacy rates, greatly improving their socio-economic conditions. Female entrepreneurs also are revolutionising education delivery by coming up with innovative solutions for diverse learners across India.

EdTech platforms of female founders have promoted flexible models, digital classroom applications, and AI-based analytics with their introduction; thereby, performance from students at high-quality education gets scaled up because access to more is also made easily feasible. Social development and the tech revolution are mutually supporting each other here.

## The Future of Women's Leadership in Higher Education

Increasing the number of women

leaders in higher education is not only about gender equality; it is a strategic imperative for India's progress.

Women leaders in higher education institutions bring diverse perspectives and transformative decision-making into academic administration, which drives innovation and excellence. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has recognised the importance of women's participation in academia and thus proposed reforms, to ensure gender inclusivity. Through the incorporation of leadership training under the framework of higher education and initiating mentorship opportunities, India can usher in an optimum pipeline of women academic leaders. Furthermore, the vision of Viksit Bharat and Atmanirbhar Bharat is in line with the very need to absorb India's demographic dividend. Education is at the heart of this vision, and empowering women as educators and leaders would be crucial in realising India's aspiration to become Vishwaguru—that is, a global leader in innovation and knowledge.

## Conclusion

Women leaders are undeniably shaping the future of Indian higher education. Despite all existing challenges, their excellence is bringing innumerable positive transformations within the present academia, which will lead to a more inclusive, progressive, and innovative educational landscape. The overall transformation of Indian education and the socio-economic liberalization of India can be achieved by removing all barriers to leadership, implementing supportive policies, and championing women's participation in higher education.

(The writer is President at Career Launcher; views are personal)

## Maha Kumbh 2025: A grand confluence of tradition, technology and transformation

IIT Kanpur research highlights how government initiatives are shaping the Mela—blending ancient traditions with modern infrastructure to enhance accessibility and efficiency

The Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj draws millions of pilgrims worldwide to the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers. As this grand spiritual event unfolds, an ongoing IIT Kanpur study provides real-time insights into stakeholder experiences. This research examines how government initiatives shape pilgrim experiences, blending ancient traditions with modern technology.

For devotees, the Mela remains a deeply spiritual journey, with bathing in the Triveni Sangam seen as a path to salvation. While age-old rituals and processions inspire awe, an extensive logistical network operates behind the scenes to manage massive crowds. A key focus of the study is



PRADIP SWARNAKAR

transportation. With pilgrims arriving from across India and abroad, the government's commitment to improving accessibility is evident. Nearly 40 per cent of attendees rely on public transportation, primarily trains and buses. Despite expanded shuttle services and improved parking facilities, feedback is mixed. While most find transportation satisfactory,

some report overcrowding and delays during peak hours. A hallmark of Maha Kumbh 2025 is its technological integration, earning it the title "Digital Maha Kumbh." Mobile apps, e-wallets, and real-time crowd monitoring enhance the experience for pilgrims and organisers. Many appreciate online registration, virtual darshan booking, and real-time updates on crowd density, transport, and amenities.

These tools streamline accessibility, particularly for international visitors and those from remote areas. However, bridging the digital divide remains a challenge. While tech-savvy pilgrims adapt easily, older attendees and those from rural regions often struggle with digital platforms.

Some report difficulties using smartphones or accessing the internet, highlighting the need for alternative engagement methods. Feedback underscores the importance of inclusive communication strategies blending digital and traditional approaches. Security and crowd management are also key concerns. Managing millions of attendees in Kumbh Mela is a massive undertaking. The government has deployed extensive security personnel, CCTV surveillance, and designated safe zones, including lifeguard-staffed bathing areas. Nearly 93 per cent of respondents feel secure within the Mela's vast grounds, affirming these measures' effectiveness. However, congestion near ghats causes anxiety among some pilgrims,



emphasizing the need for refined crowd management as the event progresses.

Health and sanitation remain top priorities. Overall, 81 per cent of respondents find sanitation facilities adequate, reflecting high satisfaction with cleanliness. Temporary medical camps and mobile health units ensure pilgrims' wellbeing, yet restroom overcrowding persists during peak

hours. Despite thousands of cleaning staff and waste management facilities, additional measures are needed to maintain hygiene during busy periods. These findings highlight commendable efforts while emphasising the need for continued improvements.

Inclusivity is also a focus, with the government enhancing accessibility for differently-abled individuals and senior citizens. Dedicated pathways, toilets, and designated spaces reflect a commitment to inclusive participation. The widely appreciated 'Lost and Found' services further ease concerns, helping separated families navigate the crowd more efficiently. Environmental impact remains a major concern. The government has introduced eco-friendly initiatives, includ-

ing waste segregation, solar-powered lighting and over 25,000 trash bins to reduce the ecological footprint.

Despite these efforts, concerns persist over plastic use and non-biodegradable waste. While 62 per cent of respondents recognise sustainability progress, stronger awareness campaigns and stricter enforcement of eco-friendly practices are needed.

The ongoing study suggests green initiatives must be reinforced through greater public education on waste management and sustainability. As the IIT Kanpur study continues to document stakeholder experiences, the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 is a testament to the evolving nature of large-scale spiritual events. Government initiatives have improved effi-

ciency, security, and inclusivity. Stakeholder feedback highlights the need to refine transportation, expand digital inclusion, enhance crowd management, and address environmental concerns.

The success of the Mela hinges not only on preserving spiritual traditions but also on integrating modern infrastructure, technology, and inclusive governance. More than a massive gathering, the Maha Kumbh exemplifies how government initiatives can transform spiritual events into safer, more efficient, and enriching experiences. As it unfolds, it remains a dynamic confluence of tradition, technology and transformation.

(The author is a professor of Sociology at IIT Kanpur. Views expressed are personal)

## CBSE approves norms for biannual Class 10 exams



Students discuss after appearing in the class 12th board exam conducted by the CBSE. File Photo

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Tuesday approved draft norms for conducting Class-10 board exams twice a year from 2026, officials said. The draft norms will now be put in the public domain and the stakeholders can submit their feedback till March 9 following which the policy will be finalised, they said. As per the draft norms, the first phase of the exams will be conducted from February 17 to March 6, while the second phase will be conducted from May 5 to 20. "Both the examinations will be conducted on full syllabus and the candidates will be

allotted the same examination centres in the two editions. Exam fees will be enhanced and collected for both exams at the time of application filing," a senior board official said. "The first and second editions of the board exams will also act as supplementary exams, and no special exams will be conducted in any circumstances," the official added. The new National Education Policy (NEP) had recommended that to eliminate the "high stakes" aspect of the board exams, all students will be allowed to take the exams on up to two occasions during any given school year.

## Tunnel collapse: Water poses threat to rescuers' lives, says Minister

PTI ■ NAGARKURNOOL

As there is a continuous flow of silt and water in the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel where eight people have been trapped for over three days, experts warned that the lives of the rescue teams could also be in danger if they attempt to venture inside, Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy said on Tuesday. Addressing media persons, Reddy cited experts, who described this as the most complex and difficult tunnel accident in the world or at least in India as there is only one entry or exit to the SLBC tunnel. He opined that the collapse might have taken place due to a slight tectonic shift and as some geological fault lines have given way. "There is one problem. The flow of silt and water into the tunnel at a very high speed continues. So there was one opinion expressed by some experts that the people going into the rescue, even their lives could be endangered. So, we are a responsible government, we are taking the best expert opinion, and we will take a final call on that (on how to go about it)," he said. The Minister noted that experts from 10 agencies such as Indian Army, the Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) of Navy, NDRE, SDRE, GSI, Rat Miners and Singareni Collieries Company Ltd are working round the clock to save the eight lives. He further said a unified command control has been set up which is constantly being monitored by



Rescue team at the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project site where a portion of the tunnel collapsed, in Nagarkurnool district. PTI

Special Chief Secretary Arvind Kumar. "People are relentlessly working in the tunnel. We are getting videos and pictures. They are being assessed by the experts. We will take a combined collective decision," he replied when asked what the current situation is. There was no contact with the trapped persons though oxygen is being pumped into the tunnel continuously. Reddy said the state government is dedicated to saving the lives of the trapped persons and has been using the best possible talent in India and anywhere in the world. Reacting to BRS' criticism that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, who has visited Delhi 36 times, does not have the time to visit those trapped in the SLBC tunnel even after 72 hours, Uttam Reddy termed it as "disgraceful

politics". "Anybody who is criticising, please remember, there cannot be more disgraceful politics. It is shameful that somebody talks about it," he hit back. Recalling that eight people died during a fire accident at Srisailem Left Bank Power Plant and seven were killed at Kaleshwaram Project when BRS was in power, the minister said they never criticised the then government. Despite relentless efforts by several agencies, no breakthrough has been achieved so far in the rescue operations, as thick muck, tangled iron rods, and cement blocks continue to impede the efforts to extricate the trapped persons from the partially collapsed tunnel of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project in since Saturday morning.

## SC questions Delhi's stand on Nitish Katara murder accused

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has questioned the Delhi government's submission that it would not release Sukhdev Yadav alias Pehalwan, serving a 20-year jail term without remission for murder of business executive Nitish Katara in 2002, despite the completion of his actual sentence. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the secretary of the Delhi government's home department to file an affidavit stating on oath that even after the completion 20 years of actual jail term, Yadav would not be released. "Our question is, is it your case that even after completion of 20 years of actual imprisonment, the state will not release the petitioner (Yadav)?" the bench asked the Delhi government counsel.

The counsel responded in the affirmative and said Yadav was sentenced to life imprisonment. The apex court noted the high court, in its verdict delivered on February 6, 2015, sentenced Yadav to "life imprisonment which shall be 20 years of actual imprisonment without consideration of remission" and fined him with Rs 10,000. On Monday, the bench was informed that Yadav would soon complete his 20 years of actual sentence. The bench asked the Delhi government's counsel if a state would read verdicts delivered by the courts this way. The home department secretary was therefore ordered to file the affidavit by February 28 by the bench, which would hear the matter on March 3. Yadav's plea challenged a November 2024 order of the Delhi High Court, which

dismissed his petition for releasing him on furlough for three weeks. On October 3, 2016, the Supreme Court awarded a 25-year jail term without the benefit of remission to Vikas Yadav and his cousin Vishal for their role in the sensational kidnapping and killing of Katara. Co-convict Sukhdev Yadav alias Pehalwan was handed down a 20-year jail term in the case. They were convicted and sentenced for kidnapping Katara from a marriage party on the intervening night of February 16-17, 2002 and then killing him for his alleged affair with Vikas' sister Bharti Yadav. Bharti was the daughter of Uttar Pradesh politician D P Yadav. The trial court observed Katara was murdered as Vishal and Vikas Yadav did not approve of his affair with Bharti as they were from different castes.

## Bogie of passenger train derailed in Haryana



Passengers leave from the site after a bogie of a passenger train, headed from Kurukshetra to Delhi, derailed at Nilokheri. PTI

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The bogie of a passenger train derailed at Nilokheri in Haryana's Karnal district on Tuesday though all the passengers were reported safe, officials said. The passenger train was headed from Kurukshetra to Delhi when the incident took

place, a Government Railway Police (GRP) official said over phone from Karnal, adding that no report of injury to passengers has been received. "When the train travelled barely 100 metres after halting at the Nilokheri railway station, a wheel of the fourth bogie from the rear came off the tracks. The train was stopped immediately,"

the GRP official said. When asked what could be the reason behind the incident, the official said, "It could be a technical issue. The technical team of the Railways will be able to tell the exact cause after a probe." Rail traffic on the affected line has been impacted by the incident, which would be restored soon, he added.

## Decision on Surjewala's plea for electoral rolls in three months: ECI to DHC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court was on Tuesday informed by

the Election Commission of India that it would decide within three months a representation of Congress MP Randeep Singh

Surjewala seeking the electoral rolls for elections held in Haryana and Maharashtra between 2009 and 2024.

Justice Jyoti Singh recorded the submission of the Election Commission of India (ECI) counsel who said since the details related to 2009, it would not be possible to logistically take an immediate decision and sought three months. "Accordingly, this writ petition is disposed of without entering into the merits of the case by taking the stand of the ECI on record that the representation dated

December 29, 2024 will be decided as expeditiously as possible and not later than three months from today," the court said. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Surjewala, submitted the ECI hadn't decide the December 29, 2024 representation seeking supply of electoral rolls for the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections conducted in Haryana and Maharashtra between 2009 and 2024.

## Crowds swell into night at Kumbh on Shivratri eve

From page 1

"Jai Ganga Maiyya, I had my 'snan' and it feels reinvigorating. This is my first time at any Kumbh Mela, I am glad I could be part of it," said a pilgrim from Jharkhand's Sahibganj, who took a dip along with his wife and son at around 2 am. As the crowds continued to grow, many just sitting down at and near the Triveni Sangam, police personnel in uniform walked near the banks instructing people to not put any bags on ground near the edges of the ghats, and not jostle for space. "Aage badhiye, aage badhiye" (move forward, move forward)," shouted a policeman on duty to people and told them not to push and shove, repeatedly blowing his whistle to manage the crowd. The rush kept increasing. Many got separated from their loved ones and friends either at the banks or at other parts of the Mela area. The 'Lost and Found' Centre at Sector 3, Akshay Vat Road was abuzz with activity even at 3 am. Ramesh Kaidan from Madhya

Pradesh had lost his wife waited at the centre anxiously. So did Munnail Thakur from Bihar's West Chandigarh district who looked out for his brother, sister-in-law and grandson. A flurry of announcements were made on loudspeakers in the Mela area while a digital screen at the centre displayed names (mostly with photos) of persons lost or found by authorities. The Triveni Marg connecting Naya Pul near Minto Park and the Maha Kumbh Mela area was an ocean of people, some going to the ghats and others getting back. Around 3.45 am, a group of 34 pilgrims — friends and family members — from Kangra in Himachal Pradesh were on their way out. And a huge batch of 100 devotees from Maharashtra, sporting matching saffron vests, was on its way for a dip straight from the Prayagraj station. Dhanraj Wasadekar, one of the pilgrims from Maharashtra, said he was attending Kumbh Mela for the first time. "We are all from different parts of Maharashtra, who converged at Mumbai and

then from there we took a train to reach Prayagraj," he told PTI while walking the Triveni Marg. The 45-day religious congregation, which began on January 13, culminates on February 26. Over 60 crore people have taken a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam since it started, according to the Uttar Pradesh government. Vendors selling 'shivling' rudraksha garlands, water containers to carry river water, and ceremonial threads could be seen doing business the whole night. "This place gets crowd of pilgrims throughout the day, the ghats are choked all night too. Sangam is always abuzz with life and constant movement of people," said Manisha, a ceremonial threads seller from Rajasthan. A food court just outside Maha Kumbh Mela area, and located along Triveni Marg, was open for business even close to 4 am as were many street-side eateries and stalls, feeding exhausted pilgrims and giving them the energy to carry on their journey, faith in their heart and a prayer on their lips.

## Centre seeks time to deport undocumented Assam migrants

From page 1

The top court on February 4 slammed the Assam government for keeping persons declared foreigners in detention centers indefinitely and not deporting them saying if it was waiting for "some muhurat". Observing Assam was suppressing facts, the court said once the detainees were identified as foreigners, they ought to be deported immediately. The top court expressed surprise at the State Government's explanation that it was not sending nationality verification forms to the Ministry of External Affairs as detainees' addresses in the foreign country were unknown. Calling it a "defective" affidavit, the top court on January 22 slammed the Assam government for not stipulating reasons for

detaining 270 foreigners at the Matia transit camp. The top court directed Assam State Legal Services Authority to conduct surprise visits at the camp to check on the facility's hygiene and food quality. The bench was hearing a plea concerning the aspect of deportation and facilities at the detention centres in Assam. While hearing the matter on May 16, 2024, the apex court said the Centre must take immediate steps for deporting 17 foreigners at the detention centre in Matia and asked to prioritise the deportation of those who had spent more than two years in the camp. The plea further sought a direction to the Assam Government to not detain any person declared a foreigner by the tribunal until it could show proof of a possible deportation in near future.

## Maharashtra considering deploying security in Karnataka-bound buses

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik on Tuesday said they were mulling to deploy security marshals or police personnel in the state transport buses going to neighbouring Karnataka, in wake of an attack on its staff. Maharashtra Minister of State for Home Yogesh Kadam said it is even the Karnataka government's responsibility to provide security to passengers and if they don't do it, then the (Maharashtra) state government will. The state government ordered the suspension of Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) buses to Karnataka on Saturday after an attack on a vehicle of the undertaking and its driver in Chitradurga

on Friday night allegedly by pro-Kannada activists. On the same day, a conductor of the state-owned transport corporation bus of Karnataka was allegedly assaulted in Belagavi, bordering Maharashtra, for not replying to a girl in Marathi. Both the incidents have since heightened tension in the border areas of the two states. Belagavi has a substantial Marathi population and a section among them often demands that this border district of Karnataka be merged with Maharashtra, which is opposed by pro-Kannada activists. "Marathi is our pride and we need to look after the security of our passengers," Sarnaik told PTI Videos. He also stressed that passengers should not face difficulties due to the

suspension of bus services by both the states. Senior officials of the transport department were talking to their Karnataka counterparts to resolve the issue, the minister said. "As transport minister, I have to think about the security of our passengers. If there are some anti-social elements, then we need to think about deploying security marshals or police personnel in our state-run buses which go to Karnataka," Sarnaik said. "Marathi is our pride and we need to look after the security of our passengers, and the issue will be discussed in the state cabinet meeting too," he said. The minister said Maharashtra has its "pride" and will not tolerate if people of the neighbouring state bully "our people".

## Sajjan Kumar convicted for life

From page 1

Nothing "adverse was reported about Kumar's behaviour" and his conduct was "satisfactory" according to a jail report, the court added. "The 'satisfactory' conduct of the convict as per the report of the jail authorities, the ailments from which he is reportedly suffering, the fact that the convict has roots in the society and the possibility of his reformation and rehabilitation are material considerations which, in my opinion, tilt the scales in favour of sentence for life imprisonment instead of death penalty," the order said. Referring to the jail report, the judge observed Kumar was unable to carry out his daily routine properly owing to poor health. The judge noted the psychiatric and psychological evaluation report of the convict, which revealed that he was under the treatment of the Department of Medicine, Urology and

Neurology at Safdarjung Hospital and was prescribed anti depressive and sleep medicines. The judge went on to add that the case at hand was part of the same incident and could be seen in continuity of the incident for which the Kumar was sentenced to life imprisonment by the Delhi High Court on December 17, 2018. He was then found guilty of having caused the death of five persons during a similar incident of rioting post the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. "Though the killings of two innocent persons in the present case is no less an offence, however, the above noted circumstances, in my opinion, do not make this a 'rarest of rare case' warranting imposition of death penalty," the court said. The judge therefore awarded life imprisonment to Kumar for being part of the mob which set afire the house of the

victims and "brutally killed" the two victims aside from looting their belongings. Referring to the jail report, the judge observed Kumar was unable to carry out his daily routine properly owing to poor health. The judge noted the psychiatric and psychological evaluation report of the convict, which revealed that he was under the treatment of the Department of Medicine, Urology and Neurology at Safdarjung Hospital and was prescribed anti depressive and sleep medicines. Kumar otherwise did not show any signs and symptoms of mental illness or requiring any psychiatric intervention at present, the judge noted. The judge fined Kumar with approximately Rs 2.4 lakh. All the sentences were ordered by the court to run concurrently. Reacting to the verdict, Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee (DSGMC) general secretary Jagdip Singh Kahlon said they are not happy with

the punishment awarded to Sajjan Kumar. "We are upset that someone like Sajjan Kumar was not given the death penalty. I believe if he had been given a death sentence, it would have been better, and we would have felt satisfied...After 41 years, even if he got life imprisonment, justice has prevailed. I respect the verdict of the court," Kahlon said. The 1984 anti-Sikh riots were triggered by the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984, by her Sikh bodyguards, Beant Singh and Satwant Singh. The assassination occurred in the wake of Operation Blue Star, a military operation that year in June, which was undertaken to remove Sikh militants, including Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who were holed up in the Golden Temple, a holy shrine for Sikhs in Punjab's Amritsar. According to a report of Nanavati Commission,

constituted to probe the violence and its aftermath, there were 587 FIRs filed in Delhi in relation to the riots that saw killings of 2733 people. Of the total, about 240 FIRs were closed by police as "untraced" and 250 cases resulted in acquittal. Only 28 cases of 587 FIRs resulted in convictions, in which about 400 persons were convicted. About 50 were convicted for murder, including Kumar. Kumar, an influential Congress leader and an MP at the time, was accused in a case over the killings of five persons in Delhi's Palam Colony on November 1 and 2 in 1984. He was awarded life imprisonment by the Delhi High Court in the case and his appeal challenging the punishment is pending before the Supreme Court. Two other appeals are pending before Delhi high court and the Supreme Court against Kumar's acquittal and life imprisonment in two other cases respectively.

## AAP WIPED DELHI'S MONEY: CAG

From page 1

The policy further permitted a single applicant to operate up to 54 liquor vends, (previous limit was two), paving the way for monopolies and cartelisation. Earlier, government corporations operated 377 retail vends, while 262 were run by private individuals. The new policy created 32 retail zones with 849 vends, but licenses were given to only 22 private entities - reducing transparency and fairness. The CAG also noted that the Excise Department allowed L1 licensees to set their own Ex-Distillery Price (EDP) for high-priced liquor, leading to price manipulation. The report also highlighted that the AAP's Excise Department approved liquor vends in nonconforming (residential/mixed land use) areas without mandatory approval from MCD or DDA. - Inspection teams falsely declared 4 vends in Zone 23

as being in commercial areas, in some cases applicants themselves admitted that the vends were in residential/mixed land use areas, yet licenses were issued. Due to these violations, all four illegal liquor vends were sealed by MCD in early 2022. This proves that due process was bypassed. The report also pointed out key exemptions and relaxations with significant revenue impact were granted without Cabinet approval or consulting the LG, violating legal procedures. According to CAG, violating of testing rules has put public at risk. The Excise Department issued licenses even when quality test reports were missing or non-compliant with Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) norms. Some test reports submitted by licensees were from labs not accredited by the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories

(NABL), violating FSSAI guidelines. "In 51 per cent of foreign liquor test cases, reports were either older than one year, missing, or had no date - indicating QC negligence. Reports on harmful substances like heavy metals, methyl alcohol etc were absent or ignored, raising serious safety concerns," it said. The CAG stated that Excise Intelligence Bureau (EIB) failed to take proactive action against smuggling, especially of country liquor which made up 65 per cent of seized stock. They merely recorded seizures instead of taking proactive action. "It was observed that licenses were issued without ensuring solvency, submission of audited financial statements, submission of data regarding sales and wholesale price declared in other states and across the year, verification of criminal antecedents from the competent authority etc as required under the Rules," it added.



# Desperation grows in northern Gaza At least 6 infants in Gaza die from hypothermia

Palestinians struggle to rebuild homes

AP ■ BEIT LAHIYA (GAZA STRIP)

When night falls over northern Gaza, much of the cityscape of collapsed buildings and piled wreckage turns pitch black. Living inside the ruins of their home, Rawia Tambora's young sons get afraid of the dark, so she turns on a flashlight and her phone's light to comfort them, for as long as the batteries last. Displaced for most of the 16-month-long war, Tambora is back in her house. But it is still a frustrating shell of a life, she says: There is no running water, electricity, heat or services, and no tools to clear the rubble around them. Nearly 6,000,000 Palestinians flooded back into northern Gaza under the now month-old ceasefire in Gaza, according to the United Nations. After initial relief and joy at being back at their homes — even if damaged or destroyed — they now face the reality of living in the wreckage for the foreseeable future. "Some people wish the war had never ended, feeling it would have been better to be killed," Tambora said. "I don't know what we'll do long-term. My

brain stopped planning for the future." The six-week ceasefire is due to end Saturday, and it's uncertain what will happen next. There are efforts to extend the calm as the next phase is negotiated. If fighting erupts again, those who returned to the north could find themselves once again in the middle of it. **A massive rebuilding job has no way to start:** A report last week by the World Bank, UN and European Union estimated it will cost some USD 53 billion to rebuild Gaza after entire neighbourhoods were decimated by Israel's bombardment and offensives against Hamas militants. At the moment, there is almost no capacity or funding to start significant rebuilding. A priority is making Gaza immediately livable. Earlier in February, Hamas threatened to hold up hostage releases unless more tents and temporary shelters were allowed into Gaza. It then reversed and accelerated hostage releases after Israel agreed to let in mobile homes and construction equipment. Humanitarian agencies have stepped up services, setting up free kitchens and water delivery stations, and distributing tents and tarps to hundreds of thousands across Gaza, according to the UN. President Donald Trump turned up the pressure by call-

ing for the entire population of Gaza to be removed permanently so the US can take over the territory and redevelop it for others. Rejecting the proposal, Palestinians say they want help to rebuild for themselves. Gaza City's municipality started fixing some water lines and clearing rubble from streets, said a spokesperson, Asem Alnabih. But it lacks heavy equipment. Only a few of its 40 bulldozers and five dump trucks still work, he said. Gaza is filled with over 50 million tons of rubble that would take 100 trucks working at full capacity over 15 years to clear away, the UN estimates. **Families try to get by day by day:** Tambora's house in the northern town of Beit Lahiya was destroyed by an airstrike early in the war, so she and her family lived in the nearby Indonesian Hospital, where she worked as a nurse. After the ceasefire, they moved back into the only room in her house that was semi-intact. The ceiling is partially collapsed, the walls are cracked; the surviving fridge and sink are useless with no water or electricity. They stack their sheets and blankets in a corner. Tambora said her 12-year-old son lugs heavy containers of water twice a day from distribution stations. They also have to find firewood for cooking. The influx of aid means there

is food in the markets and prices went down, but it remains expensive, she said. With the Indonesian Hospital too damaged to function, Tambora walks an hour each day to work at the Kamal Adwan Hospital. She charges her and her husband's phones using the hospital generator. Many of Tambora's relatives returned to find nothing left of their homes, so they live in tents or on next to the rubble that gets blown away by winter winds or flooded during rains, she said. Asmaa Dwaima and her family returned to Gaza City but had to rent an apartment because their home in the Tel al-Hawa neighbourhood was destroyed. It was only weeks after returning that she went to visit their four-story house, now a pile of flattened and burned wreckage. "I couldn't come here because I was afraid. I had an image of my house in my mind — its beauty, and warmth... I was afraid to face this truth," the 25-year-old dentist said. "They don't just destroy stone, they are destroying us and our identity." Her family had to rebuild the house once before, when it was levelled by airstrikes during a round of fighting between Israel and Hamas in 2014, she said. For the time being, they have no means to rebuild now. "We need to remove the rub-

ble because we want to pull out clothes and some of our belongings," she said. "We need heavy equipment... There are no bricks or other construction tools and, if available, it's extremely expensive." **Desperation is growing:** Tess Ingram, a spokesperson with UNICEF who visited northern Gaza since the ceasefire, said the families she met are "grieving the lives that they used to live as they begin to rebuild." Their desperation, she said, "is becoming more intense." Huda Skaik, a 20-year-old student, is sharing a room with her three siblings and parents at her grandparents' house in Gaza City. It's an improvement from life in the tent camps of central Gaza where they were displaced for much of the war, she said. There, they had to live among strangers, and their tent was washed away by rain. At least here they have walls and are with family, she said. Before the war interrupted, Skaik had just started studying English literature at Gaza's Islamic University. She is now enrolled in online classes the university is organizing. But the internet is feeble, and her electricity relies on solar panels that don't always work. "The worst part is that we're just now grasping that we lost it all," she said. "The destruction is massive, but I'm trying to remain positive."

At least 6 infants in Gaza die from hypothermia

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Palestinian medics say at least six infants have died from hypothermia in the last two weeks in the Gaza Strip, as a UN official warned that the Trump administration's suspension of funding to the World Health Organisation withheld money for critical operations in the territory. A fragile ceasefire that took hold last month paused 15 months of war between Israel and the Hamas militant group. But hundreds of thousands of people are still living in squalid tent camps or bombed-out buildings with little shelter from the cold, and temperatures have plunged in recent days. Dr Rik Peepker, the WHO representative for Occupied Palestinian Territories, said the funds suspension leaves six areas underfunded, including EMT operations, rehabilitation of health facilities, coordination with partner organisations and medical evacuations. Dr Ahmed al-Farah, head of the paediatric department at the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, told The Associated Press that it received the body of a two-month-old girl on Tuesday. He said another two infants were treated for frostbite, with one of them discharged. Saeed Saleh, of the

Patient's Friends Hospital in Gaza City, said five infants aged one month or younger have died from the cold over the last two weeks. Zaher al-Wahedi, head of the Gaza Health Ministry's records department, said it has recorded 15 deaths from hypothermia this winter. The territory on the Mediterranean coast experiences cold and wet winters, with temperatures dropping below 10 degrees Celsius (50 degrees Fahrenheit) at night. **Freed Israeli hostage says faith kept her going through Gaza captivity:** Agam Berger, a former hostage released by Hamas, said it was her Jewish faith that sustained her during her 16-month ordeal in the Gaza Strip. Berger was a military spotter who was captured during Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack that ignited the war. Berger told Israeli public radio Reshet Bet on Tuesday that she was held in tunnels and apartments with other female captives. She was given two meals a day, pita and rice, and had some access to media. In January 2024, Berger said her captors brought her and other hostages two Jewish prayer books, as well as other objects left behind by Israeli soldiers, such as a newspaper and military maps. She said around the first Hanukkah she spent in

captivity in December 2023, in a tunnel with four other hostages, they asked their captors for candles to mark the holiday, and they brought them one. **Lebanon's prime minister says only armed forces can defend the nation:** Lebanon's new prime minister has read his government policy statement stating that only the country's armed forces should defend the nation in case of war. Nawaf Salam was picked to form a new government last month after a devastating war between Israel and Hezbollah that killed over 4,000 people and caused widespread destruction. Hezbollah has kept its weapons over the past decades saying it is necessary to defend Lebanon against Israel. But many in Lebanon have been calling on the group to disarm, and such calls intensified during the latest war that stopped when a US-brokered ceasefire went into effect on November 27. Salam said Tuesday that the government asserts that Lebanon has the right to defend itself in case of "aggression" and only the state has the right to have weapons. He also said that the government takes measures to liberate land occupied by Israel "through its forces only."

## Russia, Indonesia hold talks to strengthen ties on defence, security

**Jakarta (AP):** Russia and Indonesia took steps on Tuesday to strengthen their defence ties with a meeting between a top Russian security official and Indonesia's defence minister in the capital of Jakarta as Moscow's war on Ukraine entered its fourth year. Ahead of the visit by Sergei Shoigu, secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council, the Russian news agency RIA Novosti said he would discuss ways to deepen a defense partnership with Indonesia's Defense Minister Sjafriz Sjamsoeddin. The two officials would also discuss "cooperation in other areas of mutual interest", the agency said, citing a Russian government statement. Shoigu's visit, the first stop in a five-day Asia tour that also includes Malaysia, comes after Indonesia — the world's most populous Muslim-majority country and Southeast Asia's largest economy — was admitted as full member to the BRICS bloc of developing economies, an alliance where Russia is one of the founding members. Indonesian officials said ahead of Shoigu's arrival that the sides would exchange views on international and regional issues as Russia hopes to deepen its defense engagement with Southeast Asia countries. Shoigu will also pay a courtesy call on Indonesian President

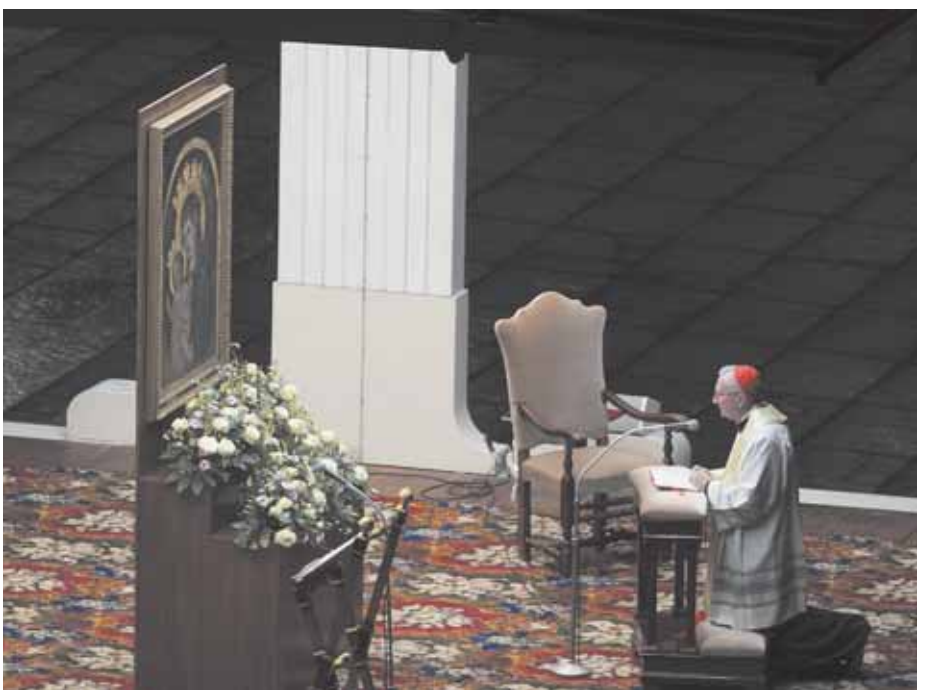
Prabowo Subianto before departing for Malaysia on Wednesday. Shoigu declined to comment to the media after his meeting with Sjamsoeddin. Indonesia's Defence Ministry spokesperson Brig. Gen. Frega Wenas told reporters that Moscow and Jakarta "share an ambition to further broaden and deepen our defence relationship" and that Shoigu's visit reflected the highest level of commitment to bilateral ties. Indonesia and the Russian navy held a joint drill last November in Indonesia's East Java Sea. Also, Jakarta has purchased Russian defense equipment, including Sukhoi fighter jets, BTR-80A military transport armoured and other combat vehicles, helicopters and assault rifles. Subianto, who has made strengthening Indonesia's military a priority, also wants to buy submarines, frigates and more fighter jets, and step up defence cooperation with other countries. Last August, as the country's president-elect, he met Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin. Indonesia has sought to maintain a neutral position since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Subianto's predecessor, Joko Widodo, was the first Asian leader who visited both Moscow and Kyiv in July 2022, hoping to push for a ceasefire.

## Pope meets Vatican No. 2 to discuss sainthood candidates

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis, hospitalised in critical condition with double pneumonia, was well enough to meet with the Vatican secretary of state to approve new decrees for saints and call a formal meeting to set the dates for their canonisation, the Vatican said on Tuesday. The audience, which occurred Monday, signalled that the machinery of the Vatican was still grinding on and looking ahead even with Francis, 88, hospitalised and doctors warning his prognosis is guarded. The Vatican's Tuesday noon bulletin announced that Francis had approved decrees for five people for beatification and two for canonisation during an audience with Cardinal Pietro Parolin and Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra, the so-called Vatican "substitute" or chief of staff. It was the first known time the pope had met with Parolin, who is essentially the Vatican prime minister, since his February 14 hospitalisation. The Vatican statement said that during the audience, Francis had "decided to convene a consistory about the future canonisations." Such an audience and decision is par for the course when Francis is at the Vatican. He regularly approves decrees from the Vatican's saint-making office, albeit during audiences with the head of the office, not Parolin. But the forward-looking sense of the future consistory was signifi-

cant, given his illness. The only other outsider who is known to have visited the pope, other than his personal secretaries and medical personnel, is Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, who visited February 19. In a subsequent bulletin, the Vatican announced that Francis had additionally named a handful of new bishops for Brazil, named a new archbishop for Vancouver and modified the law for the Vatican City State to create a new hierarchy. **Pope slept well:** On Tuesday morning, the Vatican's typically brief morning update said: "The pope slept well, all night." The previous evening, doctors had said he remained in critical condition with double pneumonia but reported a "slight improvement" in some laboratory results. In the most upbeat bulletin in days, the Vatican said Francis had resumed work from his hospital room, calling a parish in Gaza City that he has kept in touch with since the war there began. The Argentine pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, has been hospitalized since February 14 at Rome's Gemelli hospital and doctors have said his condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease before the pneumonia set in. But in Monday's update, they said he hadn't had any more respiratory crises since Saturday, and the flow and concentration of supplemental oxygen has been slightly



Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State during a rosary prayer service held for the health of Pope Francis in St Peter's Square at The Vatican, on Monday

**Allies and ordinary faithful hopeful:** Francis' right-wing critics have been spreading dire rumours about his condition, but his allies have cheered him on and expressed hope that he will pull through. Many noted that from the very night of his election as pope, Francis had asked for the prayers of ordinary faithful, a request he repeats daily. "I'm a witness of everything he did for the church, with a great love of Jesus," Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga told La Repubblica. "Humanly speaking, I don't think it's time for him to go to Paradise." Maradiaga, a founding member of Francis' inner circle of cardinal advisers, said he himself had been near death with COVID-19, on high flows of oxygen like Francis. "I know the pope may be suffering and as a result I feel closer to him in prayer." At Gemelli on a rainy Tuesday morning, ordinary Romans and visitors alike were also praying for the pope and reflecting on the teachings he has imparted over nearly 12 years. Hoang Phuc Nguyen, who lives in Canada but was visiting Rome to participate in a Holy Year pilgrimage, took the time to come to Gemelli to say a special prayer for the pope at the statue of St John Paul II outside the main entrance. "We heard that he is in the hospital right now and we are very worried about his health," Nguyen said. "He is our father and it is our responsibility to pray for him."

## Trump backs Musk as he roils federal workforce

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump backed Elon Musk's demand that federal employees explain their recent accomplishments by the end of Monday or risk getting fired, even as government agency officials were told that compliance with Musk's edict was voluntary. Confusion and anger over the situation spawned new litigation and added to turmoil within the federal workforce. "What he's doing is saying, 'Are you actually working?'" Trump said in the Oval Office during a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. "And then, if you don't answer, like, you're sort of semi-fired or you're fired, because a lot of people aren't answering because they don't even exist." The Republican president said Musk's Department of Government Efficiency has found "hundreds of billions of dollars in fraud" as he suggested that federal paychecks are going to nonexistent employees. He did not present evidence for his claims. Even as Trump and Musk pressed their case, the Office of Personnel Management

informed agency leaders that their workers were not required to respond by the deadline of 11:59 p.m. EST Monday, according to a person with knowledge of the conversation who requested anonymity to discuss internal matters. The conflicting directives led to varying advice for federal employees, depending on where they work. Some were told to answer the request for a list of five things that they did last week, others were informed it was optional, and others were directed not to answer at all. Musk bristled at resistance, saying federal workers "hate even the tiniest amount of accountability." He continued to threaten firings hours after employees were told that they didn't need to comply with his demands. "Subject to the discretion of the President, they will be given another chance," he posted on X, his social media platform. "Failure to respond a second time will result in termination." Attorneys representing unions, businesses, veterans and conservation organizations filed an updated lawsuit in federal court in California on Monday, arguing Musk had violated the law

by threatening mass firings. The lawsuit, spearheaded by the State Democracy Defenders Fund, called it "one of the most massive employment frauds in the history of this country." Anna Kelly, a White House deputy press secretary, criticized the litigation by saying "in the time it took these employees on taxpayer-funded salaries to file a frivolous lawsuit, they could have briefly recapped their accomplishments to their managers, as is common in the private sector, 100 times over." Musk is leading Trump's efforts to overhaul and downsize the federal government. They've urged employees to resign, directed agencies to lay off probationary workers and halted work at some agencies altogether. There has been pushback in protests around Washington and from within the government. The Office of Special Counsel, a watchdog for the federal workforce, said Monday that the firing of several probationary workers may be illegal. Trump is trying to fire the office's leader, Hampton Dellinger, in a case that has reached the US Supreme Court.

## 4 workers killed as elevated part of highway being built in South Korea collapses

**Seoul (AP):** Elevated parts of a highway under construction collapsed in South Korea on Tuesday, killing four workers and injuring six others, officials said. Ten people were working on the site near the city of Cheonan, about 90 kilometers (55 miles) south of Seoul. They fell when it collapsed and were trapped in the rubble, the National Fire Agency said. One was found dead in the rubble. Eight injured workers were sent to hospitals before two of them were declared dead there later. The 10th

worker who was missing for hours was eventually discovered dead, according to fire agency officials. The fire agency said in a statement that five remained in serious condition. The cause of the collapse wasn't immediately known. Acting President Choi Sang-mok urged authorities to mobilise all available personnel and equipment to salvage the workers. About 50 fire trucks, three helicopters and some 150 personnel were mobilised for the rescue effort.

## Unknown illness kills over 50 people in part of Congo

AP ■ KINSHASA (CONGO)

An unknown illness has killed over 50 people in northwestern Congo, according to doctors on the ground and the World Health Organisation on Monday. The interval between the onset of symptoms and death has been 48 hours in the majority of cases, and "that's what's really worrying", Serge Ngalebat, medical director of Bikoro Hospital, a regional monitoring centre, told The Associated Press. The latest disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of

Congo began on January 21, and 419 cases have been recorded including 53 deaths. According to the WHO's Africa office, the first outbreak in the town of Boloko began after three children ate a bat and died within 48 hours following hemorrhagic fever symptoms. There have long been concerns about diseases jumping from animals to humans in places where wild animals are popularly eaten. The number of such outbreaks in Africa has surged by more than 60 per cent in the last decade, the WHO said in 2022. After the

second outbreak of the current mystery disease began in the town of Bomate on February 9, samples from 13 cases have been sent to the National Institute for Biomedical Research in Congo's capital, Kinshasa, for testing, the WHO said. All samples have been negative for Ebola or other common hemorrhagic fever diseases like Marburg. Some tested positive for malaria. Last year, another mystery flu-like illness that killed dozens of people in another part of Congo was determined to be likely malaria.

## China not keen to join Trump's 50% defence cut proposal

**Beijing (PTI):** China on Tuesday appeared not keen to join US President Donald Trump's proposal for a 50 per cent cut in defence budget by the US, Russia and China saying that its "limited" defence spending is to protect its sovereignty, security and development interests. China's "limited defence spending is completely out of the need of safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests, and the need of maintaining world peace,"

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said reacting to Trump's proposals floated earlier this month. Media reports had quoted Trump as saying on February 13 that "one of the first meetings I want to have is with President Xi of China, President Putin of Russia. And I want to say: 'Let's cut our military budget in half.'" "And we can do that. And I think we'll be able to do it," he said. Russian President Vladimir

Putin, in his reaction on Monday, termed it as a good idea. "I think it's a good idea. The US would cut by 50 per cent and we would cut by 50 per cent and then China would join, if it wanted," Putin was quoted as saying in a television interview. Asked for his reaction to Trump and Putin's comments, Lin told a media briefing here that China is committed to peaceful development but its "limited" defence spending is to defend its sovereignty and

development interests. "China upholds a self-defence strategy, pursues coordinated development between its economy and national defence, and never engages in any arms race with any country", he said adding that Beijing has worked for world peace through concrete actions and injected stability and certainty to the world. China, which is the second largest spender on defence after the US, last year increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 232 billion

(1.67 trillion Yuan) as it continues with the massive modernisation of its military of all its armed forces. Speculation is rife that Beijing may increase its defence spending this year too amid Trump's assertion to further ramp up the US military. China is due to unveil its annual budget, including the defence spending at the annual session of its Parliament, the National People's Congress, (NPC) which is scheduled to begin from March 5.

## India imported 49 Billion Euro worth of Russian oil in 2024

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India, the world's third largest oil consuming and importing nation, bought crude oil worth 49 Billion Euros from Russia in the third year of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, a global think tank said. India, which has traditionally sourced its oil from the Middle East, began importing a large volume of oil from Russia soon after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This is primarily because Russian oil was available at a significant discount to other international benchmarks due to western sanctions and some European countries shunning purchases. This led to India's imports of Russian oil seeing a dramatic rise, growing from less than one per cent of its total crude oil imports to a staggering 40 per cent in a short period. "Russia's stronghold over new markets has solidified

in the third year of the invasion. The three biggest buyers, China (EUR 78 Billion), India (EUR 49 Billion) and Turkey (EUR 34 Billion) were responsible for 74 per cent of Russia's total revenues from fossil fuels in the third year of the invasion," Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air said in its latest report (CREA). The value of India's import saw an eight per cent year-on-year increase, it said. Russia's total global fossil fuel earnings in the third year of the invasion reached 242 Billion Euro and have totalled 847 Billion Euro since the invasion of Ukraine. Some of the refineries in India turned Russian crude oil into fuels like petrol and diesel that were exported to Europe and other G7 countries. "In the third year of the invasion, G7+ countries imported EUR 18 Billion of oil products from six

refineries in India and Turkey that process Russian crude. An estimated EUR nine Billion of this was refined from Russian crude," the CREA report said. In the first three quarters of 2024, as refineries in India and Turkey increased their consumption of Russian crude, the volume of Russian crude used to create products for G7+ countries jumped by an estimated 10 per cent. Concurrently, this also contributed to a rise in the price of Russian oil, boosting the value of the crude used for these exports by an estimated 25 per cent, it said. The EU is the biggest importer of oil products from India's and Turkey's refineries. On average, 13 per cent of these refineries' total production is targeted towards exports for the bloc in the third year of the invasion. The top-five importers within the EU were the Netherlands (3.3 Billion

Euro), France (1.4 Billion Euro), Romania (1.2 Billion Euro), Spain (1.1 Billion Euro), and Italy (949 Million Euro). The single-biggest buyer was Australia, whose imports from these refineries totalled 3.38 Billion Euro in the third year of the invasion. In the third year of the invasion, 23 per cent of the oil transhipped in EU waters was destined for China, 11 per cent for India, 10 per cent for South Korea, and two per cent for Turkey, with the remainder distributed among other markets. "CREA's data shows that from February to September 2024, 331 shipments arriving in India's Sikka port (in Gujarat) averaged USD 90.8 per barrel," it said. In this period, 65 per cent of the tankers were subject to the cap. "Applying the price cap to cost, insurance and freight (CIF) price would have cut Russia's crude export revenues by 34 per cent —

about 5.8 Billion in 2024," it said. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, it triggered a series of sanctions from the US, the European Union, and other western nations, aimed at crippling Russia's economy. One of the main sanctions was on Russian oil exports, which significantly impacted Russia's ability to sell oil to European markets. As a result, Russia began offering crude oil at heavily discounted prices in an attempt to find new buyers for its oil. India, with its large energy needs and an economy sensitive to oil price fluctuations, found this offer too attractive to ignore. The price discount on Russian oil, sometimes as much as USD 18-20 per barrel lower than the market price of other oil, allowed India to procure oil at a much cheaper rate. The discounts have, however, shrunk in recent times to less than USD 3 a barrel.

## Centre urge companies to set up skill centres in-house

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The Centre has urged the corporate sector to set up skill centres in-house so that the employability of graduating youth is improved and the overall hiring scenario is boosted, an official said on Tuesday. Ministry of Corporate Affairs Secretary Deepti Gaur Mukherjee said that there is a need to upscale the numbers of skilled youth in society. Under the Prime Minister Internship Scheme (PMIS) launched in 2024, the target is to provide skills to 1.25 lakh youth in the pilot phase and one crore over the next five years. Speaking at an event organised by CII here, Mukherjee said, "The response from companies is very encouraging and there is a need to upscale the numbers. The companies should set

up skilling cells in-house so that the quantum of the employable workforce increases." The internship programme under PMIS has been made a part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) with the view to provide flexibility. "This internship programme is a part of CSR and not a normal HR function. This will provide flexibility to the programme. Under the scheme, the industry will benefit from getting employable workforce which will contribute to the society," she said. Mukherjee said that 50 per cent of the population in India is below the age of 28 years. "This is a huge demographic dividend. If the youth of the country are not skilled, the demographic dividend will turn into a demographic nightmare," the official said. She said the internship

programme will help the youth learn teamwork and improve communication skills. "The entire government scheme on internship is a three-way partnership between industry, government and the youth", Mukherjee said. Ambuja Neotia Group chairman Harshvardhan Neotia said the industry is facing an issue of employability of youth who are graduating. The internship programme provides a wonderful tool to boost employability and job creation, he said. Renowned corporate houses like ITC, Emami, Reliance and HDFC Bank are participating in the programme. Under PMIS, individuals, aged between 21 and 24 years, are given 12-month internship opportunities in the country's top 500 companies.

## Enable MSMEs to grow through right policy, ADB to MP government

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh must look to frame policies for MSMEs to enable them to grow into large companies, which can compete globally, a senior official of the Asian Development Bank said on Tuesday. Speaking at the Madhya Pradesh Global Investors Summit (MP GIS) 2025, Asian Development Bank (ADB) Deputy Country Director Aarti Mehra complimented the state for its achievements in tackling poverty and stand out performance in agriculture, specially in organic farming. "It (Madhya Pradesh) has also done really well in tackling poverty. It is among the fast improving states of the country. Multidimensional poverty (in the state) has declined between 2015 and 2021 at a dramatic rate of 15.9

per cent and that's really commendable when you compare it to the national average of 9.9 per cent," she said. On the MSME sector, Mehra noted that MP has enacted a number of policies to deal with challenges faced by these micro enterprises, including access to finance. "While every policy that supports MSMEs is fantastic, the state must keep its eye on getting these infants to grow into giants," she said. Pointing to a trend witnessed in a number of states in India, she said MSMEs continue to be MSMEs even 10 years after inception. "Given where the state (MP) is now, and having the benefit of the experience of other states, I would urge that policies be made to actually incentivise these MSMEs to grow into giants by connecting them to supply

chains by providing good access to financing and by good regulation," Mehra said. She cited examples from other states such as Rajasthan, where in 2015 THE MSME policy was tweaked resulting in the size of MSMEs in the state growing larger. There are many benefits of growing MSMEs into big corporations, she said. "They can benefit from economies of scale and most importantly, larger companies pay employees more. They are more resilient to economic downturns, and they are just more able to compete in the global landscape," Mehra said. The senior ADB official also highlighted that the multilateral lending body has been associated with MP since 1999 and it has worked across all sectors ranging from transport to urban governance and education.

## Rupee plummets 47 paise to end at 87.19 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee fell sharply by 47 paise to settle at 87.19 against the US Dollar on Tuesday due to month-end Dollar demand by importers amid uncertainty over US trade tariffs. Elevated greenback against major crosses and sustained FII outflows also contributed to the decline in the domestic unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the Rupee opened weak at 86.83 and kept losing ground through the day before settling at 87.19, lower by 47 paise over its previous close. The local unit had settled at 86.72 on Monday. Currency markets will remain closed on Wednesday for Mahashivratri. "The rupee fell sharply against the US dollar amid uncertainty over US trade tariffs and demand from importers towards the end of the month.

Covering of short positions due to the expiry of the futures contract, too, weighed on the rupee. "We expect the rupee to trade negative on the back of overall weakness in the domestic markets and persistent FII outflows. Any recovery in the US Dollar may also weigh on the Rupee. However, any intervention by the RBI and weakness in crude oil prices may support the Rupee at lower levels," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said. Meanwhile, at the domestic equity markets, Sensex climbed 147.71 points to settle at 74,602.12 to end a five-session losing run. However, Nifty continued the downward streak, falling 5.80 points to 22,547.55. The Dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.04 per cent to 106.64.

## SEBI warns public against buying properties of HBN Dairies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator SEBI has cautioned public against buying and dealing with any property belonging to HBN Dairies and Allied Limited. The cautionary statement comes after SEBI discovered that some individuals or entities are interfering with the auction process by spreading false rumours, pretending to be SEBI officials, and trespassing on HBN properties. These actions are not only misleading potential buyers but also obstructing SEBI's e-auction process, the regulator noted. In response, SEBI in a notice issued last week, cautioned public against "buying/dealing with any properties wherein HBN, its directors or any of its associates, subsidiaries, sister companies have any interest, rights directly or indirectly".

The regulator also said no person is allowed to take illegal possession of or interfere with the assets of HBN, its directors, or its related entities, including subsidiaries, associates, and sister companies. Any such unauthorised actions will result in legal consequences under applicable laws. Further, SEBI emphasised that as per Supreme Court orders, it has full authority to sell the assets of HBN, its directors, and its related companies, including properties where HBN has any direct or indirect interest. A Supreme Court order in May 2024 granted SEBI the authority to sell the assets of HBN with the involvement of a liquidator. A subsequent order in October 2024 further permitted SEBI to sell and dispose of assets and properties of HBN's sister

companies, which are currently in liquidation. Following the orders, the regulator in January stated that it will auction 26 properties of HBN Dairies and Allied Ltd for a reserve price of ₹83 Crore on February 27. Before this, the regulator had in August last year auctioned eight properties of HBN. The moves are part of the markets watchdog's effort to recover money raised by HBN through illicit collective investment schemes. The SEBI initiated the process for the sale of the assets after HBN and its directors — Harmender Singh Sran, Amandeep Singh Sran, Manjeet Kaur Sran and Jasbeer Kaur — failed to refund investors' money. The assets of HBN and its directors were attached by SEBI under recovery proceedings initiated via a prohibitory order in September 2017.

## Kerala launches direct selling monitoring mechanism

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Kerala government has launched the Direct Selling Monitoring Mechanism (DSMM), a major initiative aimed at strengthening the direct selling industry with a transparent and consumer-friendly ecosystem. Applauding this move, the Indian Direct Selling Association (IDSA) hailed it as a game-changer for the sector's growth and regulation. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Shri Pinarayi Vijayan and Minister Shri G R Anil, the initiative introduces clear guidelines for over 1.5 Lakh direct sellers in the state. Speaking at the launch event in Thiruvananthapuram on February 19, 2025, IDSA CEO Council Member, Mr Samir K Modi, highlighted Kerala's transformative step in strengthening its, 522 Crore direct selling market. He praised the launch of an online portal to enhance transparency and compliance.

## VFS Global launch India developed AI-powered chatbot for UK visa customers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DUBAI/NEW DELHI

VFS Global, a global leader in visa and consular services, has launched an innovative AI-powered chatbot to provide enhanced customer support for UK visa applicants across 141 countries. Developed by VFS Global's AI Centres in India, the UAE, and Germany, this cutting-edge solution leverages Generative AI technology to deliver human-like, conversational support to applicants seeking information about their UK visa applications. The AI-powered chatbot is designed to cater to diverse audiences by effectively responding to both voice and text inputs. This ensures that travellers from around the world can easily access the assistance they need in a manner that feels both natural and intuitive. Jen Vidler, Deputy Director, Cross Cutting Service Operations, Visa, Status and Information Services, Customer Services Group, UK Visas and Immigration, said, "The rollout of VFS Global's AI-powered chatbot demonstrates our continued commitment to ensuring our visa services are accessible, efficient and meet the needs of all customers. Providing instant access to accurate

information about the visa application process will ensure we continue to offer the best service to our customers." Zubin Karkaria, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, VFS Global, added, "Technology and innovation have always been the cornerstones of our operations at VFS Global, and we are pleased to launch this AI-powered information solution which will significantly enhance the visa application experience for our customers travelling to the UK from across the globe. We are developing a range of AI and digital technology driven products to drive the next transformation in visa and consular services for our Client Governments and customers. We remain deeply committed to the responsible development of AI in accordance with the policies and requirements of our client governments." Powered by advanced Generative AI, the chatbot provides responses that mimic human conversation, fostering a more engaging user experience. The chatbot is fine-tuned to deliver accurate, country-specific details tailored to the needs of UK visa applicants. The system identifies and masks any Personally Identifiable Information (PII), ensuring that no sensitive data is stored or shared.

## Sensex bounces back after five-day slump, Nifty ends marginally lower



Stock Exchange building, Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex recovered 147 points in a range-bound trade on Tuesday, ending its five-day slide on the back of buying in financial and FMCG shares. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 147.71 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 74,602.12 with 17 of its constituents ending higher and 13 lower. During the day, it rallied 330.67 points or 0.44 per cent to 74,785.08.

Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints and Tata Motors were among the laggards. In the last five trading sessions, the BSE barometer lost 1,542.45 points or two per cent. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹6,286.70 Crore on Monday, while DIIs bought equities worth ₹5,185.65 Crore, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. Equity markets in Europe were trading mostly higher. US markets ended mostly in the negative territory on Monday. "Benchmark indices ended mixed in a lacklustre trading session as weak Asian cues further cautioned investors. Investors continued to stay risk averse as global uncertainty coupled with strong FII selling kept the mood sluggish ahead of expiry this week," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.13 per cent to USD 74.68 a barrel. "The domestic market experienced a range-bound trading session in anticipation of key economic data releases this week, alongside the monthly expiry. These facilities are equipped with advanced automation technologies, including state-of-the-art assembly lines and

## Aravam tech solutions unveils triptronic application



(Left to Right) co founders of Triptronic Sahil Mendiratta, Sorabh Kothari and Ankush Mendiratta founder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Aravam Tech Solutions Private Limited has launched Triptronic, a next-gen app designed to address the growing demand for efficient, sustainable, and tech-driven employee transportation solutions for businesses. The launch event, held on today at The Metropolitan Hotel in New Delhi, showcased how Triptronic blends real-time updates, advanced technology, and electric vehicles to offer a comprehensive solution tailored to corporate travel needs. To meet growing demand, Triptronic starting its operations across India. As more employees return to offices and businesses rely on organised transport, the need for better corporate mobility solutions is increasing. The company also aims to expand

internationally to the UAE and Southeast Asia, helping businesses access cost-effective and sustainable transport. India's ride-hailing market is worth USD 13.4 Billion, but with only seven per cent penetration compared to 40 per cent in China and 28 per cent in the US there is huge growth potential. By entering new markets, Triptronic expects to triple its revenue and serve more corporate clients. Triptronic is built around three core apps the Employee App, which enables employees to book, track, and pay for rides, receive real-time updates, and provide feedback, the Driver App, which helps drivers manage routes, assignments, and eco-friendly travel options and the Supervisor App, which allows businesses to monitor employee travel in real-time, track vehicles, manage expenses, and optimise routes for better efficiency.

## DJGF signature 2025 debuts as premier jewellery showcase

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Informa Markets in India has launched the first edition of Delhi Jewellery and Gem Fair (DJGF) Signature 2025 at Bharat Mandapam at Pragati Maidan. Timed ahead of the Akshaya Tritiya buying season, the exclusive three-day event brings together

over 120 premium exhibitors, 150 hosted buyers, and more than 8,000 trade visitors across one Lakh square feet of exhibition space. DJGF Signature 2025 serves as a platform for wholesalers and retailers to explore elite jewellery collections, strengthen brand positioning and engage with key stakeholders.

## Blue Star plans for gradual expansion at manufacturing facilities for ACs

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Air conditioners and commercial refrigeration system maker Blue Star Ltd has planned to take up gradual expansion of its manufacturing facilities to 1.8 million units as it aims to garner a market share of 14.3 per cent in the room air conditioner segment by FY26, a top official said on Tuesday. The company currently has a production capacity of about 1.4 million room air

conditioners. "With India set to add approximately 450 million middle-class consumers by 2030, the market for room ACs is at its inflection point and is poised to grow exponentially over the next few years. Positive trends such as the expansion of the housing sector, increased adoption of renewable energy, and growth in the rural economy are also expected to shape the industry's future," Blue Star Ltd Managing Director B

Thiagarajan said. He was here to unveil 150 models of room air conditioners including 'flagship premium' range in view of the forthcoming summer season. "We continue to make significant investments in R and D, manufacturing as well as supply chain to enhance competencies and capabilities to effectively leverage the growing demand. We are confident that our extensive range of room ACs, covering all consumer segments and price points, will enable us to

grow at a faster pace than the market," he added. The company has a cutting-edge manufacturing unit in neighbouring Sri City in Andhra Pradesh which commenced commercial production in January 2023. Besides, the company operates two dedicated plants in Himachal Pradesh for manufacturing room air conditioners. These facilities are equipped with advanced automation technologies, including state-of-the-art assembly lines and

material handling systems, along with comprehensive initiatives focused on Internet of Things integration and digitalisation. "With these plants, Blue Star's production capacity is currently around 1.4 Million room ACs, with plans for gradual expansion to 1.8 Million units in near future," the company said. The comprehensive range of air conditioners launched were in the 3-star and 5-star categories and are available in various cooling capacities

from ₹28,990 onwards. Nearly 40 models of smart Wi-fi air conditioners have unique features including 'customised sleep' where a customer can preset the temperature, fan speed, cool mode and switch on or off every hour for 12 hours ensuring uninterrupted sleep. The air conditioners also come with Voice Command technology in which customers can operate using Amazon Alexa or Google Home using English or Hindi voice commands.

# Australia vs South Africa match abandoned due to rain

PTI ■ RAWALPINDI

The Champions Trophy (CT) match between Australia and South Africa was abandoned here on Tuesday due to persistent rain, forcing the two Group B heavyweights to share a point each.

The weather did not allow even the toss to be completed. With the conditions not getting any better, the match officials called off the game a little more than three hours after the scheduled start time.

The cut-off time for the game was 7:32 pm but the officials made the call much earlier with no weather improvement in sight. After the no result, South Africa and Australia shared one point each and it means that Wednesday's contest between England and Afghanistan has turned into a virtual knockout with the loser becoming the third team to be eliminated from



the ICC event.

Tournament hosts Pakistan and Bangladesh were knocked out of the event on Monday after suffering two successive defeats. Both Australia and South Africa had won their opening game against England and Afghanistan respectively. Interestingly, it was Australia's fourth abandoned

game in their last eight outings in the Champions Trophy. They next play Afghanistan in Lahore on February 28 while the Proteas face England in Karachi the following day. The semifinalists have already been decided in Group A with India and New Zealand progressing after two wins in as many games. Rain is predicted in

Rawalpindi as well as Lahore and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will be hoping it doesn't play spoilsport in the coming days. Pakistan is hosting an ICC event for the first time in 29 years. With the host nation already out of the semifinal race, the PCB already faces a challenge in keeping the local fans interested in the tournament.

# SC bars Karnataka police from taking steps against Lakshya Sen

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday barred Karnataka Police from taking any coercive steps against badminton player Lakshya Sen, his family members, and coach over allegations of forging birth certificates.

A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and K Vinod Chandran issued notice to the Karnataka government and the complainant M G Nagaraj who alleged birth certificates of Sen and his brother Chirag Sen were forged.

The top court was hearing a plea challenging February 19 order of the Karnataka High Court which rejected the petitions filed by Sen, his family members, and his coach U Vimal Kumar. The high court ruled there was prima facie evidence warranting an investigation into the case. The case stems from a private complaint filed by Nagaraj, who alleged Sen's parents



Dhirendra and Nirmala Sen, along with his brother, coach, and an employee of the Karnataka Badminton Association, were involved in falsifying the birth records. According to the complaint, the accused allegedly manipulated the birth certificates of the Sen brothers, reducing their age by approximately two-and-a-half years. The alleged forgery was intended to allow them to participate in age-

restricted badminton tournaments and avail government benefits. Nagaraj supported his claims with documents obtained under RTI Act and requested the court to summon original records from the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in New Delhi. Based on this evidence, the court directed the High Grounds police station to conduct an investigation.

Following the court's directive, the police registered an FIR under Sections 420 (cheating), 468 (forgery), and 471 (using forged documents as genuine) of IPC.

However, the petitioners moved the Karnataka High Court in 2022, securing an interim order that stalled the investigation. The petitioners argued that the complaint and subsequent FIR were baseless, motivated, and intended to harass them.

They alleged Nagaraj was acting out of personal vendetta, claiming his daughter had applied to join the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy in 2020 but was not selected after the evaluation process. Kumar, a coach at the academy, was named in the complaint.

The high court, while dismissing the petitions, observed that the petitioners' counsel did not present arguments despite being given sufficient opportunities and refused more time.

# Ready to lead KKR if captaincy comes my way: Venkatesh Iyer

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All-rounder Venkatesh Iyer says he is prepared to lead Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) if given the opportunity in the IPL 2025 despite having no captaincy experience at any levels in competitive cricket. The reigning champions, who will take on Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the opening game this season at the Eden Gardens, are yet to announce their captain.

Shreyas Iyer had led them to the title win in IPL 2024, but he was acquired by Punjab Kings in the mega auction and later named him as their skipper.

"Definitely, I'm ready. Again, I've always said this: captaincy is just a tag. I believe in leadership. That is a bigger role to play, being a leader," Venkatesh told ESPNcricinfo. "There's no ambiguity surrounding this. I'll definitely do it, if it comes my way. There is no reason not to do it," he added. Iyer said the captain needs to



"set an example" by being a "good role model". "You don't necessarily need the tag of a captain to be a leader in your dressing room. You need to be a good role model, both on and off the field, which I am doing right now in Madhya Pradesh. "I'm not the captain of the MP team, but my opinions are respected and I really love to be in an atmosphere where every individual — new or experienced, Rs 20 lakh, Rs 20 crore, whatever — you just

need to have the freedom to voice your opinion. "You just need to have the freedom to give opinions and give suggestions and them to be taken in the right spirit," he added. Venkatesh, who joined the KKR in 2021, was released ahead of last year's auction but was bought back for a hefty Rs 23.75 crore after an intense tussle with RCB. Overall, the left-hander has scored 1,326 runs in 51 IPL matches, all for the Knight Riders.

# Praggnanadhaa favourite to win Prague Masters

PTI ■ PRAGUE

Fresh off his nail-biting victory at the Tata Steel Masters, Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa will start as the hot favorite to win the Prague Masters, which gets underway here on Wednesday.

It was a gruelling first-place finish at the Tata Steel Masters, where Praggnanandhaa overcame world champion D Gukesh in a nerve-wracking tiebreak battle and the Indian will now look to carry that momentum forward in this tournament. Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram makes his debut in elite chess, thanks to his consistent rise in both performance and rating throughout last year. Having elevated himself to 2730 points in live ratings, Aravindh is knocking on the door of the top 20 in the world rankings and is currently ranked fifth in the country, behind Gukesh, Arjun Erigaisi,

Praggnanandhaa, and five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand.

The field, as usual, is an interesting mix. Chinese Grandmaster Wei Yi starts as the top seed, with Praggnanandhaa in second place based on ratings released on February 1. Le Quang Liem of Vietnam is seeded third, ahead of Vincent Keymer of Germany, while Aravindh is seeded fourth in the 10-player, 9-round all-play-all event.

Dutch Grandmaster Anish Giri could draw attention here, thanks to his vast theoretical preparation, which might prove useful. The best Czech player, David Navara, along with Nguyen Thai Dai Van, Sam Shankland of the United States, and young talent Edil Gurezi, complete the lineup. For Praggnanandhaa, it would be a great opportunity as the Indian has the ability to outplay any opponent, giving him a distinct advantage over the others in the fray.

# IPL: Matthew Mott appointed Delhi Capitals assistant coach

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former England white-ball coach Matthew Mott was on Tuesday appointed assistant coach of IPL franchise Delhi Capitals for the upcoming season.

The 51-year-old Mott will assist former India cricketer Hemang Badani, who was named head coach in October last year. The Australian joins director of cricket Venugopal Rao and bowling coach Munaf Patel in the Delhi Capitals' support staff.

Mott, following an extremely successful stint with the Australian women's cricket team — he guided them to two T20 World Cups, one ODI World Cup and four Ashes series wins — over seven years, became the England men's team white-ball coach in 2022. The former first-class cricketer, with more than 3,500 runs under his belt in 66 games, stepped down as England coach in July last



year after guiding them to the T20 World Cup title in Australia in 2022. Mott had also served as assistant coach of Kolkata Knight Riders during the first two seasons of IPL. Delhi Capitals, who are still looking for their maiden IPL title, have made major changes to their coaching staff ahead of the new season. They brought in former India player Badani

as head coach in place of legendary Australian cricketer Ricky Ponting, while also replacing Australia's James Hopes with ex-India pacer and member of the 2011 World Cup-winning squad, Munaf, as their bowling coach. Delhi Capitals will open their IPL campaign against Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in Visakhapatnam on March 24.

# I have not seen a better player than Kohli: Ponting

PTI ■ DUBAI

Former Australian skipper Ricky Ponting said he has not seen a "better player" than Virat Kohli in ODIs, and backed the Indian batting star to go past legendary Sachin Tendulkar as the highest run-getter in the 50-over format.

Kohli made an exceptional unbeaten 100, his 51st in ODIs, to guide India to a six-wicket win over Pakistan in a Champions Trophy match here on Sunday.

"I don't think I've ever seen a better 50-over player than Virat Kohli. Now that he's gone past me (in run-maker's list) and only two (batters) ahead of him, I'm sure he would want to give himself the best chance to be remembered as the all-time leading run scorer in the game," Ponting told ICC Review. During the course of that



hundred, Kohli went past the 14000-run mark in one-dayers, joining former Sri Lankan captain Kumar Sangakkara and Tendulkar in a rare club. Kohli (14085 runs) is still 4,341 runs behind Tendulkar (18426) and at 36, the champion batter has limited time in his hand to overhaul the latter's mark. But Ponting did not see it as an impossible task for Kohli. "Obviously physical-wise, he's

probably as fit as he's ever been and works exceptionally hard on that side of his game. It's crazy when you think about it, isn't it? Just how good Virat's been over such a long period of time, yet he's still 4,000 runs behind Sachin. "It just goes to show how good Sachin was, but also his longevity in the game. But with someone like Virat, you never write him off. If the hunger's still there, then I'm

never going to write him off (to overtake Tendulkar)," he added.

Ponting said a match against Pakistan often brought the best in Kohli, and termed him as a big match player. "Yeah, 2022 (T20 WC) and now, he stood up against the team that he would probably steel himself the most to play against. When Pakistan had batted first on a tricky wicket, it needed someone at the top of the order to play a match-winning innings like that.

"Once again, it was Kohli to get the job done. He's been a champion player for a long, long time. And particularly in the white-ball formats, where he's been an unbelievably good 50-over player," said the Aussie. Ponting said Kohli's hundred was the difference between India and Pakistan on that night. "You look at the two

scorecards, it's one, Virat making a 100, and lots of Pakistan starts without anyone going on and making a big score.

"I've said forever, in any format of the game, a 50 never wins you or your team anything. You have to get big scores. And so the individual big scores weren't there, but the big partnerships weren't there either," Ponting noted. The Tasmanian said senior batters Babar Azam and Mohammed Rizwan were not able to serve Pakistan in a desired manner.

"They haven't been able to give their best back to their team. Those two guys had to stand up," Ponting said. "They had to make big runs, and they haven't been able to do it in the first couple of games, and that might be the reason why Pakistan don't make it through to the semifinals."

# India have huge advantage playing at same ground, says Cummins

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Injured Australia captain Pat Cummins believes India have a "huge advantage" to be based in Dubai for the ongoing Champions Trophy (CT) while other sides criss-cross Pakistan for their group games in the tournament being held under a "hybrid model".

Rohit Sharma's men are playing all their matches in Dubai and even the final will be held there if the team goes the distance. This was done after India refused to travel to Pakistan, the original hosts of the event, citing security concerns.

"I think it's good in that the tournament can go on, but obviously it does give them (India) a huge advantage



playing on the same ground. They already look very strong and they've got that obvious benefit of playing all their games there," Cummins told 'Yahoo Australia'. India have won both their games, against Bangladesh and Pakistan, comfortably so far and are through to the semifinal on March 4, to be held in Dubai. Their last group match is on

Sunday against New Zealand, a team that has so far played in Pakistan, also winning both its games against the home side and Bangladesh. Cummins is watching the tournament from the sidelines owing to an ankle injury and is targeting a return to competitive cricket with the IPL next month. The break also coincided with the birth of his daughter.

# Boxing Federation of India internal wars revealed amid IOA crackdown

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stripped of its Administrative powers by Indian Olympic Association (IOA) for allegedly failing to conduct elections on time, accusations and counter-accusations are flying thick and fast within the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) on what is to be blamed for the mess that has been in the making for several months. Abuse of power, financial misconduct, and the never-ending turf wars are now coming to light as officials jostle to escape blame for the shocking turn of events.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) formed a five-member ad-hoc committee on Monday to oversee the sport's affairs, citing the federation's failure to conduct elections on time.

The panel is headed by former Athletics Federation of India (AFI) treasurer Madhukant Pathak, and comprises long-serving boxing federation officials such as Rajesh Bhandari (vice-chairman), DP Bhatt, Virendra Singh Thakur and former Asian champion Shiva Thapa as the sole players representative. The sport's fortunes have been on the decline for a while now but the internal tug of war had so far been under wraps. With the IOA's crackdown, it is now out in the open.

**Allegations of financial misconduct** On December 28, the BFI received a complaint, a copy of which is in PTI's possession, accusing key officials, including Secretary General Hemanta Kalita and Treasurer Digvijay Singh, of "unauthorised fund

withdrawals, fraudulent billing, and abuse of power". They were also accused of tender process violations and it was claimed that contracts for the Multinational Training Camp in Rohtak and the Guwahati Talent Hunt were awarded without following the proper procedure. It was also alleged that non-boxing individuals were appointed as Technical Officials (NTOs) and there was unauthorised withdrawal of foreign currency and misuse of federation funds for personal expenses, among others.

During the Executive Council meeting on January 12 attended by both the secretary and treasurer, it was decided that an inquiry will be conducted. To avoid conflict of interest, former Delhi High Court



judge, Sudhir Kumar Jain was appointed by the BFI to lead the investigation on January 21. Since then Jain has conducted several sittings. However, Digvijay wrote to BFI head Ajay Singh this week, objecting to the "unilateral appointment of a one-man inquiry committee" instead of referring the matter to the federation's internal

Disciplinary and Dispute Committee. The complaints made in December specifically highlighted misappropriation of funds and protocol violations by the finance committee. It is to be noted that Digvijay also heads the BFI finance committee, which includes Meren Paul, a member of the Disciplinary

and Dispute Committee. Jain summoned Kalita and Digvijay for questioning on Tuesday, but neither appeared for the investigation.

**Election delays and internal rift** The current office-bearers' tenure ended on February 3. However, the date of elections are yet to be announced. During the National Games in Uttarakhand earlier this month, 24 state associations wrote to the BFI President, demanding elections to be held on March 9. However, many of these associations, including those from Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, later withdrew their demand, instead expressing support for Singh to decide the election's date and venue. BFI also informed the Sports Ministry about the delay.

In a letter dated February 3, the federation stated that a Special General Body Meeting (SGM) was scheduled for Tuesday, and assured the ministry that the election will be conducted by mid-March.

However, the meeting was not held. "The National Games were going on and World Boxing is in the final stages to get recognition from the IOC and the president is closely involved in this, hence it was decided that the meeting will be held in March," a BFI official familiar with the development said.

**Opposition to IOA's ad-hoc committee** Meanwhile, IOA Treasurer and Dispute and Affiliation Committee member Sahdev Yadav on Monday strongly opposed the appointment of

an ad-hoc committee to oversee the BFI. He criticised the decision as "arbitrary and without due authority," stating that no procedural steps were followed before making such a move.

In a letter to IOA President PT Usha, Yadav wrote, "The issuance of this office order creates an impression that the decision has been taken by the IOA, whereas, in reality, it is your personal decision." He further stressed that National Sports Federations (NSFs) are autonomous bodies and that the IOA does not have the authority to interfere in their internal governance. However, there have been past precedents of IOA stepping in to manage a sport's affairs if the federation fails to conduct elections on time.

# England, Afghanistan dream of semifinal berth

PTI ■ LAHORE

A battered England will hope to keep their Champions Trophy (CT) hopes alive when they face a dangerous Afghanistan in a crucial group B match here on Wednesday.

A defeat here would severely dent both the teams' dreams of a semifinal berth in the tournament, as South Africa and Australia have already notched up two points.

The days of England's white ball supremacy are far behind now, as the former world champions' creaking unit even failed to defend a 350-plus total against Australia in their tournament opener.

While England may take some comfort in posting a massive total, the reality is that it came against an Australian side missing their premier pacers — Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, and Josh Hazlewood.

The English bowlers then failed to stop an Australian line-up that did not have lead batters such as injured Mitchell Marsh and now-retired Marcus Stoinis.

So, England will need to show massive improvement against Afghanistan on both those counts.

Afghanistan's three-pronged spin attack, consisting Rashid Khan, Noor Ahmad and Mohammad Nabi, has the potential to trouble even the best, and England batters' recent outings



England players celebrating on the field during a match.

against slow bowlers are not confidence inspiring either. England also suffered a setback as all-rounder Brydon Carse has been ruled out of the tournament with a toe injury. He has been replaced by leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed in an effort to strengthen their spin department.

This move will also provide Adil Rashid with proper backing, as, until

now, Liam Livingstone had been performing that role with his mixed bag of off-spin, leg-spin, and seam-up deliveries.

But England's real problem lies in the patchy form of opener Phil Salt and Harry Brook in the middle-order.

Salt's only hundred in the format was in 2022 and since then the Welshman has not really converted his starts, often getting out after a

quick 30 or 40.

Brook also offers a similar tale. The Yorkshire man looked in prime form during the home ODIs against Australia last year, hammering a hundred and two fifties in a three-match series.

However, Brook has been riddled with self-doubts against spinners since the tour to India, and fell to Aussie leg-spinner Adam Zampa in

the last match.

Now, the 26-year-old will have to negate three high-quality tweakers against Afghanistan.

The Afghans, on the other hand, have their own problems to tackle. They are coming off a 107-run shellacking by South Africa in their tournament opener.

They had reached the semifinals of the T20 World Cup 2024 with almost the same set of players but the ODI format demands much more consistency in performance and execution of strategies.

Afghanistan have the required talent but they need to find a way to channelise that consistently to challenge England, even in their most vulnerable state.

**Teams (from):**

**Afghanistan:** Hashmatullah Shahidi (c), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah, Ikram Alikhil, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharoti, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Farid Malik, Naveed Zadran. Reserves: Darwish Rasooli, Bilal Sami.

**England:** Jos Buttler (c), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Tom Banton, Harry Brook, Rehan Ahmed, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark Wood.



# UP Warriorz face Mumbai Indians

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Rejuvenated by their thrilling super-over win over RCB, UP Warriorz will look to continue their momentum when they take on an upbeat Mumbai Indians in the Women's Premier League here on Wednesday.

The Warriorz pulled off a stunning victory against defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday, with Sophie Ecclestone delivering a match-winning performance with both bat and ball.

However, they will need more from their batters to avoid finding themselves in a tight spot once again.

While Chinelle Henry led them to victory against Delhi Capitals, Ecclestone took center stage in their latest triumph. Though openers Kiran Navgire and Shweta Sehrawat have shown promise, they have not been able to capitalise on their starts.

Opener Vrinda Dinesh and skipper Deepti Sharma will have to give stability in the middle-order.

Despite a rocky start to the season, the Warriorz have bounced back from consecutive losses, registering two remarkable wins.

However, their batting — especially the openers and middle-order — has struggled to maintain consistency.

Australian all-rounder Tahlia McGrath is another match-winner in the Warriorz lineup, with her explosive power-hitting.

But she is yet to light up the tournament and against MI, the Warriorz will need McGrath to fire along with the rest of the batting unit to avoid falling into a vulnerable position once again.

"We are backing our young

Indian players to step up and perform under pressure. We want to provide them with opportunities," said Jon Lewis, the Warriorz head coach, on Monday.

On the middle-order batting, Lewis added: "It would be nice to get a few more runs, rotate the strike better, and be more consistent. If we can do that, we will be competitive across all conditions and against every team."

For Mumbai Indians, Nat Sciver-Brunt has been the standout performer. The inaugural edition champions are a formidable side, with India captain Harmanpreet Kaur also in fine form, having scored a fifty in their last match against RCB.

Mumbai's batting is a force to be reckoned with, with destructive batters like Hayley Matthews and Amelia Kerr in their ranks but both haven't really fired so far. Opener Yastika Bhatia too is in need of a substantial score.

They also have a rising star in 16-year-old G Kamalini, who brings balance to the team, while Amanjot Kaur's all-round performance that sealed their win against RCB is a good sign for MI.

Their bowling attack is spearheaded by the exceptional Shabnim Ismail and Sciver-Brunt, who are capable of dismantling any batting lineup.

**Teams (From):** Mumbai Indians: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Yastika Bhatia (wk), Nadine de Klerk, Sanskriti Gupta, Saika Ishaque, Shabnim Ismail, Jintimani Kalita, G Kamalini, Amandeep Kaur, Amanjot Kaur, Sathyamoorthy Keerthana, Amelia Kerr, Akshita Maheshwari, Hayley Matthews, Sajeewan Sarjana, Nat Sciver-Brunt, Parunika Sisodia, Chloe Tryon.

# Amla labelled Gill as 'next big thing' in international cricket

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

South Africa batting great Shashim Amla on Tuesday labelled India opener Shubman Gill, who has had an "exceptional" start to ODIs, as the "next big thing" in international cricket along with Rishabh Pant and Ryan Rickelton.

The 25-year-old Gill, named India's vice-captain for the Champions Trophy, retook the No. 1 spot in ODI rankings for batters on the opening day of the tournament after his ascent to the top for the first time in 2023.

Gill began with a match-winning century against Bangladesh and struck a vital 46 against Pakistan to steer India to two wins in as many games in Dubai.

"For India, you have got Shubham Gill; Rishabh Pant has been around for a while. For South Africa, we have Ryan Rickelton who has done really well off late," Amla, who is playing for South Africa Masters in the International Masters League, told PTI Videos in an exclusive interaction.

"Every country has about 2-3 cricketers who are going to come through and I think that's pretty normal, that you see that every five years some youngster poke in the head through international cricket, and possibly be the next best, big thing," he added.

Talking further about Gill, Amla said, "He is a brilliant player, the way he started in one-day cricket, he has been exceptional. He has been a huge part of India's success at top of the order."

"To have him and Rohit (Sharma) at the top, it's a very potent and dangerous opening partnership, and then they have got Virat (Kohli) at No 3."

Amla said playing the tri-series in Pakistan ahead of Champions Trophy would



Shubman Gill batting during a match.

hold South Africa in good stead, especially against spin. "South African batters are well-equipped. They've had enough practice with the tour to Pakistan just before the Champions Trophy. They've also, by and large, had great success," he said.

"You've got Heinrich Klaasen, who's been very successful against spinners. He's in the middle order. You've got David Miller, who's been an excellent finisher and (there is) Aiden Markram as well. That middle order has been vital for South Africa's success."

"At the top, (Temba) Bavuma is a good player of spin and Rickelton has been very accomplished against spin over the last one and a half years," he added.

Amla said both India and South Africa have got a "great chance" to win the Champions Trophy title.

"India have obviously a very good chance, they have a fantastic team over the (last 15-odd years)," he said.

"South Africa have (a) great chance (too), they have fantastic batting and bowling and whole unit looks very well balanced, they have an excellent chance to make it to top four and then hopefully win it."

With South Africa making finals of the T20 World Cup last year and the World Test Championship final against Australia, Amla said the

Proteas did their best against whichever opponents they faced.

"South Africa getting into the (WTC) final has been a great achievement. Lots of people have said the different teams you (could) have played against, but that's the group that South Africa were put in," he said.

"For them to excel and win as many games as they have to get into a final, they did their part and they did their best and they are in the finals."

"It is going to be a really good final, with Australia being a very competitive team. But in a Test match, you (may) just need one or two players to stand up and yes, South Africa could be champions," he said.

Amla said he has no intention of returning to Test cricket but expressed that competitions such as the IML should be a regular affair.

"It's enjoyable, (there are) these elements of uncertainty that we haven't trained and (were) not involved in cricket for the rest of the year, or batting in nets, or playing matches, and that type of excitement, to just see how it all goes," he said.

"The amount of excitement that has been built around some of the great ex-players, it can only bode well, and who doesn't want to see a (Brian) Lara (or a) (Jacques) Kallis bat? It should be an annual event," he added.

# Atherton, Hussain praise Virat Kohli

PTI ■ LONDON

In awe of Virat Kohli's formidable ODI statistics, former England captains Michael Atherton and Nasser Hussain believe that the Indian mainstay is probably the best batsman in the history of the format.

Kohli played a master-class innings of unbeaten 100, his 51st century in ODIs, to steer India to a comfortable six-wicket win over arch-rivals Pakistan in a Champions Trophy match here on Sunday.

"Virat Kohli in a run-chase in 50-over cricket, there's been nobody better in the history of the game, really. 51 century is an unbelievable number," said the 56-year-old Atherton, who captained England in 54 Test matches, on "Sky Sports Cricket Podcast".

En route his century in his 299th 50-over appearance, Kohli became the fastest batter to reach 14,000 ODI runs, joining the elite group of Sachin Tendulkar (18,426 in



Virat Kohli batting during a match.

452 innings) and Kumar Sangakkara (14,234 in 380 innings).

"I mean, he's got 51 and he's passed 14,000 runs, which only Tendulkar and Sangakkara have got past that mark in one-day cricket," Atherton continued.

"And he got them in 60-odd innings quicker than Sachin, and I think about 90-odd innings quicker than Kumar. "So, I mean, ODI is probably his best. You know, he's been a great all-format player, clearly, but you'd probably say that

ODI is his absolute best format."

Echoing similar sentiments, Hussain, who led England between 1999 to 2003, remarked, "He's been an incredible player. Yeah, and you'd have to say probably the best player in ODIs of all time, really, with those stats you mentioned."

"You'd have Tendulkar in the same conversation. Kumar, you'd have AB de Villiers. They've been some great ones, but he's right at the top of the tree."

# Pakistan will struggle to beat India's B team, says Gavaskar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistan's cricket team continued to invite scathing criticism a day after being knocked out of the Champions Trophy (CT) with the great Sunil Gavaskar saying that it would struggle to beat even a second-string Indian team.

India, the 2023 ODI World Cup finalists, defeated defending champions Pakistan by six wickets in the Champions Trophy in Dubai on Sunday, continuing their dominance over the arch-rivals.

"I think a B team (from India) certainly (can give Pakistan a run for their money). C team, I am not too sure. But a B team will be very, very hard to beat for Pakistan in their current form," Gavaskar said on "Sports Today".

Pakistan, hosting an ICC tournament for the first time since 1996, were knocked out of the Champions Trophy after New Zealand beat Bangladesh in another Group A match. Pakistan are still winless in the event.

Since winning the Champions Trophy in 2017, Pakistan's cricketing fortunes have declined, with the team finishing fifth in the last two ODI World Cups.

"I think it's surprising this lack of bench strength. Pakistan always had natural talent. Natural in the sense that they may not have always been technically correct, but they had an instinctive understanding of bat and ball," Gavaskar said.

"Look at Inzamam-ul-Haq, for example. If you look at his stance, you wouldn't recommend that to a young batter, but he had great temperament. With that kind of temperament, he made up



Pakistan players on the field during a match.

for any technical shortcomings."

Gavaskar also noted that despite the Pakistan Super League (PSL) and domestic white-ball tournaments, Pakistan has struggled to produce quality players.

"How has India produced so many young stars in white-ball cricket? It's because of the IPL," said the former India skipper. "Players from there have gone

on to play in the Ranji Trophy and eventually for India. That is something Pakistan cricket must analyse. They need to figure out why they no longer have the bench strength they once did."

India vs Pakistan: A one-sided contest now, Atherton

An India-Pakistan match is always a highly-anticipated event, but former England captain Michael Atherton believes the contest has become "one-sided" and the cricket does not live up to the hype.

"Well, it was completely one-sided," Atherton said on Sky Sports Podcast.

"It looked very predictable from a long way out. An underpowered Pakistan batting line-up, as it was in that first game, actually, against New Zealand. There just seemed to lack a bit of energy and dynamism in the batting."

India and Pakistan only meet in ICC events, and their clashes are often built up as blockbuster encounters.

"There's a bit of an issue for that contest, isn't it? Because it's a highly anticipated contest for all kinds of reasons. Partly, you know, just because of the scarcity value. They only play each other in ICC events on neutral territory for obvious reasons," he said.

# Vidarbha to stake claim for Ranji Trophy title against Kerala

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Former winners Vidarbha will rely on their red-hot form to stake claim for a title that they last won over five years ago, while first-time finalists Kerala will be driven by grit when the two contrasting teams clash in the summit showdown for the 90th Ranji Trophy, starting here on Wednesday.

It has been nothing short of a stellar run for the Akshay Wadkar-led Vidarbha side this season, winning eight of their nine matches so far and drawing one which makes them the side to beat.

Vidarbha emerged from their group stage with six victories in seven matches and won

each of the knockouts by heavy margins — by 198 runs against Tamil Nadu in the quarterfinal and by 80 runs against defending champions Mumbai in the semifinal.

The winners of 2017-18 and 2018-19 edition, Vidarbha are making their fourth appearance in the final after losing in the final last year to Mumbai, displaying unmatched consistency in red-ball cricket. They had also played in the final of the Vijay Hazare Trophy this season.

Yash Rathod has been at the forefront of their batting with 933 runs in nine matches at 58.13 with five tons and three fifties — the third highest overall this season.

Not only from behind the

stumps as wicketkeeper-captain, Wadkar has had a successful run with the bat, scoring 674 runs in nine matches at 48.14 with two centuries and as many fifties.

Veteran Karun Nair is not far behind with 642 runs in eight matches at 45.85, including three centuries and a fifty, while Danish Malewar (557 runs, 1x100s, 5x50s) and Dhruv Shorey (446 runs, 1x100s, 2x50s) have also pulled in their weight.

If the 24-year-old southpaw Rathod has been a revelation in batting for Vidarbha, the bowling charts have been dominated by another youngster in 22-year-old Harsh Dubey.

Dubey has claimed 66 wickets



Vidarbha players celebrating on the field.

in nine matches with seven five-fors and is on the cusp of creating history for most wickets in a Ranji Trophy season, which currently belongs to Bihar's Ashutosh Aman when he took 68 wickets in eight matches of the

2018-19 season. On the other hand, making their maiden appearance in the Ranji Trophy final, it hasn't been just luck that has favoured the Sachin Baby-led side from down south.

Kerala rode on their luck in

the knockout games to edge out Jammu and Kashmir by one run in the quarterfinal and Gujarat by two runs to make the final after advancing in the two contests on the basis of first-innings lead.

But even that took a lot of hard work. Kerala had to grind out with the bat on the final day of the quarterfinal against J&K to force a draw.

Salman Nizar (607 runs in eight matches at 86.71, 2x100s, 3x50s) and Mohammed Azharuddeen (601 runs in nine matches at 75.12, 1x100s and 4x50s), the two batting mainstays for the side, held their nerves to frustrate J and K in Pune and ensure their team's qualification in one of the

most exciting finishes this season. Azharuddeen's monumental 177 off 341 balls in the semifinal against Gujarat on their home turf will go down in Kerala's Ranji history as one of the finest knocks played by any player from the state which has never been so close to winning the toughest red-ball competition in India.

With 38 wickets, Jalaj Saxena has been Kerala's most successful bowler and he will find strong support from former Vidarbha player Aditya Sarwate, who has grabbed 30 wickets to provide adequate support to the veteran spinner.

Teams (from): Vidarbha: Akshay Wadkar

(c&wk), Atharva Taide, Aman Mohkade, Yash Rathod, Harsh Dubey, Akshay Karnewar, Yash Kadam, Akshay Wakhare, Aditya Thakare, Darshan Nalkande, Nachiket Bhute, Siddhesh Wath (wk), Yash Thakur, Danish Malewar, Parth Rekhade, Karun Nair, Dhruv Shorey.

Kerala: Sachin Baby (c), Rohan Kunnumal, Salman Nizar, Mohammed Azharuddeen (wk), Akshay Chandran, Jalaj Saxena, Shoun Roger, Aditya Sarwate, Basil Thampi, MD Nidheesh, Nedumankuzhy Basil, Sreehari S Nair, Sharafuddeen NM, Anand Krishnan, Varun Nayanan, Eden Apple Tom, Ahammed Imran.