RAIPUR, MONDAY FEBRUARY 3, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹3

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ILISHED FROM: DELHI I LUCKNOW I BHOPAL I BHUBANESWAR I RANCHI I RAIPUR I CHANDIGARH I DEHRADUN I HYDERABAD I VIJAYWADA

Modi's guarantee for Delhi: PM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

rime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday launched a sharp attack on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) highlighting how the party is falling apart ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi. "We are seeing that even before the voting, 'jhaadu ke tinke bikhar rahe hain' (the straws of the broom are falling apart). Leaders of 'AAP-da' are leaving it, they (people) hate this party," Modi said, referring to several AAP leaders quitting the party. Taking on the AAP's claims, the prime minister told people that no jhuggi will be demolished in Delhi and no welfare scheme shut in case of the BJP coming to power. Asserting that the Union Budget has filled every

on Sunday that this is 🔽 the most middle class friendly Budget in India's history and only the BJP respects the middle class of the country. He further claimed the Union Budget presented on Saturday (February 1, 2025) was to ensure that "Modi's

family with happiness,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said

guarantees" were fulfilled. Addressing a "Sankalp" rally at RK Puram ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi, the prime minister spoke about various beneficial provisions of the Budget for the middle class to claim that since India's Independence those earning up to Rs 12 Lakh have received such a relief. The middle class

is saying that this is the most friendly Budget for them in India's history, he added. Before beginning his speech, Modi spotted a portrait of

himself among the crowd. He asked the Special Protection Group personnel, deployed for his security to bring the portrait to him. He also asked the artist to write their address on the portrait and said he would write a letter to the

The PM also took a swipe at the Congress, invoking former prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi to claim that their governments imposed heavy taxes on people's earnings, while his

PM Modi then underlined the Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public meeting ahead of the Delhi

Assembly elections, at RK Puram in New Delhi Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

government has eased the tax burden and provided greater relief to the middle class. PM Modi said, "Let me present a picture before you. It will help you understand better and make it easier to explain to others. If we look at this Budget-back in Nehru Ji's time, if you earned Rs 12 Lakh, the government would take away one-fourth of your salary as tax. If this were Indira Ji's era,

you would be shocked to hear

that out of Rs 12 Lakh, nearly

Rs 10 Lakh would go into

taxes. That was the scenario

back then, which is why I am explaining this today." He added that while a Rs 12 Lakh income meant paying Rs 2.6 Lakh in tax under Congress rule, the latest budget presented by his government ensures zero tax on the same earnings

"Even 10-12 years ago, under a Congress government, if you earned Rs 12 Lakh, you had to pay Rs 2,60,000 in taxes. Now, yesterday's government budget, a person earning Rs 12 Lakh in a year will not have to pay even a single rupee in tax," PM Modi said. The PM said many residents of RK Puram have government jobs. "You have got not just tax relief but 8th Pay Commission is also being introduced, pension schemes were consolidated, and budget benefits extended to senior citizens and the retired government officials too," he said, adding that young couples, too, will save a lot on

Budget offerings to Bihar to reach out to the Purvanchali community in Delhi, which plays a key role in the election. Purvanchal spans eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar and many migrants from the region have settled in the national Capital. "The Capital. Purvanchali community made me an MP and the PM. The Purvanchali community made me who I am and they have been taken care of in the Budget. They were neglected in Congress' time. People from Bihar were not respected. But we have respected them," the PM said, pointing to the Budget announcements for

Continued on page 2

Kumbh readies for Amrit Snan today

Mahakumbh is preparing for another massive Amrit Snan on Basant Panchami day on Monday, following the tragic stampede that marred the Amrit Snan on Mauni Amavasya. Authorities estimate that over four crore pilgrims will take the holy dip, with roads leading to Sangam already swelling with crowds by Saturday evening.

With an extended weekend and a public holiday, officials anticipate a fresh surge of visitors starting Sunday. In response, security has been intensified, crowd management measures reinforced, and medical services strengthened to prevent any untoward incidents and ensure a smooth pilgrimage experience. The Maha Kumbh, which commenced on January 13, will continue until February 26. The remaining significant snan dates include Basant Panchami on February 3, Maghi Purnima on February 12, and Maha Shivaratri on February 26. The city has been witnessing a continuous influx of pilgrims since January 26, with the Mauni Amavasya Snan setting new records as nearly eight crore devotees took a dip in the Ganga. While the footfall slightly declined in the following days, officials now expect another massive turnout for the upcoming snan.

Many pilgrims began their bathing rituals on Sunday itself, as the Panchami tithi starts that day. Local vendors near the ghats have observed a sharp rise in footfall. Shyam Sundar Mishra, a vendor, remarked that the last few days were relatively quiet, but now the crowd is swelling again and they are prepared for a busy weekend.

In light of the tragic incidents during the Mauni Amavasya Snan, the government has significantly ramped up security and crowd management efforts. Senior officials, including Prayagraj Divisional former Commissioner Ashish Goyal and former PDA Vice-Chairman and DM Bhanu Chandra Goswami, have been deployed alongside five special secretaries. On Saturday, five additional



Devotees are seen near 'Nandi Dwar' as they proceed towards Sangam during the ongoing 'Maha Kumbh

Maha Kumbh stampede: Police launches probe

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Uttar Pradesh Police has launched an investigation into the stampede that claimed 30 lives during Mauni Amavasya at the Maha Kumbh, following suspicions of a possible conspiracy behind the incident. In addition to central intelligence agencies, the state's Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) and Special Task Force (STF) are actively searching for a group of youths believed to have triggered the chaos. The state government has also constituted a three-member judicial commission to probe the matter.

Several eyewitnesses and survivors reported that a group of young men was deliberately pushing the crowd, causing panic among pilgrims. As people tried to escape, they began pushing those ahead of them, leading to many falling and getting trampled underfoot. The stampede resulted in 30 fatalities and left 37 others injured. A similar stampede was also reported in the Jhunsi area, raising concerns about deliberate attempts to create unrest.

Continued on page 2

PCS-level officers were assigned to enhance supervision and coordination. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Mano Kumar Singh assured that past crowd movements have been analysed and improvements made to ensure better flow and safety so that no devotee faces difficulties.

To prevent overcrowding, authorities have identified 28 high-risk zones at Sangam, where police, RAF, and paramilitary personnel will be stationed. Á senior official overseeing crowd management explained that these 28 locations were the most congested during Mauni Amavasya and Makar Sankranti, and teams will be stationed here to prevent stampedes and maintain

Special measures have also been introduced at the ghats. Devotees will be guided to leave the bathing areas immediately after their dip to prevent congestion. Security forces will ensure pilgrims follow designated entry and exit routes. Amit Tiwari, a devotee from Kanpur, shared his experience from Mauni Amavasya, saying that last time it was difficult to move because of the crowd, and he is glad to hear that authorities are making arrangements for

better management. Continued on page 2

Congress fly EAGLE over ECI Retired judge files PIL Badrinath temple to open on May 4

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA NEW DELHI

A fter leveling charges of alleged 'manipulations' in elections, Congress has formed a committee to monitor the conduct of free and fair elections by the Election Commission of India. The committee named as Empowered Action Group of Leaders and Experts (EAGLE) will first take up list in Maharashtra followed by Haryana and submit a detailed report to the party high command. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge constituted EAGLE with immediate effect to monitor the conduct of free and fair elections by the poll watchdog. The panel includes Congress treasurer Ajay Maken and senior leaders Digvijaya Singh, Abhishek Singhvi, Praveen Chakravarty and Pawan Khera. Besides, Gurdeep Singh Sappal, Nitin Raut and Challa Vamshi Chand Reddy are also part of the panel.

Besides Maharashtra, 'EAGLE' will also analyse past elections in other States, and proactively monitor upcoming elections and all other issues related to the conduct of free and fair elections in the country. Congress led INDIA bloc members had anticipated a massive win in both the States but only to be

routed completely. Members of Opposition parties under the INDIA bloc has claim that about 63 election petitions have been filed across various benches of the Bombay High Court



Congress General Secretary and Lok Sabha MP Priyanka Gandhi at a Delhi assembly campaign in national Capital on Sunday. Delhi goes to polls on Wednesday Pioneer photo

against discrepancies in the recently held Assembly election. About 25 Congress leaders have filed petitions, before the Nagpur and Aurangabad benches of the High Court. Five Congress leaders from Marathwada have also filed poll petitions.

Some other petitions have been filed by NCP (SP) and Shiv Sena (UBT) candidates through advocate Aseem Sarode at the Principal Bench. The petitioners have alleged misconduct in the polls, including duplicate voting, concealed criminal cases, asset concealment, EVM malfunctions, bribery, and lack of election

transparency.
Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had last month alleged that there is a "serious problem" with the

country's election system and that the Nirvachan Sadan must ensure transparency in polls which the first faith of the people of India. Rahul rued the fact as why the Election Commission has

refused to provide Congress and other opposition voter lists of Maharashtra and Haryana elections despite of several reminders and memorandum.

In his address to party workers at the inauguration of the new party headquarters last month, Rahul had alleged there has been an increase of nearly one crore voters between Maharashtra Lok Sabha and assembly elections but the Election Commission is neither answering the queries raised by the opposition nor giving the lists of

against poll freebies

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Retired Justice SN Dhingra has moved the Delhi High Court against the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Indian National Congress (INC) over their political promises to distribute cash to the voters in the upcoming Assembly polls, alleging that it falls within the meaning of "corrupt practices." The PIL refers to AAP Samman Yojana", BJP's "Mahila Samridhi Yojna" and Congress' Pyari Didi Yojna" wherein the parties have promised cash benefits to the voters if they are elected to power. A direction is also sought on BJP, AAP and Congress to desist from collecting personal and electoral data of voters and not to share or use the same to any third

The petitioner argues that such schemes violate provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, particularly Section 123(1), which pertains to corrupt practices, and Section 127A, which pertains to corrupt practices, and Section

127A, which deals with unauthorized election materials. Additionally, these actions allegedly breach Sections 170 and 171 of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which relate to bribery and undue influence in elections. Furthermore, these actions disregard advisory guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI)," the petitioner argues. The petition has been filed by

Justice Dhingra who is also the President of organisation Samay Yaan (Sashakt Samaj). The petitioner is seeking directions to cease and desist from collecting personal and electoral data of voters under false pretences and direct not to share & use election to any third party. Continued on page 2 not to share & use the data collected during

PNS NEW TEHRI

The sacred portals of the Badrinath temple in Uttarakhand's Čhamoli district will open for devotees at 6 am on May 4. On the occasion of Basant Panchami.

the auspicious time for opening the temple was decided after special prayers were offered at the former Tehri royal court in Narendra

royal priest Acharya Krishna Prasad Uniyal decided the date for opening the doors of the Badrinath temple. On this occasion, besides former Maharaja of



Tehri Manyendra Shah, his wife, daughter Shreejaand, Tehri Lok Sabha member Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah, Badrinath's chief priest Rawal Amarnath Namboodri, Badrinath Kedarnath Temple Committee's chief executive

officer Vijay Thapliyal and several religious officials were present. Every year after Diwali, the doors of the Char Dhams — Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri

- are closed for the The portals reopen in April-May the following year. During the six-month-long pilgrimage Lakhs of devotees from across the country and abroad visit the Char Dhams.



Vintage cars taking part in voter awareness drive organised by the Delhi Election Office at Major Dhyan Chand National

India's youngsters dominate U-19 Women's T20 world

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

An utterly dominant India flaunted their embarrassment of riches to win a second successive U-19 Women's T20 World Cup title with a nine-wicket shellacking of South Africa here on Sunday, the triumph giving a peek into the game's most perfectly calibrated youth structure.

Having outclassed every team during their march to the final, India asserted themselves yet again, getting the job done with as many as 52 balls to spare while also becoming the first team to win the tournament without dropping a single game.

The biggest star of the day was allrounder Gongadi Trisha, who complemented her excellent 3/15 with an unbeaten 33-ball 44 while

South Africa, led by Kayla Reyneke, opted to bowl first, but their moment is one I'll cherish forever,"

decision backfired quickly as India's three-pronged spin attack bowled them out for 82.

Left-arm spinner Aayushi Shukla was the star of the show with figures of 4-2-9-2, while leg-spinner Trisha, who has also been a revelation with the bat, further underlined her allround capabilities with her triple strikes with the ball.

Trisha once again anchored India's chase with an unbeaten knock that was studded with eight fours.

Vice-captain Sanika Chalke (26 not out; 22 balls, 4x4) sealed the victory with a powerful heave to the squareleg boundary, forcing the young Indian players, draped in the Tricolour, to break into wild celebrations.

"I've dreamt of this moment for the past two years, and I can't believe I hit the winning runs — it's truly surreal. My teammates' support made all the difference, and this



said Sanika after the match.

Left-arm spinner Parunika (4-0-6-2) provided India with an breakthrough, immediate dismissing opener Simone Lourens for a duck as South Africa struggled from the outset.

Right-arm seamer Shabnam Shakil (2-0-7-1) then removed the dangerous Jemma Botha, reducing South Africa to 20/2 by the end of the fourth over.

The pressure intensified when Aayushi bowled Diara Ramlakan, further denting South Africa's innings. At the halfway mark, South Africa were struggling at 33/3, unable to gain any momentum.

Captain Kayla Reyneke (7) tried to stabilise the innings but fell to Trisha, who later stumped Mieke van Voorst (23) to break a promising 30-run partnership for the seventh

Their skipper attempted to break free but perished while trying to go big, holing out to Trisha at long-off. Despite Fay Cowling (15; 20 balls) and Mieke van Voorst putting up a small resistance, South Africa's struggles continued.

The duo tried to rebuild but with just four overs remaining, South Africa were precariously placed at

Trisha's breakthrough then triggered a collapse and they were eventually bowled out in the final delivery of

their innings.
India got off to a strong start in their chase, scoring briskly with a steady flow of singles and boundaries. Trisha was once again the aggressor

with her exquisite strokes, while Kamalini G also chipped in. The opening partnership was moving smoothly until Kamalini was dismissed for 8, caught by Simone Lourens off Kayla Revneke's bowling, leaving India at 36/1 in 4.3 overs. Sanika faced a few dot balls before settling in as South Africa's wayward bowling and fielding also helped India's cause.

Trisha, on the other hand, continued to exude confidence, accumulating runs with a mix of singles and boundaries.

Indian opener Trisha, who struck the only century of this edition of the tournament — 110 against Scotland — finished as the topscorer with 309 runs from seven innings at a fantastic average of

77.25 and a strike rate of over 147. She also returned with seven wickets at an economy rate of 6.42 across the seven outings.

Vaishnavi emerged as the tournament's top wicket-taker, claiming 17 scalps at an outstanding economy rate of 4.35 from six matches, while Aayushi Shukla supported her brilliantly with 14 wickets from seven matches. In the final, India were 71/1 at the

Cup 2025. This victory is the result

Lanka.

Scotland.

run to six matches.

of our excellent teamwork as well as determination and grit. It will inspire several upcoming athletes. My best wishes to the team for their future endeavours," PM Modi said in his tweet.

halfway mark of their innings.

The defending champions enjoyed a

flawless campaign, winning all their

group-stage matches against the West Indies, Malaysia, and Sri

Their winning momentum continued in the Super Six stage

with victories over Bangladesh and

In the semi-final, India delivered a

commanding performance against

England to extend their unbeaten

"Immensely proud of our Nari

Shakti! Congratulations to the Indian team for emerging victorious

in the ICC U19 Women's T20 World

Continued on page 2



PM hails India-Indonesia cultural ties | Congress hits out at | MGNREGS cuts | Congress hits out at | MGNREGS cuts | Congress hits out at | Congress hits out at

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the relations between India and Indonesia are not just geopolitical but are rooted in thousands of years of shared culture and history with both countries have a tradition of unity in diversity.

Modi made the remarks while addressing the Maha Kumbabhishegam of Shri Sanathana Dharma Aalayam in Jakarta, Indonesia, via

video conferencing.
"It is my pleasure that I have become a part of the Maha Kumbabishekam of the Murugan Temple in Jakarta. I am far from Jakarta but my mind is close to it just like India and Indonesia are close to each other...I extend my wishes to all the people there on the occasion of Maha Kumbabhishegam," Modi

Just a few days ago, President Prabowo Subianto had taken the love of 140 crore Indians

added that through their president, the people of Indonesia must experiencing the good wishes of every Indian.

"I congratulate all of you and crores of devotees of Lord Murugan in India-Indonesia and across the world on the of Maha Kumbabhishegam of Jakarta Temple. I wish that the praise of Lord Murugan continues through the hymns of Tiruppugal. May the mantras of Skanda Shashthi Kavacham protect all people," Modi said. For the people of India and Indonesia, our relations are not just geopolitical. We are connected by thousands of years old culture. We are connected by thousands of years old history. Our relationship is of heritage, of science, of faith. Our relationship is of shared faith, of spirituality. We are also related to Lord Murugan and Lord Shri Ram. And, we are also related to Lord Buddha,"

When a person going from India to Indonesia folds his hands in Prambanan temple, that person gets the same spiritual experience as Kashi and Kedar, he said.

When people of India hear about Kakawin and Serat Ramayana, they get the same feeling as Valmiki Ramayana, Kamba Ramayana and Ramcharit Manas, Modi said. 'Now in India, Indonesia's Ramlila is also staged in Ayodhya. Similarly, when we hear 'Om Swasti-Astu' in Bali, we remember the Swasti recitation by the Vedic scholars of India," he said.

"In your Borobudur Stupa, we see the same teachings of Lord Buddha, which we experience in Sarnath and Bodh Gaya in India. Bali Jatra is celebrated even today in our state of Odisha. This festival is connected to those ancient sea voyages that once connected India and Indonesia with trade and culture. Even today, when people from India board Garuda Indonesia' for air

travel, they get a glimpse of our shared culture," Modi

Prime Minister Modi said that the relationship between India and Indonesia is woven with many strong threads. He said that during President Prabowo's recent visit to India, they cherished many aspects of this shared

heritage He highlighted that the new grand Murugan Temple in Jakarta adds a new golden chapter to the centuries-old heritage.

Modi expressed confidence that this temple will become a new centre for both faith and cultural values.

Noting that the Murugan

Temple in Jakarta houses not only Lord Murugan but also various other deities, Modi emphasized that this diversity and plurality form the foundation of our culture. "In Indonesia, this tradition of diversity is called 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika', while in India, it

is known as 'Unity in Diversity'," he said.

highlighted acceptance of diversity is the reason why people of different faiths live with such harmony in both Indonesia and India

He stated that this auspicious day inspires us to embrace Unity in Diversity.

"The cultural values, heritage, and legacy are enhancing people-to-people connections between India Indonesia," Modi said.

He highlighted the joint decision to preserve the Prambanan Temple and the shared commitment to the Borobudur Buddhist Temple. He also talked about the Indonesian Ramlila Ayodhya and emphasized the need to promote more such programmes.

The prime minister expressed confidence that, with President Prabowo, they will advance rapidly in this direction.

He stated that the past will form the foundation of a golden future.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday lashed out at the government over keeping MGNREGS budget stagnant and said the "neglect" of this crucial safety net exposes its indifference livelihoods. The allocation for flagship rural employment scheme Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Development Scheme (MGNREGS) was Rs 86,000 crore, the same as last

In 2023-24, the allocation for MGNREGS was Rs 60,000 crore, but additional funds were provided and the actual expenditure stood at Rs 89,153.71 crore, the Budget document showed. additional allocations for MGNREGS were made in 2024-25. In a post on X, Congress general secretary

The Border Security Force (BSF) has nabbed 14

Bangladeshis in Tripura

since January 26 for illegally

entering India, a senior official of the force said on

Two Índian touts enabling

infiltration were also nabbed during the

Besides, a significant quantity of narcotics, sugar,

cattle, and other smuggled

items valued at a total of Rs

The BSF Tripura Frontier

has enhanced vigilance and

intensified its domination

along the international

corresponding period.

2.5 crore was seized.

PTI ■ AGARTALA

Sunday.

Jairam Ramesh said that despite rising rural distress, the government has kept MGNREGA's budget stagnant at Rs 86,000 crore for 2024-26. This effectively represents a decline in the real (adjusted for price rise) allocations made MGNREGA, he said. "To add insult to injury,

estimates suggest that about 20 per cent of the budget is paid towards clearing dues from previous years," Ramesh said. This effectively reduces MGNREGA's reach, leaving drought-hit and poor rural workers stranded, he added. It also precludes any increase in the wages paid to workers, Ramesh said.

"Even in this ongoing Financial Year, the minimum average notified wage rate was increased by only 7%. This is at a time when Consumer

BSF nabs 14 Bangladeshis in Tripura

in-charge communications Price Index (CPI) inflation is estimated to be 5%. MGNREGA is therefore ground zero for the national crisis of wage stagnation," he said. The Government's neglect of this crucial safety net exposes its indifference to rural livelihoods, Ramesh The MGNREGS provides

guaranteed 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It keeps at least one-third of jobs for women. In the Covid pandemic year of 2020-21, when MGNREGS proved a lifeline employment in rural areas amid huge reverse migration in the lockdown period, Rs 1,11,169 crore was spent on the scheme, according per previous budget documents.

AAP alleges BJP attack on campaign vehicle

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday alleged one of its vehicles was campaign vandalised by BJP "goons" in the presence of police personnel in the New Delhi constituency, from where AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal is contesting the February 5 assembly polls.

The BJP rejected the charge, saying the AAP was indulging in "drama as it is losing" the polls.

Deputy New Commissioner of Police Devesh Mahla said no complaint has been received in the matter so far, and urged the party to file a formal complaint "and we assure strict legal action".

At a press conference, AAP leader Jasmine Shah alleged the publicity van was vandalised near the Lady Hardinge Medical College by BJP "goons" in the presence of police

Playing a video of the purported incident, Shah said,

Chief Minister

Nayab Singh Saini on

Sunday took a jibe at AAP

supremo Arvind Kejriwal over his "Yamuna poisoning"

remark and accused him of

Addressing a public meeting

in support of the BJP's

Mundka candidate Gajendra

Daral, the Haryana chief

minister urged people to

recognise the importance of

lying for his own benefit.

"Two of the attackers, who were also involved in stone-pelting at Kejriwal's vehicle recently, are identified in this video. Their photos with Parvesh Verma (BJP candidate) and other leaders are available," he claimed.

AAP leaders also attacked the Election Commission over the issue, with party chief Kejriwal posting on X in Hindi, "The Ramayana says Kumbhakaran slept for six months and then woke up for the next six. The Election Commission perhaps seems never awake.' Sharing a video on X that

shows some people tearing down the wrappings around the publicity van and trying to break its windshield, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said the Election Commission has its office in New Delhi, but it is unable to see or hear

If the BJP wins it will "ruin" Delhi, he said. Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor rejected the AAP's claim that his party was involved in any such attack.

much work to be done in a

'To expose his (Kejriwal's)

lies, I went to the Yamuna

ghat in Palla village and drank

the water myself so that people's fears could be

alleviated. I took water from

the point where Haryana

supplies water to Delhi, as

well as from the area where

Kejriwal claims to provide

water to the city," he said.

short period.

BJP targets Bharti in land scam allegations



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

 $B^{\text{JP's national spokesperson}}_{\text{Sambit Patra on Sunday}}$ accused AAP MLA Somnath Bharti of influencing the probe in a case of land grabbing in south Delhi.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters, Patra played a purported audio clip of Bharti, claiming that the AAP MLA from Malviya Nagar pressurised an investigating officer to give a slip to an accused and destroy evidence against him in return of bribe. Spokesperson

Haryana CM Saini Slams Kejriwal Over "Yamuna Poisoning" Claim

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI the upcoming days and "I went upstream from that got mixed with drinking been a disaster for Delhi.

there was a stark difference

between the two sources," he

On January 27, the AAF

supremo alleged that the BJP

government in Harvana had

mixed poison in the water

supplied to Delhi through the

Thanks to DJB (Delhi Jal

Board) engineers, who caught

it and stopped the water, it did

not enter Delhi. If that water

Pradeep Bhandari and State Spokesperson Dr. Anil Gupta were also present at the press conference. No immediate reaction was available from Bharti on the allegations.

Patra revealed that on November 10, 2023, a piece of land was illegally occupied in Jaitpur, and the person responsible for this act is reportedly a close associate of AAP MLA Somnath Bharti. Being a lawyer, Bharti made possible effort to protect his associate. He said a chargesheet was also filed. A video of Bharti meeting the investigating officer is also

have happened," Kejriwal had

He had claimed the BJP

wanted to mix "poison" in the

water supplied to Delhi to

trigger chaos so that AAP

could be blamed for people

Kejriwal was issued two

notices by the Election

Commission over the matter

on a complaint from the BJP.

"The AAP government has

post on its social media platforms, Patra claimed. The party is also mulling to take legal recourse in the matter, he added.

available, which the BJP will

The BJP leader said this entire conversation was captured in a sting operation, in which Somnath Bharti can be clearly heard saying:"Take the money and forget the logic, just tear up that memo."The victim of the land grabbing case had filed an FIR, and the details of the case were recorded in a seizure memo. In this case, Somnath Bharti is threatening the investigating officer to destroy the memo. The sting operation recording also captures the investigating officer responding:"If I tear up the memo, I will be guilty, so I cannot do that."

Patra further stated the biggest asset of AAP is corruption, whether it is the Delhi Jal Board scam, the DTC bus scam, or any other scam. One of the major cases among these is land grabbing. It seems that land scams have become a business for AAP

section of Delhi's population

over the past decade. He has

done nothing but deceive the

public with false promises,"

He pointed out that the

former Delhi chief minister

had promised clean water for

Delhi and claimed that he

"Now, in 2025, the condition

of the Yamuna has worsened

even further," Saini added.

would clean the Yamuna.

Saini said.

STAFF REPORTER ■ **GURUGRAM**

 $F^{\rm etal\ medicine\ is\ a\ vital}_{\rm subspecialty\ focused\ on}$ ensuring the health and safety of both mother and fetus during pregnancy.

medical prenatal significant

This field is reshaping prenatal care by diagnosing and treating medical conditions before birth, offering unprecedented opportunities to improve outcomes for both mother and baby.

how cutting-edge successfully thws several attempts infiltration, exfiltration, and trans-border smuggling,' the official said. "In various operations, 14 Bangladeshi nationals and

2025 BSF troops have successfully thwarted

two Indian touts have been apprehended by the BSF. Additionally, significant quantity of narcotics, sugar, cattle, and

other smuggled items worth Rs 2.5 crore has been seized," he said. Asserting that the BSF has with coordination

been maintaining strong Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB), he said around 80 simultaneous coordinated border. Since January 26, patrols and

coordination meetings were conducted at various levels during the period.

The BSF battalions deployed in various bordering areas have conducted over 40 coordination meetings to address the concerns of the local population.

In various joint operations with sister agencies, BSF troops carried out an extensive ganja destruction drive in remote areas, destroying 1 lakh matured crops cultivated illegally on approximately 60 acres of during

c o r r e s p o n d i n g period," he added.

Fetal medicine improves prenatal health

With recent technological and advancements, care has seen improvements, leading to better health outcomes for mothers and

Dr. Molshree Gupta, a Senior Fetal Medicine Expert at Vatsalya Centre for Fetal Medicine and C.K. Birla Hospital Gurgaon, sheds light technology and specialized expertise are revolutionizing the way we approach maternal and fetal health.

Fetal medicine is a specialized branch of maternal-fetal care focused on diagnosing and managing conditions affecting the developing baby.

"Through advanced imaging

techniques such as highresolution ultrasound, fetal MRI, and genetic testing, as early as the first trimester. Early detection allows for timely interventions, which can either correct fetal conditions or prepare for specialized care at birth," she

Dr. Gupta emphasizes, "The goal of fetal medicine is not just to diagnose but to provide solutions that can improve the quality of life for both the baby and the family.

India's youngsters dominate U-19...

From page 1

very best."

Mandaviya, who heads the sports ministry, tweeted, WORLD CHAMPIONS! Heartiest congratulations to our U19 Women's Cricket team for winning the U19WorldCup. Your hard work and dedication have made the nation immensely proud. Wishing each and every member of the team the

Tendulkar, one of the game's the first game to the final, our team played like true Winning is champions. special, but defending a title takes something extraordinary.

"Huge congratulations to #TeamIndia for lifting the U19 T20 World Cup once again! This team has inspired many and set new benchmarks for the future. Very happy for the girls & for women's cricket!"

Kumbh readies for Amrit Snan today

added.

Yamuna.

arvana

Additionally, the Akhara Marg will be closed to general foot traffic to ensure the smooth movement of devotees. A police officer stationed at Sangam stated that the priority is to prevent bottlenecks, and pilgrims will be directed in a way that avoids crowding at any one spot.

With another massive gathering expected on Monday, health services in Mahakumbh Nagar have been ambulance further strengthened since Thursday. A total of 23 hospitals, equipped with

360 beds, have been set up to provide medical care to pilgrims ahead of the Basant Panchami Amrit Snan. A special team of senior medical officials, including Medical Nodal Officer Umakant Sanyal, Chief Medical Superintendent of Central Hospital Dr. Manoj Kaushik, Co-Nodal Medical Officer Dr. Ram Singh, and Mahakumbh Mela Nodal Medical Officer Dr. Gaurav Dubey, conducted an inspection to review deployment facilities, emergency ensuring seamless healthcare services.

Dr. Gaurav Dubey stated that the Central Hospital and other medical units are functioning efficiently, providing immediate medical attention to pilgrims, from minor injuries to critical cases. He added that medical teams are responding to emergency calls within minutes, and all ambulance and health services remain fully operational, even in challenging conditions. Despite the concerns over security

and crowd management, pilgrims

remain eager to participate in the holy

ritual. Sunita Devi, who arrived from

dying.

Bihar with her family, expressed her excitement, saying that they could not make it for Mauni Amavasya, but they are here now for Basant Panchami. She noted that the arrangements seem better, and they feel safe. With enhanced security, improved

crowd management, and unwavering devotion, authorities are hopeful that the Basant Panchami Snan will proceed smoothly, allowing millions of devotees to fulfill their spiritual aspirations in a safe and organised

To identify the culprits, authorities are closely analyzing CCTV footage from

From page 1

the Maha Kumbh site. The ATS and STF teams are also questioning street vendors, including those religious bangles, in hopes of uncovering crucial leads.

Meanwhile, strict security measures have been put in place across the fairgrounds. ADG (Law & Order) and STF chief Amitabh Yash is camping in Prayagraj to oversee the investigation. DGP Prashant Kumar stated that the police

and drone cameras. "Our

Retired judge files PIL against poll freebies

priority is to ensure the safe completion of the remaining Amrit Snan rituals. Once that is secured, we will expedite the investigation," he added. The Maha Kumbh, one of the

largest religious gatherings in the world, has now come under heightened security surveillance as authorities work to ensure the safety of millions of devotees.

Modi's guarantee for Delhi: PM

The PM also assured the people of Delhi that no slum will be demolished if the BJP comes to power in the national capital. He was responding to recent claims by AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, who alleged that the BJP would target slum areas if elected to power. "Not a single slum will be demolished in Delhi. We don't make announcements just for show. We make provisions in the Budget to back our promises," PM Modi said in the rally. He criticised the AAP for spreading rumours to mislead the

Greeting people on Basant he asserted, has stood for Panchami on Sunday, he said the festival marks the change in the season, adding that people of Delhi have made up their mind to elect a BJP government. Slamming the government in the Capital for its alleged false promises and corruption, he said its policies have led to closing of factories, adding that those who have looted people will have to account The PM said the "AAP" has

destroyed 11 years of the national Capital, and a double engine government dedicated to its development and growth will now be elected. His government at the Centre,

strengthening four pillars of poor, farmers, youth and women, and the Budget is the guarantee of fulfilling Modi's guarantees. The Budget's focus on employment generating sectors like tourism and manufacturing will benefit the youth, he said. He spoke of welfare promises made in the BJP manifesto, including for senior citizens and women, to highlight the benefits a BJP government in

> to them. When Modi gives a guarantee, he puts his heart, mind and soul into fulfilling it, the prime minister said. With the middle class,

the national capital will bring

making up for a significant section of voters, the prime minister said his government takes decisions which meet their dreams and aspirations. Expressing confidence about the BJP's win, Modi said, "You can note it down the BJP government will be formed in Delhi on February 8, and by March International Women's Day, women will start receiving Rs 2,500." Women, he said, have worked as his protective shield and have made a big contribution

in ensuring the third term of

his government at the Centre.

Delhi, he said, has paid a

heavy price due to the AAP

government and has decided

including salaried employees,

who live in 'sheesh mahal' cannot related to a poor family's jhuggi or a middle class family's 2BHK flat, he said, in a swipe at former chief minister and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal. The AAP has committed scam and corruption in every field, including in health measures for people, he claimed. With several AAP leaders, including sitting MLAs who

were not given ticket by the party in the polls, quitting it, Modi said they have realised the massive anger people have for the party. Feeling jittery, the AAP is making false announcements everyday, he

selling are thoroughly examining all aspects of the tragedy, reviewing footage from CCTV offerings and

Maha Kumbh stampede: Police launches probe

From page 1

"Declare such cash-oriented schemes as unconstitutional & against the spirit of free and fair elections and classify as election manipulation, reads the petition. The judge has contended that

such activities not only violate electoral laws but also infringe upon fundamental rights of the voters, including their right to privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution of India and severely hampers the free and fair conduct of the polls.

Justice (Retd) Dhingra, in his PIL, is seeking directions from the Delhi High Court to the three national parties to "cease and desist from collecting personal and electoral data of voters under false pretences" and that they are directed to not share and use the data collected during elections to any third party.

The PIL is also seeking cashoriented schemes to be unconstitutional declared and classified as election manipulation. It is also seeking directions to the Election Commission of India to frame rules for political parties in respect of promises against distribution to voters. One of the primary concerns

raised in the petition pertains to the "Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana", announced by AAP, which is allegedly

misrepresented as a Delhi government initiative. The petitioner claims that AAP is promising Rs 2,100 per month to female voters postelections in exchange for their votes, which constitutes bribery disguised as an electoral promise. Similarly, BJP and Congress have reportedly launched their schemes-"Mahila Samridhi Yojana" and "Pyari Didi Yojana"-offering direct cash benefits of Rs 2,500 per month to female voters if elected. The petition also prays for

monitoring mechanisms to ensure a free and fair election in Delhi. It is also pointed out that Political parties have been allotted offices for in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies and land for the party office in National Capital at a very nominal price by the Central Government, along with the role they play in the democratic setup and the nature of duties performed by them, indicate their public character. Political parties are effective intermediaries that link social forces and ideologies to governmental institutions, acting as a connecting link between the government and public

Chhattisgarh's BJP govt 'failed' to live up to people's expectations: Cong chargesheet

STAFF REPORTER ■

 $T_{\text{in Chhattisgarh on}}^{\text{he opposition Congress}}$ Sunday claimed that the BJP had failed to live up to people's expectations over the past year, a charge the ruling party rejected.

All sections of society are disappointed with the Vishnu Deo Sai-led BJP government, state Congress chief Deepak Baij claimed while releasing a "chargesheet" at a press while conference here.

The BJP came to power in December 2023 after defeating the Congress in the assembly polls.

Baij alleged

"corruption" and "bad governance" prevail in the

People from the Other Backward Classes (OBC) are



angry with the state government due to the faulty" reservation policy implemented in local bodies, he claimed.

Farmers are disappointed as they are not getting the

lump sum amount of Rs 3,100 along with the additional Rs 112 increase in the minimum support price (MSP) for paddy, totalling Rs 3,212 per quintal, he charged.

Baij also raked up some

incidents of violence last year in the Kabirdham and Balodabazar-Bhatapara districts and alleged irregularities in a few recruitment exams in the state to target the BJP The law and order has

collapsed in Chhattisgarh, he alleged.

Social security pension, old-age pension and widow pension have been stopped and beneficiaries are being made to run from pillar to post, he added.

Chhattisgarh Finance Minister OP Choudhary dismissed Congress' charges. He told reporters that if

Congress were to compile a chargesheet on its previous five-year regime, between 2018 and 2023, in the state, it would be bigger than a novel. Choudhary said, "They

(Congress) are criticising our one-year-old government. Well, it is their job to make allegations." The development done in the past year is evident across Chhattisgarh and people will definitely bless us, the minister added.

25-kg IED planted near paddy centre, defused



STAFF REPORTER BIJAPUR

Security personnel on Sunday recovered 25-kg Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) planted by the Maoists in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh.

The team of 196th battalion of Central Reserve

Police Force recovered the command switch system controlled-IED planted on a plastic container close to a road to a paddy procurement centre between the Usur and Awapalli villages road in Usur area, Bijapur Additional

Superintendent of Police

Chandrakant Governa said.

The recovered IED was immediately defused by experts of the security force's Bomb Disposal Squad

Maoists often plant explosives to target security forces during anti-Naxal operations in the Bastar division, comprising seven

Grand Flower Show 2025 evokes good response

2025' held in Chhattisgarh's

Bhilai city which concluded today evoked a

Bhilai Steel Plant of the

good response.



STAFF REPORTER

The two-day annual Grand Flower Show

SAIL, organised the show. The event aimed to bring together nature enthusiasts from across the state and celebrate the environment.

The Flower Show featured over 100 stalls for competitions in multiple categories.

Participants showcased a variety of flowers, plants, and innovative gardening techniques, including cacti, bonsai, medicinal plants, and seasonal herbs.

Rangoli made from fruits, vegetables, and flowers was one of the key attractions on the second

The event also consisted of a special exhibition of vegetables

Over 700 ruralites benefit from Ayush yoga camp



STAFF REPORTER **BILASPUR**

 $A^{ ext{s many as 700 people}}_{ ext{benefitted from a}}$ five-day yoga camp of the Ayush Department held in Sarwan Deori village of Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district, an official communique

District Ayurveda Officer Dr. Yashpal Singh Dhruv said that the department is holding camps to improve community health.

The camps are based on the idea that yoga promotes physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.

The instructors

Authorities crack whip on reckless polling staff STAFF REPORTER

BEMETARA

Authorities in Chhattisgarh's Bemetara district on Sunday suspended six teachers and served show cause notices to three Headmasters over negligence in election work.

Vikas Kumar Verma of Swami Atmanand School in Thelka, Nirmal Thakur of Higher Secondary School in Boratara, Kamlesh Kumar Verma of Higher Secondary School in Boratara, Nageshwar Chauhan of Government Primary School in Keshtara, Manoj Kashyap of Government Secondary School in Ghivari, and Chain Singh Thakur of Pre-Secondary School in Kongiyakala have been suspended for being absent during training.

Headmasters Sunil Rajput of Government Primary School Mohabhata, Naveen Das Goswami of Government Primary School



Navagaon Khurd, and Horilal Ghritlahare of Government Primary School Mudhiya were served show cause notices for being negligent during training of polling parties.

Collector Ranbir Sharma has

sought their replies within 24 hours.

A glimpse of an awareness campaign demonstrating the operations of an Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) in Chhattisgarh's tribal-dominated Kondagaon district.

can damage your liver health **AGENCIES**

Just 10 micrograms daily of traffic-derived PM2.5 particles may be enough to harm your liver and raise the risk of metabolic-associated fatty liver disease, according to a new study.

Fatty liver, also called hepatic steatosis, is the most common liver disease worldwide. The disease occurs due to excess fat build-up in the

Previous studies have pointed out lifestyle factors such as a bad diet, lack of exercise, and excessive alcohol as the major reason behind fatty

The new research conducted in mice suggests our environment, particularly exposure to traffic air pollution can also contribute

educated them about the

benefits of yoga and

taught them various yoga

villagers also learnt how

to prepare Ayurvedic

educated them about the

prevention of drug

decoctions.

Social

Along with yoga, the

workers

Even low-level traffic air pollution

'We think of air pollution as being harmful to people's lungs, but it has a broader impact on health including on the liver," said lead author and Professor Hui Chen from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

When we inhale air pollution, very tiny particles known as PM2.5 enter the bloodstream through the lungs. The liver, which filters toxins from the blood, then accumulates these substances, including heavy metals such as arsenic, lead, nickel, and zinc," added Chen.

The study, published in the Journal of Environmental Sciences, said the team exposed mice to 10 micrograms of traffic-derived PM2.5 particles

The team measured

inflammation, fibrosis, and changes in liver sugars and fats at four, eight, and 12 weeks.

Although there was no significant change in four weeks by eight weeks there was disruption to the normal metabolic function of the liver. And by 12 weeks, significant changes were visible -- 64 specific functional proteins in the liver showed change. Many of these were linked to conditions like fatty liver disease, and immune system

Exposure to air pollution particles caused more immune cells to gather in the liver, increasing inflammation. It also led to more scar tissue forming, the team said.

They also found potentially harmful fats like triglycerides, diacylglycerols, and ceramides increased in the mice's liver.

FORM NO. IV [See sub rule 2(a) of Rule 5] **DEBTS RECOVERY** TRIBUNAL, JABALPUR

At 797-II , Shantikunj, South Civil Lines, Jabalpur (M.P.) 48200 (Area of Jurisdiction-Madhya Pradesh & Chatisgarh) Original Application No 1107/2024 FF APPLICANT .

CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA, Bhatapara

DEFENDANTS M/S JAI DURGA STONE & OTHERS

. M/S JAI DURGA STONE CRUSHER THROUGH ITS PROP. MR DEEPCHANI VERMA,R/O VILLAGE- RANIJAROUD TEHSIL- SIMGA, DISTT -2. MR DEEPCHAND VERMA

S/O SHRI GANESH VERMA R/O MADHAV B- 38 KRISHNA NAGAR DISTT BALODBAZAR BHATAPARA CG 493118 (2ND ADDRESS: C/O MR. GANESH RAM VERMA, SHOP NO 37, C MARKET, STREET NO. 03, SECTOR 1, BHILAI, NEAR WATER TAN BHILAI, CHHATTISGARH, 490001

3. MR DILIP KUMAR VERMA S/O SHRI ISHWARI PRASAD VERMA PROP M/S MAA SHARADA STONE CRUSHER), R/O VILLAGE-RANIJAROUD, TEHSIL- SIMGA. DISTT-BALODBAZAR BHATAPARA, CG 493118

RANIJAROUD, TEHSIL- SIMGA, DISTT-BALODBAZAR BHATAPARA, CG 493118
WHEREAS, O.A. No. 1107/2024 was listed before Hon'ble Presiding Officer on 05.09.2024
Whereas this Hon'ble Tribunal is Pleased to issue summons / notice on the said Application under section 19(4) of the Act, (O.A.) filed against you recovery of debts of Rs. 29,87,613/(application alongwith copies of documents etc. annexed). In accordance with sub-section 04 of section 19 of the Act, you the defendants are directed as under:-(1) To show cause within thirty days of the service of summons as to why relief prayed for should not be granted.
(ii) To disclose particulars of properties or assets other than properties and assets specified by the applicant under Serial No. 3A of the Application.
(iii) You are restrained from dealing without disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under Serial No. 3-A of the Original Application, pending hearing and disposal of the application for attachment of properties.
(iv) You shall not transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, except in the ordinary course of his business any of the assets over which security interest created and / or other assets and properties specified or disclosed under Serial No. 3A of the Original Application without the prior approval of the Tribunal.

Iv) You shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds realised by sale of secured assets or other assets and

sale proceeds realised by sale of secured assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of ousiness and deposit such sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank of financial institution holding security interest over such

assets.

You are also directed to file the writter statement with a copy thereof furnished to the Applicant and to appear before 30/04/2025 at 10:30 A.M. failing which he application shall be heard and ecided in your absence. Given under my hand and seal of the

Fribunal this 30th day of Jan., 2025.

By order Tribuna REGISTRAR

Drinkers with depression experience same stimulation as those without depression: Study on the brain are complex, reasons, as were people

AGENCIES

 $P_{\text{use disorder (AUD)}}^{\text{eople with alcohol}}$ and depression experience high levels of stimulation and pleasure when intoxicated, similar to drinkers who do not have depression, according to a new

The study by the University of Chicago Medicine in the US reveals that counter the long-held belief that the people pleasure experience alcohol drinking decreases with addiction and that drinking to intoxication is mainly to reduce negative feelings as a form of selfmedication.

'We have this folklore that people drink

excessively when they're feeling depressed and that it's really about self-medicating," said Andrea King, PhD, Professor of Psychiatry Behavioral Neuroscience.

In this study of natural environment drinking and smart phone-based reports of the effects of alcohol in real-time, participants with AUD and a depressive disorder reported feeling acute, sustained positive and rewarding alcohol effects just like their nondepressed counterparts.

The study, published in the American Journal of Psychiatry, challenged conventional notions about alcohol's effects in depressed people who drink excessively and could improve treatment



approaches by focusing

more on alcohol's

responsive systems.

improved understanding of the factors that affect an individual's vulnerability to AUD and depression is critical to identify and initiate early, effective treatment. The research

followed 232 individuals across the U.S. between the ages of 21 to 35, corresponding to the period when most heavy drinking occurs in a person's lifetime. Half of the study

group met criteria for AUD in the past year and were evenly divided in terms of those who had or had not experienced a major depressive disorder in the past year. Individuals who had suicidal ideation were excluded for safety

depression or AUD The positive effects of alcohol were much higher in individuals with AUD than those without AUD and contrary to lore, similar in those with

AUD and depression and

those without depression.

who had severe alcohol

consumption reduced

negative feelings,

although the reduction

small and nonspecific to their

was

The researchers found that alcohol

withdrawal symptoms.

The findings call into question predominant theory that alcohol addiction arises from the brain's attempt to maintain stability despite repeated heavy

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RSS-affiliate SJM says Budget of this year 'prudent', addresses key concerns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Hailing the Union Budget as "prudent budget amidst challenges", the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) on Sunday said it has tried to address all the key concerns to take the country's economy forward and also make it selfreliant. The SIM is an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Presenting the Union Budget for 2025-26 in Lok Sabha on Saturday, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made a slew of announcements and also exempted annual income of up to ₹12 Lakh from income tax, rejigging tax slabs. In her budget speech, she laid out a blueprint for next-generation reforms, including raising the FDI limit in the insurance sector, simplification of tax laws and cutting duties on intermediaries while providing enhanced fiscal support for welfare measures.

It's a "prudent budget amidst various challenges" the country was facing, the SJM co-convenor Ashwani Mahajan said in a statement.

"Concerns were being expressed about health of the economy due to deceleration in GDP growth in last two quarters, depreciating rupee, continuing inflation, decline in consumption, rising trade deficit, declining forex reserves," he said. the country. The MSME It was a "real challenge" for the manufacturing mission, enhanced



agriculture, support farmers and address imbalance in agriculture production, reduce dependence on foreign countries regarding pulses and edible oils, and also give tax relief to middle-income taxpayers, and address the inflationary concerns at the same time, Mahajan

"Budget 2025-26 has tried to balance all these concerns and take the economy forward," he added.

Mahajan said the Budget has given a push to the manufacturing sector in government to spur manufacturing credit guarantee for the MSME,

electric vehicles and other clean-tech manufacturing.
"It's important to note that due to our

excessive dependence on imported batteries, motors for electric vehicles and also solar cells, our import bill and also solar cells, our import bill has been rising and in future, the nation could be even exploited due to our dependence on imported components," he said.

"Therefore, it is giving a push to Aatmanirbhar Bharat and saving the nation from exploitation by

nation from exploitation by foreigners," he added.
The SJM co-convenor said the

Budget has also tried to give a push to the health and agriculture sector and bridge the rural-urban gaps as

"Budget 2025-26 does much more to push rural incomes. Apart from raising the Kisan Credit Card limit, agriculture push, food processing push and many more efforts to raise rural incomes can go a long way to reduce rural-urban disparities," he

Allocation of ₹98,311 Crore for the healthcare sector in the Budget indicates a "significant push" for growth, Mahajan said.

Key measures like customs duty exemptions on life-saving drugs and the establishment of daycare cancer centres are some of the essential steps the Budget has made, he said.

"The SJM welcomes the budget announcement for recognising gig workers," Mahajan added.

Mysterious deaths in J-K's Rajouri: AIIMS Delhi team meets patients

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

A five-member team of experts from AIIMS Delhi, including specialists in toxicology, has spoken to 11 patients who are undergoing treatment for a mysterious illness that has claimed 17 lives in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, and recorded

their clinical history.

The team would visit
Badhaal village on Sunday where three families suffered casualties due to the illness, and collect samples from their sealed homes and surrounding areas.

The samples would tested to know the cause of toxicity. The experts will also interact with the other villagers," a source said.

The AIIMS team headed by its director Dr M Srinivas comprises Dr A Shariff, clinical toxicology, Dr Shailendra Kumar, additional professor, anesthesia and critical care, Jamahed Nayer, professor, additional emergency medicine, Dr Jagdish Prasad Meena, additional professor, pediatrics, and Dr Javed Qadri, assistant professor, clinical toxicology.

According to sources, the team arrived in Rajouri on



Friday night, interacted with the patients and their relatives at the Government Medical College (GMC), and made several queries about the entire episode.

They also examined some of the patients who are under observation.

The doctors at GMC Rajouri are treating the 11 patients using Atropine, an antipoison drug, the sources said. Besides the AIIMS Delhi team, a team of experts from PGI Chandigarh is also investigating the cause of

Meanwhile, no new case has been reported in the past nine days from Badhaal village, which was shaken by the unexplained deaths of 17 people belonging to three families between December 7 and January 19, officials said. To mitigate the situation and prevent further casualties, 87

families comprising individuals were shifted from the village to three isolated centres in Rajouri --Nursing Government

College, Government Boys Higher Secondary School, and Government Medical College where they are under observation.

To ensure the safety of the remaining 808 households, comprising 3,700 individuals, in Badhaal, the village has been divided into 14 clusters monitored by multi-department teams of 182 officials, sources said.

All shops and establishments in the village have been sealed, and ration is being provided under strict supervision, an official said. The remote village has been declared a containment zone and prohibitory orders have been imposed on all public and private gatherings.

Philippines, handed over to Delhi Police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NFW DFI HI

Wanted by police and fac-ing Interpol Red Notice, gangster Joginder Gyong Was deported from the Philippines to Delhi on Sunday, the CBI said.

Joginder Gyong was wanted by Haryana Police in a case of criminal conspiracy and murder registered against him in Panipat. He was handed over to Delhi Police upon landing at the Indira Gandhi International Airport as he was also wanted by the force here, officials said. The Central Bureau of

Investigation (CBI) got a Red issued against Joginder Gyong from the Interpol on October 25, 2024, which was circulated to all the law enforcement agencies globally for tracking the wanted criminal, an agency

"On the strength of the Red Gyong was deported from the Philippines via Bangkok to Delhi," he said.



whom the subject suspected of disclosing the real identity and location of his gangster brother Surender Gyong to the police. Surender Gyong was killed in an exchange of fire with the police," the statement said.

Joginder Gyong allegedly planned and murdered the victim to avenge the death his brother, the CBI said. "The subject was also

cases in various states of India, including Delhi and Punjab, for the offences of fear of death or of grievous "The subject is a gangster hurt in order to commit and later fled abroad, police wanted by the Haryana Police extortion and kidnapping for said.

in the murder of a victim ransom," the spokesperson

Meanwhile, Delhi Police said Gyong was apprehended by the Philippines Bureau of Immigration (PBI) from Bacolod City, acting on India's request for his extradition. According to PBI officials,

Gyong was identified as an "Indian-Nepalese national" and a key figure in a separatist terror network,

Gyong was convicted to life imprisonment in Haryana for illegal firearms possession. robbery, murder, attempt to While on parole, he murder, putting person in committed the murder in Panipat in December 2017

Gangster Joginder Gyong deported from | SC to hear on February 3 plea seeking safety measures for devotees at Maha Kumbh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NFW DFI HI

extension of the PLI beyond an

earlier list and several other

measures proposed in the Budget to

improve manufacturing will insulate

'The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch was

manufacturing policy in the country

for a long time. The present endeavour of the government will go a long way towards this goal," he

Mahajan said the Union Budget has

also tried to remove obstacles in the

clean tech path, by way of push given

to lithium batteries, motors for

from

well-defined

country

dominance", he said.

demanding

added.

The Supreme Court is sched-I uled to hear on Monday a plea seeking implementation of specific guidelines and regulations to ensure safety of devotees attending the Maha Kumbh where at least 30 people were killed and 60 injured in a stampede on January 29.

According to the cause list on February 3 uploaded on the apex court website, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar is slated to hear the PIL filed by advocate Vishal Tiwari.

The petition seeks to prevent stampede incidents and protect the fundamental rights of equality and life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The plea, which made the Centre and all the states as collectively in ensuring a safe and secure environment for devotees at the Maha Kumbh. It said all states should establish facilitation centres at



information and assist their respective residents emergencies

It also sought installation of signage and announcements in multiple languages to help pilgrims navigate the event with ease.

"All states shall establish in their manner facilitation centres at the Maha Kumbh. These centres shall provide and display the basic information regarding coming from their states. In emergency these centres shall be ready for any assistance," it

The plea said SMSes and WhatsApp messages be used

protocols to attendees. There is a need coordination between the Uttar Pradesh government and other states to ensure the availability of doctors and

nurses at the venue, it said. The plea also sought regulation of VIP movement and said public safety should be given priority over VIP protocols to prevent congestion and ensure smooth crowd movement.

government to submit a status report on the stampede incident and initiate legal action against those responsible for negligence. The stampede took place on January 29 on the occasion of

Mauni Amavasya, one of the most auspicious days of the Hindu calendar. The plea cited several past

incidents of stampedes at religious gatherings, emphasising the need for proactive safety measures, and said in 1954, over 800 deaths place due to overcrowding on a narrow bridge at the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

Around 200 people were killed in a stampede triggered by restricted access at Kumbh at Haridwar in 1986, it said, adding 39 deaths and over 140 injuries took place in 2003 at Nashik.

The Kumbh Mela is one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, taking place in rotation among four major locations: Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Haridwar (Uttarakhand) Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), and

Given the massive influx of pilgrims from all states, the petition stresses the need for collective responsibility in ensuring proper crowd management, medical facilities, transportation, and

Maha Kumbh stampede: Congress slams BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

The Congress on Sunday ■ asked why the BJP government is not revealing the actual number of those who died in the Maha Kumbh stampede and claimed that the whole matter shows that it is trying to escape blame. In the January 29 stampede at

Sangam, at least 30 pilgrims died and 60 were injured with the police blaming overcrowding for the incident. blaming Congress general secretary incommunications Jairam Ramesh cited a media report which said the state administration has not given an update on the number of

"The BJP government, which Kumbh every day, is not revealing the actual number of dead even after five days. It is clear from the whole matter that this government is the culprit and wants to escape

deaths even after four days of

the incident.

PIL in Delhi HC seeks CBI enquiry into forgery by **Drone Federation India**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

 $D_{\left(\text{DFI} \right)}^{\text{rone}}$ Federation India (DFI) formerly known as Drone Federation of India is under intense scrutiny following proof of forging official documents to manipulate regulatory approvals had sur-

As per sources, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has been filed on January 29, 2025 before the Delhi High Court seeking a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) investigation against the forgery of government documents by DFI. The PIL, submitted by Right to Information (RTI) activist Tej Pratap Singh, claims that DFI forged the NOC to bypass legal obstacles and change its company name.

The fraudulent document, submitted to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MĆA), aimed to rebrand the "Drone organization as Federation India," potentially misleading the public into believing it was government-affiliated. The relevant documents are in

possession of The Pioneer. In addition to the forgery, DFI is accused of using lobbying tactics to unfairly influence tenders to certain select member companies,



thereby suppressing competition in the UAV industry. Further scrutiny has arisen over DFI's occupancy of office space at the former Air India Building, allegedly secured through questionable recommendations.

the PIL calls for urgent action seeking a CBI investigation to ensure transparency and accountability. Drone accountability. Federation India now face serious legal consequences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for criminal forgery under Section 61,

drone company, and the claim in question is fake,"



Sources said MCA has initiated an inspection and

316, 336, 337, 338 and 340 of BNS, 2023 which are cognizable and non-bailable in nature. When contacted to the company officials, a DFI official said, "DFI is a renowned think tank, not a

commented the DFI official.



Ling the necessary infrastructure and processes to harness artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning for auditing processes and to audit AI applications themselves as the country aims to become a USD 30trillion economy by 2047, CAG K Sanjay Murthy said. Speaking at the World Forum

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

India's apex auditor is build-

of Accountants hosted by ICAI on Saturday, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) Murthy said a USD 30-trillion economy will be necessarily digital, as organisations expand into emerging areas, and global champions are born.

Accounting and auditing professionals will have to provide the required support. "Adopting new technologies would help bring required efficiencies in the accounting and auditing processes.

Taking a leadership role in developing and adapting innovative technological practices would also help Indian firms to become global champions," he said, while addressing the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) programme here on Saturday.

Underlining the key role of digital technology as a major enabler as well as disrupter, the CAG said the range of



CAG building infra and processes to

harness AI and ML: Sanjay Murthy

technological solutions that are now available have transformed the scale and potential which organisations can achieve higher performance

"For us, it's an exciting challenge as the India of 2025 moves towards becoming a Viksit Bharat of 2047 which aspires to have an economy of USD 30 trillion. More larger companies and government budgets cannot be handled by physically replicating existing structures and processes. Technology will have to be leveraged to keep up and deliver," he said. The CAG's address covered the gamut of technology and innovation in auditing and accounting, pointing out how AI, machine learning, robotic

automation and blockchain

"The evolution of technology

revolutionised the field.

technology

and adaptation will require a transformation in intellectual infrastructural capacities," he said. Referring to the recent 'The

Future of Jobs Report 2025' by the World Economic Forum, Murthy noted how it has highlighted the drivers of transformation and skillsets needed in coming years.

"We have embarked upon a comprehensive digitisation journey. We are committed to further integrating advanced technologies to bolster audit capabilities. Recognising the transformative potential of AI and ML, we have already taken the leap of faith and started building new tarted new tar started building necessary infrastructure and processes to harness these technologies to use them in auditing processes and to audit AI applications themselves," he

Talking about the CAG's digitisation journey, he said a

major development is the implementation of the One IAAD One System (OIOS), an end-to-end Information Management System (AIMS) and a webenabled IT application that supports multiple languages, offers offline functionality, and includes a mobile application for audits in a fully digital environment. Digital initiatives in areas of administration,

including eHRMS and eOffice, have also been mainstreamed. He said the CAG has also implemented state-of-the-art data analytic capabilities

through its dedicated centre

to enable analysis-driven audits. Remote sensing techniques and image analytics have also been widely used. It will be our endeavour to access other applications for smoothening the process of auditing for greater transparency, Murthy

The World Forum of Accountants is an annual conference, and it was ICAI's turn as host this year.
The World Forum of

added.

Accountants brings together some of the brightest minds from among accountants, auditors, and finance professionals, business leaders and regulators of the accounting and auditing

SC conference deliberates issues faced by State judiciary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

▼ dentification of bottlenecks in case disposal and strategies to reduce backlog of cases at different levels came up for discussion at a national conference organised by the Supreme Court here on issues faced by the State judiciary.

The conference held on Saturday participation of judges of the top court, the High Courts as well as the District judiciary.

"The idea behind this conference was to engage in a meaningful dialogue with different stakeholders and functionaries in the state judiciary, especially the district courts, to first understand the challenges being faced by them and thereafter, chalk out a plan to address the same," the apex court administration said in a release. The conference had four

technical sessions which covered diverse topics affecting the performance of state judiciary. technical sessions chaired by the judges of the apex court, including Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna. It said the first session witnessed

discussions on ways to narrow the gulf between

institution and disposal of

cases, identification of case types flooding judicial dockets, identification of bottlenecks in case disposal and strategies to reduce backlog of cases at different levels.

The statement said in one of the sessions, the feasibility of having a uniform case categorisation in different courts was explored. "In this session, ways to leverage technology and better to optimise the judicial processes were also deliberated upon," the release said. It said discussions were also

held on timely recruitment

of judicial officers and court staffs, continual recruitment or empanelment of public prosecutors or legal aid counsels, creation of a permanent IT and data cadre in all high courts and district courts and measures to enhance objectivity in the process of recommending suitable candidates from district judiciary for elevation to the high courts. Discussions on career progression and continuous performance evaluation of judicial officers, need for establishing a common curriculum for training and capacity building of judicial officers and ways of ensuring accountability of judicial officers and court staff were also held during

Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb shines as Muslims extend hospitality to pilgrims in Prayagraj

The spirit of communal harmony was on full display during the Maha Kumbh's grand Mouni Amavasya bathing festival, as Muslim families in the old city opened their homes to stranded Hindu

With roads leading to the rail-way station blocked due to the overwhelming rush, local resi-dents stepped in to offer food, shelter, and warmth to the

Among them was Rameshwar Prasad, a pilgrim from Madhya Pradesh, who found shelter at a house near Chowk. "I had nowhere to go when the roads were closed, and I was shivering in the cold," he recalled. "A kind man named Rashid invited me in, gave me food, and even offered me a blanket. I will never forget his kindness.

The historic Jama Masjid in Chowk also turned into a refuge for dozens of pilgrims. Community kitchens in Muslim-majority areas ran throughout the night, serving



hot meals to those in need. With the success of these efforts, locals have now begun preparations to assist devotees on Vasant Panchami, another major bathing festival. During Mouni Amavasya, thousands of devotees spent three days at Yadgare Husaini Inter College

itated," Lakshmi told journal

ists after her surrender today.

She thanked Chief Minister

Siddaramaiah for the gener-

ous surrender package and appealed to the district

administration to relieve her

of all charges laid against

her in the police stations in

Kundapur taluk. DC Vidya Kumari said

Lakshmi comes under the 'A' category candidate for

surrender, and as a surrender package norm the Naxalites

coming under this category

The 'A' category has been denominated for the Naxals

originating from Karnataka

The surrender packages will

be given in phases extending

to three years, and in addi-

tion, depending on the core

capacity of the Naxals who surrendered, facilities like

education, rehabilitation, and

employment will be offered,"

Sripal of the State Surrender

Committee, told the jour-

nalists present that the com-

mittee had recommended to

the government to expedi-

tiously dispose of the cases

filed against the surrendered

Naxalites, helping them to

lead a normal life in society.

"Due to the efforts of the

Committee, 22 Naxal activists

have surrendered in 2025 so

far and Lakshimi happens to

be the last one in the state to

added the DC

state, Kumari added.

Shankaranarayana

Amasebail

in Chowk, where members of the Muslim community volunteered to provide food and accommodation. Gauhar Kazmi, the college manager, confirmed that arrangements are now being made for Vasant Panchami as well. Radha Devi, a devotee from

and warm bedding. Their generosity reminded me that humanity comes before reli-

opened his restaurant for female devotees. Sunita Mishra, a pilgrim from Kanpur, expressed her gratitude: "I was hesitant at first, but they treated me like family. The women in Rashid bhai's house took care of me as if I was their own sister. In addition, Haseeb Ahmed organised a langar in Chowk, serving food to hundreds of devotees. He has now started Varanasi, shared her experience: preparations to host more pil "I was tired from the journey grims on Vasant Panchami. Recognising the struggles of and had no place to rest when those walking long distances, young leader Adil Hamza arranged for vehicles to transport devotees. "Religion teach-

Local businessman Rashid Sagir, who had opened

Shaharara Bagh Mosque for pil-grims and distributed blankets

during Mouni Amavasya, is preparing similar arrangements for Vasant Panchami. "It is our duty to help those in need, regardless of religion," he said. Understanding the need for construct arrangement for

separate arrangements for women, Rashid had also

es us compassion, not division,

Maha Kumbh: BHU scientists conduct DNA and COVID immunity study

BISWAJEET BANERJEE

Scientists from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) are conducting a groundbreaking study at the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj to analyse the genetic diversity of attendees and assess immunity languages of the court nity levels against COVID-19. The study aims to determine what percentage of India's genetic makeup is represent-ed at the religious gathering and whether COVID antibodies are still prevalent in the population.

A five-member team of researchers has begun collecting samples from approximately 1,000 participants. Professor Gyaneshwar Chaubey, who is leading the Gyaneshwar study, stated that the research focuses on two primary objec

The first is to conduct antibody tests to gauge the level of immunity developed against COVID-19 among devotees.

The second is to analyse the diversity of DNA present in the crowd, given that pilgrims from across India converge at the Maha Kumbh.

of immunity, reducing the likelihood of major outbreaks patterns and genetic ancestry, contributing to a deeper understanding of India's at the Maha Kumbh. The scale of the investigation will be vast, with the The sample collection began on January 24 and will continresearchers analysing data from 25,000 individuals.

"By using random sampling ue till February 7. methods, we aim to map the The team is using saliva samgenetic diversity of attendees ples for genetic analysis and conducting antibody tests to and assess how well their DNA represents the broader Indian population," Professor Chaubey explained.
The data collected will proevaluate Covid immunity. Initial findings indicate that most participants have been vaccinated and retain a degree

Last naxalite of Karnataka, Lakshmi surrenders in Udupi



PNS BENGALURU

Lakshmi, said to be the last Naxalite in Karnataka, unconditionally surrendered on Sunday in front of Udupi Deputy Commissioner Vidya Kumari and Superintendent of Police Arun K.

According to police, Lakshmi, who had been hid-ing in Andhra Pradesh, has had three cases at Amasebail and Shankaranarayana police stations in Kundapur Taluk in the Udupi district. These cases date back to 2007-2008, and they pertain to the exchange of fire with police, literature in villages and small

Police said Lakshmi originally belonged to Thombattu of Machchattu village in Kundapura taluk.

She was accompanied by the State Naxal Surrender Committee member Sripal and her husband Salim, a former Naxalite who had surrendered in 2020 in Andhra Pradesh.

After severing her connection with her family 15 years ago, Lakshmi had gone underground and was active in pushing the Naxalite agenda in Chikkamagaluru and Udupi districts.

"I tried to get in touch with the district officials and wanted to surrender after the Karnataka government had announced the surrender protocol and package, but it had not happened for some reason. Now that the surrender committee was formed,

Pilgrim bus plunges into gorge in Gujarat, five killed 35 injured

a young man named Areeb

guided me to the school, where

they provided us with meals

Five persons were killed and 35 others injured when a private bus carrying pilgrims hailing from Madhya Pradesh fell into a deep gorge in Gujarat's Dang district early Sunday morning, police said. Among the injured persons, 17 were grievously hurt, they said,

adding the victims were on a trip to religious places across various states in the country. The accident took place at 4.15 am when the bus driver lost con-

trol over the wheels near the Saputara hill station, in-charge Superintendent of Police SG Patil said.

The bus, carrying 48 pilgrims, broke the crash barrier and fell at a depth of about 35 feet into the gorge, he said. The passengers started at night

for Dwarka in Gujarat from Trimbakeshwar, a religious place in Maharashtra's Nashik district. They made a brief stop at Saputara for tea break before



resuming their journey when the accident occurred 2.5 kilometres from the hill station, the official said. "Five persons died on the spot and 17 others suffered serious injuries and have been rushed to a civil hospital at Ahwa. Some others have sustained minor injuries. The rescue operation is nearly over," the offi-

The bus driver was among the deceased, comprising three men and two women, according to police. A total of 35 passengers

cial said.

were taken to the nearby community health centres (CHCs) for treatment, and 17 of them were referred to the civil hospital at Ahwa in the district, Patil said. The pilgrims, hailing from Madhya Pradesh, had set out on four different buses on December 23, 2024 on a trip to religious places across various states, he said. Dang Collector Mahesh Patel said the unfortunate incident occurred after one of the four buses carrying the pilgrims

Sonia Gandhi faces legal action over 'poor thing' remark on President Murmu

PNS MUZAFFARPUR

A complaint was filed against Congress leader Sonia Gandhi before a court in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district for her 'poor thing' remark on President

Droupadi Murmu. Sudhir Ojha, a Muzaffarpur-based lawyer, filed a complaint on Saturday against Gandhi seeking registration of an FIR against her for allegedly disrespecting the country's highest constitutional authority.

Ojha also named Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha-Rahul Gandhi and Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as co-accused and sought legal action against them as well.

'Sonia Gandhi has insulted President Murmu by making the 'poor thing' remark. It's disrespect to the highest constitutional authority in the country. Rahul and Priyanka are co-accused in it. A case should be registered

against them under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)," Ojha told reporters after filing the complaint before the CJM court in Muzaffarpur. The court will hear the matter on

vide insights into migration

demographic composition.

February 10. After the President's joint address to Parliament ahead of the Budget session, Sonia Gandhi was asked by reporters outside the House about Murmu's nearly hour-long

"The President was getting very tired by the end. She could hardly speak, poor thing," Sonia Gandhi, the former Congress chief, was heard saying in clips in what appeared to be a reference to how long the address was.

Rahul described the speech as "boring" in one of the clips. Priyanka was also present there. The Rashtrapati Bhavan had, later, released a statement, calling the remark "unacceptable" and saying that Murmu was not tired.

Eight naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh encounter

PNS RAIPUR

The eight naxalites killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Saturday were senior cadres carrying cumulative rewards of ₹16 Lakh, police said. The members of the outlawed Maoist organisation were gunned down during an anti-Naxal operation in a forest near Todka village under the Gangaloor police station area. Two personnel of the District Reserve Guard, a unit of state police, were also injured in the

exchange of fire. Of the neutralised Naxalites, Kamlesh Neelkanth (24), a member of the Gangaloor area committee under the west Bastar division of Maoists, carried a reward of Rs 5 lakh on his head, a senior police official said on

Sunday. Two others, identified as Tati Kamlu and Mangal Tati of the Gangaloor LOS (local organization squad), carried a reward of Rs three lakh each on their

heads, he said. Potam (40), Shankar Tati (26), Raju Tati, Vijju Padam (22) and Sannu Tati (40), were active in various wings of Maoists and carried a reward of Rs 1 lakh

each, he said. One Insas rifle, one Barrel Grenade Launcher (BGL) and its 10 shells, two 12-bore rifles, four muzzle-loading rifles and a huge cache of explosives items were recovered from the

encounter site, he said. So far this year, 49 Naxalites have been killed in separate encounters in the state. Of them, 33 were killed in the Bastar division

comprising seven districts, including Bijapur. On January 20-21, police said, 16 Naxalites were killed in an

encounter with security personnel in the state's Gariaband district, which is a part of the Raipur division.

Last year, 219 Naxalites were neutralised by security forces in separate encounters in the state, as per police.

is protected, nurtured, and

given the opportunity to

thrive free from the shadow of drugs," the Manipur CM

The Assam CM on Sunday said around 170 bighas (over

56 acres) of poppy farming worth more than ₹27 Crore

were destroyed in Goalpara

district of the state in January

"Dear Local Pablo Escobars,

posted on X.

this year.

Wetlands crucial for ecology, must be protected from encroachers: CM Yogi

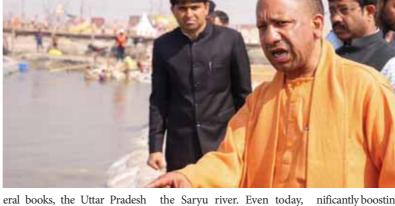
PNS LUCKNOW

Tttar Pradesh Chief Minister Uttar Prauesii Cinc. Yogi Adityanath on Sunday emphasised on the ecological importance of natural wetlands and said that many of them are suffering due to encroachment. Addressing an event at Gonda on the occasion of World Wetlands Day, themed "Wetland Future, Our Future", the Chief Minister said natural wetlands are vital for our ecosystem.

They play a key role in groundwater conservation, irrigation, drinking water availability, flood and drought control and carbon storage, he said.

Wetlands also play an important role in conservation of aquatic ecosystem-dependent vegetation, wild animals, migratory and local birds and provide food, medicine, livelihood, as well as income resources, he said. Adityanath launched a pro-

gramme on "Conservation of Wetlands for the Future of All of Us" at Parvati Arga Bird Sanctuary and also released sevsurrender. Karnataka is now a 'Naxal-free' state," he said.



government said in a statement. The Chief Minister visited an exhibition, and felicitated winners of various competitions, the statement said. He said wetlands not only sustain

aquatic life but also preserve nature in its original form. "Parvati and Arga natural lakes are a symbol of India's heritage, formed hundreds of years ago by

migratory and local birds arrive here from thousands of kilometers away," Adityanath said. Highlighting the economic

potential of tourism, he said eco, heritage, and spiritual tourism generate employment. "In 2016, Ayodhya saw only 2.35 lakh tourists. After improving connectivity and facilities, 16.11 crore people visited in 2024, significantly boosting employment and businesses like hotels, taxis, restaurants, and local handicrafts," he said.

He added that efforts are underway to integrate nearby villages into the Parvati Arga Wetlands conservation initiative and encourage women self-help groups to market their products online in collaboration with Amazon.

in the direction of self-reliance and to achieve the target of one trillion dollar economy, every family will have to be made selfreliant. The Chief Minister also said that

Adityanath said that women vol-

Tikri forest would be developed as an open safari, turning the Awadh region into a major ecotourism hub. The state government will ensure

connectivity and link the Parvati and Arga wetlands with the Saryu Canal National Project, he "In a survey conducted 8 years

ago, Gonda was the dirtiest district in the country, but today its ranking is good. Today a medical college has been built here. The Vantangiyas who did not get rights for 100 years, have are also living a respectable life with rights," he added.

Speaking about carbon emissions, Adityanath said that Prime Minister Modi has asked to take steps towards achieving the target of net zero in 2070.

Row over Saraswati Puja continues in Kolkata college

PNS KOLKATA

West Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu on Sunday faced protests by a group of students of a Kolkata college, who alleged that outsiders led by a Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) leader threatened them for organising Saraswati Puja on the institute campus. Following a row between two groups of students in Jogeshchandra Law College premises over organising the Puja, the Calcutta High Court on Friday asked the Kolkata Police to ensure that the ceremony can be held by law college students with adequate

Matters came to a head on January 29 when students of the law college, majority of them women, alleged they were being prevented from organising the puja on college premises by members of TMCP-led by ex-student Sabir and met them. Ali and even faced rape threats

One of the girl students then moved the Calcutta High Court seeking its intervention and the judge ordered that the students must be allowed to celebrate the festival and asked a top-ranked official of Kolkata Police to monitor their security posting enough personnel at the college gate. A general college and a law college are run in the same building at different times of the day.

Students of the two colleges have been separately organising the puja on the same campus for years.

The situation, however, is dif-

ferent this year. Basu, who was accompanied by local Trinamool Congress MP Mala Roy, was greeted by 'We Want Justice' slogans from the female students as he went "I am here to talk to you. None

will coerce you, terrorise you or threaten you. If anyone has issued any threat, we will take strong action against him," the education minister said. Several of the female students broke down before him and alleged that while entering the college, they were threatened with assault and rape by some "outsiders"

"I have met the students, I had a darshan of the idol and offered prayers. I have assured the students we will look into their grievances and appropriate action will be taken after inquiry, Basu said

He said he would meet them and the college authorities on February 5-6 to discuss the

Rejecting the allegations, Ali said, "We are organising the Saraswati puja of the day section in the adjacent lane of the inside the law college campus college. No threats have been

issued against anyone. They cannot show any such video (of issuing threats). He also added that being an alumnus of the day college, he

has every right to be part of the Saraswati Puja. Mala Roy said, "Saraswati Puja is not the occasion to shout slogans demanding justice. The MP said she and the education minister visited both

puja pandals erected by the students of the two colleges. "There has been no provocation or aggression shown by the Saraswati puja organises of the day section. Everything is being conducted as ordered by the honourable high court in the presence of the police.

"There are reasons to suspec that those demanding justice are backed by political elements who want to disrupt the academic functioning of the law college and foment trouble during the Saraswati puja,'

Manipur CM hails Himanta for taking tough measures against illegal poppy cultivation where every youth of the NE

PTI IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday hailed his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma for taking tough measures against illegal poppy cultivation and drugs in the

He said both the states remain resolute in building a future where youth are protected from the shadow of drugs. Replying to media queries

on Sarma's post on X, Singh said at the sideline of a programme in Imphal West district, "I appreciate the chief minister of Assam. He is taking up counter drugs activities very actively. We have to be united and save the future generations from drugs." Later in a post on X, Singh appreciated his Assam coun-



terpart in taking measures against illicit poppy cultiva-

'My deep appreciation for the decisive measures taken in Assam, under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister

Shri @himantabiswa ji, in addressing the challenges posed by the cultivation of poppy," he said.

"We stand together and remain resolute in our shared

goal of building a future

Sorry to spoil your planned Udta Assam party! Because @Goalpara_Police destroyed 170 Bighas of poppy cultivation in the Char areas worth ₹27.20 Crore in January, He also uploaded a video, showing a tractor smashing the purported poppy planta-

Sarma said in a post on X. tion amid the presence of a huge posse of policemen.

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PAPER WITH PASSION-

Boost for middle class

Tax reliefs, agricultural boosts and support for gig workers define Union Budget 2025, but concerns about economic growth persist

inance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2025-26 on February 1, 2025, focusing on stimulating economic growth, supporting the middle class and enhancing agricultural productivity. The Union Budget 2025-26 with a total expenditure of Rs 50,65,345 crore, focuses on economic growth, middle-class relief and agricultural development. On the infrastructure front, capital expenditure there is a modest increase to drive development, though specific figures were not detailed. Meanwhile, the fiscal deficit is projected to be 4.4 per cent of GDP for 2025-26. While the budget lays out ambitious plans to stimulate various sectors, its effectiveness will depend on implementation and overall economic conditions. What must come as big relief for the middle class is raising of the income tax limit. The budget introduced significant tax relief for the middle class by raising the income tax exemption threshold to Rs 12.75 lakh per annum, effectively exempting individuals

with an average monthly income of up to Rs1 lakh from paying income tax. This move aims to boost household savings and consumption.

A six-year programme has been announced to increase the production of pulses and extra-long staple cotton and help farmers. The government plans to support farmers by purchasing pulses at guaranteed prices and investing in research and development to enhance cotton yields, thereby reducing dependence on imports. The budget has also proposed registeration of one crore gig workers on the e-Shram portal. This initiative aims to formalise the gig economy workforce and improve their access

to healthcare and welfare schemes. An allocation of Rs 11.21 lakh crore was made for capital expenditure, reflecting a modest increase from the previous year. This investment is intended to stimulate infrastructure development and economic growth. Some analysts, including Moody's Ratings, have expressed concerns that the tax relief measures for the middle class may have a limited effect on overall economic growth. The effectiveness of these measures in significantly boosting consumption and investment remains uncertain. The budget's capital expenditure increase was modest, which may not be sufficient to drive the desired level of infrastructure development and economic expansion. While the budget outlines ambitious programmes, the success of these initiatives will depend on effective implementation at the ground level. Past challenges in executing government schemes could pose hurdles to achieving the desired outcomes. The Union Budget 2025-26 introduces notable measures to support the middle class and agriculture, but its potential impact on broader economic growth and the effectiveness of implementation remain areas to watch. While the budget's initiatives are promising, concerns linger about their impact on economic growth and the effectiveness of their implementation.



Visitors at the 'World Book Fair' at Pragati Maidan, in New Delh

Rethinking the Places of Worship Act 1991



The Supreme Court's interim order barring civil courts from hearing suits related to places of worship has reignited debate over the Places of Worship Act, 1991

special bench of the Supreme Court led CJI Sanjiv Khanna, December 12, 2024, had barred all the civil courts from entertaining any fresh or pending suits related to the places of worship, in effect, validating the Act for an interim period, even before hearing the constitutional challenge to it. The Places of Worship Act was enacted to serve as a legislative firewall against religious disputes over the places of worship. It seeks to bar conversion of places of worship and freezes their religious character as they existed on August 15, 1947, with an exception for the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dis-

Judicial Review and the Rule of

The abatement of suits and other legal proceedings in relation to the places of worship, as sought to be done through Parliament by a legislative fiat in 1991, goes contrary to the basic feature of the rule of law and judicial review as held in Indira Gandhi vs Raj Narain, among others. In India, and other parliamentary democracies, the view of the Parliament, served through its members, often portrayed as an eternal "will of the people," free from all fetters, is misplaced: it is not only anathema to democratic and constitutional thoughts of our republic but also problematic in its philosophical underpinnings from where it stems out.

The Parliament's act of granting immunity to certain legal disputes is based on a fallacious hypothesis that Parliament is a symbol of the continuous 'will of the people' and, consequently, not answerable to the courts. However, the Indian constitution establishes the principle of constitutional supremacy, as opposed to unchecked parliamentary sovereignty, which ensures that even parliamentary legislation, though reflecting the will of the people, is subject to judicial review. This is traceable from Article 13(2), which reinforces that parliamentary of law in a republic while the laws cannot override the fundamental rights guaranteed by the caprice of an absolute Constitution and remain subject monarch.

to constitutional constraints and judicial scrutiny. Hence, an act passed by the Parliament—the Places of Worship Act, in this case cannot annihilate the fundamental right of freedom of worship enshrined under Articles 25 and 26, as well as the text of the Preamble. Treating equals as unequal

The Places of Worship Act, nevertheless, made its effect inapplicable to the hitherto Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid dispute, by way of Section 5, acknowledging its special significance emanating from being present at a particular site while excluding other similarly placed temples, viz Kashi Vishwanath and Krishna Janma Bhumi, also derive their significance from being located at specific sites/places. In this manner, the Act has created an unreasonable and arbitrary classification against Article 14 of the Constitution by treating Ram Janma Bhumi as a separate class in itself. The Supreme Court in Royappa has held that "equality is antithetic to arbitrariness. In fact, equality and arbitrariness are sworn enemies; one belongs to the rule



THE PARLIAMENT'S

ACT OF GRANTING IMMUNITY TO CERTAIN LEGAL DISPUTES IS BASED ON A **FALLACIOUS HYPOTHESIS** THAT PARLIAMENT IS A SYMBOL CONTINUOUS 'WILL OF THE PEOPLE' AND CONSEQUENTLY, **NOT ANSWERABLE**

Where an act is arbitrary, it is implicit in it that it is unequal both according to political logic and constitutional law and therefore violative of Article 14." In addition, under the two-pronged Article 14 test, first settled by the Supreme Court in Anwar Ali Sarkar, any legislative classification that provides advantages and disadvantages on a differential ground will be declared as unconstitutional: (a) if there is no intelligible differentia between the classification made, which distinguishes those that are grouped from those that have been excluded;

(b) if that differentia does not have a rational relation to the object sought to be achieved by the statute in question. The classification made under the Act is unconstitutional for two primary reasons:

First, the exemption accord-

ed to Ram Janma Bhumi presumes the rights of the parties attached to the Ayodhya dispute to be more equal and holier than the rights of similarly placed parties about the other two religious sites (Kashi & Mathura); secondly, the classification is devoid of any factual basis and based on a premise that abatement of legal proceedings for reclamation of religious sites other

than Ram Janma Bhumi will ease communal tensions in the country.

Even assuming so, a routine law and order situation cannot be the basis for the suspension of a constitutional right. The unreasonable classification carved out by the Act and placing a bar on parties attached to disputes concerning places of worship from knocking on the court's door warrant serious re-eval-

uation.

The door of the courts, in a functioning democracy, based on a written constitution, must always be ajar to the victims of wrongdoings. Having said that, invalidating the entire Act, at this stage, may not be the most pragmatic course of action. In that case, following the terms of "ut res magis valeat quam pereat" (it is better for a thing to have an effect than to be void), a more measured approach would entail reading down the Act to extend the benefit of Section 5 [exemption from the Act, as done with Ram Janma Bhumi] to two other similarly placed temples (Kashi & Mathura), rather than inval-

(The author is a practising advocate in Delhi, with inputs from Vaidushya Parth; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Budget 2025-26: A leap toward 'Viksit Bharat' with fintech at the forefront



S SUNDARARAJAN

Finance Minister has unveiled a forward-looking Budget that reinforces India's commitment to financial inclusion, innovation and sustainable economic growth.

Minister, → Nirmala Sitharaman has presented a forwardthinking and progressive Union Budget 2025-26 that reinforces India's steadfast journey toward Viksit Bharat. This year's budget is a reflection of the government's unwavering commitment to fostering financial inclusion, driving innovation and ensuring sustainable economic growth. By laying a robust foundation for a digital-first economy, it not only addresses the present needs of businesses and individuals but also sets a visionary course for the future of India's financial

ecosystem. The fintech sector has been a cornerstone of India's digital transformation, playing an instrumental role in expanding financial accessibility, empowering MSMEs, and accelerating the adoption of digital transactions. The government's continued emphasis on fostering a light-touch regulatory environment, strengthening digital public infrastructure, and enhancing credit availability for small businesses and startups is a significant step forward in unlocking new avenues for

fintech innovation. These strategic measures will help fintech companies drive greater financial inclusion and economic resilience across the country.

Some of the most impactful highlights of this budget for the fintech ecosystem include: Grameen Credit Score Framework - A groundbreaking initiative aimed at transforming rural financial empowerment by enabling better credit access for Self-Help Group (SHG) members and underserved rural communities. This will facilitate greater participation of rural enterprises in the formal

Revamped Central KYC **Registry** – A much-needed step toward simplifying compliance requirements for financial institutions, reducing redundancies, and enhancing the ease of doing business across banking and fintech sectors.

Expansion of Digital Public Infrastructure – Initiatives such as BharatTradeNet will play a pivotal role in streamlining trade financing and documentation processes, ensuring seamless digital transactions, and bolstering India's position as a global

Higher Credit Availability for MSMEs and Startups -Enhanced credit card limits for micro-enterprises, alongside expanded guarantee cover programs, will provide vital financial support to budding entrepreneurs and small businesses, fueling economic

growth and job creation. As we look ahead, the fiscal year 2025-26 presents enormous opportunities for fintech players like us at i-exceed to drive groundbreaking innovations in banking and financial services. With strong regulatory support and government-led initiatives, we are well-positioned to: Scale digital banking and embedded finance solutions to cater to unbanked and underbanked segments, fostering a

more inclusive financial land-

Leverage cutting-edge technologies such as AI, blockchain, and automation to enhance regulatory compliance, improve credit risk assessment, and strengthen fraud prevention mechanisms.

Accelerate the adoption of digital lending and payment solutions by seamlessly integrating with India's rapidly evolving financial ecosystem, thereby enhancing user experience and operational efficiencies. The budget's strong focus on inclusive growth, digital empowerment, and financial accessibility aligns perfectly with our vision of creating next-generation fintech solutions that bridge gaps, simplify processes, and unlock new growth opportunities for businesses and individuals alike. The year ahead promises to be a transformative one for India's fintech landscape. We must seize this momentum, foster collaboration, and continue to innovate relentlessly.

(The writer is co-founder and CEOCompany: i-exceed technology solutions; views are personal)

PEOPLE-CENTRIC BUDGET

Madam — The Union Budget 2025 may be hailed as the budget of the people, for the people. The FM has admirably identified the middle class's dedication towards nation building, so apart from targeting the indices, ratios and vital parameters to showcase the country's march towards the third largest economy, she has presented a grassroots budget swaying over every aspect of the middle class from largesse on tax benefits, MSMEs, farmers and entrepreneurs. The synergy of the middle class in service, industry and business will have a multiplier effect on the GDP in coming years. The new Income Tax Bill is expected next week and commensurate with the budget, comprehensive amendments and

simplification are expected. Our country has unlimited resources, but they need to be tapped through reasonable and promotional tax legislation and encouraged for wealth creation through ease and promotional legislation. The GDP has a fair ratio of revenue collection of more than sixty percent. So the revenue policymakers, particularly the GST administration, should tune their policy by lowering GST slabs and doing away with the irrelevant concepts of luxury goods. The media has missed the defence outlay increase of 9.53 per cent at Rs 681,210 crores, but looking at the huge investments in defence by neighbouring China, the resources have to be mobilised for the modernisation of infrastructure, sixth-generation missiles, aircraft, artillery, and Navy warships. It is now the turn of the state governments to present their budgets conforming with the union budget, targeting the rural industrialisation and infrastructure, modernising their existing industrial estates and promoting the industry. **Vinod Johri** | *Delhi*

END EXPLOITATIVE WORKWEEKS

Madam— The articles 'Beyond the 70hour workweek: Redefining productivity' (January 30) and 'A 90-hour workweek: Path to success or recipe for burnout' (February 1), both in The Pioneer, are

Govt schools show improvement



ndoubtedly, the general public has a negative image of government schools. As soon as the economy improves slightly, people are eager to send their children to pricey private schools. However, the findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2024) offer new optimism. The ASER report, which was conducted on pupils from

timely and well argued. The suggestions regarding 70 to 90 working hours per week by some leading industrialists and capitalists of India are highly reactionary and

exploitative. The suggestion shows their greed for more profits in the name of increased productivity and efficiency. Both the authors have given pertinent arguments against this proposal. All work and no play makes young people dull, unhealthy and unproductive. Extended working hours will make the young population of the country hypertensive, heart patients and mentally deranged. It will cast the young population of India into fire. Despite labour laws, many companies in India are taking 60 hours of work per week from their employees without paying them extra money. Due to fear of unemployment, young people are compelled to work for long hours. All righteous persons, employers and labour union leaders should oppose this proposal tooth and nail. A 5day, 35 to 36.5 hour workweek is consid-

ered ideal internationally. Vinay Kr Malhotra | Ambala Cantt rural areas, demonstrates that the reading abilities and mathematical skills of youngsters aged six to fourteen in the country improved following the Corona crisis. Students' basic mathematical skills have improved in schools at both the gov-

idating it entirely.

ernment and private levels. Children in class five can solve division problems. The good news is that learning standards have increased in schools across the country. This level remained steady until 2010, after which it began to decline. According to the ASER research, as enrolment rates have improved, so has digital literacy. It is encouraging that, following the Corona period, there has been a renewed emphasis on education in schools. Awareness has also been demonstrated among parents.

Abhijit Roy | *Jamshedpur*

INDIA T20 WIN: 17TH TIME IN A ROW

Madam —India clinched a record 17th consecutive T20 series on home soil with a thrilling 15-run win in the fourth match against England in Pune on Friday. This match will be remembered for a long time for the scintillating batting performance of Hardik Pandya and Shivam Dubey, whose half-centuries helped India bounce back

from early jolts. But it was bowler Harshit Rana who stole the show. He made his debut in the match as a concussion substitute for Shivam Dubey and claimed three scalps. However, his impressive performance did not go down well with some foreign players who questioned the entry of Harshit Rana, a bowler, as a concussion substitute for an all-rounder player. But their misplaced criticism does not belittle his feat. These are the same players who seal their lips over bad umpiring against India in their coun-

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

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FIRST COLUMN

THE SCIENCE **OF MUDRAS**

Rooted in the five elements, the five pranas and the three doshas, mudras have therapeutic properties



RAVI VALLURI

ord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita says, "There is nothing as sacred as knowledge." Knowledge can be acquired by the human mind through the 5 Ds-dedication, determination, dynamism, devotion and discipline and one H-Humility. The science of mudras, is intrinsically related to the esoteric knowledge of yoga and which can be further segregated into the five elements, the five life forces (or subtle forces of energy called the pranas) and the three doshas. The five elements are namely - Akash (ether or space), Vayu (air), Agni (fire), Jal (water) and Prithvi (earth); the five life forces or pranas are Prana, Udana, Samana, Apana and Vyana and the three doshas are Vata, Kapha and Pitta. Humans unconsciously practice mudras. For instance, the Namaste Mudra or a young child begins learning to walk with his thumbs raised which is called the Meru Dand Mudra. An infant even in a deep slumber, his index finger would involuntarily touch the thumb and the other three fingers are on the base of the palm (Chinmaya Mudra). The universe in its auto-mode conjures these processes to take place and we are oblivious to the occurrence. Some other mudras which need to be practised are:

(a) Jnana mudra: This is performed to increase brain power, improve memory and for the removal of negative thoughts. Thereby one attains

(b) Prithvi mudra: This helps in balancing the five sense organs, improves blood circulation and enhances our energy levels. Practice of this mudra assists in increasing our alertness.

(c) Apana mudra: This facilitates an improved elimination process, revitalising the digestive system, improving the gums and strengthening immu-

(d) Prana mudra: This mudra addresses the problem of fatigue; it also



provides essential vitamins to the body besides increasing stamina and vigour to the human body. It also helps in maintenance of the health of

(e) Dhyana mudra: Essentially, this mudra helps in making us mindful and wakeful and we are at peace with ourselves. Over a period, we attain

(f) Shunya Vayu mudra: Practice of this mudra helps in combating problems of flatulence and gastric ailments. The gut houses our solar plexus, which is also referred to as the second brain. We need to take adequate care of our abdomen as most human ailments arise from this part of the body. Therefore, there is enormous merit in the adage, "Health is in

Sudarshan Kriya: The unique breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya is the fulcrum of the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living. Su means proper, Darshan implies vision and Kriya is a purifying action. Through the actions of our breath, we appreciate a proper vision of who we are. It is momentous to understand that nature runs on a rhythm. For instance, the sun rises and sets at a particular time, similarly, seasons arrive and exit at predetermined times. Humans feel hungry or sleepy at certain times. Our emotions, feelings and thoughts are all cast in the symphony of rhythm. We are unable to distinguish between cacophony and symphony in this frenetic pace of life which is cannonaded by innumerable thoughts, continuous action and noise. When sounds are harmonised by the syllable of Soham, we can term it as magical music. Enlightenment is not accruing anything providential but harmonising our whole being rhythmically. During the breathing process participants feel varied sensations, emotions, tingling sensations, laughter, weeping among others. This wonderful knowledge and wisdom have triggered humanness to blossom when every cell is energised.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Cornered in the wild: Trapped tigers spark conservation debate

As human encroachment, tourism and habitat fragmentation continue to blur the boundaries between nature and civilisation write BKP Sinha and Arvind Kumar Jha

viral video capturing a distressing scene of a tigress and her cubs blocked by a throng of safari vehicles in Maharashtra's Umred Pauni Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary has recently stirred significant concern and legal action. The Bombay High Court has taken suo-motu cognizance of the incident. Soon after, the Supreme Court sought a uniform national policy for managing the country's tiger reserves. The harrowing sight of the tiger family, seemingly gripped by fear while navigating the available space, serves as a poignant metaphor for the troubling dynamics between humans and wildlife, whether inside a tiger reserve or not. Mankind's relentless drive to dominate and exploit nature has led to a disturbingly eroded sense of ecological sanity. Tigers, magnificent predators endowed with a formidable set of adaptations, have long been revered for their prowess. Their sharp teeth and claws, exceptional vision and hearing, flexible spines and explosive bursts of speed enable them to efficiently stalk and capture prey.

Their striped coats act as camouflage, mak-

ing them elusive both as hunters and as well as prey. Tigers, being solitary creatures, are known to be fiercely territorial, marking their domains with scents, claw marks, and vocalisations. While frequent and close encounters with tigers may thrill tourists, these experiences come at a significant cost to the animals' well-being. Increased human presence not only exacerbates stress and vulnerability among these majestic creatures but also alters their natural behaviour. After several populist initiatives to regularise forest encroachments, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was legislated in 2006. It marked an era of mass-scale recognition of habitation, self-cultivation, and community forest resource rights. However, it has also resulted in new encroachments and a notable influx of human populations into forest areas increasing the proximity and chances of conflict between wildlife and humans.

The data from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs shows that by November 2024, an overwhelming 4.35 million (85.7 per cent) out of 5.07 million claims under the FRA had been disposed of. Titles on forest rights in 33 million acres of forest land having been FOREST OFFICIALS given, illegal occupation continues in the rejected cases which are 36.5 per cent in leftwing affected states and 60 per cent in oth-

The absence of a final deadline for claim submission, ease of securing recommendations from Gram Sabhas that many times are not held, the prevalent use of the FRA as a political tool, and the quality of scrutiny at the authorities' levels have created an environment encouraging encroachers confident of RESPONSIBILITIES regularisation. In Gujarat, 434 cases have been disposed of, and Maharashtra accept- AND CHALLENGES ed 4,322 new individual forest rights claims in November while distributing 498 titles. Triggered by legislation, such a trend of ingress into wildlife habitats is unprecedented. There has been a significant surge in recognition of community forest resource rights (CFRR) after the FRA Rules were amended in 2012. Management rights of forests have been granted to communities by violating the eligibility conditions stipulated in sections 3(1)(i) and 4(3) of the FRA. Not sparing even tiger reserves and National Parks and Sanctuaries, such rights are granted, for example, in huge areas in Chhattisgarh in Dhamtari (5,544 ha), Achankmar and Sitanadi Udanti tiger reserves (12,527 ha), 60 per cent of Billigiri Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, and the



IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE, THE **ODISHA STATE** GOVERNMENT

ACCOUNTABLE FOR TIGER HAS STIRRED CONVERSATIONS **ABOUT THE** FACED BY FORESTERS IN

BALANCING CONSERVATION **EFFORTS WITH** THE RIGHTS AND SAFETY OF

Tansa Sanctuary in Maharashtra. Such actions do trigger a surge of human presence within wildlife habitats. As regards human casualties resulting from tiger attacks, they were recorded at 110 in 2022 and 82 in 2023. Data from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), however, sheds light on troubling trends in tiger mortality. In 2021 and 2022, tiger deaths within reserves exceeded those outside. However, this pattern reversed in 2023 and 2024, with more tiger fatalities occurring outside protected areas. As of January 2025, 17 tiger deaths have been reported, 12 of which occurred outside reserves. The conversion of spared areas into shared spaces impacts the behaviour of wildlife. Tigers are no

They naturally respect territorial boundaries but get forced to venture into human habitations due to encroachment and habitat degradation. It does result in harm to ocals, mostly accidental and out of hunger rather than retaliatory or revengeful. People, however, in contrast to their erstwhile prevalent spir-DEATHS WHICH it of tolerance and to cause mostly respond now through retalit of tolerance and co-existence, iation or out of vengeance resulting in the escalation of human-wildlife

In an unprecedented move, the Odisha state government issued an order in 2024 holding forest officials accountable for tiger deaths which has stirred conversations about the responsibilities and challenges faced by foresters in balancing conservation efforts with the rights and safety of people. The interaction between humans and wildlife species that are naturally active during the day (diurnal) or at dawn and dusk (crepuscular) face substantial behavioural changes when their activity patterns overlap with human activities. In the case of recreational activities in parks also, animals that typically forage or hunt during these times may alter their routines due to the presence of people, leading to stress and changes in feeding, mating, and territorial behaviours. al behaviour by regularly avoiding Inside and near forests, light pollu-

tion, such as artificial lighting from streetlights, homes and recreational areas disrupts wildlife in numer-

It can interfere with their natural movement patterns, making it difficult for animals to navigate their habitats, find food, or avoid predators. Light pollution can also impact predation, as predators might find it easier to spot prey, or conversely, prey might become disoriented and more vulnerable. Additionally, artificial lighting can affect reproductive behaviours, as many species rely on natural light cues for mating rit-uals and timing. The current approach of providing electricity etc. to interior forest habitations, seemingly beneficial for human populations, does pose a significant threat to long-term wildlife conservation. Along with this, large-scale proposals such as those recently announced in Telangana and Nagarhole (Coorg district) of Karnataka must consider their potential impact on humanwildlife conflict too.

Mitigating adverse impacts on wildlife necessitates more than merely avoiding times when human activities overlap with wildlife activities. Even if human disturbances occur outside of wildlife activity periods, the large-scale nature of such disturbances can still have a profound effect on wildlife. These disturbances often displace ani-mals from their natural habitats, causing significant behavioural changes that can threaten even their survival. Instances from the area near Pench National Park in Maharashtra highlight the negative consequences of the changed behaviour of tigers. In one such case, a tiger in Parshiwni village attacked only tethered cattle, easy prey. During the necropsy of this tiger, excessive fat was found due to changes in its behaviour and diet. In the Ramtek area tigers have exhibited a concerning loss of territorial instincts indicating a breakdown in their natural order and social structure. Another tiger from the Kanhan region displayed unusuconsuming its kill. Such avoidance

suggests, prima facie, a high level of stress and disturbance. Such instances are alarming as they simply indicate that the natural predator-prey dynamics and status of the health of the tiger population are compromised. Minimising disturbance to wildlife is paramount inside tiger reserves. However, with the current onslaught by humans and the pace of blurring of ecosystem boundaries, a more nuanced approach is necessary which requires a deeper understanding of the spatial and temporal dynamics of wildlife movement, recognition of the varying levels of sensitivity among different species, and consideration of a broader ecological context that includes fragmented landscapes, human settlements, and the impacts of climate change.

While the whole country is eagerly waiting for an early decision in the matter of Wildlife first and Ors Vs Union of India & Ors (109/2008) from the Supreme Court, the need for a national policy framework for not just tiger reserves but for all habitats cannot be overstated. It should be implemented by State Governments while duly considering the local contexts and the unique challenges faced by each region.

Evicting illegal encroachments on forest and wildlife habitats and relocating the genuine right-holders onto non-forest areas with adequate infrastructure should be the first step towards restoration of the ecological integrity of our natural systems. The impacts of climate change and natural disasters are no longer theoretical threats but stark realities. Recognizing the broader public interest in wildlife conservation and ecosystem sustainability, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the National Tiger Conservation Authority, and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs must collaborate closely to develop and implement effective conservation strategies that address these challenges.

(The writer are former PCCFs, UP and Maharashtra; views expressed

Budget 2025 puts sustainability at the forefront, but execution holds the key

With substantial investments in renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture and afforestation, the budget lays a strong foundation for a greener future

¬he Union Budget 2025 signals a decisive shift towards environmental sustainability, reinforcing India's commitment to a cleaner, greener future. With a strong focus on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, afforestation, waste management and climate resilience, the government has intended to balance economic growth with ecologresponsibility Expanding solar, wind, and hydro energy, along with incentives for green hydrogen, is a welcome step toward reducing India's car-

bon footprint. The emphasis on electric vehicles (EVs) and battery storage solutions will further bolster the transition to clean energy, reducing



dependence on fossil fuels. However, the chal lenge remains in efficient implementation and ensuring accessibility to these technologies, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Agriculture, often at the crossroads of economic and environmental policies, has received a much-needed sus- Afforestation

tainability boost. The PM Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana and Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses are moving in the right direction, ensuring climateresilient farming and reducing excessive reliance on fertilisers. However, agroforestry, regenerative farming and watershed management need further integration into mainstream agricultural policy to create a truly sustainable food system.

The budget's allocation for afforestation and biodiversity conservation reflects an increased understanding of the role that forests and ecosystems play in mitigating climate change. With Compensatory Fund

Management Authority (CAMPA) enhanced support, there is hope that India's forests will be managed with greater transparency and scientific precision. However, urban greening and nature-based solutions in city planning deserve stronger commitments, given the growing challenges of urban heat islands and pollution. The circular economy model

gets a notable push with incentives for waste-to-energy projects, stricter plastic waste management, and extended producer responsibility (EPR) regulations. These are positive steps, but enforcement remains a crucial hurdle. Ensuring that industries comply with waste management norms and



moving towards a zerowaste economy will require robust monitoring and pub-

lic participation. The budget's recognition of climate resilience, particu-

larly through disaster management investments and early warning systems, is a commendable effort. Coastal and flood-prone regions will benefit from increased fund-

ing for disaster-resistant infrastructure, but a longterm climate adaptation roadmap needs further

detailing.
One of the most promising aspects of Budget 2025 is the expansion of India's Green Finance ecosystem. With tax incentives for Green Bonds and carbon trading markets, the government is encouraging private sector participation in sustainability efforts. However, ensuring that green investments translate into real environ-mental benefits will require stringent regulatory over-While Budget 2025 takes

sight and transparency. significant strides in promoting environmental sustainability, its true success will be measured by execution, enforcement, and longterm commitment.

India has demonstrated political will in tackling climate change, but the challenge remains in aligning policy promises with on-the-ground realities. Sustainability is not just a budgetary allocation; it is a mindset shift. To truly achieve a green future, India needs a whole-of-society approach, where the government, private sector, and citizens work together to ensure that economic growth does not come at the cost of ecological wellbeing. With this budget, India has set the direction-what remains is the resolve to act decisively.

(The writer is a retired IFS officer; views are personal)

TRUMP PUTS TARIFFS ON CANADA, MEXICO AND CHINA

Spurs trade war as North American allies respond

PTI PALM BEACH (US)

 $P^{\text{resident Donald Trump on }}_{\text{Saturday signed an order to}}$ impose stiff tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, drawing swift retaliation from the country's North American neighbours in an emerging trade war.

The Republican president posted on social media that the tariffs were necessary "to protect Americans," pressing the three nations to do more to curb the manufacture and export of illicit fentanyl and for Canada and Mexico to reduce illegal immigration into the US. The action fulfilled one of Trump's commitments to voters but threw the global economy and Trump's own political mandate to lower prices into turmoil.

The tariffs, if sustained, could cause inflation to significantly worsen, possibly eroding voters' trust that Trump could as promised lower the prices of groceries, gasoline, housing, autos and other goods.

Trump declared an economic emergency in order to place duties of 10% on all imports from China and 25% on imports from Mexico and Canada. But energy imported from Canada, including oil, natural gas and electricity, would be taxed at a 10% rate. The action provoked an economic standoff with America's two largest trading partners in Mexico and Canada, upending a decades-old trade relationship with the possibility of harsh reprisals by those two nations. Mexico's president immediately ordered retaliatory tariffs and Canada's prime minister said the country would put matching 25% tariffs on up to \$155 billion in US imports. China did not immediately respond to Trump's action.

Trump's order includes a mechanism to escalate the rates charged by the US against retaliation by the other countries, raising the specter of an even more severe economic

Canadian Prime Minister

Justin Trudeau on Saturday said that Canadian duties on \$30 billion in trade in American alcohol and fruit the US tariffs go into effect. He opened his address to Canadians with a message aimed at American consumers.

"It will have real consequences for you, the American people," he said, saying it would result in higher prices on groceries and other goods.

Trudeau channelled the views of many Canadians who were feeling betrayed by their neighbour and longtime ally, reminding Americans that Canadian troops fought alongside them in Afghanistan and helped them respond to myriad crises from wildfires in California to Hurricane

"The actions taken today by the White House split us apart instead of bringing us together," Trudeau said, warning in French that it could bring about "dark times" for many people. He encouraged Canadians to "choose Canadian products and services rather than American

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said she had instructed her economy secretary to implement a response that includes retaliatory tariffs and other measures in defense of Mexico's interests.

We categorically reject the White House's slander that the Mexican government has alliances with criminal organizations, as well as any intention of meddling in our territory," Sheinbaum wrote in a post on

"If the United States government and its agencies wanted to address the serious fentanyl consumption in their country, they could fight the sale of drugs on the streets of their major cities, which they don't do and the laundering of money that this illegal activity generates that has done so much harm to its population." tries.

Meanwhile, the Premier of The Trump administration put

Canadian province of British Columbia, David Eby, called on residents to stop buying liquor from U.S. "red" states and said will take effect Tuesday, when it was removing American alcohol brands from government store shelves as a response to the tariffs.

In a televised message, Eby deemed the Trump's administration decision as "a declaration of economic war against a trusted ally and friend" and that he will stand up for his citizens and all Canadians in general.

Effective today, I have directed BC liquor sales to immediately stop buying American liquor from red states," he said. "Liquor store employees will be removing the most popular of these brands from government store shelves?

The tariffs will go into effect on Tuesday, setting a showdown in North America that could potentially sabotage economic growth. A new analysis by the Budget Lab at Yale laid out the possible damage to the US economy, saying the average US household would lose the equivalent of \$1,170 in income from the taxes. Economic growth would slow and inflation would worsen — and the situation could be even worse if the countries retaliate.

A senior US administration official, insisting on anonymity to brief reporters, said the lower rate on energy reflected a desire to minimise any disruptive increases on the price of gasoline or utilities.

That's a sign White House officials understand the gamble they're taking on inflation. Price spikes under former President Joe Biden led to voter frustration that helped to return Trump to the White House last year.

The order signed by Trump contained no mechanism for granting exceptions, the official said, a possible blow to homebuilders who rely on Canadian lumber as well as farmers, automakers and other indus-

the tariffs in place to force the three countries to stop the spread and manufacturing of fentanyl, in addition to pressuring Canada and Mexico to limit any illegal immigration into the United States.

The official did not provide specific benchmarks that could be met to lift the new tariffs, saying only that the best measure would be fewer Americans dying from fentanyl addiction. The order would also allow for tariffs on Canadian imports of less than \$800. Imports below that sum are currently able to cross into the United States without customs and duties.

"It doesn't make much economic sense,' said William Reinsch, senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a former U.S. trade official.

"Historically, most of our tariffs on raw materials have been low because we want to get cheaper materials so our manufacturers will be competitive .. Now, what's he talking about? He's talking about tariffs on raw materials. I don't get the eco-

The Republican president is making a major political bet that his actions will not significantly worsen inflation, cause financial aftershocks that could destabilize the worldwide economy or provoke a voter backlash. AP VoteCast, an extensive survey of the electorate in last year's election, found that the U.S. was split on support for

nomics of it.'

With the tariffs, Trump is honouring promises that are at the core of his economic and national security philosophy. But the announcement showed his seriousness around the issue as some Trump allies had played down the threat of higher import taxes as mere negotiating tactics.

The president is preparing more import taxes in a sign that tariffs will be an ongoing part of his second term. On Friday, he mentioned imported comural gas, as well as against copper, pharmaceutical drugs and imports from the European Union — moves that could essentially pit the US against much of the global economy. It is unclear how the tariffs

could affect the business investments that Trump said would happen because of his plans to cut corporate tax rates and remove regulations. Tariffs tend to raise prices for consumers and businesses by making it more expensive to bring in foreign goods.

Many voters turned to Trump in the November election on the belief that he could better handle the inflation that spiked under Biden. But inflation expectations are creeping upward in the University of Michigan's index of consumer sentiment as respondents expect prices to rise by 3.3%. That would be higher than the actual 2.9% annual inflation rate in December's consumer price index.

Trudeau said Canada is addressing Trump's calls on border security by implementing a CDN\$1.3 billion (US\$900 million) border plan that includes helicopters, new canine teams and imaging

Trump still has to get a budget, tax cuts and an increase to the government's legal borrowing authority through Congress. The outcome of his tariff plans could strengthen his hand or weaken it.

Democrats were quick to say that any inflation going forward was the result of Trump, who is about to start his third week back as president.

'You're worried about grocery prices. Don's raising prices with his tariffs," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York posted on X. "You're worried about tomato prices. Wait till Trump's Mexico tariffs raise your tomato prices. ... You're worried about car prices. Wait till Trump's Canada tariffs raise your car prices," he wrote in a series of posts.



Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addresses media following the imposition of a raft of tariffs by US President Donald Trump against Canada, Mexico and China, in Ottawa on Saturday.

US businesses brace for rising costs

 $F^{\text{rom an ice cream parlour in}}_{\text{California to a medical sup-}}$ ply business in North Carolina to a T-shirt vendor outside Detroit, U.S. businesses are bracing to take a hit from the taxes President Donald Trump imposed Saturday on imports from Canada, Mexico and China — America's three biggest trading partners.

The levies — 25 per cent on Canadian and Mexican and 10 per cent on Chinese goods – will take effect Tuesday. Canadian energy, including oil, natural gas and electricity, will be taxed at a lower 10 per cent rate.

Mexico's president immediately ordered retaliatory tariffs and Canada's prime minister said the country would put matching 25% tariffs on up to USD 155 billion in US imports. China did not immediately respond to Trump's action.

The Budget Lab at Yale
University estimates that

Trump's tariffs would cost the average American household USD 1,000 to USD 1,200 in annual purchasing power. Gregory Daco, chief economist at the tax and consulting firm EY, calculates that the tariffs

would increase inflation, which was running at a 2.9 per cent annual rate in December, by 0.4 percentage points this year. Daco also projects that the US ization agreements between economy, which grew 2.8 per cent last year, would fall by 1.5 in his first term, is believed to per cent this year and 2.1 per costs dampen consumer spending and business investment. The Penny Ice Creamery in Santa Cruz, California, has had to hike prices of its ice cream — including popular flavours "strawberry pink pep-percorn" and "chocolate caramel sea salt" — repeatedly in recent years as an inflationary surge increased the cost of its supplies.

"I feel bad about always having to raise prices," said co-owner Zach Davis. "We were looking forward to inflation coming down, the economy stabilizing in 2025 ... Now with the tariffs, we may be back at it again." Trump tariffs, Davis said,

threaten to drive up the cost of the mostly made-in-China refrigerators, freezers and blenders he'll need if Penny Ice

tions to the multilateral system

stand out, Yang listed India's

contribution to peacekeeping,

efforts as a first responder in

numerous humanitarian emer-

gencies and being a strong voice of the Global South.

Yang said that India's most

Creamery goes ahead with plans to add to its six shops. He still has painful memories of the extra equipment costs the company had to absorb when Trump slapped massive tariffs on China during his first term. The new tariffs will also raise the price of a customer favourite - sprinkles - which Penny Ice Creamery imports from a company in Whitby, Ontario. Tacking a 25 per cent import tax on even something as small as that can damage a small business like his.

"The margins are so slim," he said. "Being able to offer that add-on can maybe generate an additional 10 cents in profit per scoop. If a tariff wipes that out, that can really be the difference between being profitable and being break-even and even being underwater by the end of the year."

In Asheville, North Carolina, Casey Hite, CEO of Aeroflow Health, expects to take a hit because his company gets more than half its supplies — includ-ing breast pumps — from Chinese manufacturers, providing them to American patients through insurance plans. Aeroflow Health gets paid by insurers at pre-negotiated rates, put in place before Trump decided on his tariffs. Hite said the tax on Chinese imports would hit the company's finances, forcing it either to purchase cheaper and lowerquality products or pass higher costs along via higher health might take two years to materialise, Hite said, but eventually they would hit consumers'

budgets. "It will impact the patients," Hite said. "In time, patients pay more for the products." Even the made-in-USA absorbent incontinence pads Aeroflow Health buys aren't safe from Trump's import taxes. They may include pulp from tariff target Canada and plastics and packaging from China, according to the Aeroflow Health, which warns of "turbulences" from the tar-

"Is this going to affect our business? You bet it is," said Linda Schlesinger-Wagner, who owns skinnytees, a women's apparel company in Birmingham, Michigan, north of Detroit, that imports clothing from China. She said the 10 per cent tax would increase her costs, though she plans to absorb the extra expense instead of passing it along to customers.

"I don't like what's going on," she said, referring to the broader impact of the tariffs. "And I think people are going to be truly shocked at the pricing they're going to see on the cars, on the lumber, on the clothes, on the food. This is going to be a mess.' William Reinsch, a former US

trade official now with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said that many companies that stocked up on imported goods ahead of time to avoid the tariffs. They will be able to draw on their piled-up inventories for weeks or a couple of months, delaying their customers' pain. George Carrillo, CEO of the Hispanic Construction Council, an industry advocacy group, said construction companies have been hoarding materials in anticipation of Trump's actions, but he worries about the possibility of inflation spiking in three to six

"Once that inventory starts to get low, we're going to start feeling the effects," Carillo said in a phone interview Saturday, ahead of the announcement. "Developers and general contractors need to keep up with the pace and they're going to and it's going to be at a higher

months.

price point. All that will be exacerbated by an emerging immigration crackdown that is already spooking the construction industry's labour pool, he said. 'You put tariffs and you put workforce instability, it's going to create major delays in projects. It's going to create an increase in prices because of the lack of availability," Carrillo said. Then there are the industries that don't have the luxury of stockpiling, including supermarkets whose farm products will spoil. So the impact will show up on grocery shelves within days.

"You don't stockpile avocados," Reinsch said. "You don't stockpile cut flowers. You don't stockpile bananas?

Israel's Netanyahu heads to US to discuss 'victory over Hamas' with Trump

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday he will discuss "victory over Hamas," countering expanding diplomat ic relations with Arab countries in his meeting with US President Donald Trump.
Tuesday's meeting at the White

House will be Trump's first with a foreign leader since returning to office. It comes as US and Arab mediators begin the daunting work of brokering the next phase of an agreement to wind down the war in the Gaza Strip and release dozens of militant-held hostages.

Hamas, which has quickly reasserted its control over Gaza since the ceasefire took hold last month, has said it will not release the hostages slated to go free in the second phase without an end to the war and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces. Netanyahu, who is under mounting pressure from farright governing partners to

that triggered the war.

It's unclear where Trump stands in all this.

He has been a staunch supporter of Israel, but has also pledged to end wars in the Middle East and took credit for helping to broker the ceasefire agreement. The deal has halted the fighting and led to the release of 18 hostages who had been held for over 15 months, as well as hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel

Netanyahu embraces Trump's call for peace through strength: In a statement released ahead of his departure on Sunday, Netanyahu said they would discuss "victory over Hamas, achieving the release of all our hostages and dealing with the Iranian terror axis in all its components,"

resume the war after the first referring to Iran's alliance of Under the first phase of the phase ends in early March, has militant groups across the said Israel is still committed to region, including Hamas.

victory over Hamas and the He said that by working togethreturn of all the hostages cap-tured in the militants' Oct. 7, er, they could "strengthen secu-rity, broaden the circle of peace and achieve a remarkable beace through strength." The war began when thou-

sands of Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage. Over 100 hostages were freed during a weeklong ceasefire in November 2023, eight have been rescued alive and dozens of bodies have been recovered by Israeli forces.

Israel's air and ground war has killed over 47,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to local health authorities who do not say how many of the dead were fighters. The war has left large parts of several cities in ruins and displaced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million ceasefire agreement, Hamas is to release a total of 33 hostages. eight of whom Hamas says are dead, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces have from most areas and allowed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to return to devastated northern Gaza.

Negotiations on the second phase, in which the war would end and the remaining 60 or so hostages would be returned, are set to begin Monday. If the United States, Oatar and Egypt are unable to broker an agreement between Israel and Hamas, the war could resume in early March.

Aspirations for a bigger deal: Trump's Mideast envoy, Steve Witkoff, joined the yearlong ceasefire negotiations in their final weeks last month and helped push the agreement over the finish line. He met with Netanyahu in Israel last week and the two were expected to formally begin talks on

SDGs, Yang said he is particu-

the second phase in Washington on Monday. Trump, who brokered normal-Israel and four Arab countries e seeking a wider and notentially historic agreement in which Israel would forge ties

with Saudi Arabia. But the kingdom, which resisted similar entreaties from the Biden administration, has said it would only agree to such a deal if the war ends and there is a credible pathway to a Palestinian state in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

Netanyahu's government is opposed to Palestinian statehood, and a key partner, farright Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, has threatened to leave the governing coalition if the war is not resumed next month. That would raise the likelihood of early elections in which Netanyahu could be

India experienced remarkable transformation in last decade: UNGA President Yang

PTI UNITED NATIONS

India has experienced "remarkable transformation" in the last decade, UN General Assembly President Philemon Yang has said, underlining that his upcoming visit to the country will give him an opportunity to see how digital and technological innovation has "fuelled this change"

Yang will visit India from February 4 to 8, his first official visit to the country as President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly. "As the world's largest democ-

racy, the fifth-largest economy and home to one-fifth of humanity, India is an important member of the United Nations," Yang told PTI in an exclusive interview ahead of his

Responding to a question on the visit's focus, Yang said he looks forward to "understanding, more deeply, India's prior-

ities and vision for the future of multilateralism. During the visit, he will engage with Indian leadership, including President Droupadi Murmu and External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar.

Recalling that he had visited India in 2013 as Prime Minister of Cameroon, Yang said that since then, India has experienced a "remarkable transformation" and he expects the visit to give him the "opportunity to see how digital and technological innovation has fuelled this change, all the way to the grassroots level.

The visit will also serve to highlight the importance of information sharing and capacity building in advancing sustainable development in the Global South. India has in many respects led the way through its South-South cooperation," Yang said in the written interview.

Yang said his message "to the people of India, and particularly to the young people of India, is one of confidence and ambition. Confidence in the extraordinary work achieved and ambition in that there is always more work to do, collectively, to make our world a better

For that reason, I would like to encourage them to continue spearheading efforts in harnessing innovation while also celebrating their rich culture and heritage

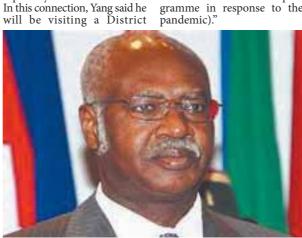
"As the world's largest population, the people of India have a huge stake in the work of the United Nations, in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and in ensuring that -indeed- no one is left behind. I therefore look forward to seeing India's continued engagement and leadership within the United Nations," Yang said.

Yang began his year-long tenure as President of the 193member General Assembly in September last year at the commencement of the 79th UNGA

As PGA, his priorities include peace and security in Africa, combatting illicit use of small arms and light weapons, eliminating child labour, and turbocharging the SDGs, through digitalisation. Given his focus on digitalisa-

structure (DPI) tools. "I am told the Co-WIN plat-

tion and how it can advance form was instrumental in delivering two billion doses to India during the COVID-19 panlarly keen to see how India is demic (I have heard it being using digital technology to referred to as the "digital backimprove the lives of its people, especially in the health sector. bone" of the vaccination programme in response to the pandemic).



Vaccine Store in Gautam Buddha Nagar in Uttar Pradesh and meet with health workers to understand the role of some of these digital public infra-

Yang also plans to visit the Infosys Campus and the Indian

Institute of Science in Bengaluru and other sites in Delhi and Bengaluru. When asked to highlight three areas where India's contribu-

ignificant contribution to the UN has been to its peacekeeping operations, both in terms of financial and human resources. With more than 290,000 Indians having served in 49 of the 71 UN peacekeeping missions established around the world since 1948, India's contribution to multilateral efforts

towards peace and security is

remarkable. He further said that India has acted as a first responder in numerous humanitarian emergencies within its region and has contributed humanitarian aid, whether in the form of food grains or medical supplies, to countries and regions devastated by war and natural disasters.

Finally, India's consistent efforts to defend and advance the voice of the Global South,

including in other multilateral forums, particularly on urgent issues like mobilising financing for sustainable development and advocating for additional climate finance for developing countries, have stood out for their timeliness

and sincerity," Yang said. "It is my hope that India will continue to advance the interests of the Global South," he

India has rapidly emerged as a critical enabler of South-South Cooperation through initiatives like the India-UN Development Partnership Fund which supports sustainable development projects in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing

"For all of these reasons, I convey my deep appreciation for the longstanding and steadfast commitment that India has displayed towards multilateralism, and I am confident that this will continue in the future, Yang said.

States (SIDS).

Yang, as UNGA President, presided over the adoption of the Pact of Future in September last year. Given his focus on the Pact and

its roadmap, Yang said that as General Assembly President, his role is to support the imple mentation efforts of the Pact. "I intend to do this by facilitating inclusive dialogue, creating opportunities for Member States to engage substantively in the implementation of the Pact, and galvanising collective efforts to advance its objectives." When asked what role he envisages for India in this, Yang said India is a strong voice of the Global South, a country that has made great strides at the national level, including on artificial intelligence which is one of the topical areas of the "It is for this reason that I think

that India, like other countries from the Global South, must not just take an active role in these discussions, but should also lead on national implementation of the Pact's commitments," he said.

Zelenskyy says excluding Ukraine from US-Russia talks on war 'dangerous'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Saturday that excluding his country from talks between the US and Russia about the war in Ukraine would be "very dangerous" and asked for more discussions between Kyiv and Washington to develop a plan for a ceasefire.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, Zelenskyy said Russia does not want to engage in ceasefire talks or to discuss any kind of concessions, which the Kremlin interprets as losing at a time when its troops have the upper hand on the battlefield. He said US President Donald Trump could bring Russian President Vladimir Putin to the table with the threat of sanctions targeting Russia's energy and banking system, as well as continued support of the Ukrainian military.

"I think these are the closest and most important steps," he said in the interview in the Ukrainian capital that lasted for more than an hour.

Zelenskyy's remarks followed comments Friday by Trump, who said American and Russian officials were "already talking" about ending the war. Trump said his administration has had "very serious" dis-

Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir has

vowed to hunt down the

"frenemies" acting as terror-

ist proxies targeting the coun-

try. Munir's comments came

as he visited Quetta on

Saturday following the killing of 18 soldiers during clashes

Balochistan's Kalat district.

Twenty-three terrorists were

During the visit, Munir was

given a comprehensive brief on

the prevailing security situa-

tion in Balochistan, the Army

said in a statement. Munir

said, "Those who are acting as

terrorist proxies of their foreign

masters who have mastered the

art of manifesting double stan-

dards of hunting with the

hound and running with the

"No matter what these so-

called 'frenemies' may do, you

will surely be defeated by the

resilience of our proud nation

and its Armed Forces

our motherland and its people,

we will definitely retaliate and

'hunt you down', whenever

required and wherever you

PTI ISLAMABAD

For the d

hare are well known to us.

also killed in clashes.

terrorists

cussions with Russia, but he did not elaborate.

"They may have their own relations, but talking about Ukraine without us — it is dangerous for everyone," Zelenskyy

He said his team has been in contact with the Trump administration, but those discussions are at a "general level," and he believes in-person meetings will take place soon to develop more detailed agreements. 'We need to work more on

this," he said, adding that understandably appeared to be focused on domestic issues in the first weeks after his inauguration. The nearly three-year war in Ukraine is at a crossroads. Trump promised to end the fighting within six months of taking office, but the two sides are far apart, and it is unclear how a ceasefire deal would take shape. Meanwhile, Russia continues to make slow but steady gains along the front, and Ukrainian forces are enduring severe manpower shortages. Most Ukrainians want a pause in fighting to rebuild their lives. The country faces neardaily Russian attacks on homes, and strikes on power systems have plunged entire cities into

Millions of Ukrainians have been displaced, unable to United States of America,

Pakistan has been battling

two-pronged militancy led by

the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan

and Baloch nationalists. The

two groups have been fighting for different objectives, with

the TTP for the so-called Islamic system like in

Afghanistan and the Baloch

extremists against the alleged

exploitation of Balochistan's natural wealth by the federal

government. Pakistan officials often blame

the "foreign hand" for the

trouble, which it said uses the

local elements – 'frenemies' -

to create an insurgency-like sit-

uation. The Chief of the Army

Staff (COAS) also appreciated

the efforts of the valiant offi-

cers and soldiers of the Army,

Frontier Corps and Law

Enforcement Agencies for their

courage and determination

towards fighting terrorism. He

reassured the Army's resolve to ensure the security and well-

being of the people of Balochistan, while also reaf-

firming its commitment to

ernment in its efforts to pro-

development in the region.

Pak Army Chief pledges to defeat 'frenemies'

return to their homes after vast tracts of the country's east have been reduced to rubble. Nearly a fifth of Ukraine is now occupied by Russia. In those areas, Moscow-appointed authorities are swiftly erasing any hint of Ukrainian identity. With Trump back in the White House, Ukraine's relationship with the U.S., its largest and

most important ally, is also at a tipping point. In an initial phone call with Trump during the presidential campaign, Zelenskyy said, the two agreed that if Trump won, they would meet to discuss the steps needed to end the war. But a planned visit by Trump's Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, was postponed "for legal reasons" Zelenskyy said. That was followed by a sudden foreign aid freeze that effectively

caused Ukrainian organiza-

tions to halt projects. "I believe that, first and foremost, we (must) hold a meeting with him, and that is important. And that is, by the way, something that everyone in Europe wants," Zelenskyy said, referring to "a common vision of a quick end to the war." After the conversation with Trump, "we should move on to some kind of format of conversation with Russians. And I would like to see the

Five killed as militants attack

in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Four paramilitary personnel

were among five people killed

when their vehicle was

ambushed by the militants in

Pakistan's restive Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa province on

The incident happened in Dera Ismail Khan district

bordering South Waziristan.

According to police, the

Karizat Levies personnel were

heading to recover a stolen truck in Daraban Tehsil of the

district, accompanied by a

private driver, when they

The attack resulted in the

deaths of four Levies person-

The security forces have been

tion to losses in Balochistan,

were ambushed.

mote peace, stability, and the security forces as in addi-

Saturday was a lethal day for another four security person-

Pakistan's economic growth stalls

despite interest rate cuts: Report

nel and one civilian

Sunday, police said.

paramilitary personnel's vehicle

Ukraine and the Russians at the negotiating table. ... And, to be honest, a European Union voice should also be there. I think it would be fair, effective. But how will it turn out? I don't know." Zelenskyy cautioned against allowing Putin to take "control" over the war, an apparent reference to Russia's repeated threats of escalation during President Joe Biden's administration.

Without security guarantees from Ukraine's allies, Zelenskyy said, any deal struck with Russia would only serve as a precursor to future aggression. Membership in the NATO alliance, a longstanding wish for Kyiv that Moscow has categorically rejected, is still Zelenskyy's top choice.

NATO membership is the "cheapest" option for Ukraine's allies, and it would also strengthen Trump geopolitically, Zelenskyy argued.

really believe that these are the cheapest security guarantees that Ukraine can get, the cheapest for everyone," he said "It will be a signal that it is not for Russia to decide who should be in NATO and who should not, but for the United States of America to decide. I think this is a great victory for Trump," he said, evidently appealing to the president's penchant for winners and business deals.

terror operations across the

country to curb the menace of

terrorism in both Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and

On Saturday law enforcement agencies killed 23 ter-

rorists during separate operations in Balochistan.

These operations are part of

a sustained effort as the coun-

try witnessed a surge in vio-

lent attacks since the Taliban

returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, partic-

ularly in the bordering provinces of KP and

Terror attacks have increased

since the banned militant

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan

group broke a fragile ceasefire

agreement with the govern-

nel and a civilian were killed in

Dera Ismail Khan district of

Balochistan.

Balochistan



In this photo released by the Iranian Presidency Office, President Masoud Pezeshkian, third right, visits an exhibition of the defense ministry's latest defense and space

Syria's interim president heads to Saudi Arabia on first trip abroad, likely signal to Iran

Syria's interim president made his first trip abroad Sunday, travelling to Saudi Arabia in a move likely trying to signal Damascus' shift away from Iran as its main regional ally.

regional ally.
Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was once aligned with al-Qaida, travelled to Riyadh alongside his government's foreign minister, Asaad al-Shaibani.
A photo published by the state-run SANA news agency showed the two men on a jet, likely provided by the king-dom, with a Saudi flag visible on the table behind them.

Saudi state television trumpeted the fact that the first trip by al-Sharaa, first known internationally by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Golani, would make Riyadh his first destination.

Saudi Arabia had been among the Arab nations that poured money into insurgent groups

President Bashar Assad after Syria's 2011 Arab Spring protests turned into a bloody crackdown. However, its groups found themselves beaten back as Assad, supported by Iran and Russia, fought the war into a stalemate in Syria.

That changed with the December lightning offensive led by al-Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. The group was once affiliated with al-Qaida but has since denounced its former ties. Al-Sharaa and HTS have carefully managed their public image in the time since, with the interim president favoring an olive-colored military look similar to Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, Volodymyr appointing women to roles and trying to maintain ties to Syria's Christian and Shiite Alawite populations.

both Iran and Russia largely at arms' length as well. Iran has yet to reopen its embassy in Damascus, which had been a key node in running operations through its self-described "Axis of Resistance," including Assad's Syria, Lebanon's Hezbollah militia and other partners. Russia meanwhile would like to maintain access to air and sea bases it has in Syria, but took in Assad when he fled Syria during the advance.

That also includes keeping

Those moves appear aimed at reassuring the West and trying to get crippling sanctions lifted on Syria. Rebuilding the country after over a decade of war will likely cost hundreds of billions of dollars, not to mention covering the needs of Syria's people, millions of whom remain impoverished.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan vis-

ited Damascus in January and said Rivadh has been "actively engaging in dialogue" to lift sanctions on Syria. Saudi Arabia, unlike Al-Sharaa's key allies in Turkey and Qatar, restored ties with Assad in 2023 alongside most of the Arab world. Getting sanctions lifted could go a long way in cementing their relationship.

Meanwhile, Syria's interim government still faces challenges from the Islamic State group and other militants in the country. On Saturday, a car bomb exploded in Manbij, a city in Syria's Aleppo governorate, killing four civilians and wounding nine, SANA reported, citing civil defense officials.

Turkish-backed Syrian rebels had seized Manbij in December, part of a push by Ankara to secure Syrian territory close to its border for

Elon Musk's DOGE commission gains access to sensitive Treasury payment systems

PTI WASHINGTON

The Department of Government Efficiency, I run by President Donald Trump's billion-aire adviser and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, has gained access to sensitive Treasury data including Social Security and Medicare customer pay ment systems, according to two people familiar with the situation. The move by DOGE, a Trump administration task force assigned to find ways to fire federal workers, cut programs and slash federal regulations, means it could have wide leeway to access important taxpay-

er data, among other things. The New York Times first reported the news of the group's access of the massive federal payment system. The two people who spoke to The Associated Press spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The highest-ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, Ron Wyden of Oregon, on Friday sent a letter to Trump's Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent expressing concern that "officials associated with Musk may have intended to access these payment systems to illegally withhold payments to any number of programmes."

To put it bluntly, these payment systems simply cannot fail, and any politically motivated meddling in them risks severe damage to our country and the economy," Wyden said.

The news also comes after Treasury's acting Deputy Secretary David Lebryk resigned from his position at Treasury after more than 30 years of service. The Washington Post on Friday reported that Lebryk resigned his position after Musk and his DOGE organization requested access to sensitive Treasury data.

The Fiscal Service performs some of the most vital functions in government," Lebryk said in a letter to Treasury employees sent out Friday "Our work may be unknown to most of the public, but that doesn't mean it isn't exceptionally important. I am grateful for having been able to work alongside some of the nation's best and most talented operations staff."

The letter did not mention a DOGE request to access Treasury payments.

Musk on Saturday responded to a post on his social media platform X about the departure of Lebryk: "The @DOGE team discovered, among other things, that payment approval officers at Treasury were instructed always to approve payments, even to known fraudulent or terrorist groups. They literally never denied a payment in their entire career. Not even once. He did not provide proof of this claim.

DOGE was originally headed by Musk and former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, who jointly vowed to cut billions from the federal budget and usher in "mass headcount reductions across the federal bureau-

mentioned wrongly written as VIJAY KUMAR in my Adhar Card No 679725922992, The actual name of mine is VIJAY ARORA, which may b amended accordingly. It is certified that I have complied with other legal requirement in this connection



CHANGE OF NAME

I, Arushi Ahluwalia alias Arushi Puri W/o Deepak Puri, R/o 1013, Indirapuram, Shakti Khand, Ghaziabad-201014, have changed my name to ARUSHI KAUR

AHLUWALIA. PD(1377)A I, Naresh Kumar Miglani S/o Om Parkash Miglani R/o flat no 103 tower I, Mahindra Aura apartment sector 110A Gurgaon that in some documents name mentioned is naresh kumar & in some name mentioned is naresh miglani. That Naresh kumar, Naresh Miglani & Naresh Kumar Miglani are name of one & same person. That i may be known as Naresh Kumar Miglani for all future

purposes. PD(1378)C I, Sangeeta Prasad Gupta, Mother of- No.10136957W Rfn Amit Prasad Gupta, R/o- H.No.-C-21, CTI Complex, Raja Garden, PO- Rajouri Garden, West Delhi, Delhi-110027, have changed my name from Sangeeta Prasad Gupta to Sangita Gupta, vide affidavit dated 01/02/2025 before

Notary Public Delhi.

I, Baliram Prasad Gupta, Father of- No.10136957W Rfn Amit Prasad Gupta, R/o- H.No.- C-21, CTI Complex, Raja Garden, PO- Rajouri Garden, West Delhi, Delhi- 110027, have changed my name from Baliram Prasad Gupta to Baliram Gupta, vide affidavit dated 01/02/2025 before Notary Public Delhi

realisation of a renewed international system that is responsive to the realities of today's world and the challenges of tomorrow.

It is also a powerful tool to accelerate the process of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, he said. "Its implementation requires collective efforts by all relevant stakeholdersmember states, international and regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector. Nations and their leaders must work hand in hand to address complex challenges and leverage innovation," he said.

progress through collaboration and partnership. World leaders must ensure that the commitments in the Pact are implemented in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. The success of the Pact lies in translating those commitments into tangible, transfor mative outcomes, especially at the national level. My message to the leaders of the world

in the interest rate by the central bank during this period, according to a media report. The State Bank of Pakistan in tions (NBFIs).

the latest cut on January 27 further reduced the interest rate by 1 per cent to set it at 12 per cent, a whopping 10 per cent down from 22 per cent in June last year. It was expected the decision would help to increase

 $P^{\text{akistan failed to kick-start}}_{\text{economic growth in the}}$

first seven months of the

current fiscal year despite a

massive 10 per cent reduction

money supply and growth.

ed that despite a steep fall in the interest rate, the monetary expansion remained negative during the first seven months of the current fiscal year, noting that the frequent declines in interest rates resulted in a massive outflow of liquidity from banks to the private sector and non-bank financial institu-

Still, it has failed to stimulate economic growth, it said. Bank advances to the private sector and NBFIs increased sharply in the second quarter

The Dawn newspaper report-

While financial experts believe that the impact of high liquidity supply to the private sector will take time to impact the

economy, the government fears that inflation may catch the economy again, imports would be higher, and resultantly the current account would face a deficit which was currently surplus with USD 1.2 billion in the first half of FY25.

According to the newspaper, the latest data showed that the M2 growth (money supply) was negative Rs973 billion in July 1-Jan 17, FY25, compared to a net growth of Rs 416 billion in the same period last fis-

Expanding the money supply is meant to result in lower interest rates and borrowing costs to boost consumption and investment.

The M2 data shows that the broad money expanded by Rs 4.94 trillion in FY24 and Rs 4.17 trillion in FY23. This huge supply, mostly to the government, created only inflation, which reached a record high of 38 per cent in May 2023

It badly hampered economic growth as the State Bank increased the interest rate to tame surging inflation.

UNGA President calls on member states to commit to Security Council reforms

PTI UNITED NATIONS

s the United Nations turns 80 this year, As the Office Practice to be fit for purpose, UN General Assembly President Philemon Yang has said, calling on all member states to "engage actively" and commit to reform, including of the Security Council. Yang, who is set to travel to India from February 4 to 8 on his first official visit to the country as President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, said the global body must acknowledge the need to adapt to the change of times.

"I believe it is imperative for the United Nations to be fit for purpose, to better address the many pressing issues of global concern. As the UN marks its 80th anniversary we must acknowledge the need to adapt to the change of times, to a manifestly different geopolitical context to that of 1945," Yang told PTI in an exclusive interview here. In response to a question on UN reforms, particularly of the powerful 15-nation body

on which the needle has not moved much over the past few decades, he said there is no doubt that the calls for reform have been loudest about the UN Security Council.

"Again here, the Pact for the Future provides us with a boost of political momentum for the success of the intergovernmental negotiations during this session. I am fully supportive of the membership to follow through with ambition and determination, particularly at a moment where we see a deadlocked UN Security Council on matters of key importance for the maintenance of international peace and security," Yang said in the written interview ahead of the visit.

Yang added that the Pact emphasises the importance of making the Council more representative. "This includes addressing the historical injustice against Africa as a priority and improving the representation of underrepresented and unrepresented regions and groups. I am hopeful that we will be able to see a consolidated model being agreed to at the end of this session and I call on all member states to engage actively and commit to reform an institution that is vital for our collective security.

At the landmark Summit of the Future during the high-level General Assembly session in September last year, world leaders had adopted by consensus the ambitious Pact of the Future along with the annexes - the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations.

On UN reform, Yang further said that in this regard, the General Assembly has played and continues to play a key role

"In fact, since the end of the Cold War, the General Assembly has been constantly reviewing its effectiveness and efficiency through the process of revitalization of the work of the Assembly.

Yang emphasised that as the most representative body in the United Nations system, the General Assembly has the potential to lead the way into the future. As it was exemplified in September 2024, at the Summit of the Future, the Assembly was able to adopt by consensus the Pact and its annexes, charting the way forward for humanity.

India has been at the forefront of years-long efforts to reform the Security Council, saying the UN body does not reflect current geopolitics realities and underscored that it rightly deserves a permanent seat at the horse-shoe table. India last sat at the UN high table as a non-permanent member in 2021-22. In response to a question on how nations and leaders should ensure implementation of the roadmap laid out in the Pact as the world confronts challenges and conflicts, Yang said the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations is a key moment for the international community to not only reflect on the collective achievements of the organisation since its foundation but to highlight those areas where urgent action is needed.

The Pact provides a perfect lens through which the international community can undertake this exercise, he said adding that the Pact marked a major step towards the

Yang underscored that it has been made clear time and time again that "we can only make

is clear: we have no time to lose."

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Budget is by the people, for the people, says Finance Minister

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday described the Union Budget as "by the people, for the people, of the people", and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was fully behind the idea to cut taxes for the middle class but it took time to convince the bureaucrats.

"We have heard the voice of the middle class" who had been about complaining aspirations not being met despite being honest taxpayers, she told PTI in an interview.

With the honest and proud taxpayers wanting the government to do more to limit the impact of factors like inflation, the prime minister was quick to task Sitharaman to look at ways to give

While Modi was quick to agree to tax relief, it took a bit of convincing to get on board the officials in the finance ministry and the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) - who are tasked to ensure revenue collection to meet welfare and other schemes, she

Presenting her eighth straight budget, Sitharaman on Saturday announced an increase in the personal income tax threshold below which taxpayers owe no tax to ₹12 Lakh, up from ₹7 Lakh, as well as a rejig in tax brackets that would help those earning higher than that save up to ₹1.1 Lakh.

The ₹5 lakh hike in exemption

limit is the biggest ever and equals all the reliefs that were given between 2005 and 2023.

"I think the prime minister put it succinctly, he said it's the people's Budget, it is the Budget which the people wanted."

Asked to describe the ethos of the budget in her own words, she said, "As they say in democracy in Abraham Lincoln's words, it is Budget by the people, of the people for the people.

Sitharaman said the new rates would "substantially reduce the taxes of the middle class and leave more money in their hands, boosting household consumption, savings and investment".

Explaining the thought that went behind the big announcement, Sitharaman said the tax cuts were in the works for some time.

One of the ideas was to make the



comply with. Work on this started in the July 2024 Budget and now a new law is on the anvil, which will simplify the language, reduce the compliance burden and be a bit more user-friendly.

"It wasn't talking about rate restructuring, although for several years now, we have been looking at wavs in which the rates can be a lot more reasonably taxpayer friendly. And therefore that work was also

the strengthens India's clean

energy ecosystem, he stated.

Investments in offshore wind capacity, green hydrogen

production, and hybrid renewable projects will drive

innovation, job creation, and

economic growth, he opined. Sunil Mathur, Managing Director and Chief Executive

Officer, Siemens Ltd said that

announcements are a shot in

the arm for consumption,

which will in turn drive

manufacturing in the private

The National Manufacturing

Mission, the focus on clean

technology and measures to

support Start Ups and MSMEs

With a 10 per cent increase in

infrastructure over the revised

estimates, the Government

stays on course in its commitment of building a

world class infrastructure in

the country, he added. Bikesh Ogra, MD and CEO,

Jakson Green said, "Crucially,

the budget emphasises power

sector reforms, incentivising

distribution and transmission

infrastructure that is essential

for seamlessly integrating

Resources into the grid and

ensuring a stable power supply. The proposed PPP

supply. The proposed PPP model for infrastructure development, coupled with

substantial interest-free loans,

will catalyse investments in

RBI's interest rate decision, quarterly earnings and global cues would be the major driving

factors for equity markets this week, analysts said adding that the impact of the Union Budget could linger

Trading activity of foreign investors will also be a key

driver for the markets,

and

India's

RE projects."

on this week.

experts noted.

spending

are welcome steps, he said.

demand

and

Budget

going on," she said. "Equally, after the July budget, there was this voice of the middle class, which felt that they were paying tax... But also felt they don't seem to have much in the way of redressing their problems.

There was also this feeling that the government was very inclusive in taking care of the very poor and the vulnerable sections

"So the voice, which came wherever I travelled, was we are

proud taxpayers. We are honest taxpayers. We want to continue to serve the country by being good taxpayers. But what do you think about what kind of things you can do for us?" she said. "And so I had this discussion also with the prime minister who put me on the specific assignment to see what is it that you can come up with."

Numbers were worked, and presented to the prime minister

who gave guidance for what was presented in the FY26 Budget on Saturday, she said.

Asked how much persuasion did it take to get the prime minister on board, Sitharaman said, "No, I think your question should be. how much did it take for me to convince the ministry (and) the board (CBDT).

So, it is not so much the PM, the PM was very clear that he wants to do something. It is for the ministry to have had the comfort level and then go with the proposal," she So, the more work that was needed, was needed convincing the Board efficiency in collection and honest taxpayers' voice" needs to be

The ministry and CBDT needed

convincing because they have to be sure of revenue generation. "So, they were not wrong in reminding me periodically, saying what would it mean? But ultimately, everybody came around," she

The finance minister said the prime minister meets and listens to the voices of people from different sectors and industry leaders and responds to their

"I'm very happy to be a part of this government, which literally hears the voice and responds," she said. Stating that an attempt has always been to widen the tax net, Sitharaman said efforts are to get more Indians, who are in a position to pay and come on

That attempt of widening the tax net is a continuous, ongoing exercise," she said.

India currently has about 8.65 crore income tax return filers. The number swells to over 10 crore after people with TDS liability but not filing returns are included.

"I think many people who are just outside of the fringe should be nudged to come in who have never been taxpayers or who have now

reached that level of income, or even those who have avoided tax. will all have to be brought on," she said. "So, that is certainly a task before us. We have to make sure that people are understanding the role of paying tax and bring them on board

Sitharaman defended the modest increase in capital spending at ₹11.21 Lakh Crore in the next financial year starting April compared to a lowered ₹10.18 lakh crore in the current fiscal, saying the quality of spending has also to

"If we are looking at the numbers, because we have got used to 16 per cent, 17 per cent increase (in capital spending) every year from 2020, and saying you have not increased it by that number (in the Budget for 2025-26), I would equally want to ask you to please look at the way in which the quality of spending has happened, particularly capital expenditure," she said.

She was also appreciative of the states which received the 50-year interest-free share of the money which went from the central government's side as capital expenditure for them.

Industry experts hail steps for boosting clean energy



Industry experts hailed steps for boosting clean energy nuclear mission, incentives for critical minerals and renewable equipment in the Budget presented on Saturday by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharman. Sitharaman announced a ₹20.000-crore nuclear mission and duty exemptions for

goods for electric vehicles to step up energy transition. Rajat Verma, Founder and CEO, LOHUM said, "The budget marks a watershed moment in India's journey toward clean energy economy leadership. The government's strategic vision for domestic manufacturing and critical minerals recycling remarkable demonstrates

crucial minerals and capital

sustainable future." The elimination of import duties on lithium-ion battery scrap, cobalt powder, and an

array of critical mineral wastes

foresight in securing our

unlocks unprecedented

opportunities. Coupled with the duty exemption expansion to 63 additional capital goods for EV and mobile battery production, this creates a robust foundation for India's manufacturing renaissance, he opined. The landmark ₹20,000 Crore

investment in private-sector R D emerging technologies signals transformative shift building a sustainable critical minerals ecosystem, Verma

Executive Devansh Jain, Director, INOXGFL Group, "The emphasis on wind Hydrogen Mission, and EV infrastructure, along with dedicated support for Clean Tech manufacturing, marks a transformative step toward sustainability."

By fostering domestic value addition in solar PV cells, EV batteries, motors, controllers, electrolysers, wind turbines, high-voltage transmission

Frequent extreme weather in India: Economic Survey

The food inflation rate in India has remained firm over the past two years defying the global trend, and frequent extreme weather events are one of the reasons, the government said in its latest Economic Survey

Tabled in Parliament on Friday, the report said that the decline in onion and tomato production over the past two years can be partly attributed to frequent extreme weather events in major producing states compared to other regions. Extreme weather events in

2023-24 damaged crops in major horticultureproducing states, leading to inflationary pressure on horticultural commodities, it said.

"Over the past two years, India's food inflation rate remained diverging from global trends of stable or declining food inflation. This can be attributed to factors such as supply chain disruptions exacerbated by extreme harvest of some food items,' the report read.

Citing data from the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), the report said that the total crop area damaged in 2024 was higher than in the previous two years due to extreme weather conditions. government also



Meteorological Department (IMD) data, which shows a significant rise in the frequency of extreme weather events, especially heatwaves.

Between 2022 and 2024. heatwaves were recorded on 18 per cent of days, compared to 5 per cent in 2020 and 2021, the report

The Economic Survey acknowledged that recent shocks like geopolitical conflicts and weather have caused price fluctuations, but their impact has now subsided, leading to more variation in commodity prices.

For long-term price stability, the report suggested developing climate-resilient crops, strengthening data reducing crop damage, and minimising post-harvest

Saturday, government announced a six-year mission to increase pulse production, aiming to achieve self-sufficiency in three widely consumed varieties - tur, urad, and

Customs duty cuts in certain areas events driving food inflation to benefit American exports: GTRI PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The customs duty reduction announced in the Budget on products such as motorcycles and synthetic flavouring essences would benefit American exports, economic think tank GTRI said on Sunday. The Global Trade Research

Initiative (GTRI) said that despite the repeated criticism of India as the biggest tariff abuser and tariff king by the Trump-administration, the Budget country's introduced significant tariff on multiple reductions products, many of which benefit the US exports.

With key tariff cuts on technology, automobiles, industrial inputs, and waste imports, India appears to be taking toward facilitating trade even as the global trade environment remains tense. Whether these reductions will alter Washington's view of India's trade practices or become a point of contention in the US election cycle remains to be seen," it added.

Among the key tariff reductions, India lowered the duty on fish hydrolysate for the manufacturing of aquatic cent, a move that directly impacts US exports, which amounted to \$ 35 Million in 2023-24. For the automobile sector, India has reduced tariffs on motorcycles based on engine capacity.

For motorcycles with an below engine capacity 1,600cc, the tariff has been cut from 50 per cent to 40 per



cent, while for motorcycles above 1,600cc, the tariff has been slashed from 50 per cent to 30 per cent.

FY24, and this tariff cut could American manufacturers," the GTRI said.

grade) under the others category from 20 per cent to 10 per cent would help American exporters. The US exported \$ 653.4

Million worth of these products to India in the last fiscal, "making this a significant trade benefit", Founder Srivastava said.

duties on synthetic flavouring essences from 100 per cent to 20 per cent, a category in which Washington exports stood at \$ 21 Million in FY24. "In the space sector, tariffs on ground installation for satellites, including spares and consumables, have been reduced to zero, benefiting American exporters who

supplied \$ 92 Million worth of these products in FY23,

'The US motorcycle exports to India stood at \$ 3 Million in help expand market access for

Similarly, it said, tariff cut on ethernet switches (carrier-

Srivastava said. However, in the last financial

year, these imports dropped significantly to \$ 0.07 Million, suggesting a sharp decline in trade activity in this category. Additionally, the Budget has proposed elimination of tariffs on specific waste and scrap items, reducing duties from 5 per cent to zero.

America exported a total of \$ 2.5 Billion worth of waste and scrap of all types to India in While Trump has long

India's criticised latest structure, these reductions indicate a shift in policy that could boost US exports across

During April-November 2024-25, the US was the second largest trading partner of India with \$ 82.52 Billion bilateral trade in goods (\$ 52.89 Billion worth of exports \$ 29.63 Billion of imports and \$ 23.26 Billion trade surplus). During 2021-24, America was the largest trading partner of

Focus on infrastructure, manufacturing, sustainability to push steel sector growth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The stainless steel industry has hailed the Union Budget 2025-26, saying the focus on infrastructure, manufacturing, sustainability will push the sector's growth.
Union Finance Minister

Nirmala Sitharaman presented the record eighth straight Union Budget in the Lok Sabha on Saturday. "The industry lauds the Union

Budget 2025-26 for its robust focus on infrastructure, manufacturing, sustainability, crucial for the stainless steel industry's growth," apex industry body Stainless Association Development

(ISSDA) said in a statement. The Budget offers a balanced roadmap for long-term growth in the stainless steel industry. The focus on infrastructure,

manufacturing, and sustainability will elevate the sector's economic contribution and reinforce India's position as a global leader in stainless steel production and innovation, the association said.

Jindal Stainless Managing Director Abhyuday Jindal said, "Infrastructure remains central to India's growth, and the sustains this momentum with a 10.08 per



cent hike in capex to ₹ 11.21 Lakh Crore and ₹1.5 Lakh Crore earmarked for state capital expenditure. The ₹10 Lakh Crore Asset Monetisation Plan (2025-30) will unlock funds for new projects, while increased public-private partnerships will drive private investment in transport, urban development, and energy".

The digital skilling initiative aimed at equipping youth with Industry 4.0 technologies has the potential to revolutionise both manufacturing and

In the stainless steel industry, automation and advanced manufacturing are on the rise, these efforts will ensure a workforce capable of navigating rapid change and expansion, Jindal said.

The newly introduced credit cards for micro-enterprises and the growth of Funds of Funds for startups will encourage entrepreneurship innovation across sectors.

manufacturing PMI for January to be released on Monday, will be the key macro data to watch out for. Investors will closely study the fine prints of the Budget policies and market focus will shift back to the corporate earnings/outlook and RBI's interest rate decision to be announced on Friday," Siddhartha Khemka,

Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said. From the earnings calendar, Asian Paints, PC Jeweller, Tata Power, Titan, Apollo Tyres, Bharti Airtel, ITC,F, SBI, LIC, MandM and NHPC would announce their earnings this week.

Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said, "Will the RBI soften its stance and announce any rate cut in this week's credit policy that would be interesting to watch out for? However, a non-event but practically



Global trends key drivers for markets: Analysts

for global developments, as any uptick in US bond yields and FII selling dampen sentiment.

data manufacturing and services would also be tracked by investors. "As we look to this week,

there are several important events on the horizon, including the MPC outcome, the Delhi state election, and developments regarding US tariffs. These events present an opportunity for market participants to remain engaged and informed, as they are likely to introduce some volatility," Krishnan, Sr Krishnan, Analyst, Technical and Derivatives of - Angel One, said. Krishnan further said, "Now,

the major Union Budget is

behind us, and it appeared as

was very minimal. Hence, the actual reaction is likely to be witnessed on Monday and hence, we need to wait for a day or two to understand whether the market has really discounted the Budget factor or not."

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced significant income tax cuts for the middle class and unveiled a blueprint generation reforms for Viksit Bharat as she treaded a fine line between fiscal prudence and providing a thrust to growth. The Budget for April 2025 to

March 2026 fiscal (FY26) proposed to raise foreign limit investment insurance sector to 100 per cent from current 74 per cent and continued spending spree on infrastructure while

raising allocations for social sectors as well as providing for measures for poor, youth, farmers and women. "The Union Budget largely

played to our expectations, particularly with the muchneeded income tax relief for the middle class, which will drive consumption and economic growth. No changes were made to Securities Transaction Tax or capital gains tax, as anticipated," Pranav Haridasan, MD and CEO, Axis Securities, said.

Equity markets were open on Saturday due to the presentation of the Union Budget.

week, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,315.5 points or 1.72 per cent, and the NSE Nifty went up by 389.95 points or 1.68 per

Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research,

Religare Broking Ltd, said, "The impact of the Union Budget could linger in the next session, particularly in the consumption sectors. Additionally, with the earnings season set to take center stage again, traders should focus on stock

selection, Mishra added. On Saturday, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex eked out a marginal gain of 5.39 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 77,505.96. The Nifty dipped 26.25 points or 0.11 cent to settle at

Exporters demand extension of interest equalisation scheme

The Indian exporting community on Sunday urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to extend the interest equalisation scheme (IES) for getting affordable rates of credit, as their demand was not mentioned in the Budget. The scheme ended December 31 last year.

The scheme, according to exporters, has helped them avail of rupee export credit at competitive rates at a time when the global economy is facing headwinds. Exporters used to get subsidies under the scheme for pre and postshipment rupee export credit. Sanjay Budhia, Chairman of CII National Committee on EXIM, said though the Budget announcements would help boost outbound shipments, "We sincerely request the

Finance Minister to kindly

reinstate the scheme for all

exporters to make them

globally competitive." similar Sharing Federation of Indian Export (FIEO) Organisations President Ashwani Kumar said the commerce ministry has allocated funds of ₹2,250 Crore under export promotion scheme of covering IES and

(Market



extended immediately with effect from January 1 with a cap of ₹10 Crore and international events for 2025-26 may be approved immediately. Budhia also said that measures

announced in the Budget such as cutting customs duties on certain inputs, and rolling out of national manufacturing mission would help boost exports and job creation.

He added that the proposed export mission to improve export credit, and support to MSMEs to tackle non-tariff measures in overseas markets would surely help in getting greater market access for domestic goods.

"The reduction of basic customs duty on several inputs production rationalisation of customs tariff structure for industrial goods will boost the export potential of the country significantly," Budhia, who is also MD of Patton Group, said.



Get your skin analysis at the KorinMi's clinic that brings authentic Korean skincare to Delhi, writes ABHI SINGHAL



ver wanted to have glass skin looking at all those viral Instagram reels and products? Ever wanted to get a 3D analysis of your skin like it happens in Korea? Then the quest for the radiant, flawless "glass skin" just got easier. KorinMi, India's Korean skin clinic has expanded its footprint with a new location in Defence Colony in Delhi.

Korean glass skin is a skincare trend that emphasises achieving skin that looks incredibly smooth, radiant, and intensely hydrated, almost like a pane of glass. The term originated from Korean beauty (K-beauty) and has gained global popularity for its focus on achieving a naturally luminous complexion.

To get your skin have qualities for the glass skin, there is KorinMi, at the the prestigious Centre for Skin & Hair Pvt Ltd, under the guidance of dermatologist Dr. Deepali Bhardwaj. The new space promises a transformative skincare experience. Known for its unique fusion of timehonoured Korean beauty rituals and cuttingedge dermatological techniques, KorinMi offers bespoke treatments tailored to a diverse range of skin concerns

The Defence Colony clinic offers a range of exclusive treatments, including a comprehensive 3D Skin Analysis & Consultation to personalise treatment plans. Clients can also indulge in various K Glow Treatments targeting specific



concerns like brightening and anti-aging, sensitive skin, and acne and pore control. For those seeking a quick and effective radiance boost, the KorinMi Glass Skin Resurfacing Treatment promises visible results in just three days. And for special occasions, the KorinMi Diamond Glass Skin Treatment delivers an instant glow and brightness.

"The overwhelming response and remarkable results we've seen at our Gurgaon clinic inspired







us to bring KorinMi to Defence Colony," says Reshbha Munjal, Co-founder of KorinMi. "This new location makes authentic Korean skincare more accessible to Delhi, providing a luxurious and personalised experience designed to address every skin need. We're thrilled to continue our mission of helping clients achieve radiant, glass skin through the elegance and expertise of Korean beauty traditions."

This exciting collaboration with Dr. Deepali beauty, right here in Delhi.

Bhardwaj adds another layer of expertise to KorinMi's offerings. As an internationally trained Skin Allergy Specialist, Dr. Bhardwaj brings a wealth of knowledge to the table, particularly relevant in today's environment of increasing pollution and skin allergies. "I've incorporated an Indian scientific perspective into these Korean treatments," Dr. Bhardwaj explains, "which has significantly enhanced the results, helping Indians achieve their desired clear and glass-like skin. It's a fantastic treatment approach, especially with its holistic focus."

KorinMi's philosophy centres on enhancing natural beauty through safe and effective skincare solutions that embody the elegance and precision of Korean beauty. Every detail, from the personalised care to the luxurious ambiance, is designed to create a pampering and transformative experience. The clinic uses products, treatments, and technologies imported directly from South Korea, ensuring authenticity and quality.

This expansion isn't just about opening another clinic; it's about making the transformative power of Korean skincare accessible to a wider audience. For those seeking the coveted "glass skin" look and a truly personalised skincare journey, KorinMi's new Defence Colony location offers a unique and exciting opportunity. It's an invitation to experience the best of Korean







By ANURAAG BHARDWAI

s we spend increasingly more time indoors, it's essential to consider how our built environments impact our physical health. A welldesigned residential building can significantly boost occupants' mood, sleep quality, productivity, and overall well-being.

NATURAL LIGHT AND VENTILATION:

Exposure to natural light and fresh air is crucial for our physical and mental health. Natural light regulates our circadian rhythms, influencing our sleep-wake cycles, hormone secretion, and mood. Adequate ventilation, on the other hand, removes stale air, reducing the concentration of pollutants and allergens.

To incorporate natural light and ventilation into your residential building design:

- Orient windows to maximize natural light exposure.
- Incorporate skylights, clerestory
- windows, or solar tubes. ■ Use light-coloured interior finishes to



reflect natural light. ■ Install ventilation systems that provide

a consistent supply of fresh air.

ERGONOMICS AND ACCESSIBILITY: A space

Well-designed should accommodate occupants of all ages and abilities. Ergonomic design principles prioritize comfort, reducing the risk of injury and strain.

To design ergonomic and accessible spaces:

- Incorporate adaptable fixtures and furniture
- Ensure sufficient clearance for
- wheelchair navigation ■ Install grab bars, non-slip flooring, and tactile signage
- Design spaces with flexibility in mind, accommodating different user needs

INDOOR AIR QUALITY: The air we breathe indoors can be up to five times more polluted than outdoor air. Indoor air quality is influenced by various factors, including building materials, ventilation systems, and occupant activities.

- To improve indoor air quality:
- Specify low-VOC (volatile organic compound) materials
- Install effective ventilation systems, including air filtration

Incorporate plants, which naturally purify the air

Implement regular maintenance schedules for HVAC systems

THERMAL COMFORT: Thermal comfort significantly impacts our mood, productivity, and overall well-being. A well-designed thermal environment should maintain a consistent,

comfortable temperature range. To achieve thermal comfort:

- Install efficient HVAC systems with
- precise temperature control
- Incorporate passive design strategies such as insulation and shading
- Specify materials with high thermal mass, which absorb and release heat Design spaces with flexible thermal
- zoning, accommodating different occupant needs By incorporating these design principles

into your residential building, you can create a healthier, more comfortable indoor environment that supports the well-being of occupants.

The author is an architect and is the founder of Anjaney Vastu & AB Architects



Holistic Wellness in the Digital Age



the world is changing rapidly, and with it, the way we think about wellness. Gone are the days when wellness was simply about hitting the gym or following the latest diet trend. Today, wellness is a multi-faceted, deeply personal journey, one that goes beyond physical fitness to encompass mental, emotional, social, and even environmental wellbeing. It's no longer just about feeling good; it's about being whole, in mind, body, and spirit. And in this digital age, brands are stepping up, weaving holistic wellness into their DNA to foster deeper connections with consumers.

A SHIFT IN CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS:

The wellness movement began quietly at first a small ripple in the wellness community, but over time, it turned into a tidal wave that reshaped industries. We saw yoga studios spring up, organic food brands gaining prominence, and mindfulness apps becoming household names. But as technology began to play an even larger role in our lives, the scope

of wellness began to widen. Today's consumer is informed, engaged, and expects brands to be more than just a product or service. They want companies that reflect their values, understand their needs, and contribute to their holistic well-being. The conversation around wellness has evolved into something much larger than simply improving physical health. It's a fusion of mind, body, soul, and environment, all wrapped into one. As a result, brands have a unique

opportunity. The challenge, however, is in how to craft campaigns that not only resonate with consumers' needs but also inspire them to live healthier, more sustainable lives. It's not enough to sell a product; brands now have to sell a





lifestyle like the one that nurtures wellbeing on every level.

THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION: In a world where social media dictates trends and influencers have the power to shape movements, the digital age has been both a blessing and a challenge for brands trying to tap into the wellness space. The power of digital platforms cannot be overstated.

The most successful brands are those that recognise this and align their core values with the principles of holistic wellness. Take Patagonia, for example. outdoor apparel brand's commitment to sustainability and environmental well-being extends far beyond their product offerings. They have built a narrative that connects consumers with the idea of wellness as a

global movement—one that includes not only personal well-being but also the well-being of the planet. By promoting responsible consumption environmental conservation, they are not just selling jackets; they are selling a lifestyle that speaks to the core values of their audience.

PERSONALISED APPROACH TO WELLNESS: But it's not only about big, global brands. Small, direct-to-consumer companies are equally making their mark. Take the wellness app, Headspace, for example. Its digital-first approach has made mindfulness and meditation more accessible than ever before. What sets it apart is not just the meditation guides or breathing exercises but it's the way Headspace taps into the emotional

wellness of its users. In the wellness space, there is no onesize-fits-all solution, and brands that can offer personalised, tailored experiences will always be one step ahead. Whether it's a beauty brand offering skincare solutions based on specific skin concerns or a fitness brand offering virtual personal training sessions tailored to your fitness level, the more personalised the experience, the deeper the connection.

WELLNESS THAT LASTS: Ultimately, the goal of holistic wellness is not just to make consumers feel good in the moment but to empower them to make choices that lead to long-term health, happiness, and sustainability. Brands are now tasked with being more than just vendors. They must be allies in their

customers' wellness journeys. In a crowded market, it's the brands that prioritise education, emotional connection, and authenticity that will truly resonate. Take for example, Lulu lemon - what began as a yoga apparel company has grown into a lifestyle brand that is rooted in the idea of holistic wellness. Lulu lemon has built a community of consumers who don't just wear their clothes; they live by the principles of mindfulness, self-care, and personal growth that the brand promotes. By creating a community around wellness, they are inspiring healthier lifestyles, not just through the products they offer, but through the values they embody.

- Excerpts from Ishani Ghosh, Business Head, Brand Street Integrated

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