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Maoists face existential crisis as 31 more gunned down in Chhattisgarh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT BIJAPUR

Maoist militants, who have waged bitter bloody war in Chhattisgarh since late 1980s, are now on the verge of extinction as security forces gunned down 31 armed rebels on Sunday in their forested hideouts in Bijapur district.

Two security personnel were also martyred in this meticulously planned daring anti-Maoist operation. Two jawans were injured in the incident and they were airlifted to Raipur for advanced medical treatment.

Politicians, intellectuals and people from across the society in Chhattisgarh have lavished praise on security forces for carrying out a successful operation against Maoists in their bastion in Bijapur's Indravati National Park area, about 550 km south of capital Raipur. "The gunfight broke out when a

contingent of security forces drawn from District Reserve Guard (DRG), Special Task Force (STF), and Bastar Fighters encircled insurgents in their den all around based on specific intelinputs", Superintendent of Police Jitendra Yadav informed.

He added, "The armed Maoists opened fire on Security Forces and tried to escape into the forest but troopers neutralised them". The troopers have also recovered a huge cache of sophisticated arms and explosives from the site of the gun battle.

Sunday's operation was as per plan of a deadline set by India's home minister Amit Shah to make the country free from Maoists menace by March,

In a post on microblogging site X, Shah has reiterated his pledge to elim-



inate Maoists from India within the stipulated time period.

Vishnu Deo Sai said he salute the bravery of Security Forces for killing Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Maoists in their hideouts. Sai revealed

that 282 Maoists were killed in the state in the past 13 months since the



BJP MPs from Delhi and newly-elected MLAs before a meeting after the victory in Delhi Assembly elections, at the Delhi

BJP huddles for new Delhi CM

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After the party's historic Avictory in the Delhi Assembly elections, senior BJP leaders began crucial meetings to find its leader to head the next government in the national capital as party president JP Nadda met Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday where key decisions regarding the future of Delhi's governance were discussed.

BJP's strong performance across all regions and communities in the polls has left the party with a wide pool of potential chief ministerial candidates. With larger political messaging often guiding the party's choices in choosing its chief ministers in different states, insiders believe that Delhi would be no exception. The BJP won 48 seats in the 70member Assembly defeating the AAP which secured 22 seats. This was the BJP's first win in Assembly polls in 27 vears and the AAP's first defeat after three successive

The BJP is also planning a grand swearing-in ceremony after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns from

his visit to the US after February 13. PM Modi will

victories since 2013.

be on a two-day visit to meet US President Donald Trump on February 12 and 13. The swearing-in ceremony will be a grand event that will mark the BJP's return to power in Delhi after 27 years and BJP is planning to invite all the major leaders and chief ministers of the NDA alliance, celebrities and renowned personalitties. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva wrote Lieutenant-Governor V K Saxena, seeking time from

him for a meeting with the 48 newly-elected party MLAs. "I along with the BJP MPs from Delhi and our newly elected 48 MLAs wish to meet you at an early date. Please, allow an appointment at an early date according to your convenience," the letter said. Earlier today, AAP leader and Chief Minister Atishi

tendered her resignation to the Delhi L-G, who has asked her to continue till the ruling party stakes claim to form the government. Sachdeva also held

The BJP, which went to the

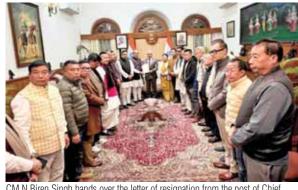
election without announcing

a Chief Ministerial face, has

started high-level meetings to decide the head of government, with five leaders emerging as key contenders. With larger political messaging often guiding the party's choices in choosing its chief ministers in different states, political watchers believe that Delhi would exception. While visible faces such as Parvesh Verma, a

leader from the Jat community who defeated AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, and seasoned organisational leaders like Satish Upadhyay, Vijender Gupta, Āshish Sood and Pawan Sharma are being talked about, the BJP has a history of elevating leaders with a relatively low public

Manipur ready for change of guard



CM N Biren Singh hands over the letter of resignation from the nost of Chief Minister to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhawan in Imphal accompanied by party MLAs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE IMPHAL/NEW DELHI

In a swift turn of events in months of strife-torn Manipur, Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Sunday tendered his resignation to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at the Raj Bhavan in Imphal. Singh's resignation came hours after he returned from Delhi after his meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah.

Through his resignation the CM urged the central government "to continue the stringent and fool-proof revised mechanism of Free Movement Regime (FMR) with the biometric being stringently applied time bound and faster border which is underway." He also requested the Centre to continue the "crackdown on

border infiltration and to formulate policy for the deportation of the illegal immigrants and the fight against drugs and narco terrorism."

"It has been an honour to serve the people of Manipur thus far. I am extremely grateful to the central government for time actions, interventions, developmental work and implementation of various projects for safeguarding the interests of every single Manipuri," Biren said in his letter.

"My sincere request to the central government through your good office is to continue with the same. I take the opportunity to enumerate most important ones of them ... To maintain the territorial integrity of Manipur which

has a rich and diverse civilizational history over thousands of years," the letter

On Saturday, Singh convened a meeting with BJP-led ruling alliance MLAs at the CM Secretariat. The meeting was held in the wake of the opposition Congress seeking to move a no-confidence motion against

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless since ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023. Meanwhile, sta state Sharda

confirmed that chief minister N Biren Singh tendered his resignation to governor in the interest of the people of the state. "We are yet to receive further instructions from the party," he told reporters.

Sharda asserted that Singh worked tirelessly for the development and integrity of the state. "He has been trying to bring peace in the state since the ethnic violence broke out on May 3, 2023. The BJP will continue to work hard for the integrity of the state," she added.

Congress termed N Biren Singh's resignation as "belated" and said people of the state were now awaiting a visit by "our frequent-flier Prime Minister" Narendra

BUDDH SUTRA



Tibetan Buddhist monks participate in Kangyur (the Tibetan name for the Buddhist sutras) procession at Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya

Atishi quits, Delhi Assembly dissolved

STAFF REPORTER **NEW DELHI**

Aday after Capital's Verdict, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Chief Minister Atishi tendered her resignation Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena who has asked her to continue till the to form government.

Atishi, who retained her Kalkaji seat, handed over her resignation to Saxena at Raj Niwas. Later, the Lt Governor also dissolved the Seventh Legislative Assembly of the national Capital. The notification, dated February 7, stated, "In exercise of the power conferred upon me by subsection (2)(\bar{b}) of section 6 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, I, Vinai Kumar Lieutenant Saxena, Governor of Delhi, hereby dissolve the Seventh Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi with effect from 8th February, 2025."

Election Besides, the Commission of India (ECI) officially concluded the process of Delhi Legislative Assembly Election 2025, with the submission of the Constitution Notification" containing the



AAP leader Atishi submits her resignation as Delhi Chief Minister to Lt Governor VK Saxena in New Delhi

candidates to the Lieutenant Governor. The same was submitted to LG by Ajoy Kumar, Principal Secretary of the ECI and R Alice Vaz, Chief Electoral Officer of Delhi. Also present on the occasion were B C Patra, Secretary, ECI, and Rajesh Kumar, Special Chi Electoral Officer of Delhi. Atishi served as Delhi's Chief Minister for nearly five months. She took oath as chief minister in September last year after AAP convenor and her predecessor Arvind Kejriwal resigned from the post amid corruption allegations against him.

Five women candidates,

of newly elected including outgoing chief minister Atishi won in the Delhi Assembly poll 2025, down from eight in the 2020 elections. Atishi is the only woman candidate of AAF who won this time. The BIP is expected to stake claim to power next week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns from a foreign visit, party leaders said. In a related development,

newly-elected MLAs of AAP met party supremo Arvind Kejriwal at his Ferozshah Road residence a day after the party faced drubbing in the Delhi assembly election, winning only 22 out of the total 70

Dry spell to cast on Shimla apple variety

A prolonged dry spell has got Shimla farmers worrying about the apple crop, which is now threatened by a hampered production.

Desired cooling hours (1,200 to 1,600 below 7 degrees Celsius) for traditional varieties and 600 hours for early varieties have not come by this season.

Farmers were also restricted from new plantations due to unfavourable weather conditions, Fruit Vegetable Flower Growers Association President Harish Chauhan told PTI on Sunday.

About 90 per cent of apple orchardists in the state are still on traditional varieties, while the remaining have adopted high

density plantations. "Snow during winter months also kills insects and diseases but we are harmful.

witnessing a one-month shift in weather for the past three years which has affected production," Chauhan said. apple

The state saw a rain deficit of 97 per cent in October last year, 99 per cent in November, and 84 per cent this January, the ninth lowest since 1901, Meteorological expert Sandeep Sharma said.

In all, the rain deficit was 41 per cent in the post-monsoon season (October to December), with December the only exception with 21 per cent of excess rain.

Rain deficit from February 1 to 9 was 38 per cent, with the state receiving 16.2 mm of precipitation against a normal of 26.3 mm, the Met said.

Sufficient chilling hours and moisture during winters is essential for a good apple crop, while hailstorms at flowering stage prove

The temperature has to remain below 7 degrees for appropriate chilling, which varies with latitude as the apple growing area falls mainly in the temperate zone, according to scientists.

An increase in temperature tends to harm the apple production, while early spouting in stone fruit in low hills could affect the yield and the crop, said Sujaat Chauhan, an apple orchardist from Sandhu village.

Farmers had dug pots in several areas for new plantation but a dry spell that led to less moisture in the land halted the process, says Sushil Dhalta, another apple grower.

The cost of plantation is high as one plant costs between Rs 150-200, he said. "We were unable to sow the peas crop due to dry spell and are hoping to see rain and snow in February," another farmer, Rajhubeer said.

Climate change affects arrival of winged guests T K ROY NEW DELHI

Global climate change has impacted the arrival of migratory birds to National Zoological Park (NZP) wetlands here this month besides several such habitats all over the country. However, NZP still managed to welcome few species of migratory water birds including Common Teal, Common Sandpiper and Great Cormorant.

Sharing this information, eminent ecologist T K Roy said on Wednesday National Zoological Park (NZP) has cluster of four smaller wetlands which support the habitat for water birds both resident and migratory and especially breeding bird Painted Stork's large breeding colony since

past many decades. Asian Waterbird Census (AWC),



he said.

Giving details, Roy said 19 species of total population 609 includes 16 resident species and three migratory species in comparison to AWC 2024 i.e. 17 species of total population 1,249 includes 15 resident species and 02 migratory

In 2025, among three migratory Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), species includes only one part of International Waterbird Common Sandpiper, one Great



Common

and among 16 resident species largely 382 Painted Storks, 58 Indian Cormorants, 37 Little Egrets, 41 Great White Pelicans, 19 Indian Spot-billed Ducks and 19 Moorhen comparison to last year (2024) among 15 migratory species largely Painted Storks 985, Indian Cormorants 127Great White Pelicans 46, Common Moorhen 17, Black-headed Ibis 12, Indian

spot-billed Duck 10.

annual Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) part of the global International Waterbird Census is carried out in the month of January in 27 countries together in Asia and Australasia including India. This exercise includes active

Roy said Wetlands International's

volunteers under coordination of the AWC State Coordinators as per the confirmed annual dates by National Coordinator. AWC supports the conservation and management of wetland and waterbirds globally. The AWC here was conducted on

January at the smaller wetlands of NZP with active support of NZP Director. Participants included serious birders, professor as volunteer from Amity International University, Ramanujan College, NZP

BJP seeks meeting of newly elected MLAs with LG after Delhi Assembly win

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

day after registering a massive victory in the Assembly elections, the BJP on Sunday sought time for a meeting of the newly elected party MLAs with Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena. Delhi Virendra president Sachdeva wrote to Saxena, seeking an appointment for a meeting with the 48 newly elected party MLAs and seven Lok Sabha MPs from the city. Senior leaders provided the The party's winning candidates MLAs with guidance on also held thanksgiving rallies working within organisational

in their respective constituencies on Sunday. The candidates celebrated their success by distributing sweets, cutting cakes and thanking

voters for supporting them. "I along with the BJP MPs from Delhi and our newly elected 48 MLAs wish to meet you at an early date. Please, allow an appointment at an early date according to your convenience," he wrote to the LG. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva also met with the newly elected MLAs to discuss post poll scenario. The meeting was also attended by BJP National General Secretary (Organisation) BL Santosh, Delhi BJP Election In-Charge Baijayant Jay Panda, Delhi BJP Co-In-Charge Alka Gurjar, Co-Incharge Atul Garg, etc. Most MPs also participated in the scheduled parliamentary meetings alongwith their area MLAs.

administrative frameworks. They also emphasised that all MLAs should maintain complete transparency in their working style.

During the meetings, the drew attention to Minister Narendra Modi's victory message from last evening and stated that without wasting any time, efforts should begin to build a developed Delhi, in line with the Prime Minister's vision. Sachdeva, however, refused to

end the suspense over the next Delhi Chief Minister, claiming that the party leadership would take the decision, and the name of the new CM would be known soon. The Delhi BJP office on Sunday witnessed a series of meetings with newlyelected legislators converging at the premises since morning. Earlier in the day, a group of BJP winning candidates paid a courtesy visit to Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena.

Parvesh Verma, who won from the New Delhi Assembly seat; Arvinder Singh Lovely, elected from the Gandhi Nagar Constituency and Kailash Gahlot, the winner from Bijwasan seat, were among the leaders who met Saxena at Raj Niwas, the official residence of the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi. Speaking to reporters, Kailash Gahlot said, "I am here just for a courtesy meeting with the LG." Arvinder Singh



Lovely, while leaving the Raj Niwas, also said, "It was just a courtesy meeting." Vijender Gupta, was also met Lieutenant Governor

The party's winning candidates held thanksgiving rallies in their respective constituencies on Sunday.The candidates celebrated their success by distributing sweets, cutting cakes and thanking voters for supporting them. BJP's Moti Nagar MLA-elect Harish Khurana took out a rally in his constituency."I am here in

Moti Nagar to thank the people who have shown immense trust in me. I assure them that I will work honestly for their welfare, focusing on issues like public toilets and water supply," he said.

Satish Upadhyay, who won from Malviya Nagar, led a victory procession that saw his supporters dancing to drum beats. He also visited a temple and cut a cake."The people have supported us and this rally is our way of showing gratitude. We will work

tirelessly for them," he said. Parvesh Verma, who emerged as the BJP's 'giant slayer' by defeating AAP convenor and former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in New Delhi constituency, distributed sweets and was seen feeding them to many passersby

including children. MLA-elect from Garden Manjinder Singh Sirsa attributed the BJP's victory to people's trust in Prime Minister Narendra Modi."For 12 years, people were deceived

have chosen development and under leadership. This victory belongs to Delhi, the people and our prime minister," Sirsa

Tarvinder Marwah, who won from Jangpura, claimed that during the election campaign, leaders of rival parties tried to sway voters by offering them money but people chose Modi's guarantee. "The AAP leader (Manish Sisodia) called me a goon, distributed money and deployed 300 to 400 workers in Jangpura. All the prominent leaders wanted Sisodia to win this seat and yet people trusted me and Modi's guarantee. Now, it is our responsibility to fulfil our promises and work for the welfare of Delhi," he

The BJP's victory marks the end of the Aam Aadmi Party's decade-long dominance in Delhi, signalling a major shift in public sentiment. The recent election comes after suffering losses in 2015 and 2020. With a strong mandate, the BJP is poised to implement its vision for Delhi, ending the Kejriwal-led governance era in the city. The AAP managed to win 22 of the 70 assembly seats while the Congress drew a blank in the elections held on February 5. The BJP leaders said that formation of the government is likely to take olace after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns from his foreign visit.

The buzz over the new chief minister of Delhi has intensified in the party with several names of senior leaders, who won the elections, being speculated to hold the

Parvesh Verma, the son of former Delhi chief minister Sahib Singh Verma, emerged as a giant killer by defeating AAP convener and former three time Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

BJP forms SIT to probe corruption cases in Delhi

proper

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

A day after storming to power in Delhi following a gap of more than 26 years, the BJP on Saturday announced to form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) at the first Cabinet meeting of the new government to probe corruption cases. BJP also stated that the AAP government's corruption will be exposed once the 14 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports on city administration are tabled in the Delhi Assembly. Delhi BJP chief Virendra

Sachdeva said the party has "zero tolerance" for corruption and those involved in scams will be held accountable.

"As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said many times, and so did we, the CAG report will be presented during the first Cabinet meeting. We will also form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate all corruption cases," Sachdeva

Commenting on the BJP sweeping Delhi polls with 48 seats in the 70-member House, Sachdeva credited Prime Minister Modi and BJP president J P Nadda for guiding the



BJP supporters celebrate the party's win in the Delhi Assembly polls outside the Delhi BJP office

He emphasised that Delhi's voters backed the BJP for development, expressing confidence in Modi's leadership.

On the rout of the Congress which drew a blank for the third time in a row, Sachdeva said despite being a historically significant party, it has suffered a major downfall and should "work harder".

BJP's Rohini MLA Vijendra Gupta on Sunday said the AAP government's corruption will be exposed once the 14 CAG reports on city administration are tabled in the Delhi

Assembly.

The Delhi government did not present a single CAG report in the assembly during the past five years, he said in a statement. Once these reports are finally disclosed, the AAP government's wrongdoings will come to light, he asserted.

Gupta - the opposition leader in the outgoing assembly -slammed the AAP government for withholding the reports and expressed disappointment that opposition MLAs had to struggle to get these reports repeatedly raising the issue in various Assembly sessions, they faced humiliation from ruling party MLAs instead of receiving a positive response. The situation forced them to appeal to constitutional authorities like the President, Lieutenant Governor, and Chief Secretary for intervention.

Despite raising the issue during multiple sessions, "we were met with hostility from previous ruling party MLAs instead of receiving a proper response", he alleged.

Gupta and six BJP MLAs filed a petition in Delhi High Court last year, seeking its direction to the speaker to call a session of the assembly for tabling the CAG reports.

Gupta also accused the AAP government of deliberately withholding the reports out of fear that those would expose the corruption within the adminis-

In an appeal to the public, Gupta said, "I request the people of Delhi to carefully read, listen to, and watch the reports when those are made public." "See for yourself how AAP misgoverned for 10 years. Do not let it get away - those responsible will soon be held accountable," he added.

Delhi assembly election, win-

reaffirmed the party's commit-

ment to serving the people

and holding the BJP govern-

ment accountable and said the

AAP will play the role of a con-

structive opposition and ensure that the BJP pays Rs 2,500 per

month to women by March 8 as

was promised by it, provides

300 units of free electricity and

continues other facilities for the

people. She stated that AAP chief has

instructed AAP's newly elected

22 MLAs to prioritise public welfare and address grievances

in their constituencies. Atishi

also emphasized that AAP will

act as a responsible opposition, ensuring that the BJP fulfills its

promises, including the Rs

seats it contested.

BJP's Mustafabad MLA proposes renaming constituency

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) newly-elected Mustafabad MLA Mohan Bisht on Sunday proposed to change the name of the northeast Delhi constituency, which has a significant population from the minority community, to "Shiv Vihar" or "Shiv Puri". He justified his proposal by claiming that the Hindu population was higher in the constituency. He said, 'The official data says that Muslims are 45 per cent but wherever I have travelled, I have seen that Muslims are 60 per cent and Hindus are 40 per cent. We will conduct a census and also change the name of the area from Mustafabad to Shiv Vihar or Shivpuri.

Elected as an MLA for the sixth time Bisht, who was the sitting Karawal Nagar MLA and was replaced there by Kapil Mishra, defeated Adeel Ahmad Khan of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)by 17,578 votes. The senior leader had openly expressed his resentment at being replaced by Mishra in Karawal Nagar. He agreed to contest from Mustafabad after being placated by the BJP's national lead-

Many thought it would be



counterproductive for the BIP. which was desperate to win this time. But as the results started pouring in on Saturday, they were exactly how the BJP leadership had anticipated.

Regarding his election from Mustafabad, he said that the senior leaders of the organisation blessed him and he extended the credit of his victory to the top leadership of

In his last five-year tenure, he was an MLA from Karawal Nagar, however, his seat was changed in this election.

Reacting to it, Bisht said, "I was sad when my seat was changed but I returned to this seat after 17 years. I was asked to contest from Mustafabad but the organisation was worried that there might be a game of 19-20 from Mustafabad but I was sure that we would win. I was sad that why my seat was changed because my people were there and I was continuously working there after winning the elec-

On 2020 riots, he said, "The riots of 2020 saddened me a lot. A boy named Ankit Sharma

hands were chopped off and his eyes were gouged out. I had never seen anything like this happening in Delhi. And I was even dragged into the allegations of those riots, but later the court cleared the air."

Reacting to Bisht's proposal to change the Mustafabad name, AAP's Okhla MLA Amanatullah Khan sought to know what the BJP wanted to achieve by it. Instead of doing such things, the BJP should start working positively and avoid negativity, he told reporters.

Bisht is being seen by some in the party as a potential candidate for the post of chief min-

'The party gave me the chance to contest elections seven times and I won six of those. I am a regular party worker and whoever the party chooses will carry the 'lotus' symbol," he said, when asked to comment on the speculation.

The BJP swept to power in Delhi after more than 26 years winning 48 of the 70 assembly seats. AAP won 22 seats while the Congress drew a blank in the polls held on February 5. The results were announced on

Sisodia's unfulfilled promises led to his defeat in Delhi election: Marwah



STAFF REPORTER | NEW DELHI

¬he BJP's Tarvinder Singh Marwah, who defeated senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia in the Jangpura constituency, on Sunday claimed the former deputy chief minister's failure to fulfil his promises led the public to shift their support away from him. According to the Election Commission of India, Sisodia lost to Tarvinder

Singh Marwah by a margin of 675 votes. The BJP leader

secured 38,859 votes. "AAP attempted to convince the people to vote for Sisodia but the public placed its trust in me and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantees," Marwah said.

Marwah also expressed his disappointment at the AAP's messaging during the election campaign. "What hurt me the responsibility is assigned to most was that during every me.

public meeting, AAP members called me a goon?

Marwah, alleged that the former deputy chief minister's campaign was focussed on labelling him a 'goonda' in every public meeting.
"The people of Delhi have

given the BJP a clear victory and now it is our responsibility to live up to their expectations," he added.

The BJP swept to power in Delhi after more than 26 years, winning 48 of the 70 assembly seats. AAP won 22 seats while the Congress drew a blank in the polls held on February 5. The results were announced on Saturday.

Asked about who the new chief minister would be, the newly-elected lawmaker said that decision would be taken by

the prime minister. Marwah also said he did not have any expectation about being inducted into the Cabinet. "I will carry out with full dedication whatever

AAP MLA's meet Kejriwal post Delhi election loss Kejriwal asks candidates Newly-elected MLAs of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) met party supremo Arvind Kejriwal at his Ferozshah Road residence on Sunday, a day after the party faced drubbing in the ning only 22 out of the total 70 After the meeting, Senior AAP Leader and MLA-elect Atishi

Former Delhi CM Atishi with AAP winning candidates addresses the media after a meeting with party convenor Arvind Kejriwal Photo: Ranian Dimr

2,500 financial assistance for women and the continuation of

key public welfare schemes. Addressing reporters after the meeting, outgoing chief minister Atishi, who is among the 22 AAP leaders who weathered the BJP storm, said the party will play the role of a constructive opposition and hold rival BJP accountable for their poll promises. Atishi stated that AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal held a meeting with the newly elected 22 AAP MLAs, providing them with

clear directives. She added, "He emphasised that these MLAs must serve the people in their respective constituencies and ensure that all public grievances are addressed effectively." She added, "It is now the party's responsibility to serve them and resolve their issues." Additionally, she stressed that AAP will play the role of a responsible opposition, and added, "The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has formed the government, must be held

to stay engaged with voters

STAFF REPORTER **NEW DELHI**

The Aam Aadmi Party Convener Arvind L Convener Arvind Kejriwal has directed AAP candidates who lost in the Delhi Assembly elections to stay connected with the people, address their concerns, and continue public service. Senior leader Manish Sisodia stated that Arvind Kejriwal met with AAP candidates who lost, and highlighted the challenges of an unfair electoral environment but praised the candidates for their perseverance. Sisodia added that their experience will be utilised

for the party's expansion

beyond Delhi, reaffirming

AÁP's commitment to

accountable.

Sisodia spoke to the media and said that today, Arvind Kejriwal met with AAP candidates who contested the Delhi Assembly elections but were not successful. He said, "Arvind Kejriwal encouraged acknowledging their strong efforts in the elections."
He added, "Despite an

electoral environment where government money, and liquor were openly misused, and election rules were blatantly violated, these candidates remained steadfast and courageously."

The AAP leader highlighted that during the discussion, Kejriwal stressed the importance candidates continuing their serving the public and public service, regardless of holding the government the election outcome.

Yamuna factor reshapes voter sentiment, paves way for BJP's victory

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

¬he Yamuna factor seemingly played a significant role in the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, reshaping voter sentiment and helping the BJP script history by defeating AAP. A key driver of this shift was the backlash from Harvanviorigin voters who viewed AAP's narrative on Yamuna pollution as an attack on their

home state. The BJP, which bagged 48 out of 70 sets, fielded 14 candidates of Haryanvi descent and 12 of them won. The Aam Aadmi Party had 10 such candidates but only four

In 13 constituencies with over 10 per cent Jat voters, the BJP secured 11 seats, a major reversal from 2020. The saffron party also dominated 12 out of 13 seats where Haryanvi-origin voters account for over five per cent of the electorate and won nine out of 11 seats bordering Harvana.

Flowing 52 kilometres through Delhi and passing through 15 constituencies, Yamuna has long been a symbol of environmental neglect.

Kejriwal had promised ahead of the Delhi elections in 2020 that he would clean Yamuna. Every year, as a thick layer of froth enveloped the river, especially around the Chhath festival when people offered prayers at its ghats, the AAP government was reminded of

its unfulfilled promise. When the BJP stepped up its attack on the issue of Yamuna

pollution during the election campaign, Kejriwal alleged that BJP-ruled Harvana had 'poisoned" the river water to harm the people of Delhi. His remarks triggered a massive controversy as the BJP swiftly turned it into an emotional issue, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling it an "insult to Haryana and all Indians"

While AAP later clarified that Kejriwal was referring to the rising ammonia level in the river water coming from his Harvana, remarks backfired politically.

Modi's counterattack whether Haryana's asking people would poison water consumed by their own families in Delhi — resonated and helped BJP deeply consolidate its voter base,



"When he failed to clean up the Yamuna, he said its water from the Haryana side was

being poisoned. This statement has cost him very dear. If he had not made such a statement, his party would have won 5-7 seats more," Union minister and former Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar said.

"More than 40 per cent of Delhi's residents are from Harvana. This statement insulted people of Haryana and Delhi," Khattar said on Sunday. In 2020, AAP had dominated

the Yamuna belt, winning 13 out of 15 seats, but this time, the BJP flipped nine of them. AAP's total tally was reduced to 22 from 62.

Instead of strengthening AAP's position, the party's messaging on Yamuna pollution was overshadowed by BJP's counter-narrative and promises of tangible action.

BJP leaders Amit Shah and Tiwari further Manoi reinforced the party's position by announcing a dedicated 'Yamuna Kosh' fund and promising a Sabarmati-style Yamuna Riverfront project to transform the riverbanks into an eco-friendly urban space. This approach allowed the BJP to present itself as both the protector of Haryana's honour and the party with a concrete vision for the

Yamuna's revival. AAP's losses were not just limited to the Yamuna belt. The party suffered a

significant decline in rural and semi-urban areas, particularly in outer Delhi, where BJP flipped 10 seats that AAP had won in 2020. AAP's vote share in these regions dropped by an estimated 8-12 per cent, as per early analysis. AAP had entered the election

seeking a third consecutive term, banking on its governance record and promises of cleaning the However, Yamuna. election showed how a single environmental issue, mishandled, can become a political liability. With the BJP now in power in

Delhi for the first time in 26 years, its promises of cleaning the Yamuna and developing the riverfront will be closely

After the Delhi victory, Prime Minister Modi on Saturday addressed party workers with an invocation to Yamuna, noting how the revered river had been "insulted" by AAP. "Delhi has flourished in the lap of 'Ma Yamuna'. The people of Delhi are pained by Yamuna ji's plight but Delhi's AAP-da hurt their faith... For their own failure, they levelled such a grave accusation against the people of Harvana... "I have pledged during the

election campaign that we will make Yamuna ji the identity of Delhi. ... No matter how much time it takes, no matter how much energy it requires, but if the resolve is strong, then blessings of Yamuna ji will remain with us," he said.

Curtain comes down on poll campaign

Chhattisgarh urban body polls

After a series of exhausting public meetings, processions and political conflicts, campaigning for the urban body elections in Chhattisgarh concluded at midnight on Sunday.

This marks commencement of a silence period, which prohibits all election-related activities.

Only approved political advertisements will be allowed to be published during this time.

A total of 173 civic bodies, comprising 10 municipal corporations, 49 municipal councils, and 114 nagar panchayats, will go poll in a single phase on February 11. The votes count will be held on February 15.

A total of 44,74,269 people are eligible to exercise their franchise, out of which 22,00,525 are men, 22,73,232



are women and 512 are transgender.

About 5,992 booths have been set up for polling.

There are 12 alternative documents that will serve as valid ID proofs in case a

person is unable to present their Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC), including Aadhaar card, MGNREGA job card, bank or post office passbook with photograph, health insurance smart card,

PAN card and passport. One of the key events is the contest between the BJP's Meenal Choubey and Congress' Deepti Dubey for

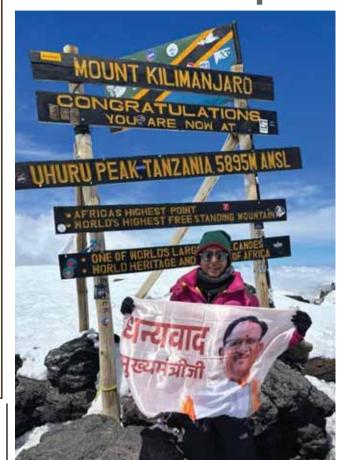
the Raipur mayor post. The two are being

considered to be locked in a straight fight.

Choubey is the outgoing leader of the opposition in the Raipur Municipal Corporation (RMC) and a three-time

Dubey is contesting elections for the first time. She is a social worker and the wife of former Raipur mayor and incumbent RMC chairman Pramod Dubey.

Chhattisgarh climber conquers Africa's tallest peak



STAFF REPORTER ■

Chhattisgarh mountaineer Nisha Yadav has con-quered and hoisted the tricolour at Africa's tallest peak, Mount Kilimanjaro, which stands at 5,895 metres (19,341 ft) above sea level.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai congratulated Yadav on his X handle on Sunday. Sai said, "She has glorified Chhattisgarh Mahtari in the

whole world by conquering Mount Kilimanjaro with her tireless hard work and tough struggle.'

Kilimanjaro is a dormant volcano in Tanzania and one of the highest free-standing mountains in the world.

Yadav hails from Bilaspur district and is the daughter of an auto driver.

She has also conquered Europe's tallest mountain, Mount Elbrus, a dormant volcano in Russia which stands at 5,642 metres (18,510 ft) above

More screen time may lower language

development skills in toddlers: Study

toddlers.

She has also scaled several

development skills in

entertainment content was

the most consumed by

toddlers. It was followed by

music and educational programming. Further, families with lower

socioeconomic status

reported less use of books

and fewer educational

screen exposure had lower

lexical density and delayed

with more exposure to books

or had screen engagement

language

achievement.

Children with more

On the other hand, those

milestone

The team also found that

She has also conquered **Europe's tallest** mountain, **Mount Elbrus.** a dormant volcano in **Russia which stands at 5,642** metres (18,510 ft) above sea

level. of the country's summits, including the Gorichen Glacier at 6,488 metres (21,325 ft) in Arunachal Pradesh and Kedarkantha at 3,810 metres

with adults had better

between screen use and

motor development was not

previous research that

excessive screen use

negatively impacts early

language development.

Shared engagement with

adults and appropriate

content types may mitigate

to increase and become more

complex, the researchers

suggest future experimental

designs control variables and

With screen use poised

some of these effects.

isolate their impact.

The findings support

relationship

language skills.

The

significant.

(12,500 ft) in Uttarakhand.

Six held for cheating people on pretext of polishing ornaments



STAFF REPORTER

Chhattisgarh Police arrested six men from Bihar and brought them here for cheating people on the pretext of polishing their gold and silver ornaments worth lakhs of rupees here.

Amardeep Shah, Mukesh

Bhagat, Shikendra Shah, Vipin Kumar, Shambhu Shah and Amit Kumar, all hailed from Bihar, have been taken into custody, Raipur (Range) Inspector General of Police

(IGP) Amresh Mishra said. They were arrested following a cheating case lodged with the police by the Raipur based victim woman recently, he said.

The IGP said that the modus operandi of the accused was to target elderly persons by befooling them on pretext of polishing jewelries.

The police seized golden mangalsutras, chains, bangles and rings, three motorcycles and mobile phones totaling Rs 25 lakh from them, he added.

Nine arrested for online delivery of hookah products



STAFF REPORTER

hhattisgarh Police on Sunday seized a huge stockpile of hookah products at a raid in three godowns of an online shopping site and arrested nine persons for providing home delivery.

The raid was conducted at godowns of Blinkit online shopping at Devendra Nagar, Civil Lines and Telibandha following a tip off about the

home delivery of hookah products in the state capital city, Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Lal Umed Singh said. In the raid, the police

seized hookah pots, several hookah flavours, hookah nozzle, cartons of hookah coal, tobacco, a desktop, a laptop, a printer, a barcode sticker machine, a an order device machine, a mobile phone and a mini goods vehicle totaling Rs 15 lakh,

AGENCIES

tional study.

Increased exposure to

screens such as television

and smartphones may lead

to lower language develop-

ment skills in toddlers,

according to an interna-

researchers from 20 Latin

American countries found

that book exposure and

shared screen time with

adults could boost language

data from 1,878 toddlers

aged 12 to 48 months across

Latin America between

August 2021 and March

The researchers analysed

skills in toddlers.

The findings led by

the SSP added. The accused Lokesh

Sagar, Vivek Manjhi, Jaydeep Mishra, Pramod Sahu, Netram Dhidhi, Aditya Rahatullah Chauhan, Sheikh, Lokeshwar Sahu and Dayashankar Banjare were nabbed for providing home delivery. They were arrested under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) and further probe was on.

2023. The toddlers were

evaluated based on parent-

reported surveys of screen

engagement, book exposure,

language skills, and

developmental milestones.

the socioeconomic status of

the participants to

understand basic needs,

parental education, and

in the journal PLOS ONE,

showed that TV and

background TV were the

most frequently used media,

with average daily exposure

exceeding one hour. This

language

Powerhouses of the cell may help

The results, published

occupation.

The team also screened

shared media

The Bank of Baroda in Raipur felicitated meritorious tribal schoolchildren as part of their Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Memorial

Four C'garh pilgrims killed in road accident

STAFF REPORTER SONBHADRA/RAIPUR

 $F^{\text{our pilgrims of Chhattisgarh}}_{\text{were killed and seven others}}$ were injured on Sunday morning after a Bolero collided with a trailer near Dardakhand on the Sonbhadra-Raipur road in Uttar Pradesh, police said.

The Bolero, carrying 10 people, was on its way to Raipur in Chhattisgarh after taking a dip in the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. "As they reached near Darankhad under Babhani police station area, the trailer truck crashed



Babhani, the official added.

deceased

Police reached the spot

and took the injured to the

identified as Lakshmibai (30), Anil Pradhan (37), Thakur Ram Yadav (58), and Rukmani Yadav (56), all residents of Chhattisgarh. The bodies were sent for postmortem examination, he said.

The injured include Ramkumar Yadav (33), Dilip Devi (58), Abhishek Yadav (6), Ahaan Yadav (4), Yogi Lal (36), two-and-a-half-year-old Harshit Yadav, and Surendri Devi (32).

Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai expressed profound grief over the incident.

cure diabetes, say researchers **AGENCIES**

Mitochondria, that produce energy for the cell, holds the key to curing diabetes, researchers have

Mitochondrial defects are associated with the development of diseases such as type 2 diabetes. Patients who suffer from

this disorder are unable to produce enough insulin or use the insulin produced by their pancreas to keep their blood sugar at normal levels.

Several studies have shown that insulinproducing pancreatic cells of patients with diabetes have

abnormal mitochondria and are unable to generate energy. Yet, these studies were

unable to explain why the

cells behaved this way.

In a new study published in the journal Science, researchers at the University of Michigan in the US used mice to show that dysfunctional mitochondria trigger a response that affects

the maturation and function

of these cells. "We wanted to determine which pathways important for are maintaining proper mitochondrial function," said Emily M. Walker, Ph.D, a research assistant professor of

internal medicine and first author of the study.

To do so, the team damaged three components that are essential for mitochondrial function: their DNA, a pathway used to get of damaged mitochondria, and one that maintains a healthy pool of mitochondria in the cell.

"In all three cases, the exact same stress response was turned on, which caused pancreatic cells to become immature, stop making enough insulin, and essentially stop being pancreatic cells," Walker said.

"Our results demonstrate that the mitochondria can send signals to the nucleus and change the fate of the cell." The researchers also confirmed their findings in human pancreatic islet cells.

Losing your pancreatic cells is the most direct path to getting type 2 diabetes. Through our study we now have an explanation for what might be happening and how we can intervene and fix the root cause, said authors.

The team is working on further dissecting the cellular pathways that are disrupted and hope that they will be able to replicate their results in cell samples from diabetic

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Farmers' role crucial in India's development: VP Dhankhar

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday said that no one can undermine the role of farmers in India's journey

towards development. Addressing the Akhil Mewar Region Jat Mahasabha in Chittorgarh, the vice-president said the farmers possess political strength and economic capability, adding they should not depend on anyone's help.

"When the economic situation of farmers improves, the country's situation improves. After all, farmers are the providers and they should not look to anyone or depend on anyone for help because farmers with their strong hands possess political strength and economic capability,



happens, no matter how many obstacles arise, no one can undermine the role of farmers in India's journey towards development. Today's governance system bows to the farmers," he added. Remembering the Jat reservation movement that took place 25 years ago, the vice-president urged that never forget the support and efforts of this society gave social justice. Today the results of that effort are visible in the administrative services of the country and the state, he added. Encouraging the farmers to take advantage of Agricultural Science Centers, Dhankhar said, "There are over 730 Agricultural Science Centers to help farmers. Don't leave them alone, go there and ask them. What services will you offer us?' Learn about new technologies and government policies."The vice-president empha-

sised the farmers' participation in trade and value addition of agricultural products. "Why isn't the farmer increasing the value of their products? Several businesses are running on the prod-ucts of farmers, like flour mills, oil mills and many more. We should collaborate and make sure the farmer focuses on livestock. I feel great joy when dairies expand. There should be more growth in this sector," he

Urging the youth to engage in agricultural business, Dhankhar said, "My appeal is to farmers and to the sons and daughters of farmers agriculture production is the world's largest and most precious trade. Why are farmers not involved in the trade of their products? Why aren't they participating in it? Our youth is tal-

Parliamentary panel calls for security assessment of Indian missions abroad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

A Parliamentary panel has recommended that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) should conduct a "comprehensive security assessment of all missions and posts of India taking into account the geopolitical situation, potential threats and vulnerabilities in host countries. In its report, the Committee on External Affairs has also noted that India currently lacks resident missions in 42 countries.

While acknowledging the challenges involved in establishing new missions, the committee recommended "accelerating efforts to bridge these gaps, particularly in countries where India has significant economic or strategic interests or a large diaspora pres-

The fourth report of the committee on external affairs (2024-25) on demands for grants (2024-25) of the Ministry of External Affairs' was presented in is headed by Congress MP Shashi

The committee further said in its report that it has also "taken note of the criteria" for establishing new missions, focusing on economic partnerships, strategic cooperation, diaspora engage-ment and multilateral diploma-"The committee have also been informed about ongoing efforts

to operationalise missions in other strategic locations such as Fukuoka (Japan), Kazan (Russia) and Yekaterinburg (Russia) and future plans for opening five missions in Europe and Latin America and Caribbean regions,' it said. The parliamentary panel has made a slew of other recommendations including on the security of Indian missions abroad in view of the geopolitical situation and other factors. "In view of recent developments, the committee feels that the security of Indian missions and posts abroad is paramount for

ensuring the safety of personnel, the protection of sensitive information and the continuity of diplomatic functions," the report

The MEA has informed the panel that the safety and security of Indian missions and posts is "continuously reviewed". The committee has recommended that "the ministry should conduct a comprehensive security assessment of all missions/posts taking into account the geopolitical sit-uation, potential threats and vul-

nerabilities in host countries", the

report said. Adequate resources should also be allocated for the protection of physical and digital infrastructure of the Indian missions, it added. The recommendations assume salience given the situation in countries like Bangladesh as also in parts of West Asia, and with New Delhi flagging in the last several months the issue of space being provided to anti-India activities in Canada that has affected the bilateral ties.

AIIMS to acquire automated biomedical waste conversion rig

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) is all set to get an automated biomedical waste conversion rig that can disinfect pathogenic biomedical waste such as blood, urine, sputum and laboratory disposables, without the use of costly and energyintensive incinerators.

Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh will formally commission the waste conversion rig, 'Srjanam', developed by CSÍR-National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram, on Monday.

The prototype equipment, with a daily capacity of 400 kg, can handle 10 kg degradable medical waste per day in the initial phase and convert it into soil additives.

"With its potential to transform treated waste into valueadded soil additives with minimal human intervention, our technology provides a safer solution for healthcare facilities, avoids

the risk of spills and occupational exposure, and assists in preventing uncontrolled spread of infectious microbes," said C Anandharamakrishnan, Director, CSIR (NIIST). The technology, once vali-

dated, will be ready for fullscale implementation after securing approval from competent authorities.
Through this technology,

an innovative and alternative solution for the safe, inexpensive and environmentfriendly disposal of pathogenic biomedical waste, Anandharamakrishnan said. The technology has been validated by expert third parties for its antimicrobial action

and non-toxic nature of the treated material. Incineration is a costly, ener-

gy-intensive strategy that forces the stakeholders to adopt simpler and cheaper, but sometimes illegal means, to dispose of biomedical waste. The CSIR-NIIST technology can also disinfect lab-oratory disposables for direct recycling. Soil studies have confirmed that the treated biomedical waste is superior to organic fertilizers like vermicompost.

India produces 743 tonnes of biomedical waste daily, which presents a significant challenge for proper management and disposal.

Improper segregation, open dumping, open burning and inadequate incineration lead to severe health hazards, such as the release of harmful human carcinogens, particulate matter and ash residues. Increased biomedical waste generation demands more transportation facilities, increasing the risk of accidents and spills. The WHO has also emphasised the importance of innovative and alternative protocols for pathogenic biomedical waste disposal, a statement from CSIR-

President Murmu to take holy dip in Sangam

PNS MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

President Droupadi Murmu, the First Citizen of India, is set to visit the sacred land of Prayagraj and take the holy dip in Sangam on Monday. During her visit, which will last over eight hours, she will experience the Mahakumbh's grandeur and spiritual significance.

She will also offer prayers at the revered Akshayavat and Bade Hanuman Temple. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will also be present on this occasion.

President Murmu will begin her day at the Sangam Nose, where she will take a ceremonial dip at the Triveni Sangam, reinforcing the deep-rooted faith in Sanatan Dharma. Notably, the country's first President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, had also taken a holy dip during the Mahakumbh in the past.

President Droupadi Murmu will then visit the sacred Akshayavat tree, which is considered a symbol of immortality in Sanatan culture, and offer her prayers. The site holds great signifi-



cance in Hinduism and is mentioned in ancient scrip-

tures. She will also visit the Bade Hanuman Temple, where she will pray for the well-being and prosperity of the nation. Supporting the initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to integrate religious events with modern technology, President Murmu will visit the Digital Mahakumbh Experience

This center provides detailed information about the Mahakumbh Mela through advanced digital tools, allowing devotees from India and abroad to experience the grandeur of the event more closely. The President is scheduled to

leave Prayagraj for New Delhi in the evening. In light of the President's visit, strict security arrangements have been put in place across the city.

Jail gets fake Presidential order to free murder accused

BISWAJEET BANERJEE

Saharanpur police have launched an investigation after a forged document, allegedly issued in the name of the President of India, was sent to the district jail in an attempt to secure the release of a murder accused. Jail authorities grew suspicious and flagged the fraudulent order before any action could be taken.

According to Senior Jail Superintendent Satyaprakash, the fake release order was for an inmate named Ajay, who is currently facing trial in a murder case. The document was purportedly issued by the President's Court," a non-existent judicial body. Upon verification, jail officials confirmed that the order was a forgery, prompting immediate action.

VHP calls for uniform law governing religious donations for all faiths

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE PRAYAGRAJ/NEW DEI HI

Alok Kumar, the international president of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), on Sunday urged the Centre to enact a uniform law governing religious donations for all faiths. Speaking after a three-day meeting of the VHP here, Kumar questioned the existence of separate laws for religious donations. "When Muslims donate land to Allah, it becomes Waqf property. But what happens when Hindus donate to temples, Christians to churches, or Sikhs to gurdwaras? Why are there different laws for different religions," he asked.

Referring to the Waqf Act of 1954, he claimed two Congress Rajya Sabha members questioned the then-Law Minister about having a separate law for Muslims. "The Minister had said he was

considering a common law for all. Now the time has come for the government to implement such a law," Kumar said



On the issue of "reclaiming" temples in Kashi and Mathura, the VHP functionary said, "We have assured the Hindu community that we will take all constitutional steps to regain these temples."

The meeting also discussed the issue of "freeing" Hindu temples from government control. Kumar said temples across various states have been under government control for 208 years, with laws mandating that 12 per

cent of temple revenue be deposited in government coffers as administrative expenses. He cited a gathering at Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh attended by "2.5 Lakh people" to demand temple freedom, and announced plans for similar large-scale meetings in north and South India in the coming months. "We will meet the Chief Ministers and legislators of different states to submit memorandums on this issue.

Kumar emphasised that temple governance should remain in the hands of devotees, with representation from all sections of society, including Scheduled Castes and women.

He also claimed that if temples were freed from government control, they could generate an additional ₹1 Lakh Crore in revenue for welfare initiatives for Hindus, such as healthcare, religious education, and temple maintenance.

Institutes of Technology (IITs).

The second edition of the event

with participating institutions

from top 50 of NIRF, apart from

IITs, NITs, IISc and IISERs, was

held at IIT Hyderabad last year.

The highlights of the third edi-

tion include release of a coffee

table book on leading techno-

logical innovations from Indian

higher education institutions and

Shivir or brainstorming session

will be organised for each the-

matic area, featuring leading

experts from government, indus-

try, academia and start-ups, with

followed by a discussion on what

is the current research and devel-

opment, focus and industry need,

a rapporteur from each session

will be responsible for drafting an

"chintan shivir". "A Chintan

On Waqf properties, Kumar expressed satisfaction with the government's recent actions and mendation to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Waqf Amendment Bill that Waqf claims should not apply to the scheduled tribal areas. The JPC has considered our suggestion and recommended it," he said.

On the demand from certain quarters to declare India a 'Hindu Rashtra', Kumar said, "There is no need for such a declaration as India is already a Hindu Rashtra. We do not seek a state with an explicitly religious constitution." The meeting was attended by representatives from across India and abroad, including from the UK, the US, Canada, Germany Hong Kong, Mauritius, South Africa, France, Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh and Guyana.

Senior RSS leaders Dattatreya Hosabale and Bhaiyaji Joshi, along with religious figures like Swami Paramanand and Buddhist scholar Lama Chosphel Zotpa, were also present.

Ex-CM Nishank's daughter accuses film producers of ₹4 Crore fraud

DEHRADUN

 $F^{
m ormer}$ Union minister and ex-Uttarakhand chief minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank's daughter Aarushi Nishank has accused two Mumbai-based film producers of duping her of ₹4 Crore after promising her a role in a movie. However, the two film producers have termed the allegations as "false".

On the basis of a complaint filed by Aarushi Nishank, an FIR has been lodged against the two under various sections of the BNS, including extortion, cheating and fraud, forgery, criminal intimidation and criminal conspiracy, investigating officer sub-inspector Manmohan Singh Negi said here. In the complaint, she has alleged that Mansi Varun Bagla and Varun Pramod Kumar Bagla offered her an important role in a Hindi film they were producing



and lured her to invest ₹5 Crore in it after promising big returns in the movie's earnings. Trusting them, she initially transferred ₹2 Crore to the accused through her firm Himshree Films. She also made additional payments to them subsequently bringing the total amount to ₹4 Crore the complaint alleged. However, the two later informed

by another actor in the movie and its shoot in India had been completed, she alleged. Aarushi Nishank asked the two to return her money but they refused to do so and also allegedly threatened her. Aankhon Ki Gustakhiyan" - the movie in which Aarushi was offered a role - starred Vikrant Massey and Shanaya Kapoor in lead

IIT Madras to host third edition of IINvenTiv expo



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELH**

The third edition of IINvenTiv, a national research and development expo, will feature projects not just from IITs but also NITs, IISc Bengaluru and IISERs this time, according to IIT Madras Director V Kamakoti. The expo scheduled from February 28 to March 1 is being hosted by IIT

It will be inaugurated by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, with special emphasis on technologies in mature Technology Readiness Level

(TRL) stages, which are ready for commercialisation and can be transferred to the industry durture exhibits only from Indian

This time IINvenTiv will feature research and development projects from all the IITs, NITs, IISc and IISERs besides top government and private engineering institutes that rank within the top 50 in NIRF.

The primary objective is to increase awareness among indus-try of these technological breakthroughs and achieve better industry-academia collaboration," Kamakoti said.

"Over 300 exhibits from participating institutions will be featured at the with a good representation from startups that have been initiated based on the R&D from these institutions. Special emphasis would be placed on technologies in mature TRL stages which are ready for commercialisation and can be transferred to the industry during the event itself," he added. outcome paper that will be presented at the closing of the IInvenTiv is a flagship event of the Ministry of Education, which was event," Kamakoti said. first held in 2022 at IIT Delhi fea-

"The focus in these discussions would be on the specific needs of the industry and how academic institutions can gear their research efforts to meet these requirements. The role of government and start-ups will add to the discussion," he said.

The thematic areas that would be covered include artifical intelligence and machine learning technologies, aviation, defence and space, marine rechnology medical and healthcare engineering, rural technology, smart cities and infrastructure, advanced manufacturing (industry 4. and 5.0) and circularity and

sustainability. A coffee table book on leading each session featuring a lead talk technological innovations from Indian higher education institutions, which have led to great impacts on the industry, will be released during the event.

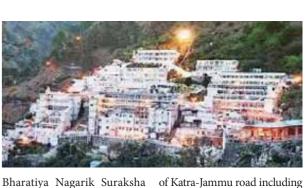
Sale, consumption of liquor, non-veg food banned in Katra

her that she had been replaced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Authorities have extended two more months of the ban on the sale, possession and consumption of liquor and non-vegetarian food in Katra, the base camp for pilgrims visiting Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district, officials said on Sunday.

The prohibition will be enforced on the 12-km track from Katra to the holy cave on the Trikuta hill and adjoining areas, they said and added that the order would remain in force for two months from the date of its issuance, unless revoked earlier. Katra subdivisional magistrate Piyush Dhotra has prohibited the sale, possession and consumption of liquor and non-vegetarian food, under Section 163 of the



Sanhita, the officials said.

Besides the track, the prohibition would be applicable in villages within a distance of up to two Km on either sides of the track, including Arli, Hansali and Matyal villages, within 200 metres on either sides of Katra-Tikri road, including villages Chamba, Serli and Bhagta and within 200 metres on either side

villages Kundrorian, Kotli Bajallian, Nomain and Maghal, the officials said. The ban also covers 200 metres on both sides of Katra-Reasi road from Katra to Nau Devian and Aghar Jitto and Nau Devian markets, within 200 metres on either side of railway station Katra-Sool Road and within 100 metre on either side of Panthal-Domail road.

BJP's win in UP by-elections boosts CM Yogi's leadership

BISWAJEET BANERJEE

With the victory in Milkipur, the BJP and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath have secured their eighth win in Uttar Pradesh by-elections within the last two and a half months. The NDA's success in eight out of 10 seats reinforces its dominance in state politics and signals continued public support for Yogi Adityanath's governance, law-and-order policies, and welfare

Political analyst Dr Rajeev Pandey sees these results as a decisive endorsement of the BJP's leadership in Uttar Pradesh. "The BJP has not just won these byelections; it has dismantled the opposition's strongholds," he said. "A victory margin of over 1.44 lakh votes in Kunderki is not just a win- it is a statement. The electorate is clearly standing with Yogi Adityanath.

One of the most significant turn-



arounds happened in Katehari. where the BJP had struggled for over three decades. Dharmaraj Nishad's victory over SP's Shobhavati Verma by 34,514 votes marked a historic shift. "Katehari has been a challenge for the BJP for years, but this result shows that Yogi Adityanath's

governance model is breaking barriers," said political commentator Anil Verma. "The party is making inroads even in places where it had little influence before." The Kunderki seat, previously held by the SP, became a battleground after the sitting MLA was elected to Parliament.

Yogi Adityanath personally campaigned to turn the tide, and BJP's Ramveer Singh Thakur delivered a crushing defeat to SP's Mohammad Rizwan by over 1.44 lakh votes. "This was a prestige battle," said senior journalist Pankaj Mishra. "For years, Kunderki was an SP bastion, but

now the BJP has stamped its authority here.'

In Milkipur, Chandra Bhanu Paswan's win by 61,710 votes further weakened the SP's grip. The constituency, once a swing seat, now appears to be solidly in BJP's camp. "This is the third time the BJP has won Milkipur. It's no longer a coincidence-it's a trend," said Dr Pandey. "The opposition must rethink its strategy if it hopes to challenge the BJP in

Apart from these key victories, the BJP also secured wins in Ghaziabad, Khair, Phulpur, and Majhawan, while its ally Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) won Meerapur. The results, analysts say, set the stage for the 2027 assembly elections. "The message is clear-Uttar Pradesh voters prefer stability, strong leadership, and a party that delivers on its promises," said Verma. "The opposition has a lot of ground to cover before the next big election.

Portion of Kushinagar Mosque demolished after stay order expires

BISWAJEET BANERJEE

In a major operation of Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, officials dismantled a section of the 26-year-old Madani Mosque, citing unauthorised construction on government-owned land. The demolition commenced at 10 AM on February 9, following the expiration of a court-issued stay order a day earlier.

The mosque, built in 1999 within the Hata Municipality area, was originally sanctioned as a two-story structure. However, additional floors and a basement were later constructed without approval. That same year, Hindu leader Ram Bachan Singh raised objections over the unauthorized expansion, but no immediate action was taken. The matter resurfaced on December 18, 2023, prompting authorities to launch an inquiry into the structure's legality.

Following the investigation, municipal officials issued three notices to the mosque's manage ment on December 23, 2023, seeking relevant documentation. The management failed to provide the necessary paper-

work, leading authorities to talion of the Provincial Armed declare the building unautho-Constabulary (PAC), were starised and order its demolition. tioned at the site. Authorities The mosque's representatives challenged the decision in the also set up barricades and sealed off a 500-meter radius around High Court, obtaining a stay order that remained in effect until February 8, 2025. With the the mosque to prevent distur-

Reactions to the demolition have been mixed. Some locals legal protection no longer in place, the administration prosupport the move, arguing that it upholds zoning regulations and property laws. Others, howceeded with the demolition. To maintain security during the operation, six bulldozers were ever, have expressed concerns deployed, and extensive law over how the situation was handled, emphasising the imporenforcement measures were put in place. Personnel from ten tance of dialogue and legal propolice stations, along with a batcedures in such matters.

Iltija Mufti meets family of youth Ham radio users detect suspicious signals along Indo-Bangladesh border who died by suicide in Kathua



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

 $P^{\mathrm{DP}}_{\mathrm{Sunday}}$ leader Iltija Mufti on Sunday met the family of a youth who recently committed suicide after alleged torture by police over his suspected links with terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, party leaders said This comes a day after Iltija

claimed that she and her mother Mehbooba Mufti had been managed to reach Bilawer in Kathua to meet the bereaved family of Makhan Din, who was driven to suicide by police tor-

"It's deeply saddening that she (Iltija) had to endure so many obstacles and travel like a fugitive just to offer comfort to the victim's family. The ruling party has shirked responsibility conveniently attributing all issues to the Lieutenant Governor.

However, as a responsible opposition PDP will always strive to reach out to the people to offer solace," she said. On Saturday, Iltiia claimed in a social media post that she and her mother were under house arrest in

"I intended to visit Kathua to meet Makhan Din's family and (I) am not being allowed to even move out. Nothing has changed in Kashmir even after elections. Now even comforting the families of victims is being criminalised," she said on X.

Amateur ham radio operators have picked up suspicious late-night radio signals in coded Bengali, Urdu and Arabic along the Indo-Bangladesh border in South Bengal over the last two months, raising concerns about possible extremist activities, officials said.

PTI KOLKATA

The development comes amidst ongoing unrest in Bangladesh and growing anti-India rhetoric in the neighbouring country. The incident first came to light

in December last when Ham radio operators detected unauthorised communications in coded Bengali, Arabic, and Urdu from Basirhat and Bongaon in North 24 Parganas, as well as from the Sunderbans in South 24 Alarmed by these transmissions,

the operators informed the Ministry of Communications. The matter was subsequently forwarded to the International Monitoring Station (Radio) in Kolkata for tracking. Ham radio operators have also



been asked to monitor and report if similar signals are detected again. "These suspicious radio signals have been picked up between 1 AM and 3 AM. The transmissions are in coded Bengali (with a Bangladeshi accent), Urdu, and Arabic. Sometimes, there are signals in another language that we could-n't identify. Whenever we asked those communicating to identify themselves, they went silent, Ámbarish Nag Biswas, secretary of the West Bengal Radio Club

According to Biswas, the first such signal was detected by a Ham radio operator in Sodepur in North 24 Parganas district in mid-December

"Initially, we did not attach much importance to it. But then similar signals were detected from Basirhat, Bongaon, and later from South 24 Parganas district. Even during the Gangasagar Mela in mid-January, several Ham radio users reported hearing these suspicious signals," he said. Asked why these signals seemed suspicious, Biswas

Ministry of Communications explained that their pattern and language usage were unusual. confirmed that the matter had "The global norm among Ham been forwarded to the radio users is that if a third party International Monitoring Station enters an ongoing communica-tion; they must identify them-(Radio) Kolkata for further examination. selves using a radio identification code or radio call sign. But in A senior official from a security agency, who visited Biswas' place these cases, whenever we asked for details, declined to comment on the matter. When contacted, for identification, the signals went silent. The pattern remained the same in all instances," he said. a senior BSF official acknowledged the seriousness of the sit-

Ham or amateur radio operators

are licenced under the Union

Ministry of Communications

and are authorised to communi-

cate using specific radio fre-

After Biswas reported the latest

findings to his superiors in the

Ministry of Communications in

January, security agencies visited

him to gather more details about

the coded signals. "I informed my

superiors in New Delhi, who then

forwarded the matter to the

International Monitoring Station

(Radio) Kolkata for investigation.

We have also been asked to con-

tinue tracking these signals," he

A senior official from the

quencies.

"If we receive details from Ham radio users, we will use our resources to track the source of these transmissions," the BSF official said.

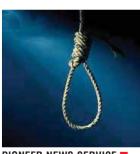
uation, stating that unidentified

radio chatter along the border is

a matter of concern

He added that it is not uncommon for smugglers and extremist groups to use Ham radio frequencies, as this mode of communication is unconventional and harder to track compared to mobile networks or emails, which are more easily monitored. Biswas recalled previous instances where suspicious and unidentified radio transmissions

Man hangs from tree in Mathura, family alleges murder



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE LUCKNOW

A 32-year-old man was found hanging from a tree in Sirrela village, located in the Mant police station area of Mathura, on Sunday morning. The deceased, identified as Vasudev alias Karua, son of Sohanlal, was found near his house, sparking tension in the village.

The victim's family has accused neighbors of murdering him over a dispute involving ₹200. According to them, Vasudev was beaten to death before his body was hung from the tree to make it appear as a suicide.

As soon as the incident was reported, a heavy police force from multiple stations arrived at the scene. However, angry villagers initially refused to let the police take down the body. The police had to use force to gain control of the situation and eventually sent the body for a post-mortem examination.

Pratham Singh, the victim's cousin, alleged that neighbors assaulted Vasudev on Saturday night and later killed him. Mant Police Station in-charge, Rajit Verma, confirmed that the body had been sent for autopsy and that an investigation was underway to determine the cause of death.

Priyanka Gandhi slams Centre for weakening Constitution, democracy | NTCA warns Morand-Ganjal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Makhan Din (25), a Gujjar youth from Billawar area of Kathua,

ended his life by consuming

insecticide at his home on

Tuesday evening and recorded

the act on a video claiming

innocence. He denied any con-

nection with terrorists, prompt-

ing separate probes by the police

PDP president and former chief

minister Mehbooba Mufti wrote on social media, "Finally Iltija

and the local administration.

Continuing her criticism of the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday alleged that, for the first time in history, a government is working to weaken both the Constitution and democracy of the country.

Addressing the party's booth-level leaders in Eranad Assembly constituency, the Wayanad MP said, "It's prob-ably for the first time in our country's history, we have a government that is working to weaken the Constitution and the democracy.

"You must understand that today the fight we are fighting is not just a fight for our own politics and ideology



but a fight for protecting the essence of India, everything that makes our nation what it

three-day visit to Wayanad, Privanka addressed the issue of human-animal conflicts, is today," she added. stating that she would write On the second day of her to both the Centre and state governments to allocate more tion for forest guards, watchessential for effective protec-

Later, speaking to reporters after the meeting on the human-animal conflict issue, she said she has already raised it once and will continue to raise it. "It's something we need to look into, it's a complex issue as there is no easy solution. Definitely, I will put as much as pressure and raise as much as I can," she added.

Priyanka stated that there is difficulty in securing funds from both the Centre and state governments. "I will take up this issue and ensure it is resolved," she said, adding that increased fund-ing is crucial for better monitoring, improved safety measures, and enhanced protec-

On Monday, she will hold meetings with booth-level leaders at Wandoor and Nilambur assembly constituencies and will also visit families of a faw victims of families of a few victims of wild animal attacks, Congress sources said. This is her second visit to Wayanad after she won the Lok Sabha bypoll

from there. Priyanka vowed to pressure both the central and state governments to increase funding for mitigating human-animal conflict in this hill constituency while also raising Corporate Social Responsibility funds for the

She stated that since January four deaths have occurred in Wayanad due to wild animal

irrigation project may impact Tiger movement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/BHOPAL

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has warned that the construction of the Morand-Ganjal Irrigation Project in Madhya Pradesh will submerge forested areas used by tigers to move between reserves, and strongly recommended exploring alternative sites, government records

The environment ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) discussed a proposal to divert 2,250.05 hectares of forest land for the project at a meeting on January 27. The project involves building two dams on the Morand and Ganjal rivers to improve irrigation in Hoshangabad, Betul, Harda, and Khandwa districts of the state.

According to the minutes of the meeting, the NTCA has warned that the project will destroy a crucial tiger corridor between the Satpura and Melghat Tiger Reserves and pose a threat to other wildlife

and biodiversity.
The NTCA's analysis, based on the National Tiger Estimation 2022, shows that the project site is part of a critical tiger-occupied habitat. It said the dams would submerge forested areas essential for tiger movement between reserves, affecting "genetic exchange and population stability'

Any disruption to this ecological connectivity will likely have long-term detrimental impacts on the viability of More than two dozen American tiger populations and the broader wildlife community within this landscape," the

NTCA said. The authority also said that both the Satpura and Melghat reserves are in a recovery

phase, with tiger populations increasing after voluntary village relocations. It warned that losing this

corridor could reverse those The NTCA has strongly rec-

ommended exploring alternative sites to minimise environmental damage.

"Selecting less ecologically sensitive locations for such projects can help strike a balance between developmental needs and the conservation of critical wildlife habitats. Ensuring the long-term preservation of biodiversity and the ecological integrity of this landscape must remain a top priority," it said.

According to the project proposal, the construction of the dams and related infrastructure will displace 644 families, including 604 tribal families, who rely on the forest for their livelihood. Over seven lakh trees will also be affected at full reservoir level, with 5.75 lakh trees marked for

felling.
The FAC has also flagged several discrepancies in the Madhya Pradesh governry afforestation in Agar Malwa, Sagar, Betul, and Jabalpur districts.

It said that some proposed afforestation areas are already classified as forest land, while others contain settlements and agricultural land.

The state government has not submitted a detailed afforesta tion plan or revenue records to verify the land status.

The FAC has recommended that a sub-committee conduct a site inspection before making a decision.

The sub-committee will include representatives from the environment ministry, NTCA, and soil conservation experts.

Defence Minister to participate in 15th Aero India air show

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said he will be attending the 15th edition of 'Aero India' in Bengaluru that will showcase cutting-edge defence technologies and global avia-tion excellence. 'Aero India' is billed as Asia's largest air show, and hosted at Air Force Station, Yelahanka in the southern city. Air Chief Marshal A P Singh and Chief of the Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi set the tone for the grand Aero India-2025 by flying in the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas here at Yelahanka based Air Force Station.

The performance by the top brasses was the prelude to the biannual event, which com-mences on Monday and will continue till February 14. All eyes were glued to the sky as the Air Chief Marshal flew the metal bird with the Army Chief.

After the successful sortie, General Dwivedi termed the experience as the best moment in his life. For the Army Chief, the experience was such that he



called the Air Chief Marshal his

guru and even regretted why he did not opt for the Indian Air LCA Tejas is an Indian combat

aircraft designed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Indian Air Force (IAF) and Indian Navy.
"Leaving New Delhi for Bengaluru to attend the 15th edition of Biennial Aero-India. AeroIndia2025 will showcase cutting-edge defence technolo-

gies and global aviation excel-

lence. Looking forward to witness

the future of aerospace sector," Singh shared on social media. The Department of Defence Production also shared an update on its X handle about the show that will take place from February 10-14. In a social media post, the department said that the defence minister will inaugurate the 'India Pavillion' at Aero India 2025 on February 10.

It is India's premier aerospace and defence exhibition where global aero vendors and the Indian Air Force (IAF) thrill the spectators with back-to-back aerobatic flying displays.

A flagship event 'Aero India'

brings together global industry leaders, government officials, technology experts, and defence strategists under one roof, offi-

"The event not only showcases the nation's technological prowess and innovations but also provides a dynamic platform for international cooperation and strategic dialogue" the and strategic dialogue," the defence ministry said ahead of Aero India 2025.

The broad theme of this edition is -'The Runway to a Billion Opportunities'. "Aero India stands as a testament to India's unwavering commitment to innovation, strategic collaboration, and excellence in aerospace and defence," the ministry

As the nation prepares to host Aero India 2025, the event promises to build on the rich egacy of previous editions, most notably, the transformative Aero India 2023, it said. "Through rigorous operational protocols, strategic partnerships, and a forward-thinking agenda, Aero India 2025 is poised to further elevate India's profile on the

global aerospace stage," the ministry said. The United States of America is set to dazzle the audience during the Aero India show with its defence equipment and technology, including F-16, F-35, KC-135 stratotanker, and B-1 bomber, US consular officials

As the stage is set for the biannual event here in Bengaluru from February 10 to 14, the US on Sunday said it is proud to take part in it for the fifteenth time. "The United States will showcase a range of advanced aircraft

reinforcing the strong and growing defense and aerospace partnership between the United States and India, which share a commitment to promote regional security, stability, economic prosperity through diversified trade, and strategic investment ties," a statement issued by the US Consulate said.

exhibitors will engage Indian counterparts, explore new business opportunities, and demonstrate innovative solutions in aviation and defence, according to the statement.

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Delhi dislodges AAP

In a landmark political shift, the BJP has stormed to power in the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, marking its return after 27 years

am Aadmi Party (AAP) that ruled for ten years has been ousted by the BJP. It is one of the major setbacks that AAP has suffered since its inception. Despite its misadventures it always remained voters favourite in Delhi. Now with the BJP making a comeback it has suffered not only a big jolt to the party morale but also to the brand Kejriwal. In a historic political shift, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has secured a decisive victory in the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, ending the AAP's decade-long governance in the national capital. This marks the BJP's return to power in Delhi after 27 years. The BJP won 48 out of the 70 Assembly seats, surpassing the majority mark of 36 seats. In contrast, AAP managed to secure only 22 seats, a significant decline from its previous tally of 62 seats in the 2020 elections. The Congress party failed to open account, continuing its decline in the region. Notably, AAP's prominent leaders faced unexpected defeats. Aam Aadmi Party chief



Arvind Kejriwal lost the New Delhi seat to BJP's Parvesh Verma by a margin of 4,089 votes. Similarly, former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia was defeated in the Jangpura constituency. Senior AAP leaders, including Saurabh Bharadwaj in Greater Kailash and Somnath Bharti in Malviya Nagar, also lost their seats. After ten years in power, AAP encountered strong antiincumbency sentiments, with voters expressing a desire for change.

Legal troubles and corruption allegations against key leaders, including Kejriwal and Sisodia, further diminished public trust in the party. Meanwhile, the BJP successfully leveraged AAP's shortcomings, presenting

a development-driven governance model that resonated with the electorate. This electoral outcome serves as a critical juncture for AAP. The party must undertake a comprehensive introspection. Perhaps it is time it realised that it would be a good idea to remain with the INDIA bloc and playing solo is not always a good idea. One of the major reason for its defeat might have been the division of votes. Congress though did not gain but pulled it down. Addressing the corruption allegations transparently and implementing internal reforms will be essential to rebuild credibility. Reassessing policy positions and strengthening grassroots connections can help the party reconnect with its core voter base. In his concession speech, Arvind Kejriwal acknowledged the defeat and extended his congratulations to the BJP, expressing hope that the new government will fulfill its promises to the people of Delhi. The results of the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections send a strong and clear message to all political parties—governance, credibility and adaptability matter more than rhetoric. The political parties cannot rely solely on past achievements; they must continuously evolve and deliver on public expectations. Ultimately, there are no shortcuts to winning voters' trust— even freebies have their limits.



Tourists take a ride on a hot air balloon, in Manali

The new geopolitical communication era



With emerging technologies, evolving geopolitical alliances and the dominance of visual storytelling, the way messages are crafted and delivered is being redefined

ne of the critical areas where visible changes will be witnessed post-January 2025 is the communication landscape geopolitically. This era is positioned to redefine the very speedways of global communication, with a pivotal question arising: Are we on the verge of a 360-degree transformation in communication delivery content orientation, outreach mechanisms, and the tools we deploy? Geopolitically, the communication ecosystem will embrace a new language—a language of immediacy, focused messaging, results-driven delivery, and the prioritisation of measurable outcomes to identify realistic patterns and global

impacts. As the world steps into this new chapter of geopolitical shifts, communication strategies are becoming more sophisticated, dynamic and multidimensional. The need of the hour is to analyse the new alliances afoot in the shifting political landscape and the major geopolitical developments. The evolving political climate is challenging traditional paradigms, compelling communication specialists, diplomats, and policymakers to rethink how messages are crafted, delivered, and received on a global stage. The era demands a communication framework that not only transcends borders but also bridges divides with precision, creativity, and authenticity. In 2025, the phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words" takes on greater resonance. Visual communication has become the most impactful way to deliver messages. A single, well-composed image has the power to convey emotions, ideas, and narratives that words may struggle to encapsulate. Building on this, the explosion of short-form videos, and 30second reels, for instance, has transformed the landscape fur-

Their brevity and emotional depth make them tools of unparalleled influence in shaping public opinion, mobilising support, and even defusing tensions. This evolution places immense responsibility on communicators in the geopolitical arena. Diplomacy, once conducted primarily behind has added another layer of

closed doors, is increasingly playing out in the public domain through curated visuals, symbolic gestures and strategic messaging amplified by digital platforms. For foreign policy, the challenge is to balance transparency and strategy, using these tools to build trust while maintaining

As social media continues its rapid rise, many ask whether traditional media can still hold its ground in the face of this digital juggernaut. Social media has undeniably globalised and democratised communication, giving individuals, governments, and organisations a direct channel to their audiences.

It thrives on immediacy, engagement, and the power to go viral, making it an essential tool in geopolitical communication. However, traditional media is far from obsolete. In an era of information overload, its role as a trusted gatekeeper remains critical. While social media is the messenger of the moment, traditional media provides depth, analysis, and context-elements that are crucial for informed decision-making. For communication to be effective in this new geopolitical era, the two mediums must complement each other, creating holistic narrative that is both immediate and enduring. The rise of artificial intelligence



SOCIAL MEDIA HAS UNDENIABLY **GLOBALISED DEMOCRATISED** COMMUNICATION, **GIVING** INDIVIDUALS, **GOVERNMENTS ORGANISATIONS** A DIRECT **CHANNEL TO AUDIENCES**

complexity to global communication. AI-driven analytics enable unprecedented insights into audience behaviour, preferences, and sentiments, allowing for hyper-personalised messaging. These tools are invaluable for diplomats and foreign policy experts, who can now craft messages with immense precision and predict their impact with greater accuracy. However, with these advancements come ethical dilemmas. The line between strategic communication and manipulation can easily blur, necessitating robust frameworks to ensure accountability and fairness. As the communication landscape becomes more intricate, the demand for skilled specialists is growing. These professionals are not just channels for information, they are strategists, analysts, and creators who understand the nuances of messaging in a diverse and rapidly changing

Traditional media must evolve to remain relevant, embracing digital innovations and audience-centric approaches. Meanwhile, social media must grapple with issues of misinformation, polarisation, and echo chambers, striving to become a platform that unites rather than divides. in this era, communication is

no longer just about delivering a message; it is about shaping perceptions, building relationships, and driving action. As

the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to communicate effectively will be one of the most powerful tools in navigating the complexities of a neo-geopolitical era. In an era marked by shifting alliances and evolving global priorities, multilateral institutions face both challenges and opportunities.

The reworking of commitments by key nations to international frameworks has drawn notice to the fragility of global consensus, raising questions about the role and relevance of these institutions in addressing shared challenges like public health, climate change, and economic inequality. This shifting landscape calls for a more nuanced approach to diplomacy within multilateral spaces, with a renewed focus on collective responsibility. For these institutions to thrive in a complex geopolitical climate, they must leverage communication technologies to foster transparency, engage diverse stakeholders, and amplify their ability to drive action. Whether through the lens of a camera, the reach of a tweet, or the depth of an investigative report, the stories we tell and how we tell them will shape the world in ways we are only beginning to

(The writer is a former civil servant. Views are personal. Inputs by Vaishnavie Srinivasan and Źoya Ahmad)

unaerstana.

THE EDITOR

Flying faster-than-sound travel closer to reality



PTI

RAJNEESH **BHANDARI**

Boom Supersonic successfully tested its prototype supersonic aircraft, proving that supersonic commercial travel is not just a dream but an imminent reality

significant milestone in commercial aviation history has been achieved. Boom Supersonic, a Colorado-based startup, completed a successful test flight of its prototype supersonic aircraft XB-1, demonstrating that commercial air travel at faster-than-sound speeds is not only feasible but may soon be available for frequent flyers, cutting average intercontinental flight times in half.

When we think of supersonic commercial aviation, Concorde often springs to mind. Concorde was an iconic aircraft that flew passengers across the Atlantic in just three hours. It was the first commercial supersonic aircraft, and it flew twice the speed of sound for Air France and British Airways from 1976 to 2003. Concordes were retired in 2003 due to excessive costs, high fares and loud noise. Since then, aerospace giants like Airbus and Boeing have never delivered a commercial-scale

replacement. So, what makes Boom different? Boom's team didn't view past failures as insurmountable obstacles. Instead, they



lenges to be overcome with a fresh mindset. Unlike traditional companies that would try to upgrade a subsonic plane to go faster, Boom's team designed every component, from the aerodynamic shape and propulsion system to the fuel system, specifically for supersonic travel.

The company exemplifies how ignoring legacy assumptions and knowledge can unlock groundbreaking solu-

Boom's engineers embraced the concept of "unlearning," jettisoning assumptions that certain design elements were necessary or that certain hurdles were insurmountable. Unlearning allowed Boom to innovate with advanced composite materials, wing design and a new noisereduction strategy.

game, overcame longstanding technical barriers and ignited fresh interest in supersonic flight. Established players like Boeing and Airbus often shy away from radical changes for fear of failing or canalising profitable products. Boom took calculated risks, embraced uncertainty, and refined each step through rapid data-driven iteration. Historically, supersonic jets are fuel guzzlers. Boom's approach combines aerodynamic optimisation with advanced high-performance materials and a propulsion system designed ground-up to minimise fuel consumption. The propulsion system (Symphony) will run on zero aromatic 100 per cent sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) for sustainable commercial supersonic flights. As a startup, Boom operates with lean teams. This contrasts sharply with the massive bureaucratic hierarchy within aerospace giants. Swift prototyping, quick feedback loops, and a willingness to pivot ensure that new technology is tested and integrated faster than what Boeing or Airbus might

They rewrote the rules of the The prototype aircraft smoothly transitioned through Mach 1 (the speed of sound) and touched Mach1.1. This technology demonstration will help refine the design ahead of the company's next goal: launching a full-scale 60 to 75-seater supersonic jet called Overture. The founders' vision is that passengers can fly supersonically at tickets comparable to business class fares. Imagine cutting a 7-hour transatlantic flight to 3.5 hours. Suddenly, a business meeting in Delhi and a dinner date in London are feasible on the same day. Overture is being designed to fly 7800 km. It can fly nonstop on routes like Delhi to Frankfurt or New York to London. Faster travel time can be a game-changer for business travellers and highpriority cargo. While Airbus, Boeing, and other established players have the resources and legacy to make big moves, it often takes a nimble newcomer with a fresh perspective and first-principles thinking to challenge what's possible.

(The writer is an author, innovator and founder of NeuroEquilibrium; views are

WTO NEEDS REFORM

Madam — It is with reference to the editorial page article "WTO is at a crossroads; Reform or perish"-February 8. WTO is the world's largest international economic organisation, established in 1995 with 166 members representing over 98 per cent of the global trade and global GDP. Before the WTO, there was the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), a global trade organisation with 23 countries. Every member country is obligated to follow the laws and policies framed by WTO rules. India is a significant member of the WTO. Trade disputes are addressed by the WTO's dispute settlement process. It is the WTO that makes efforts to promote transparency in decision-making by encouraging participation and, in partic-

ular, the use of the consensus rule. As an international platform, the WTO regulates and negotiates additional trade liberalisation. In recent days, the WTO has been facing many challenges related to changes in the global economy and geopolitical context. Its members have not been able to agree on new rules on agricultural goals, highlighting the conflicting interests between developed and developing countries. Difficult trade relations between the two largest world economies and WTO members-the US and China-also put a strain on the WTO. Unilateral trade measures such as raising tariffs on iron and steel threaten the multilateral trading system. This highlights the WTO might need to be reformed to meet current concerns such as national security, environmental standards, and the impact of technology on trade. If urgent reforms are not undertaken, the global trading system may soon witness the demise of the institution once deemed indispensable.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

ZERO SEATS FOR CONGRESS IN DELHI

Madam — It will be painful for the Congress for the massive loss in the Delhi elections when people voted against them consistently for the last 3 terms 0-0-0. The most pathetic observation is that they

BJP returns to power in Delhi



The BJP's long wait of 26 years to return to power in Delhi has ultimately come to an end after it registered an emphatic victory in Delhi Assembly polls. In fact, Delhi was the only erstwhile BJP-ruled state where victory remained elusive for the BJP even under the strong Modi wave since 2014. Hence, this victory has come as a big relief for the saffron party, which faced unceremo-

couldn't manage even a single seat in the last 3 assembly elections. Capital is Congress's home ground under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi.

The greed for power and dynastic politics made Priyanka Gandhi run all the way from Delhi to Wayanad to come back victorious in the by-election. There's a saying in the villages that 'If one has to assess the quality and power of a person in the village, ask the locals. The same yardstick proved right when there were no takers for Congress locally in Delhi and scoring 0-0-0 in their report card reflects that the quality of the Congress party is under a scanner. For the Congress to survive, the realistic approach must be to keep Rahul and Priyanka from the main limelight and keep them in a low profile so that the party can rebuild the faith for a better future of the party.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

RBI CUTS INTEREST RATES Madam —It is a first-rate cut in nearly five years by RBI and it signifies a shift in monetary strategy. With this cut, RBI has clearnious defeat at the hands of the AAP in two consecutive elections. On the other hand, the way the almost top leadership of the AAP, including former CM and party face Arvind Kejriwal and former Dy CM Manish Sisodia, licked the dust in the election reflects the deep anguish of the voters against the party.

No doubt that the anti-incumbency of 11 years and the corruption charges have led to the defeat of the AAP. The arrest of Kejriwal and Sisodia in the liquor scam and the Sheesh Mahal controversy dented the party's image deeply. Interestingly, 'theatrics,' the biggest tool of the AAP, also failed to impress the voters this time. But the BJP needs to be cautious, as the AAP, which was born out of the agitations, will

prove to be a strong opposition.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

ly sent a signal that it wants to boost lending, stimulate consumer demand and nurture investment. In the recent months, core inflation has shown easing out, providing much-needed headroom to the RBI to implement this rate cut. And a slowdown in the economic growth forced the RBI to take the plunge now.

By lowering the borrowing cost, RBI wants to encourage businesses to expand, boost consumption, and help economic growth. Now banks will be happy to extend credit more freely, but they need to be wary of what they have witnessed with their microfinance and unsecured loan portfolios in recent months. In the real estate sector, SMEs will take a sigh of relief, and individual borrowers will see a reduction in their EMIs and, in turn, more money in their pockets, coupled with recent income tax cuts, which will create a positive environment for the consumption boom to take place.

Bal Govind | Noida

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FIRST COLUMN

LIFE IS A MOUNTAIN: CLIMB YOUR PEAK, YOUR WAY

Just like climbing a mountain, life's true joy comes from the ascent, not just the summit



■ have come to believe life is a lot like climbing a mountain. It's not a race or a competition, and it's not about finding a shortcut. The absolute joy of life isn't standing at the summit—it's in the climb. It's in slipping on loose gravel, feeling the burn in your legs, and wondering halfway through if you should turn around. But when you catch your breath at a ridge or find your footing after a stumble, you realise something powerful: the climb isn't about the mountain-it's about who you become

Each of us has a mountain to climb. It doesn't need to be Everest or Kilimanjaro. It doesn't have to impress anyone else. What matters is that your mountain challenges you, excites you and pushes you to grow. And yes, the climb will be messy. The trail will disappear just when you think you're getting somewhere. The air will get thin. You might even feel like quitting. But that's the beauty of it—the mountain shapes you with every step. Every great climb starts with a dream—one so audacious it gives you butterflies. Don't let its enormity overwhelm you. Focus on taking the next step, then the one after that. Progress isn't about giant leaps but small, consistent efforts.

Moving forward, even a little each day, builds the path to big dreams. Mountains don't reward the fastest or most competent climber—they reward perseverance. Talent may get you started, but resilience carries you through fatigue, failure, and seemingly impossible moments. You don't need to be perfect; you need to keep climbing. Your journey is unique; not everyone will understand or agree with it. That's okay. When the trail disappears, create your path, even if it's



The best routes are discovered through improvisation and authenticity, not by meeting others' expectations. Slips and falls are inevitable, and they hurt. Yet, each stumble teaches something valuable about the terrain, limits, and strength. Mountains don't demand perfection—they demand persistence. Learn from every fall, and rise stronger. The mountain doesn't care who reaches the summit first. It isn't about trophies or comparisons. The climb is about pushing yourself, growing beyond your comfort zone, and becoming someone who belongs at the sum-

True success is transformation, not competition. The best climbers don't focus solely on themselves. They lend a hand, share tools, and cheer others on. Life's peaks are more meaningful when shared. Those you help will often support you, making the climb richer for everyone. When you reach your summit, pause and reflect. Did your climb inspire others? Did you leave the path better for those who follow? Success isn't standing alone at the top; it's in the legacy you leave-the encouragement, improvements, and hope for others to climb higher. Ultimately, the climb makes life beautiful

The summit is fleeting, but the slips, breakthroughs, lessons, and growth endure. These moments shape you into someone worthy of the top.lf your mountain feels daunting, don't let the height scare you. Start small. Take one step at a time. You don't need to move fast or know the whole path. Just keep climbing. One day, standing at your summit, you'll look back and realise it wasn't about the peak. It was about the person you became along the way. That's the valuable reward of the climb—knowing every inch of it was unapologetically yours.

(The author is DGP & Head of Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau, with three books to his credit; views are personal)

Trump's vision for Gaza: Paradise or purgatory?



President Donald Trump's proposal for Gaza is more than just another audacious policy move—it is a collision of commerce, geopolitics and power



veryone saw it unfold. This is the harsh reality of life in the Devil's paradise, where desires are transformed into laws, ambitions become twisted ethics, and behaviour is coerced into the very fabric of the system. The truth? To survive here, one must bow to the powers that be, no matter the cost. Conscience and integrity are irrelevant praise those in power or face annihilation. President Donald Trump welcomed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—an alleged war criminal wanted by the International Criminal Court—as the first foreign leader in his second term, declaring his grand vision to take control of Gaza, turning it into a 'brave new Levantine Riviera" by cleansing

over 2 million Palestinians.

Nevertheless, the proposal has sparked strong opposition. Saudi Arabia, a key ally

ARAB INITY, HAS of Trump, swiftly condemned it, insisting that no nation would recognise Israel without the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Jordan and Egypt also rejected the idea of accepting millions of displaced Palestinians. The mere announcement of this plan starkly illustrates the chaotic grandeur of Trump's vision. Yet, his proposal, however audacious, was no accident of rhetoric. It was a calculated, methodical blueprint, crafted long before Trump's second term in office. With Netanyahu—a willing ally in these manoeuvres—Trump painted a picture of Gaza not as a refuge for the Palestinian. defined not by its displaced residents, but by REALPOLITIK AND people, but as a commercialised "paradise" foreign investments and a transformation

into a luxury resort. Trump's proposition, laden with both visionary ambition and horrific repercussions, challenges the entrenched paradigm. This proposal, as reported, was not born of sudden whim, but the culmination of years of deliberation within Trump's inner circle—an enterprise in which his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, played a pivotal role in positioning the geopolitical and commercial components

across Asia. Kushner's claim, in a recent interview with the Financial Times, that his "ability to see trends before others" uniquely positions him to capitalise on opportunities others find unpalatable, resonates with the underlying logic of Trump's plan. It's a logic that blurs the line between statecraft and property development, where geopolitical ambitions are pursued not merely for strategic suprema-



THE ARAB WORLD, ONCE INTOXICATED BY ARAB UNITY, HAS REPEATEDLY SUCCUMBED TO

FISSURES, NEVER ABLE TO OVERCOME THE FORCES OF

SELF-INTEREST

ITS INTERNAL

cy but also as a means to expand a While the Sykes-Picot Agreement business empire throughout Asia. This fusion of commerce and conquest is as disquieting as it is unprecedented, conjuring images of modern-day feudalism, where land and people are subjugated to serve the profit motives of a privileged few. What is truly striking, however, is that Trump's plan could offer a rare and pivotal opportunity for Arab nations, whose history of disunity has long hindered their collective potential

Regional players—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Jordan, and others—have long danced to contradictory rhythms, using Palestine as a symbol to justify their betrayals, while failing to act with sincerity or consequence.

These rivalries, cultivated over decades of political expediency, have reduced Palestinians from champions of an independent cause to mere pawns in a game that has been further complicated by internal rifts within Palestinian move-For far too long, the Arab states have

abandoned Palestine's plight in favour of personal ambition and strategic alliances, turning the Palestinian cause into a commodity—moulded and shaped according to the whims of foreign powers. This latest manoeuvre must be understood within the context of the convoluted history of Arab disunityan entangled web of colonial subterfuge, sectarian fragmentation, and a legacy of betrayal that has persistently eroded Palestinian sovereignty and reduced their cause to a tragic geopolitical instrument. The Arab world, once intoxicated by the idea of pan-Arab unity, has repeatedly succumbed to its internal fissures, never able to overcome the corrosive forces of realpolitik and self-interest. Behind the veneer of solidarity and proclamations of support for Palestinian self-determination, there lies a catalogue of secretive agreements, covert operations, and Machiavellian plots that have long entangled the region.

remains the most infamous symbol of colonial partition, it is far from the only clandestine accord that has shaped the fate of Palestine.

Lesser-known pacts, such as the H u s a y n - M c M a h o n Correspondence, which promised Arab independence in exchange for rebellion against the Ottoman Empire, were later betrayed in favour of European imperial ambitions.

Similarly, the post-World War II period saw Arab states engage in secret dealings with both Western and Soviet powers, each prioritising their strategic interests over Palestinian rights. Agreements such as the Baghdad Pact and the Eisenhower Doctrine—purportedly aimed at regional stability—left the Palestinian cause sidelined in favour of Cold War allegiances, perpetuating cycles of betrayal.

And perhaps most insidious of all were the secret negotiations between Arab leaders and Israel, at times tacit and other times more explicit, often involving quiet exchanges of territory, economic support, or even military cooperation, all under the guise of broader diplomatic manoeuvres. These acts of realpolitik—often driven by the selfish interests of a few at the expense of the many—have left Palestine isolated, its sovereignty forfeited in a game of geopolitical chess. The fractured nature of Arab leadership, perpetuated by sectarianism and divergent national ambitions, only serves to deepen the wound. While leaders such as Egypt's Nasser sought to rally the Arab world under a banner of unity, his efforts were consistently thwarted by rivalries and internal conflicts.

Today, these past betrayals reverberate in the region's collective psyche, leaving Palestinian aspirations still choked by the suffocating embrace of powers both external and internal, with the dream of a unified Arab world and a free Palestine rendered ever more elusive by the cynical. Yet, it is precisely this history that

makes Trump's audacious proposal so paradoxically compelling. Here lies an opportunity for the perennial exiles—the Palestinians not as pawns in a geopolitical chess game, but as potential agents for the reawakening of Arab unity.

For decades, Palestinian suffering has been wielded as a symbol of resistance, a poignant reminder of an exodus that began with the Nakba in 1948. However, the continued instrumentalisation of Palestinian tragedy by neighbouring Arab regimes—who have long used the plight of these people as a rhetorical tool without offering substantial solutions.

It is within this environment of ambivalence and simmering tension that Trump's proposal must be viewed as a paradigm-shifting moment. The convergence of state-craft and property development, epitomised by Trump and Kushner's ambitions, signals a departure from conventional geopolitical paradigms. We are stepping into an era where the shifting power of oligarchies is increasingly driven by the convergence of economic gain and oliticai opportunism—a transfor mation with far-reaching consequences for the future of West

Whether this radical reimagining of Gaza could catalyse Arab unity remains uncertain, inherently tied to the unresolved contradictions within the region's historical legacy. Trump's Riviera dream for Gaza is as much a test of American resolve as it is a crucible for Arab unity—a proposition that, if realised, could compel the Arab states to transcend their long-standing acrimony and

However, the likelihood remains that this bold gambit, with all its extravagant rhetoric and ambitious visions, will only serve to deepen existing rifts, leaving Palestinians once again at the mercy of external schemes.

(The writer is a journalist and a policy analyst. Views expressed are

Uttarakhand leads the way: The first state to implement Uniform Civil Code

Uniform laws that empower women will be the common thread binding the nation in oneness and uphold the constitutional spirit

ttarakhand has led the way in formalising laws for women of different faith as equal, upholding the spirit of the constitution. Babasaheb Ambedkar would have been a contented man knowing that Uttarakhand has become the first state in India to have put an end to the disparity in legal protection provided to women, as till now, they were governed by their respective personal laws based on religion and customary

state practices. By implementing the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) from January 26, 2025, with less than 2 per cent of total land area and less than 1 per cent of total population, Uttarakhand has taken the lead in reinstating the ethos of social equality, part of our syncretic cul-



ture/constitution. The courageous step taken by this young state will pave the way as a paradigm for others to follow similar footsteps. For the first time post-independence, a legislative body has drafted rules for marriage, divorce, inheritance of property, and live-in relationships. UCC has been used as

tabled for discussion in the Constituent Assembly when Babasaheb, as Chairman of Drafting Committee, had expressed need for uniformity-in fundamental laws, both civil and criminal. UCC was placed under a sub-committee which proposed to list it as a non-justiciable right hence, making it non-disputable in the courts. Majority of the members of

this sub-committee were in agreement with the proposal except Minoo Masani, Hansa Mehta and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur who wrote to Patel stating, "One of the factors that have kept India back from advancing to nationhood has been the existence of personal laws based on religion". The dissent observed by the a political tool ever since it was women members of the con-

stituent assembly got support from Dr BR Ambedkar, KM Munshi and Alladi K Aiyyar. The opposition from the Muslim members ensued the UCC under Directive Principles Article 44, where the Constituent Assembly was not obliged to enforce the provision and at the same time, the provision could be implemented by the legislatures in the future. A compromise made between

those in support and those in disagreement of the UCC. The changing social milieu has seen a trend in rigorous churning to shed away repressive, orthodox practices so as to evolve a social structure which believes in equal rights. This led to the codification of matrimonial, inheritance, succession and adoption laws for the



Hindus from 1955-56. The women's rights under Muslim Personal law were challenged by Shah Bano in 1985 demanding maintenance from her husband.

The landmark Supreme Court judgement in favour of Shah Bano was later overturned when the incumbent Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government, under pressure, enacted Muslim Women

(Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986. The lingering wait for gender rights saw a ray of hope after 30 years when on the plea filed by Shayara Bano and others, who were victims of matrimonial dispute, the Supreme Court declared "talaq-e-biddat," or instantaneous triple talaq as unconstitutional in 2017.

This time the government of the day stood by the rights of Muslim women and vindicated the crusade undertaken by Shah Bano by legally prohibiting triple talaq and protecting the rights of married Muslim women by bringing The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act in 2019. Though the present government has asserted equal rights and status to Muslim women

by bringing this act, there are miles to go as social customs of polygamy and Halala still looms large.

The judiciary has reminded the legislators to fulfil their obligation towards the Constitution and promote equal rights for women. A fivemember panel constituted in the chairmanship of retired justice Ranjana Prakash Desai diligently worked on the draft for two years besides holding public interactions, taking suggestions from people of the state and internal meetings of the panel to discuss the points to be taken under the draft. The bill in its four parts covers marriage and divorce, succession, live-in relationships. The section 4 of the bill outlines that "neither party has a

spouse living at the time of the

marriage" with marriage age of 21 and 18 for man and women respectively, making polygamy and child marriage illegal. The bill also requires compulsory registration of marriages

within 60 days where the couple has equal right to dissolve the marriage through a decree of divorce only through court proceedings. The Bill says that marriages

can be dissolved only through the provisions of the law "notwithstanding any usage, custom, tradition, [or] personal law of any party to the marriage." This bill provides legal safeguards to protect women who cohabit in a live-in relationship.

(The writer is Director, Non Collegiate Women's Education Board, University of Delhi; views are personal)

Israeli forces begin to withdraw from key Gaza corridor

(GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces began withdrawing from a key Gaza corridor on Sunday, Israeli officials said, part of Israel's commitments under a tenuous ceasefire deal with Hamas that is moving ahead but faces a major test over whether the sides can negotiate its planned extension. Israel agreed as part of the truce to remove its forces from the 6 km Netzarim corridor, a strip of land that bisects northern Gaza from the south that Israel used as a military zone during the war. At the start of the ceasefire last month, Israel began allowing Palestinians to cross Netzarim to head to their homes in the war-battered north, sending hundreds of thousands streaming across Gaza on foot and by car. The withdrawal of forces from the area will fulfil another commitment to the deal, which paused the 15-month war. However, the sides appear to have made little progress on negotiating the deal's second phase, which is meant to extend the truce and lead to the release of more Israeli hostages held by Hamas. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was sending a delegation to Qatar, a key mediator in talks between the sides, but the mission included low-level officials.

sparking speculation that it won't lead to a breakthrough in extending the truce. Netanyahu is also expected to convene a meeting of key Cabinet ministers this week on the second phase of the deal.

Separately on Sunday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said that a 23-year-old Palestinian woman who was eight months pregnant was fatally shot by Israeli gunfire in the northern occupied West Bank, where Israeli troops have been carrying out a broad operation.

The ceasefire is fragile and its extension is not guaranteed: Since it began on Jan 19, the ceasefire deal has faced repeated obstacles and disagreements between the sides, underscoring its fragility. But it has held, raising hopes that the devastating war that led to seismic shifts in the Middle East may be headed towards an end.

On Sunday, cars heaped with belongings, including water tanks and suitcases, were seen heading north through a road that crosses Netzarim. Under the deal, Israel is supposed to allow the cars to cross through uninspected, and there did not appear to be troops in the vicinity of the road.

Hamas spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanoua said the withdrawal showed Hamas had "forced the enemy to submit to



A Thai hostage who was freed from Hamas, Sathian Suwannakham, center, hugs relatives upon arrival at Suvarnabhumi International Airport, in Samut Prakarn Province, Thailand, Sunday.

our demands" and that it thwarted "Netanyahu's illusion of achieving total victory". The Israeli officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorised

to discuss troop movement

with the media, did not disclose how many soldiers were with-drawing. Troops currently remain along Gaza's borders with Israel and Egypt and a full withdrawal is expected to be negotiated in a later stage of the

truce. During the first 42-day phase of the ceasefire, Hamas is gradually releasing 33 Israeli hostages captured during its Oct 7, 2023, attack in exchange

for a pause in fighting, freedom

humanitarian aid to war-battered Gaza. The deal also stipulates that Israeli troops will pull back from populated areas of Gaza as well as the Netzarim corridor. In the second phase, all remaining living hostages would be released in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a "sustainable colm". But details beyond that calm". But details beyond that are unclear and repeated stum-bling blocks throughout the first phase and the deep mistrust between the sides have cast doubt on whether they can nail down the extension. The truce faces many challenges, including Trump's

for hundreds of Palestinian

prisoners and a flood of

Gaza proposal: Israel has said it won't agree to a complete withdrawal from Gaza until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated. Hamas says it won't hand over the last hostages until Israel removes all troops from the territory. Netanyahu meanwhile is under heavy pressure from his far-right political allies to resume the war after the first phase so that Hamas, which carried out the deadliest attack on Israelis in their history, can be defeated. He is also facing pressure from Israelis who are eager to see more hostages return home and want to deal to continue, especially after the gaunt appearances of the

three male captives freed on Saturday stunned the nation. Complicating things further is a proposal by US President Donald Trump to relocate the population of Gaza and take ownership of the Palestinian territory. Israel has expressed openness to the idea while Hamas, the Palestinians and the broader Arab world have rejected it outright. The suggested plan is saddled

with moral, legal and practical obstacles. But it may have been proposed as a negotiation tactic by Trump, to try to ratchet up pressure on Hamas or as an opening gambit in a bargaining process aimed at securing a normalisation deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia. That grand deal appeared to be rat-tled on Sunday as Saudi Arabia condemned remarks by Netanyahu who said Palestinians could create their state in that territory. Saudi Arabia said his remarks

"aim to divert attention from the successive crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against our Palestinian brothers in Gaza, including the ethnic cleansing they are being subjected to"

In an interview Thursday with Israel's Channel 14, Netanyahu said: "The Saudis can create a Palestinian state in Saudi Arabia; they have a lot of land over there?

Violence surges in the occupied West Bank: The war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas' attack that killed 1,200 people and saw 250 taken hostage, has killed more than 47,000 Palestinians according to local health authorities who do not differentiate between fighters and noncombatants in their count. Vast parts of the territory have been obliterated in the fighting, leaving many Palestinians returning to damaged or destroyed homes.

Violence has surged in the

West Bank throughout the war and has intensified in recent days with an Israeli military operation in the north of the territory. The shooting of the pregnant woman, Sundus Shalabi, happened in the Nur Shams urban refugee camp, a focal point of Israeli operations against Palestinian militants in the territory. The Palestinian Health Ministry also said that Shalabi's husband was critically wounded by the gunfire.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz announced on Sunday the expansion of the Israeli military operation, which started in the city of Jenin several weeks ago. He said the operation was meant to prevent Iran from establishing a foothold in the occupied West Bank.

40 held after violence, vandalism at Awami League leader's house

 $F^{\text{orty people have been}}_{\text{arrested in Bangladesh in an}}$ operation launched following a violent attack on a student group's activists during vandalism at an Awami League leader's house on the outskirts of Dhaka that left several people injured, according to a media report. Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus's

government ordered "Operation Devil Hunt" on Saturday after the attack on students and civilians in the Gazipur district on Friday

Superintendent of Police (SP) of Gazipur Chowdhury Jaber Sadek said that the 40 people were rounded up from parts of the district as part of the operation, United News of Bangladesh reported.

On Friday night, at least 14 individuals, all belonging to the mobs out to vandalise and destroy all signs of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's injured as they came under attack in Gazipur city's Dakshinkhan area. The violence occurred during the attack on the residence of former Liberation War Affairs Minister Mozammel Haque. The injured were immediately taken to Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital for treatment. Later, some of them were referred to Dhaka Medical College and

Hospital. In protest, the Anti-Discrimination Student

Citizens Committee held a day-long protest and rally in Gazipur. After the protest, a student was injured in a shooting by miscreants in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office

around 6:30 pm.

Home Affairs Advisor Md
Jahangir Alam Chowdhury has
said that Operation Devil Hunt
will be targeting those who seek
to destabilise the country,
stressing that the crackdown stressing that the crackdown would continue until the "devils" are brought to book.

Ils" are brought to book. The operation is being jointly conducted by the Bangladesh Army, Air Force, and Navy, along with members of the police, Border Guard Bangladesh, Ansar, and Coast Guard

Asked about the goals of the operation, Jahangir said, "What does 'devil' mean? It refers to evil forces. This operation is aimed at those who try to destabilise the country, break the law, engage in criminal activities, and commit acts of

Jahangir, a former military officer, added that those involved in the recent attacks on students in Gazipur would be brought to justice. "Many of those responsible have already been arrested. Those who haven't will be caught soon and we will ensure they receive the maximum punishment."

The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement leaders claim their activists went to the ex-minister's house to prevent looting but were attacked by miscreants. Saturday's incident

was part of the widespread violence that erupted across the country on Wednesday night over a live online address by Hasina. Mobs targeted supporters of the deposed prime minister and vandalised their homes and businesses in Dhaka and other cities.

Some media tallied about 70 attacks in at least 35 districts across the country since Wednesday. Protesters also set fire to the historic 32 Dhanmondi residence of Bangladesh's founding leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was from this residence that Rahman proclaimed the country's independence from Pakistan in 1971.

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 last year, when she fled Bangladesh fol-lowing a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's 16-year regime.

In a statement on Friday, Yunus called for "complete law and order" and an end to attacks on the properties of the deposed her "fascist" Awami League.

Former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) urged the interim government to curb "mob culture" and restore law and order, warning that failure to do so could lead to the reemergence of "fascist' forces. The party announced a series of rallies across the country starting on February 11, demanding effective measures to address the deteriorating law and order situation and push for an electoral roadmap.

Two mass graves with 50 bodies of migrants found in Libya

PTI CAIRO

Libya authorities uncovered nearly 50 bodies this week from two mass graves in the country's southeastern desert, officials said Sunday, in the latest tragedy involving_people seeking to reach Europe through the chaos-stricken North African country.

The first mass grave with 19 bodies was found Friday in a farm in the southeastern city of Kufra, the security directorate said in a statement, adding that authorities took them for

Authorities posted images on its Facebook page showing police officers and medics digging in the sand and recover-ing dead bodies that were wrapped in blankets. The al-Abreen charity, which helps migrants in eastern and southern Libya, said that some were apparently shot and killed before being buried in the

A separate mass grave with at least 30 bodies was also found in Kufra after raiding a human trafficking center, according to Mohamed al-Fadeil, head of the security chamber in Kufra. Survivors said nearly 70 people were buried in the grave, he added. Authorities were still searching the area.

Migrants' mass graves are not uncommon in Libya. Last year, authorities unearthed the bodies of at least 65 migrants in the Shuayrif region, 350 km south of the capital, Tripoli.

Libya is the dominant transit point for migrants from Africa and the Middle East trying to make it to Europe. The country plunged into chaos following a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed long-time autocrat Moammar Gadhafi in 2011. Oil-rich Libya has been ruled for most of the past decade by rival governments in eastern and western Libya, each backed by an array of militias and foreign governments. Human traffickers have benefited from more than a decade of instability, smuggling migrants across the country's borders with six nations, including Chad, Niger, Sudan Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia.
Once at the coast, traffickers

pack desperate migrants seeking a better life in Europe into ill-equipped rubber boats and other vessels for risky voyages on the perilous Central Mediterranean Sea route.

Rights groups and UN agencies tematic abuse of migrants in Libya including forced labour, beatings, rapes and torture. The abuse often accompanies efforts to extort money from families before migrants are allowed to leave Libya on traffickers' boats. Those who have been intercepted and returned to Libya — including women and children — are held in government-run detention centres where they also suffer from abuse, including torture, rape and extortion, according to rights groups and UN experts.

7.6 magnitude earthquake shakes Caribbean

Mexico City (PTI: A magnitude-7.6 earthquake shook the Caribbean Sea southwest of the Cayman Islands Saturday, according to the US Geological Survey, and some islands and countries urged people near the coastline to move inland in case of a tsunami.

The quake struck at 6:23 pm local time in the middle of the sea and had a depth of 10 kilometers, the USGS said. Its epicenter was located 130 miles (209 kilometers) south-southwest of George Town in the Cayman Islands.

The US National Tsunami Warning Center said there is no tsunami alert for the U.S. mainland but issued a tsunami advisory for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, which was later cancelled.

The sounding of alarms in Puerto Rico's northwest region caused people to leave coastal areas and caused heavy traffic, according to local media. Hazard Management Cayman

Islands urged residents near the coast to move inland and to heights of 0.3 to 1 meter are expected. Puerto Rico Gov Ienniffer

Gonzalez Colon said in a statement she is in contact with emergency agencies after the tsunami advisory, but did not recommend anyone leave the

The Dominican government also issued a tsunami alert and recommended residents on the coast move to high areas "of more than 20 meters of altitude and 2 kilometers inland." But it later canceled the alert.

Trump's actions leave Afghans who aided US airstrikes in limbo

Tirana (PTI): They helped the US military order airstrikes against Taliban and Islamic State fighters and worked as drivers and translators during America's longest war. They were set to start new lives in the United States.

Then President Donald Trump issued executive orders that put an end to programmes used to help Afghans get to safety in America. Now those same Afghans, who underwent a yearslong background check, find themselves in a state of limbo.

"I was shocked. I am still in shock because I have already waited four years for this process, to get out of this hell and to get to a safe place and live in peace and have a new beginning," said Roshangar, one of the Afghans whose life was upended by Trump's Roshangar requested that The

first name because he was afraid of Taliban reprisals. He spoke in an interview from Afghanistan where he, his wife and son live in hiding, fearing punishment or even execution by the Taliban for his more than a decade-long

partnership with American forces. Roshangar served as a legal adviser to the Afghan Air Force, helping US officials review and eventually approve airstrike packages that were

used against the Taliban and

the Islamic State group from 2007 until the fall of Kabul, the Afghan capital, in 2021. "This was an unexpected move from Mr. Trump and everything went wrong and against us and leave us in severe danger under the

Taliban regime," he said. His family's experience is just one aspect of the fallout from Trump's orders, many of which were implemented without broad consultation with experts in the areas affected.

"It's an absolute stain on our national honour that we've pulled the rug out from under people who have patiently peen awaiting relocation and those here in the US who have recently arrived," said Shawn VanDiver, a Navy veteran and head of #AfghanEvac, a coalition supporting Afghan resettlement efforts. "This is an imminently solvable issue and our national security demands

During the US evacuation from Kabul in August 2021, American military planes airlifted tens of thousands of Afghans from the main air-

But many more Afghans did not make it onto the planes. Since then, the US has had various ways to help Afghans emigrate to the US depending on what their role was in helping the US-led mission in Afghanistan.

Those path have been halted at this point.

Trump's AI ambition, China's DeepSeek overshadow summit

Paris (PTI): The geopolitics of artificial intelligence will be in focus at a major summit in France where world leaders, executives and experts will hammer out pledges on guiding the development of the rapidly advancing technology.

It's the latest in a series of global dialogues around AI governance, but one that comes at a fresh inflection point as China's buzzy and budget-friendly DeepSeek chatbot shakes up the industry US Vice President JD Vance —

making his first trip abroad since taking office — will attend the Paris AI Action Summit starting Feb. 10, while China's President Xi Jinping will be sending his special envoy, signalling high stakes for the meeting. Heads of state and top government officials, tech bosses and researchers are gathering in Paris for the two-day summit cohosted by French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The event aims to address how to harness artificial intelligence's potential so that it benefits everyone, while containing the technology's myriad European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is attending, along with officials and CEOs from 80 countries, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Microsoft President Brad Smith and Google CEO Sundar Pichai. Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who attended the inaugural 2023 summit at former codebreaking base Bletchley Park in England, and DeepSeek founder Liang Wenfeng have been invited, but it's unclear if either will attend. Panel talks and workshops at the Grand Palais venue on Monday will be followed by a dinner at the Elysee presidential palace for world leaders and CEOs. Leaders and company bosses are expected to give speeches at Tuesday's closing session.

More than two years after ChatGPT's debut, generative AI continues to make astounding advances at breakneck speed. The technology that powers all-purpose chatbots is transforming many aspects of life with its ability to spit out high-quality text, images or video, or carry out complex

Kurds in Syria aim to keep cultural rights gained in war

Qamishli (Syria (PTI): Kurds in Syria were marginalised during five decades of Assad family rule, with many denied citizenship and wrongly described as Arabs. Now they are seizing the chance during the post-Assad transition to keep the cultural gains they made in the northeast enclave they carved out during the country's civil war.

Mothers can now give children Kurdish names. The Kurdish language is taught in schools. The new year, Nowruz, can be celebrated openly. The Kurds, one of the world's largest populations without a state of their own, have been feeling some control over their lives and want to make that permanent with a new government in

But that depends on Syria's new leaders, and the outcome of an ongoing conflict between the Kurds and Turkish-backed rebels that's been overshadowed by the dramatic shift from Assad rule. Two months of fighting have left scores dead on both sides

*We have made all these gains. There is no way we will abandon them, even over our bodies and the bodies of our children," said Amira Ali, a

Kurdish woman from the northeastern city of Hassakeh whose husband is a member of the local police force known as "Asayish", the Kurdish term for security.

Shortly after the uprising against the Assad government began in 2011, the Kurds filled the vacuum created by the withdrawal of government forces from wide areas of Syria's northeast. The main Kurdish-led force now controls about 25% of Syria. An autonomous authority runs day-to-day affairs of the region that many Kurds call "Rojava Kurdistan" or "western Kurdistan".

Now Kurdish leaders are negotiating with the new authorities in Damascus on the future of their people, who made up 10% of the country's prewar population. They don't want full autonomy with their own government and parliament; they want decentralisation, room to run their day-to dayaffairs.

The new authorities, however, are allied with the Turkishbacked armed groups that launched an offensive against the Kurds in December during the chaos around Assad's fall. The fighting between the Kurds and the coalition known as the Syrian National Army has forced about 100,000 peo ple to flee their homes.

The conflict has major implications for Syria's future as its new government, led by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham former Islamist rebel group, tries to consolidate control and begin rebuilding after nearly 14 years of civil war. Mazloum Abdi, commander

the Islamic State group as it

rampaged across Syria and

neighbouring Iraq for years

during Syria's civil war.

of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, the main Kurdish-led force, said the country should be a secular, civil and decentralised state that treats all citizens equally. Western countries have called on Syria's new rulers to respect minorities and women's rights. Abdi recalled the Syrian identity cards that described all its citizens as "Syrian Arab citizens," including non-Arabs like the Kurds. They want it to be changed to "Syrian citizens". 'Kurds were persecuted by previous authorities," he said. He wants anti-Kurd laws to be abolished. Abdi and others point out that the Kurds played an important role in defeating

Sam Nujoma, Namibia's first president, dies aged 95

Oshakati (Namibia) (PTI: Sam Nujoma, the fiery white-beard-ed freedom fighter who led Namibia to independence from apartheid South Africa in 1990 and served as its first president for 15 years, and became known as the father of his nation, has died. He was 95.

Nujoma's death was announced on Sunday by current Namibian President Nangolo Mbumba, who said Nujoma died on Saturday night after being hospitalised in the capital, Windhoek."The foundations of the Republic of Namibia have been sĥaken," Mbumba said in a statement. "Over the past three weeks, the Founding President of the Republic of Namibia and Founding Father of the Namibian Nation was hospitalized for medical treatment and medical observation due to ill health.""Unfortunately, this time, the most gallant son of our land could not recover from his illness," Mbumba added.

Mbumba said Nujoma "marshalled the Namibian people during the darkest hours of our liberation struggle.

Nujoma was revered in his arid, sparsely populated homeland in southwestern Africa as a charismatic father figure who steered it to democracy and stability after long colonial rule by Germany and a bitter war of independence from South Africa.

He spent nearly 30 years in exile as the leader of its independence movement before returning for Parliamentary elections in late 1989, the first democratic vote in the country. He was elected president by lawmakers months later in 1990 as Namibia's independence was confirmed. Nujoma was the last of a generation of African leaders who brought their countries out of colonial or white minority rule that included South Africa's Nelson Mandela, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, Tanzania's

Julius Nyerere and Mozambique's

Samora Machel. Many Namibians credited Nujoma's leadership for the process of national healing and reconciliation after the deep divisions caused by the independence war and South Africa's policies of dividing the country into ethnically based regional governments, with separate education and health care for each race. Even his political opponents praised Nujoma — who was branded a Marxist and accused of ruthless suppression of dissent while in exile—for establishing a democratic Constitution and involving white businessmen and politicians in government

after independence.

25 killed in Mali gunmen attack

Bamako (Mali)(PTI): Gunmen have attacked a convoy of vehicles escorted by Mali's army, killing 25 civilians mostly gold miners, a military spokesman said Sunday. The attack took place Friday

about 30 km from Gao, the largest city in the country's northeast where armed groups hostile to the ruling junta operate. It was the deadliest attack on civilians this year. The assailants targeted a convoy of some 60 vehicles escorted by the army, military spokesman Col Maj Souleymane Dembélé told The Associated Press. He said soldiers assisted the victims and transferred 13 wounded to the Gao hospital. He said four of the attackers were wounded and declined to comment on any army casualties."My sister survived the attack, but she's in a state of mental shock.

She saw a lot of dead and wounded, a whole scene of horror. It was the first time she had seen dead people," said a Gao resident, who spoke on condition of anonymity for his own safety. No armed group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Kim slams US-South Korea-Japan partnership

his nuclear programme

PTI ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said an elevated US security partnership with South Korea and Japan poses a grave threat to his country and vowed to further bolster his nuclear weapons programme, state media reported on Sunday.

Kim has previously made similar warnings, but his latest statement implies again that the North Korean leader won't likely embrace President Donald Trump's overture to meet him and revive diplomacy anytime soon

In a speech marking the 77th founding anniversary of the Korean People's Army on Saturday, Kim said the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral security partnership established under a U.S. plot to form a NATO-like regional military bloc is inviting military imbalance on the Korean Peninsula and "raising a grave challenge to the security environment of our state," according to the official Korean Central News

"Referring to a series of new plans for rapidly bolstering all deterrence including nuclear forces, he clarified once again the unshakable policy of more highly developing the nuclear forces," KCNA said.

Amid stalled diplomacy with the US and South Korea in recent years, Kim has focused on enlarging and modernizing his arsenal of nuclear weapons. In response, the United States and South Korea have expanded their bilateral military exercises and trilateral training involving Japan. North Korea has lashed out at those drills, calling them rehearsals to invade the country.

Since his Jan. 20 inauguration,



Trump has said he would reach out to Kim again as he boasted of his high-stakes summit with him during his first term. During a joint news conference with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on Friday, Trump said that "We will have relations with North Korea, with Kim Jong Un. I got along

with him very well, as you know. I think I stopped the

During a Fox News interview broadcast on Jan. 23, Trump called Kim "a smart guy" and "not a religious zealot." Asked whether he will reach out to Kim again, Trump replied, "I

Trump met Kim three times in 2018-19 to discuss how to end North Korea's nuclear programme in what was the firstever summitry between the leaders of the US and North

The high-stakes diplomacy eventually collapsed because Trump rejected Kim's offer to dismantle his main nuclear complex, a partial denuclearization step in return for clearization step, in return for broad sanctions relief.

North Korea hasn't directly responded to Trump's recent overture, as it continues weapons testing activities and hostile rhetoric against the U.S. Many experts say Kim is now preoccupied with his dispatch of troops to Russia to support its war efforts against Ukraine. They say Kim would still eventually consider returning to diplomacy with Trump if he determines he would fail to maintain the current solid cooperation with Russia after

the war ends. In his Saturday speech, Kim

reaffirmed that North Korea "will invariably support and encourage the just cause of the Russian army and people to defend their sovereignty, security and territorial integrity." Kim accused the U.S. of being behind "the war machine which is stirring up the tragic situation of Ukraine?

In South Korea, some worry that Trump might abandon the international community's long-running goal of achieving a complete denuclearization of North Korea to produce a

diplomatic achievement. But a joint statement issued by Trump and Ishiba after their summit stated the two leaders reaffirmed "their resolute commitment to the complete denuclearization of the DPRK," the acronym of North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The statement said the U.S. and Japan also affirmed the importance of the Japan-U.S.-South Korean trilateral partnership in responding to North Korea.

Conservative, leftist lawyer in presidential race

PTI ■ GUAYAQUIL (ECUADOR)

Voting is mandatory in

More than 13.7 million peonolls opened on Sunday in



a presidential election in Ecuador that is shaped up to be a repeat of the 2023 race, when voters chose a conservative young millionaire over the leftist protegee of the ons.

ple are eligible to vote. On Thursday, thousands of inmates who await sentencing cast ballots at voting centres set up in more than 40 pris-

Imran: Army should return to its constitutional limits

PTI ISLAMABAD

Tailed former Pakistan premier Imran Khan on Sunday penned an open letter to Army chief Gen Asim Munir in which he criticised the military's unlawful actions and its engagement in politics and urged it "to return to its con-

stitutional limits". In the letter posted on X, the Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) founder alleged mistreatment in prison, including placing him in solitary confinement in a deathrow cell for 20 days with no access to sunlight or electricity. Khan has been incarcerated in Adiala Jail Rawalpindi for over a year. This follows his first letter on February 3, which urged the military to review its approach towards national

After the first letter, security sources said it had not been received by the military and dismissed reports in the media about its existence. They claimed that the establishment was not interested in receiving such a letter.

security and governance.

In his latest letter, Khan said the response to "my (first) letter was dismissive and irresponsible", adding that his concern "is purely for the reputation of our arm-ed forces and the dangerous consequences of the widening gulf between the military and the public. This is why I

wrote this letter". have deepened the rift between the people and the military. These points included the

manipulation of election results through pre-poll rigging orchestrated by intelligence agencies, the forced passage of the 26th Constitutional Amendment in Parliament at

gunpoint to take control of the judiciary and appoint hand-picked judges and the imposition of draconian legislation like the amendments to PECA (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act) to silence dissent. Khan noted that political instability and the "might is right" policy plunged the country's economy into chaos. Khan regretted that the country's "largest political party" was being targeted and all state institutions were being used for political engineering and

He mentioned that if a public referendum were held on the six points he highlighted, "I believe that 90 per cent of Pakis-tanis would support them"

He said these alleged act-ions were not only harming public sentiment but also worsening the rift between the people and

"For Pakistan's stability and security, it is imperative to bridge the growing gap between the military and the public," he wrote in the letter.
"The only way to achieve this is for the military to return to its constitutional limits, disengage from politics and fulfil its designated responsibilities," he

The letter came after several leaders of Khan's party were arrested on Saturday as it held And forced electoral outcomes. Khan said that on May 9, 2023, rallies to mark February 8 as Black Day over the alleged rigging of the general elections last year. "The army is a vital institution of the country, but a few black sheep within it are causing severe damage to its reputation," Khan said.

Khan also accu-s-ed a military officer statio-ned at Adiala Jail of orchestrating harassment

and rig-hts violations against him. "This officer ignores court orders and behaves like an 'occupying' force," he alleged. Khan claimed that he was kept in complete isolation for 20 days in a dark cell with no access to sunlight.

Electricity to his cell was cut off for five days, leaving him in darkness, and even his exercise equipment, television and newspapers were confiscated and access to books was arbi-

He clai-med that he was allowed only three phone calls with his sons in six months, despite court orders permitting more. PTI workers travelling from distant areas were denied meetings with him.

trarily restricted.

He also accused the authorities of violating court orders by denying him meetings with his wife, Bushra Bibi, whom he alleged was being kept in solitary confinement.

He claimed that four convictions against him were politically motivated, with judges allegedly forced into issuing pre-determined verdicts.

Khan said that one judge allegedly suffered severe stressrelated health issues due to the pressure of ruling against him and that the PTI was being targeted through pre-poll rigging down on peaceful PTI support-

Live ammunition was fired at peaceful citizens. Under the guise of political retaliation, raids were conducted on the homes of hundreds of thousands of citizens over the past three years.

PTI rules out possibility of resumption of dialogue with govt

PTI ISLAMABAD

Tailed former prime minister
Imran Khan-founded Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's Leader of Opposition in National Assembly, Omar Ayub Khan, has ruled out the possibility of resumption of the dia-logue between the party and the government, a news report said on Sunday.

"The chapter of talks is now closed," Geo News quoted Ayub as saying on Saturday.

Ayub said political negotiations

were not based on mere wishes but required firm commitment which the government failed to demonstrate. Censuring the coalition government's approach to talks, which now seem to have collapsed, the senior PTI leader said his party's committee had initiated discussions in good faith. "However, the other side neither displayed goodwill nor intent, leading to a deadlock." Ayub's remarks come as negotiations between the PTI and the ruling government, which began in late December after months of heightened political tensions, failed to witness notable progress despite the two sides holding three negotiation sessions. The PTI, which also presented its written charter of demands, refused to attend the fourth round of talks citing the government's failure to form a judicial riots in 2023 and November 2024 protests

Since then, Khan's party has hinted at agitation and even held a rally in Swabi City of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Saturday to observe 'Black Day' to protest the alleged rigging of last year's general elections.

With the future of parleys left uncertain, a spokesman for the National Assembly has clarified that Speaker Ayaz Sadiq had not formally invited the PTI for negotiations but merely said that as the custodian of the House, his doors remained open to all members.

Responding to Ayub's statement, the spokesman said a formal invitation for talks would only be extended if requested by either the government or the opposition.

He reiterated the speaker's role

was to facilitate dialogue and that his chamber and residence remained accessible to all law-

Separately, echoing Ayub's remarks on the future of talks, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senator Irfan Siddiqui said the government's negotia-tion committee had become "practically non-functional and ineffective'

In a statement on X, Siddiqui said regardless of whether the committee was formally dissolved, it was no longer operational. He noted that the PTI unilaterally withdrew from the negotiation process and subsequently rejected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's offer to reconsider their stance.

The senator accused the PTI of returning to its "home ground of violent protests" and said the options if the party later decided to engage in talks. Meanwhile, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan clarified the party was not seeking intervention from any country, including the United States, for the release of the jailed former prime min-

Bunkers demolished in Kurram district under Shia-Sunni peace deal

Peshawar (PTI): Pakistani security forces have demolished 10 more bunkers in the strife-torn Kurram district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province as part of a peace agreement reached between warring Sunni and Shia tribes, officials said on Sunday. The peace accord was signed between Alizai and Bagan tribes on January 4 after sectarian clashes resulted in the killing of 133 people in the district between November 21 and December 2. Under the agreement, residents

pledged to surrender their weapons to the government in different phases within 15 days, while the dismantling of local bunkers is set to be completed by the end of February. The bunkers, situated in the Pewar and Gaiddu areas, were demolished using explosive materials during a joint operation carried out by the security forces and police, officials said. The demolition process was started on January 10. There are more than 250

bunkers in the lower and upper Kurram district. Forty-eight bunkers have been demolished so far.In line with the peace pact, Kurram district officials have started planning a strategy for collecting arms and ammunition from the warring tribes. The process is expected to proceed once a comprehensive and feasible strategy for the surrender Representatives of the rival tribes, who participated in a jirga (tribal council) at the Commissioner House in Kohat on Thursday, have been briefed about the procedure for handing over their weapons and ammunition to the administra-

ECUADOR POLLS

country's most influential president this century. President Daniel Noboa and Luis González are the clear front-runners among the pool of 16 candidates. All promised voters to reduce the widespread crime that pushed their lives into an unnerving new normal four years ago. Voting is mandatory in Ecuador. More than 13.7 mil-

lion people are eligible to

More than 100,000 members of the military and police officers have been deployed to safeguard the election, including voting centres.

To win outright, a candidate needs 50 per cent of the vote or at least 40 per cent with a 10-point lead over the closest opponent. If needed, a runoff election would take place on April 13.

Ecuador's presidential election Sunday is shaping up to be a repeat of the 2023 race, when voters chose a conservative young millionaire over the leftist protége of the country's most influential president this century. President Daniel Noboa and Luis González are the clear front-runners among the pool of 16 candidates. Al promised voters to reduce the widespread crime that pushed their lives into an unnerving new normal four years ago. The spike in violence across the South American country is tied to the trafficking of bouring Colombia and Peru. So many voters have become

crime victims that their personal and collective losses will be a determining factor in deciding whether a third president in four years can turn Ecuador around or if Noboa deserves more time in office.

Noboa defeated González in the October 2023 runoff of a snap election triggered by the decision of then-President Guillermo Lasso to dissolve the National Assembly and shorten his own mandate as a result. Noboa and González, a mentee of former President Rafael Correa, had only served short stints as lawmakers before launching their 2023 presidential campaigns. Noboa, 37, is an heir to a for-

tune built on the banana trade. His political career began in 2021, when he won a seat in the National Assembly and chaired its Economic Development Commission. He opened an event organiz-ing company when he was 18 and then joined his father's Noboa Corp., where he held management positions in the shipping, logistics and com-

mercial areas.

mercial areas. Under his presidency, the homicide rate dropped from 8,237, or 46.18 per 100,000 people, in 2023 to 6,964, or 38.76 per 100,000 people, last year. Still, it remained far higher than the 1,188 homicides, or 6.85 per 100,000 people, in 2019. González, 47, held various government jobs during the presidency of jobs during the presidency of Correa, who led Ecuador from 2007 through 2017 with freespending socially conservative policies and grew increasingly authoritarian in his last vears as president. He was sen-2020 in a corruption scandal. González was a lawmaker from 2021 until May 2023, when Lasso dissolved the National Assembly. She was unknown to most voters until

Correa's party picked her as its

presidential candidate for the

PUBLIC NOTICE

TO WHOMESOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

This information for the General Public that m

client Manoj Kumar son of Jay Bhagwan

resident of 69, Basant Nagar, Vasant Vihar, South West Delhi, Delhi-110057, has

disowning and disinherited their daughter

namely **Shubhangini** from all their moveable 8

mmoveable properties and have also severed

all their relations from her. Therefore my client

shall not be responsible for any act, illegal or

snap election.

Britain navigates rough waters as Trump strains 'special relationship

PTI LONDON

ver since Winston Churchill Ecoined the phrase in the wake of World War II, politicians have extolled the "special relationship" between the United States and Britain.

Under President Donald Trump's second administration, Britain will settle for a merely functional relationship with its former colony turned most important ally. As Trump threatens to slap tariffs on America's neighbors mulls buying Greenland and suggests the US could "take over" and reconstruct Gaza.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government is racing to bolster its diplomatic and economic defences for a turbulent new transatlantic era. "We're in such uncharted waters

that anyone who claims to know what in the hell is going on is just lying," said Kathleen Burk, emeritus professor at University College London and an expert on US-UK relations. British officials say Starmer

hopes to visit Washington in the coming weeks, but he has yet to receive an invitation from Trump. In the meantime, a heavy burden

rests on Britain's new ambassador Washington, Mandelson. A towering figure in Starmer's Labour Party who served in the governments of former Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, Mandelson replaces veteran diplomat Karen

Pierce, who was widely respected by both Democrats and Republicans in Washington. It's rare for a politician, rather

than a career civil servant, to be

given a key UK ambassadorial post. The centre-left former lawmaker is not an obvious emissary to the Trump administration. Mandelson once called Trump a "danger to the world" — words he now says were "ill-judged and wrong".

But some analysts see Mandelson as a canny choice. A controversial figure who twice resigned from government over allegations of financial or ethical impropriety, he has — like Trump — repeatedly bounced back. His mastery of political intrigue brought him the nickname "Prince of Darkness".Jill Rutter, a senior fellow at the Institute for Government, said Mandelson is "a considerable political talent" with economic expertise from his time as the EU's trade commissioner between 2004 and 2008. "He's also very comfortable with very rich people," Rutter said. "He's very well connected. He will give

very classy parties? In addition to diplomatic clout, Britain plans to deploy another key asset: the royal family. Trump, whose mother was born on Scotland's remote Isle of Lewis, owns two Scottish golf courses and is a fan of the roy-

He praised the late Queen Elizabeth II, who hosted him at Buckingham Palace during a 2019 state visit, and said he had a "great talk" with Prince William when the two men met in December.

A return visit to the UK for Trump, replete with pomp and pageantry, seems likely.

Some politicians on the right of UK politics see Trump's return as an opportunity for deeper UK-US trade ties, maybe even a longelusive free trade agreement.

Talks on a trade deal started after Britain left the European Union in 2020 but foundered on issues including agriculture, with strong opposition in Britain to importing chlorine-rinsed chicken or hormone-treated beef. A further complication is Starmer's desire for closer trade with the EU as part of a "reset" with the bloc after years of acrimony over Brexit. Sandwiched between the US and the EU, Britain could face pressure to pick a side.

Surely the choice is obvious," Conservative Party lawmaker John Cooper said during a recent debate in Parliament. "Under President Trump, the American eagle is starting to spread its wings. ... Europe is fading, with sclerotic growth amid political turmoil

But Leslie Vinjamuri, director of the US and the Americas program at the international affairs think-tank Chatham House, said choosing between Europe and America was a "ridiculous proposition." While the US is Britain's biggest individual trading partner, half of Britain's trade is with the 27 EU members.

Rescuers search for 28 in China landslide Beijing (PTI): Emergency teams in China's south-

western Sichuan province raced against time Sunday to locate 28 people after a landslide triggered by rains killed one person and buried homes. Nearly 1,000 personnel were deployed following the landslide in the village of Jinping in Junlian county on Saturday.

Some officers navigated through the remains of collapsed buildings, using drones and life-detection radars to locate any signs of life with the help of locals who were familiar with the area. state broadcaster CCTV said.

Two injured people were rescued and about 360 others evacuated after 10 houses and a manufacturing building were buried, CCTV report-

ed. At a news conference Sunday, authorities said preliminary assessments attributed the disaster to heavy rainfall and local geological conditions. They said these factors transformed a landslide into a debris flow about 1.2 kilometres long, with a total volume exceeding 100,000 cubic metres. The rescue operation was hampered by continuous rainfall and more landslides. According to preliminary estimates, the collapsed area was about 16 football pitches in size and many houses were carried far by the debris flow. Chinese Vice Premier Liu Guozhong was at the site to guide the operation and visited the affected residents, according to official news agency

UK shadow ministers join protest against China's

mega embassy plan London(PTI): UK shadow tion against a much-larger ministers and fellow Opposition Conservative Party parliamentarians were among hundreds of protesters who descended upon the proposed site of China's socalled mega embassy in east London. Shadow justice secretary Robert Jenrick, shadow security minister Tom Tugendhat and former Tory leader Ian Duncan Smith joined groups representing Hong Kongers, Uyghurs and Tibetans at the site of the historic Royal Mint Court near the Tower of London on Saturday. Shadow ministers are members of the opposi-

tion who scrutinise the work of the government. According to UK media reports, the protesters wanted to register their opposi-

new embassy which they fear could be used as a "spy hub" if it is allowed permission to go ahead as one of China's largest diplomatic missions in Europe."We do not want this great historical building behind us — in the shadow of the Tower of London — to become a mega embassy of the Chinese Community Party," Jenrick told the gathering."This is the wrong site. The Police clashed with the protesters, who had gathered

in large numbers to demonstrate the site's disruptive potential as a massive embassy with offices and homes, with slogans such as "Stand with Hong Kong" and "Mega Embassy, Mega No" ringing Gupta S/o. Vijay Gupta both are the joint Title Holders in possession of Entire Second Floor of Freehold Built up Residential Property Bearing Plot No. 15/208, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi —1100/17 admeasuring 72.00 sq. yards', hereinafter referred to as "Schedule Property vide Sale Deed dated 14th June, 20/19 duly registered as Regn. No. 4210, Book No. 1, Vol. No. 2881, pp. 161-177 on 17.06.19 in the Office of the Sub Registrar-V-A, Hauz Khas, New Delhi. That original documents i.e. (1) Lease Deed dated 45.09.61, (2) Death Certificate of H.T. Asnani dated 31.01.73, (3) Release Deed dated 48.04.78 (4) Substitution Letter dated 29.08.81, (5) Death Certificate of Ramchand H. Asnani dated 16.06.02, (6) Relinquishment Deed dated 25.06.02, (7) Substitution Letter dated 29.06.04, (8) Conveyance Deed dated 69.07.2004, (9) Resolution dated 18.03.2009, (10) Sale Deed dated 23.07.2009 and (12) Resolution dated 48.03.2009 and (12) Resolution dated 22.01.10 w.r.t. the Schedule Plot (Plot No. 15/208, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi) have all been lost/misplaced and are untraceable as on date, in lieu of which Information Report dated 09.02.2025 bearing LR No. 2568811/ 2025 has been filled with Delhi Police. This notice is thus issued to the Public at large. i.e. any Person(s). Company(ies), Authority(ies), Society(ies), Organisation(s), Financial Institution(s), Bank(s), HUFs etc. having any knowledge, custody or possession of the above mentitioned lost/

PUBLIC NOTICE

Company(ies), Authority(ies), Society(ies), Organisation(s), Financial Institution(s), Bank(s), HUFs etc. having any knowledge, custody or possession of the above mentioned lost misplaced' untraceable original documents or otherwise having any claims, rights, title, interests, possession etc. in the Schedule Property/ Plot, by way of Ownership, Succession, Inheritance, Sale, Mortgage, Exchange, Charge, Lien, Gift, Trust, Encumbrance etc., may come forward with supporting documents, to be delivered to the undersigned within 15 days from the date of this Publication, post expiration of which, any claim(s) or objection(s), if raised or received, shall be treated as null & void and as waived.

Joni Kashyap, Advocate Joni Kashyap, Advoca Idress:Chamber No.6, Block-E,Karkardooma Co New Delhi-110032, Contact No. +91 99716 264

THE PIONEER O **THANKSGIVING**

Thank you holly spirit for all

the blessings Celine. PD(1433)C

PUBLIC NOTICE t is known to all that the allottees of Residential Flat No.B-703, 7th Floor, in

It is known to all that the allottees of Residential Flat No.B-703, 7th Floor, Tower-B, "Grand Ajnara Heritage", Plc No.GH-01/B, Secfor-74, Noida, Smt Kamalpreet Chani Wio Sh, Jagjit Singh & Sh Jagjit Singh & S

e publication of this notice.

MANJEET PRATAP CHANI

criminal activity and conduct done by her in Ombir Sangwan (Advocate) Ch.No.5, Patiala House Court, ND-110001

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is for notice of general public that a political party is proposed to be registered by the name of **Samyabadi Ganatantrik** Dal. The office of the party is located a Room no.1, 72/1 Jessore Road near Kalika Hall, PO: Habra, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal - 743 263. This party has submitted application to the Election Commission of India, New Delhi for registration as Politica Party under section 29A of the Representation of People Act, 1951.

Names/Address of office bearers of the Party are as follows President: Dinesh Chandra Biswas College Para, Bagula, Nadia, West Bengal Pin 741502.

General Secretary: Barun Mahato Subuddhipur, Kastodanga, Nadia, Wes Bengal, Pin 741257.

Treasurer-Tusar Kanti Biswas, Jessore Road, Near Kalika Hall, Habra, north 24 Parganas, West Bengal, Pin 743263. If any one has any objections and to the registration of Samyabadi Ganatantrik Dal, they may send their Objection with reasons

thereof to the secretary Samyabadi Ganatantrik Dal Election Commission of

India, Nirvachan Sadan, Asoka Road, New Delhi-110001 within 30 days of the

publication of this notice.

पट्टा सूचना

सर्व साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि ग्राम पंचायत हरचन्दपुर में पार्किंग व ${
m SC}$ (I) व ${
m SC}$ (II) चौपाल के कंडम सामान जैसे गाटर, स्याल की गाटर व पत्थर की बोली लगाई जायेगी। पार्किंग की बोली दिनांक 11 फरवरी 2025 दिन मंगलवार दोपहर 2 बजे पार्किंग के स्थान पर तहसील के साइड में एवं SC (I) व SC (II) चौपाल की बोली दिनांक 11 फरवरी 2025 दिन मंगलवार सुबह 11 बजे दोनों चौपाल में लगाई जायेगी। पार्किंग के लिए जमा राशि 10000/-रूपये होगी एवं चौपाल के सामान के लिए जमा राशि 5000/- रूपये होगी। **नियम व शर्ते लाग**

नन्दराम व एकत मो.09466353959

खण्ड बावल, जिला रेवाडी। मो.8930078446

श्री साहिल, गाम पंचायत हरचन्दपुर अधिकारी, बावल

Government looking at procedural easing to further promote FDI: Official

The government is looking at further easing of procedures in certain sectors to attract more foreign direct investments (FDI) into the country, a government official said. The department for promotion of

industry and internal trade (DPIIT) has held stakeholder consultations different government departments, regulators, industry associations, advisory and law firms, pension funds, private equity and venture capitals.

The department sought their views on ways to further attract foreign direct investments into the country. have completed consultations. The department has received suggestions on different issues. Things have not yet been finalised... Looking at easing of norms at the procedural front," the

official said. However, the official did not disclose the sectors where the government is considering the procedural easing. In the consultations, issues which

were raised included permitting e-commerce players to receive FDI in inventory-based models of online trade for export purposes only; easing press note 3 by defining beneficial ownership; and some automobile, tweaking of the policy for single-pharmaceuticals.



brand retail trading. Under this press note, government approval is mandatory for investors from countries sharing land borders with India in any sector.

Foreign direct investment inflows into India have crossed the \$1 Trillion milestone in the April 2000-September 2024 period.

The key sectors attracting the maximum of these inflows include the services segment, computer software hardware. telecommunications, trading, development, construction chemicals,

The investment in India rose by 45 per cent year-on-year to \$29.79 Billion in April-September this fiscal. Experts suggested that steps such as implementing time-bound approvals for FDI applications, clear guidelines

for approvals, and a seamless single-

window clearance system will help

India further improve its business

climate for overseas players. "India's FDI inflows are largely into brownfield projects, but the real opportunity lies in greenfield expansion. plug-and-play infrastructure ecosystem, coupled with streamlined land acquisition processes, efficient dispute

resolution, and easy clearances can unlock India's full investment Majumdar, Rumki Economist, Deloitte India, said.

Rudra Kumar Pandey, Partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas, said that at present, the approval process for FDI often involves cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, creating an environment of uncertainties - as generally speaking the overall timeline goes beyond six months and in some cases even 9-12 months.

This perception can be addressed by introducing greater transparency, particularly in the objectives and criteria the government considers when assessing FDI applications. Clear guidelines and timelines for approvals would help eliminate uncertainty, ensuring that investors feel secure and informed," Pandey

One of the most impactful reforms would be the introduction of "deemed approvals", he said, adding, under this system, FDI applications that are not processed within a specified timeframe would be automatically approved, thereby eliminating unnecessary delays.

Avimukt Dar, Founding Partner, IndusLaw, suggested the government provide clarity and alignment on the meaning of beneficial owners under

Markets to track inflation data, global trends this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investors would track a host of macroeconomic data announcements scheduled this week, including inflation numbers, and also monitor global market trends, and trading activity of foreign institutional investors, analysts said.

The ongoing earnings announcements and the rupee-dollar trend would also influence the markets.

'This week is set to be dynamic for global and Indian markets, driven by key macroeconomic data releases and corporate earnings. Market sentiment will be shaped by inflation figures, industrial production data, and major earnings announcements," Master Trust Director Puneet Group Singhania said.

On Wednesday, the US inflation data for January will be in focus. Later in the day, Fed Chair Jerome Powell's testimony will be closely watched for insights into interest rate expectations, Singhania said

"For India, inflation and industrial production data will be released on February 12," he

On Thursday, the UK's GDP



growth data will be released and on Friday the US retail sales data for January will provide insights into consumer spending, Singhania said.

Corporate earnings will also drive market sentiment. Major companies reporting earnings include Eicher Motors, Grasim Industries, Vodafone Idea, Steel Authority of India, he added.

The BJP on Saturday trounced the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi and returned to power in the city after more than 26 years, extending its saffron imprint and dealing a body blow to the Arvind Kejriwal-led party top leadership crumbled or barely made it.

"The sentiments in the Indian market are slowly improving in response to an excellent Budget and the rate cut by the MPC. The victory of the BJP in

achievement for the ruling dispensation. This is likely to positively impact the market in the short run.

"However, the medium to long-term trend in the market will depend on the recovery in GDP growth and earnings recovery," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said. Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 354.23 points, or 0.45 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 77.8 points, or 0.33 per cent. Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said, "Looking ahead, investor focus will shift to earnings and upcoming macroeconomic data, including IIP, Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation, and Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation, scheduled

Increase in MSME financing right step to boost biogas industry: IBA



 $I_{({\rm IBA})}^{\rm ndian\ Biogas\ Association}$ proposed increase in MSME financing in the General Budget 2025 is a right step to boost biogas industry.

With a strong push for

manufacturing, green energy, and digital transformation, this Budget sets the stage for Aatmanirbhar and Viksit Bharat, an IBA statement said. biogas/CBG (compressed biogas) industry, the announced increase to the MSME Credit Guarantee Scheme will significantly benefit the biogas industry, which often faces challenge in credit reasonable terms, it noted.

By expanding the credit guarantee cover from ₹5-10 Crore, the scheme ensures

include funding for collection of agricultural residues, subsidised transportation costs, and expansion of the anti-crop burning scheme as that existing in Haryana to the rest of the country, it suggested.

turnover limits as compared

The amendment ensures that

now even the larger-capacity CBG projects are eligible for

adequate steps in supporting

the MSME sector, inclusion of

specific policy measures for

the CBG industry would have

made it even more conducive

So, to foster the growth of the biogas and CBG producers,

the IBA has already requested

the Indian government for

development of a framework

that allows the biogas plant

for the sector, it suggested.

these incentives, it noted.

to earlier regime.

production would loans, thus reducing financial through stimulated barriers for the CBG corporate tax holiday and, in developers, it pointed out. turn, investment would boost Additionally, the revised employment and cleaner MSME classification criteria energy, it also suggested. allow for almost 2-2.5 times Tax incentives would yield investment and

Investment

losses in the short-term, but with CBG producers, about 100 commercial plants generating ₹1,200 Crore in FY25, there will be long-term benefits.

promoters to sell carbon credits in both international

and domestic platforms,

enhancing financial viability

and aiding climate targets, it

The policies further must

These steps will greatly economic development, and elevate India's clean energy standing, it said.

Overall, recently presented Indian Budget is a consumption-driven blueprint that gives the economy a much-needed push by increasing domestic demand, improving credit access, and encouraging entrepreneurship, it added.

Significant reduction in gold smuggling post July import duty cut, says CBIC Chief

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold smuggling has freduced significantly since July 2024 when the government slashed import duty on the precious metal to 6 per cent, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Chairman Sanjay Kumar Agarwal said. As per the latest available

data, Customs and DRI officers seized 847 kg of gold worth ₹544 Crore at various airports in the April-June period of the current fiscal. In July, the government reduced customs duty on gold to 6 per cent from 15 per cent.

After the rate of duty was reduced on gold in the last year's budget, there is a significant reduction in the smuggling of gold," Agarwal told PTI in an interview. Although Agarwal did not

reveal the quantum or value authorities regular watch over the international passenger traffic, porous borders, and commercial cargoes coming into the country to cut the smuggling of narcotics through any route.

Smuggling is the secret movement of goods across national borders to avoid customs duties or import or

restrictions. typically occurs when either customs duties are high enough to allow a smuggler to make a large profit on the clandestine goods or when there is a strong demand for prohibited goods, such as narcotics or weapons.

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), under CBIC, is the apex agency of the Indian customs in the field of anti-smuggling in India.

During the 2023-24 financial year, DRI officers alone seized 1,319 kg of gold and smuggling through India's porous eastern borders, particularly with Bangladesh and Myanmar, has also emerged as a major concern enforcement law

agencies. This is part of the 4,869.6 kg of gold seized by the CBIC, including by Customs officers, in 2023-24. 1,922 CBIC during the year.
As per DRI's Smuggling in

India Report released in December, India has become a major destination for illicit gold imports, with gold and silver predominantly originating from Gulf states such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, where these metals are sourced and available at lower prices.

Maruti Suzuki plans to boost charging infra

Maruti Suzuki India aims to bolster charging infrastructure in the country before it drives in e VITARA with plans to establish the model as a primary vehicle in a household, according to a senior company executive.

The auto major also plans to boost after-sales support, bring in a leasing model and more finance options to encourage customers to buy the model.

"One of the major concerns for the customer is the adequacy of the public infrastructure in terms of the chargers. So we are planning to have a fast charger at a frequency of 10 kilometers in the top 100 cities," Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) Senior Executive Officer (Marketing and Sales) Partho Banerjee told PTI in an interaction.

Currently top 100 cities in the per cent of the total EV sales, he stated while elaborating on the plan.

"We believe that the customer who will be buying the car will be moving out of the city as well so we want to make our e VITARA as the primary car, not the secondary car and to make it a primary car, it is very important to provide a good after-sales support," Banerjee

said. As per the industry figures, electric passenger vehicles in the country today are mostly bought as a second or third vehicle in a household.

Banerjee said the auto major is planning to have 1,000 cities where it will be providing the EV after-sales support in case someone is having an emergency, he added. "So this more or less covers

the entire India. We want to make e VITARA as the primary car, then only the EV stated. MSI unveiled the electric SUV

in the Bharat Mobility Global The e VITARA will first be

exported to a few key markets overseas before being put on sale in India. The production of the model

is expected to commence later this year at MSI's Gujarat plant which would also cater to all

"We are planning to have an overall ecosystem before we

export markets.

launch it here. When we started 40 years back, we first created the infrastructure, and then we started selling the product. So this time, also our thought is that when we start selling the product, the ecosystem should be in place," Banerjee said.

The company is also training manpower at its dealer network with soft skills to handle customer queries

"Soft skills is an ongoing thing, actually, that is more to do with the etiquette and how you handle the customer, but fundamentally, rightly said that it is very important that how we address the concerns and the query of the customers pertaining to the electric vehicle. So for that also, our work is going on," Baneriee noted.

Saudi's USD 63-Billion giga project Diriyah sees keen interest from Indian investors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/DAVOS

 $S^{\rm everal\ Indian\ firms\ have}_{\rm shown\ a\ keen\ interest\ in}$ investing in Diriyah, a \$ 63-Billion Saudi Arabian giga project, while some big names like Tatas and Oberois having already signed up, its CEO Jerry Inzerillo said.
Diriyah, being billed as the City of Earth, is being built on the outskirts of Saudi Arabia's

the outskirts of Saudi Arabia's capital Riyadh and it will have homes for 100,000 people and office space for a further 100,000 plus. This new city will include over

40 luxury hotels, more than 1,000 shops, over 150 restaurants and cafes, a university, arts and cultural assets, museums, an opera 20,000-seater multipurpose event arena, a course and international equestrian and polo centre, among other facilities

The \$63.2 billion real estate development and tourism project aims to restore the historic birthplace of the modern Saudi kingdom and the site includes the UNESCO World Heritage Site of At-

"At Diriyah we are keen to enhance the impact of India as one of Saudi Ārabia's biggest trading partners, ranking among the top in bilateral



approximately \$52.8 Villion in 2022-23," Inzerillo told PTI. He was in Davos for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025.

Inzerillo said over 3,000 Indian companies are already operating in the Kingdom, contributing to sectors such as construction, IT, energy, and telecommunications, strengthening the economic partnership between the two

"Diriyah is very keen to work with firms here already and those based in India itself. This is a \$63.2 Billion project backed by the Public Investment Fund and it means the investment opportunities in Diriyah are countless and cover multiple asset classes,"

The scope for the Indian investment community and partners is enormous. Diriyah already has multiple partners on board from around the world, but there remains an amazing array of opportunities for Indian companies and organisations across the full spectrum of

urban development to partner with Diriyah," Inzerillo said. He said İndia is an important part of their global investment outreach strategy and they have hosted CEOs and have hosted ` founders of prominent companies in India, to showcase Diriyah and Saudi

Arabia. There is already a lot of Indian interest from companies – especially the hotel sector with the Taj Hotel group set to open their 250th property here in Diriyah with

202 rooms. 'An Oberoi Hotel is being developed close to our new equestrian and polo centre and these two properties are among the more than 40 luxury hotels being built at Diriyah," he said.

Inzerillo said companies and investors from India can also benefit from a number of new investment packages tailored across various sizes and asset classes, including for mixed-use, residential, hospitality, office, education healthcare assets.

Given the size and economic impact India has in the Kingdom - we are confident that Indian firms will have a significant part to play in the continued success of The City of Earth," he said.

He said Diriyah will also have a major role in helping showcase Saudi Arabia in the most beautiful light for tourists from India and other countries.

"Two of our biggest attractions – the UNESCO World Heritage Site of At-Turaif and neighbouring Bujairi Terrace - are heavily featured and have welcomed over three million visits since opening just over two years

ago.
"For Indian tourists and others their journey into the Kingdom will typically start at Diriyah and we are confident that Indian visitors will play a major part in our anticipated 50 Million visits a year from 2030 onwards," he said.

Ministry of DoNER working with Amazon, two other companies to boost Bamboo market: official

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Ministry of Development of North East Region would explore the market opportunities for Bamboo in domestic and overseas markets and it was working with Amazon and two other companies in this connection, a senior government official has

Besides promoting Bamboo locally, the Ministry would also look for shipping them to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region Secretary (MDoNER) Chanchal Kumar said.

At a recent roadshow in Chennai, Union Minister for Communications and Development of North Eastern Region Jyotiraditya M Scindia said nearly 38 per cent of the Bamboo was produced in the North States. Eastern provides a huge opportunity for Chennai which has a huge furniture-making huge furnitu industry, he said.

'Today, we can grow that Bamboo, process it to manufacture furniture and export it (to other parts of the country). Right now, my Ministry is working with Amazon and two other companies to adopt self-



help groups in the North Starting with two Tripura and Nagaland, where we plan to end-to-end processing of Bamboo. So, the possibilities are endless," Scindia said.

In a brief interaction with PTI, the Ministry's Secretary Chanchal Kumar said the government intends promote Bamboo products in both domestic and overseas markets.

We are going to market it. Marketing can be domestic and export. You have to come with quality. These companies will be helping them (Self Help Groups in North East) in designing world-class Bamboo items like furniture, and boards. So it will help the farmers countries incountries incou

aggregate and take it to the end user. The entire value chain has to pick up," Kumar

Elaborating on the initiative he said that after the companies entered into a tie-up with the ministry, it (the ministry) will help the companies to market the products easily.

"Once it captures the domestic market, then we will go international. The ultimate aim is to go to the markets of neighbouring including countries Bangladesh, Thailand, and

He underlined that the North East holds a majority of Bamboo resources in the country and offers a great opportunity to the furniture

Narcotic drug seizure declines about 22 per cent in 2024

PTI NEW DELHI

Narcotic drug seizures have declined by about 22 per cent year-on-year to over 1,087 tonnes in 2024, government data showed. In 2024, 1,087 tonnes of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances (NDPS) worth ₹16,966 Crores were seized in 72,496 cases across the country. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) authorities had seized 1,389 tonnes of NDPS worth ₹16,123 Crore in over 1.09 Lakh cases in 2023.
To curb the smuggling of narcotics, the Customs Department is keeping a watch over international passenger traffic, porous borders, and commercial cargo coming into the country, CBIC Chairman Sanjay Kumar Agarwal told PTI.

"We keep on making the cases but the border is porous. We are able to catch (smugglers) but still a lot may be coming which may go unnoticed," Agarwal said, without disclosing the quantum of seizures.

As per the government data, in 2024 as many as 94.19 lakh narcotic drug tablets valued at ₹376 Crore were seized at ports in just two cases.

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Whole Foods

Whole
Flavours

Must-Do Yogasanas

BY YASH GUPTA

reathe in! Breathe out! As long as you live there are certain things that you cannot control but there are other things that you can control. Having control over your senses is considered one of the wealth and the path is through yoga.

The list of activities is forever going,

Nadi Shodhan: The

stress buster and

balancing the entire

body. Place your right

thumb on your right

nostril and inhale

the right exhaling

through the left.

from the left press

the ring finger close

left nostril and release

breath, inhale through

the right, and exhale

pranayam, the instant

king of all the

there is no end to what to do for better mental and physical health. Some exercises do not go well with the body because of the body structure, past injuries, or ongoing health issues. But here are 5 yogasnas that are recommended and are equally beneficial for everyone. You can do it during office hours and 2 of them are recommended as for starting your day.



Tadasana: The most common asana for a healthy spine is the tadasana iust be barefoot and balance vour body weight on both leas equally, join the feet together and lock your fingers together, and stretch up lengthening your spine, come on your feet. lift your heels and hold the position. Keep breathing and after a while slowly come down, relax your feet and hand by the side. Repeat 2-3 times

People with shoulder iniuries can just lift the shoulder without raising hands and elderly people can also do it while sitting on a chair.

Yogic breathing: The most

breathing. Sit in an upright

Start breathing in slowly,

effective way to increase prana or

vital life force is the pranayamas,

simple yet effective and soothing

position, relax yourself, and relax

your body, place one hand on your

chest and the other on your navel.

expanding your chest and stomach

slowly, don't rush it and when you

Do not hold your breath and do

reach full capacity, even more

slowly release the breath slowly

contracting your abdomen and

chest. Repeat 3-5 times.

not rush, the slower the

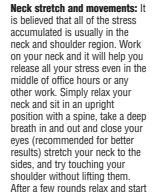
breathing process the

The author is an Art of Living faculty, meditation and mind coach, and professional yoga trainer.

too. It is also known as conscious



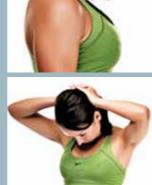
People having knee issues, can try pulling knees towards the chest while sitting on the cushion surface.

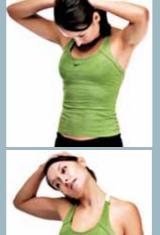


rotating your neck clockwise and anti-clockwise and open your eyes slowly. People suffering from survival do it very gently and not more than two













ating well isn't just about counting calories or following strict diet rules; it's about embracing a balanced lifestyle that fuels your body with nutrient-rich, delicious foods. When we choose fresh, wholesome ingredients, we not only boost our health but also enhance the flavours and textures of our meals.

Whether you're looking to add more plant-based goodness to your plate, experiment with creative ingredient combinations, or simply prepare meals that are both nutritious and satisfying.

From salads packed with fibber and antioxidants to hearty grains and protein-rich legumes, each dish is crafted to bring out the best in natural ingredients while keeping things easy, flavourful, and fulfilling.

These carefully curated recipes prove that healthy food can be just as your favourite comfort meals.

Barley Salad With Chickpeas And Cherries



Ingredients

- 1 cup hulled barley (uncooked)
- 14.5 oz can chickpeas, drained & rinsed 1/2 cup diced celery
- 1/4 cup chopped green onion
- 1 cup pitted & halved cherries • 1/4 cup toasted slivered almonds

2 oz crumbled goat cheese Dressing:

- 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice 1 tbsp white balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp grape seed oil
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1/2 tsp kosher salt 1/8 tsp black pepper



Serve immediately or chill for up to

toss with the salad.

Note: Add cherries and almonds just before serving to maintain

· Cook barley in salted boiling water

(3 cups) for 45-60 mins until

chewy. Drain, rinse, and cool.

Mix barley with chickpeas, celery,

green onion, and almonds.

· Whisk dressing ingredients and

· Gently fold in cherries and goat

texture and prevent discoloration.

Chilean Cherry, Wild Rice, and Quinoa Salad



Ingredients

- 3/4 cup wild rice
- 1/2 cup quinoa
- 2 cups fresh Chilean cherries, pitted & halved 2 celery stalks, diced
- 3/4 cup smoked Gouda cheese, diced
- 1/2 cup toasted, chopped pecans Vinaigrette: 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup fruity vinegar (raspberry or strawberry)
- 1 tsp Diion mustard 3/4 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground pepper

Directions

- Cook wild rice in boiling water for 30 mins, add quinoa, and cook 15
- mins more. Drain, rinse, and cool. Toast pecans in the oven at 350 F
- for 8 mins or in a skillet until fragrant, Cool and chop.
- Whisk vinaigrette ingredients in a large bowl.
- Toss rice, quinoa, cherries, celery, Gouda, and pecans with the vinaigrette
- Serve at room temperature or chilled



POWER OF SELF-CARE

nelf-care is often neglected yet the most important part that defines your overall health. Authentic selfcare fits with your needs, values, and lifestyle. Self-care need not be copied such as using gratitude journaling, bubble baths, etc., rather it should be something that aligns with your body and mind and nourishes your soul. **Importance of self-care:** To be honest, as a

psychiatrist, I have felt that self-care is a biological necessity as it has a direct relation to improving mental and physical **Stress reduction:** - When a person stays

in persistent stress, the body's cortisol levels rise, leading to poor sleep quality and anxiety too. But to alleviate stress, it's best to practice self-care activities such as deep breathing, mindfulness practices, exercise, etc. These activities are responsible for activating the

parasympathetic nervous system. Boosting up emotional health: The activities that are guided towards self-care are responsible for releasing the 'feel good

neurotransmitters namely dopamine and serotonin. They, in turn, improve the mood and relieve the symptoms of anxiety and depression. So working on you is an excellent approach to improve the quality of life and gain emotional regulation.

 Improvising physical health: Self-care activities are inclusive of a good quality night sleep, consuming a well-balanced diet, and engaging in regular physical exercise. They lay the foundation for a healthy mind and body.

Better decision making: When your mental health stays sound, it creates an opportunity to develop a recharged brain that is efficient in problem-solving and is more focused on chores.

Authentic self-care isn't about perfection or following trends, it's about tuning into yourself and making intentional choices that enhance your well-being.



Identification of needs: Think about the self-care

activity that you need the most and aligns with your lifestyle, values, and thoughts. You may need it in physical form such as exercise or sleep, emotional form such as therapy or journaling, social form such as connecting with friends, and spiritual form like prayer,

nature therapy, etc. Wise choice - After identification of your alignment with your personality. For instanceyou may prefer solitude or social gatherings as per your nature. **Building a routine:** After choosing the activity

that you are interested in, plan a simple yet flexible schedule that is easy to follow. Begin by practicing 1-2 habits and try to fix them in your current routine.

Tracking progress: Keep a record of your selfcare activities and also reflect on your feelings post accomplishing them.

—Inputs by Dr Ashish Bansal, MD, Consultant Psychiatrist & co-founder of House of Aesthetics

Real Madrid vs Atletico Madrid ends in 1-1 draw

ylian Mbappé scored in his first capital derby against Atletico Madrid as Real Madrid fought back for a 1-1 draw and kept its slim lead of the

Spanish league on Saturday.

Next up for Mbappé and Madrid is a trip to Manchester City on Tuesday for the first leg of their Champions League knockout round playoff.

Julián Álvarez put Atletico ahead from the penalty spot in the 35th minute. Mbappé equalised in the 50th for the hosts, which stayed one point ahead of Atletico in the

standings.
Jude Bellingham hit the crossbar with a header as Madrid searched for a second goal. Atletico goalkeeper Jan Olbak made saves to deny Rodrygo, Vinícius Júnior and Mbappé to split the points at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"We knew how to hang in there and had our chances," Álvarez said. "We are in the fight and will stay in it right to the end."

Atletico, which spent big last summer to acquire Álvarez and other reinforcements, is trying to add to league titles in 2021 and 2014 under coach Diego Simeone.

Barcelona, in third place, is five points behind Madrid before visiting Sevilla on Sunday.

Mbappé had missed the first Atletico derby of the season, a 1-1 draw in September, because of

First half to Atletico

A spate of injuries left Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti relying on a makeshift backline of Lucas Vázquez, regular midfielder Aurélien Tchouaméni, youth player Raul Asencio, and Fran García.

A reckless stretch of his boot by Tchouaméni that ended up tripping Samuel Lino was spotted by a video review referee and sent Álvarez to the penalty spot. The former Man City striker

gently stroked his penalty down the middle as Thibaut Courtois dived to his left.

Antoine Griezmann showed again his great value to Atletico with precision passing even under duress. The French under duress. The French midfielder twice placed perfectly weighted balls that left Álvarez and Lino in good position to get off shots inside the area, but clumsy touches by both ruined the opportunities. "It is a draw that leaves both

teams thinking they could have



gotten a better result," Simeone said. "We had some situations that we lacked the clarity we needed to resolve better."

when he dribbled past Javi Galan and Lino on the right side and slipped a ball to Bellingham in the heart of the box. Bellingham's Second half to Real scuffed shot hit a defender and Rodrygo sparked the Madrid fell to Mbappé to rifle home for comeback just after halftime scuffed shot hit a defender and fell to Mbappé to rifle home for searching for a second goal with his first goal against Atletico. Atletico rattled. Vinícius dribbled

Mbappé had missed the first Atletico derby of the season, a 1-1 draw in September, because of injury.

poured

end," Ancelotti said. Changes for Man City Ancelotti hinted that he will make

on three occasions.

woodwork

changes to his starting 11 for City, most likely in midfield since he has few options in defense other than including Ferland Mendy, and will find it hard to touch his attack. That means that Dani Ceballos could likely make way for Eduardo Camavinga or Luka Modric. Former Madrid defender Marcelo was honored before kickoff after he announced his retirement this week.

the ball for Bellingham, who smashed a header off the

Simeone changed both his full

backs with Reinildo and Nahuel Molina in the 63rd, but Oblak still

had to come to Atletico's rescue

"It is going to be a tightly contested league until the very

Sancet hat trick

Oihan Sancet scored a hat trick to lead fourth-placed Athletic Bilbao's 3-0 rout of Girona as the Basque club moved to within one point of Barcelona.

Ernesto Valverde's Athletic, which only fields players from or near the Basque Country region a second of northern Spain, hasn't lost in cancer.

14 consecutive rounds, dating back to a defeat at Girona on October 6.

Antony scores but Celta wins Antony scored his first goal since

joining Real Betis on loan from Manchester United, but Celta Vigo rallied from two goals down to earn a thrilling 3-2 comeback victory.

Antony deftly curled in a shot from inside the box to put Betis ahead before Diego Llorente headed in a second goal in the

Betis twice hit the woodwork before Fran Beltran started Celta's fightback with a powerful strike from outside the area in the 63rd. Javi Rodríguez scrambled in the equalizer before Williot Swedberg got the 87th-minute winner. Support for Kirian

Alejandro Baena and Ayoze Pérez scored in Villarreal's 2-1 win at Las Palmas.

The teams stopped playing momentarily in the 20th minute to join the fans in applauding Kirian Rodríguez, who wears No. 20, in a show of support for the Las Palmas midfielder. Rodríguez announced this week that he will be stepping away from soccer for a second time to treat recurring

SRI LANKA CHAMPIONS

Australia secures first test series win in Sri Lanka in 14 years

PTI ■ GALLE

Australia wrapped up a comprehensive 2-0 series victory over Sri Lanka, sealing the second test with a commanding nine-wicket win in Galle on Sunday.

Top order batter Marnus Labuschagne flicked a delivery from retiring Sri Lankan player Dimuth Karunaratne to mid-wicket to complete the triumph, just 15 minutes before lunch on the fourth day. It's Australia's first test series win on Sri Lankan soil since

Their last success here came under Ricky Ponting's captaincy, a 1-0 victory in 2011. However, they suffered a 3-0 whitewash in 2016 under Steve Smith's leadership, and the 2022 series ended in a 1-1 draw. This time, with Smith standing in as captain for Pat Cummins, the victory was a welcome redemption.

"I thought it was a real good series and we played well from the outset," said Australia captain Steve Smith, who was named Player of the Series after his consecutive hundreds. "Everyone had their methods and stuck to it over a long period of time and to score that many runs was great.

"All our spinners and lone quick Mitchell Starc did quite well. Been a great series win." Australia approached the

with planning — including a training camp in Dubai — and executed their strategies with precision.

Their batters laid the foundation with big hundreds, allowing the bowlers to dictate terms with attacking fields. Meanwhile, the spinners remarkable displayed discipline and variety, putting relentless pressure on Sri Lanka and paved the way for a resounding 2-0 series win.

early, winning the first test by Lanka's heaviest ever test defeat. They remained clinical in the second match, ensuring there was no way back for the

Hosts unable to set a testing

Sri Lanka resumed Sunday on 211-8, holding a slender lead of just 54 runs, with much riding on vice-captain Kusal Mendis, who had remained unbeaten overnight.

Mendis brought up his second half-century in the game by guiding Nathan Lyon to deep cover but perished in the same over, caught at short square leg by Steve Smith.

The dismissal was a milestone moment - Smith's 200th Test catch, a feat previously achieved by only four players: Jacques Kallis, Mahela Jacques Kallis, Mahela Jayawardene, Rahul Dravid,

meticulous and Joe Root.

Beau Webster wrapped up the innings soon after, leaving Australia with a modest target of 75 runs.

Sri Lanka briefly found hope when Prabath Jayasuriya removed Travis Head (20) early, caught behind. However, Usman Khawaja (27 not out) and Marnus Labuschagne (26 not out) calmly guided the visitors home with an unbroken 37-run stand.

Alex Carey was named Man of The tourists had set the tone the Match for his outstanding 156 and four dismissals behind the stumps. His innings stand as the highest score by an Australian wicketkeeper in

> This victory marks Australia's fourth consecutive test win, having also won the final two matches of its recent 3-1 home series against India. It plays South Africa in the final of the World Test Championship at Lords in June.

Karunaratne farewell

Sri Lanka slumped to its fourth straight defeat and marked a disappointing end for 36-yearold opener Karunaratne in his 100th and final test.

Very emotional day for me. It has been a long career," said Karunratne who scored 7,222 runs at 39.25 with 16 centuries. 'When I started my cricket, I Just wanted to play one test match. To go onto play 100 Tests was amazing.

question mark about their

bowling attack. Who will

accompany Matt Henry? Will

MI Cape Town wins maiden SA20 title

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

 $P_{\text{Rabada}}^{\text{ace spearhead}} \text{ Kagiso } \\ \text{Rabada produced an } \\ \text{inspired bowling performance}$ to lead MI Cape Town to their maiden SA20 title with a comfortable 76 runs win over two-time champions Sunrisers Eastern Cape in the final at the Wanderers here. After finishing last in the

previous two seasons, the Rashid Khan-led MI Cape Town hardly put any foot wrong in the third season. Rabada on Saturday night claimed 4/25 in 3.4 overs to dismiss Sunrisers Eastern Cape for just 105 in response to MI Cape Town's 181 for 8 – the second-highest score in a

SA20 final. Rabada was ably supported by player-of-the-match Trent Boult, who took two wickets for just nine runs from his four overs, spin twins George Linde (2/20) and skipper Rashid (1/19).

Chasing 182, the Aiden Markram-led Sunrisers, which had registered consecutive



wins over Joburg Super Kings and Paarl Royals in the last two matches, could not maintain the momentum and except Tom Abell and Tony de Zorzi, no other batter could live upto the expectations. Leg-spinner Rashid, who had

surprised the cricket world by leading Afghanistan to the semifinals of the T20 World Cup last year, has added another feather in his already illustrious career.

Earlier, in the same tournament, he became the highest wicket-taker in the High on confidence after five wins on the trot before the final, MI Cape Town won the toss and chose to bat. In-form Ryan Rickelton (33 off

15; 1x4, 4x6s) and Rassie van der Dussen (23 off 25; 2x6s) showed their intent from the onset, giving an aggressive start to MI Cape Town's innings.

Craig Overton bowled an economical first over in which only three runs came but in the second over Rickelton smashed sixes over deep third man and fine-leg besides a straight four over Marco Jansen's head.

Overton too was not spared as Van der Dussen hit a six over square leg while Rickelton continued his attacking game against Jansen by hitting two brilliant sixes in the fourth

But MI Cape Town suffered consecutive blows which gave Sunrisers a chance to make a comeback in the game. Rickelton was the first to

depart, deceived by a slower ball from Overton and Liam Gleeson took a fine catch. In the very next over, Liam Dawson dismissed Reeza

Hendricks, who failed to open his account. MI scored 52 runs for the loss

of two wickets in the Powerplay. The wickets stemmed the flow

of runs as left-arm wrist spinner Dawson gave only four runs in the seventh over. Van der Dussen looked uncomfortable from the beginning and was the next to depart stumped by Tristan Stubbs off Dawson in the ninth over.

Shuttler Sindhu pulls out of **BAMTC 2025**

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two-time Olympic medallist shuttler PV Sindhu has pulled out of the Badminton Mixed Championships in China due to a hamstring issue, dealing a huge blow to the country's chances of improving the colour of their medal in the prestigious edition.

The tournament is set to be played in Qingdao from February 11-16 with the Indian shuttlers currently undergoing training at a camp in Guwahati. Besides Sindhu, the other leading players in the camp are Lakshya Sen, and HS Prannoy, along with the formidable doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty. Sindhu was a part of the squad that won bronze in the previous edition of the tournament.

share I won't be travelling with the team for BAMTC 2025. While training on the 4th (February) in Guwahati, I felt a twinge in my hamstring. Despite my efforts to push through with heavy taping for our country, an MRI has take slightly longer than I initially expected," said the 29year-old Sindhu in a post on X. Sindhu has grappled with injuries since winning her maiden women's singles gold medal at the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

"It is with a heavy heart that I

However, the star shuttler sustained a left foot stress fracture injury during the Games, which kept her out of all remaining tournaments in 2022, including the World Championships and the World Tour Finals.

India are placed in a tough Group D alongside runners-up South Korea and Macau. They will begin their campaign against Macau on February 12, which will be followed by a tough outing against South Korea on February 13.

New Zealand beat Pakistan ahead of Champions Trophy Khushdil Shah in the outfield

PTI ■ LAHORE

lenn Phillips warmed up **U**for the Champions Trophy with his first one-day international century as New Zealand beat Pakistan by 78 runs in the opening game of the tri-nation cricket series on Saturday.

Phillips smashed an unbeaten 106 off 74 balls, including six boundaries and seven sixes, at a newly renovated Gaddafi Stadium. The No. 6 batter propelled New Zealand to 330-6 in its 50 overs on a flat wicket with Daryl Mitchell (81) and Kane Williamson (58) also getting the feel of the wickets for the upcoming Champions Trophy with half centuries.

In reply, Fakhar Zaman, playing his first international in more than seven months because of illness, made a belligerent 84 off 69 but the



rest of the top-order batters struggled against spin. Pakistan was bowled out for 252 in 47.5 overs.

Perfect day Phillips capped a perfect day by trapping Zaman leg before wicket with his off-spin and also took a brilliant diving catch to dismiss Babar Azam early in Pakistan's run chase. Babar struggled in his new role as opener in ODIs for the first time since 2015 and scored a painstaking 10 runs off 23

New Zealand captain Mitchell Santner (3-41) clipped the topwhile Bracewell took 2-41.

order with his left-arm spin New Zealand, which is already sweating on the fitness of fast bowler Lockie Ferguson, had another injury scare when the ball hit Rachin Rayindra in the

face as he misjudged a catch of

No. 10 batter Abrar Ahmed hit an unbeaten 25 that included three successive boundaries off Henry. Phillips power

and had to leave the field.

chipped in with 3-55.

Phillips unleashed his power-

hitting against Pakistan's two premier fast bowlers -Shaheen Shah Afridi and Naseem Shah -- in the last five overs that cost the home team 84 runs. Pakistan, which lost the toss, had kept New Zealand in check at 246-5 before Phillips cut loose

against the two pacers. Williamson, playing his first ODI since November 2023, took his time to settle down. He reached the slowest ODI half century of his career in 82 balls before he edged Afridi after sharing a 95-run stand with Mitchell.

After India, New Zealand is one of strongest teams in CT: Ashwin

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Spin great R Ashwin has Called India and New Zealand the strongest sides heading into the Champions Trophy but warned teams against taking Australia lightly despite the loss of key players to injuries as they "bring their A-game" into marquee tournaments.

The ICC event starts in Pakistan on February 19 with India playing all their matches in Dubai under a hybrid model agreement.

"India has the home advantage in Dubai, and it almost like every other team is playing an away match against India. This is a problem for the other teams, for sure," Ashwin said on his Youtube channel

With the long-forgotten triseries making a return after a gap of many years, Ashwin wondered if India should also have played in a triangular tournament instead of a bilateral series

against England for better preparation before Champions Trophy. "Is this preparation with

England enough for the Indian team ahead of CT in Dubai? Should we have played a tri-series too? Pakistan, New Zealand and South Africa are playing in Pakistan conditions, which would help them in the CT. "India only played against England in India, and moreover, we don't have a lot of pleasant memories of playing T20s in Dubai. The toss becomes really crucial in Dubai. I think winning the toss becomes crucial? Ashwin said New Zealand.

despite the absence of the long-serving pace duo of Trent Boult and Tim Southee, who have quit playing the 50-over format, will pose a challenge to India. "After India, New Zealand is one of the strongest teams in the Champions Trophy. Since the likes of Southee and Boult are not playing, there is Mitchell Santner is the

it be Will O-Rourke, who has the potential to be a runaway champion of next generation. Will it be Ben Sears? "They have an experienced spin attack with Michael Bracewell and Glenn Phillips.

captain, how is he planning to marshall his resources. New Zealand is definitely a strong team. They are one of the challengers to India." As far as Australia are concerned, Ashwin observed

that they transform into a

formidable outfit when the

stakes are high in ICC events.

"Steven Smith as captain is a

marriage made in heaven. Smith is going to captain the team in the Champions Trophy. Will Smith, Head, Maxwell and Labuschagne pull through the team to the semis. I always believe that Australia is a champion team that always brings its A-game in marquee tournaments. "Considering Australia have

department, a lot will depend on Smith's form and captaincy." Skipper Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood were on Thursday ruled out of the

a few issues in their bowling

Champions Trophy due to injuries. They are also without Mitchell Marsh, who is grappling with a back injury and was ruled out of the

tournament on January 31, and Marcus Stoinis, who announced on Thursday that he would be retiring from cricket, removing himself from the squad. Ashwin also expressed his excitement at the return of tri-series tournaments after a

gap of many years. Another moment happiness is the return of the tri-series. Yeah, there are bilateral series happening, including the India-England one. But it feels like England

isn't playing serious enough cricket. "In the recent series against perfect curtain raiser for

Pakistan, England's template worked, and the absolutely trampled them. Brooke and Duckett scored heavily. "I don't think the Champions

Trophy in Pakistan will have such pitches. It will be far from easy for bowlers, and England's probably, firepower would be back to shooting blanks in the tournament. The great off-spinner, who

announced his retirement from international cricket during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia, added, "90s kids would definitely understand this fascination for tri-series. "Now, South Africa, New

Zealand, and Pakistan have decided to reignite the interest in the tri-series and organise a tournament. The revival of tri-series tournaments would breathe life into the ODI format that gradually

overlooked. "The tri-series might be a what's in store for these teams at the Champions Trophy. He called South African

captain Temba Bavuma one of the "luckiest" cricketers. South Africa also have ar all-rounder conundrum. Will they play Wiaan Mulder, and can Rabada be the spearhead throughout the tournament? Will Marco Jansen leave an impact in Pakistan?

"South Africa is in the group

of death with England, Afghanistan and Australia.

Will England play like how they did in India, or transform into something else entirely in CT 2025? "South Africa is going to be led by (Temba) Bavuma, who I think is one of the luckiest cricketers. They have qualified for the WTC finals, and have played quite good

"Will Tristan Stubbs be benched? Will Mulder and Jansen play together along

with one of Keshav Maharaj and Shamsi?