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Photo: PTI

## TRUMP AND HIS TRUMPET ENGULF INDIA

PTI/AGENCIES ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump has once again raised USAID's purported \$21-million grant for 'voter turnout' in India, which his administration has purportedly cancelled, and linked it to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Trump, as usual, also questioned why such a significant amount was spent abroad when a similar sum could have been used to boost voter turnout in the US.

"And \$21 million going to my friend, Prime Minister Modi in India, for voter turnout. We are giving 21 million for voter turnout in India. What about us? I want voter turnout too," Trump said at the Governors

Working Session.

"\$29 million to strengthen the political landscape in Bangladesh went to a firm that nobody ever heard of. Got 29 million. They got a check. Can you imagine? You have a little firm, you get 10,000 here, 10,000 there, and then you get 29 million from the United States government. There are two people working in that firm. Two people. I think they're very happy, they're very rich. They'll be on the cover of a very good business magazine pretty soon for being great," he added.

Meanwhile, a federal judge has cleared the way for the Trump administration to pull thousands of US Agency for International Development staffers off the

job.

US District Judge Carl Nichols on Friday removed his temporary block on the effort to remove all but a small fraction of USAID staffers from their posts and give those abroad a 30-day deadline to move back to the US at government expense.

His ruling comes in a lawsuit filed by unions on behalf of workers. They say the rush to dismantle the agency had cut off some staffers overseas from emergency communications systems, including some in danger of political violence in Congo.

Nichols found that the unions' challenge must be dealt with under federal employment laws rather than in district court.

## BJP, Congress slugfest over USAID

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trump Administration raising the issue of USAID funding has created massive political ramifications, allegations and counter allegations amongst the Centre, ruling party BJP and Opposition Congress.

Trump's remark has evoked a sharp response from the Congress which urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to "talk to his friend" and strongly refute the allegation. The Opposition party has demanded a white paper on the funds received in India from developmental agencies, aid mechanisms and multilateral forums.

Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar called the accusations "worrisome" and said that "if there's something to it, then the country should know who the people are involved in it."

BJP IT Cell Chief Amit Malviya shared Trump's remarks in a social media post on X and took a swipe at the Opposition which later posted the complete statement of Trump where he called Modi his friend.

"For the third day in a row, US President Donald Trump reiterates his claim about USAID funding efforts to promote voter turnout in India. He says, 'We're giving \$21 million for voter turnout in India. What about us? I want voter turnout too. But what does he know about his own country's spending,'" Malviya said.

Malviya faced wrath of Congress Media and Publicity Head Pawan Khera who said perhaps Malviya erred in sharing the video of Trump



The Congress has demanded a white paper on the USAID funding in India

who has clearly named PM Modi yet he tries to defend and implicate Congress aimlessly.

Congress also sought legal action against the RSS-BJP and "their ecosystem" for making wild allegations against credible civil society members, NGOs and political parties.

Jaishankar on Saturday for the first time spoke about the allegations levied by former US President Donald Trump against USAID's \$21 million funding for 'voter turnout' in India.

While speaking at the Delhi University Literature Festival, EAM Jaishankar said, "Some information has been put out there by the Trump administration people, and obviously, that is concerning... I think, as a government, we're looking into it. My sense is that the facts will come out... USAID was allowed here in good faith, to do good faith activities; now, suggestions are being laid out from America that there are activities which are in bad faith. It's worrisome, and if

there's something to it, then the country should know who the people are involved in it."

Khera said the Modi government, its ministers, its economic advisor, BJP's IT department head, its ecosystem and "one-fourth media," which acts as cheerleaders for the BJP are desperately tying themselves in knots to somehow prove their allegation of 'deep state' and 'foreign intervention' with regards to 'USD 21 million USAID funds narrative'.

"The white paper should not only focus on USAID funding, but all such agencies which fund both governments, individuals and all other entities under Indian law," Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera told a press conference.

Khera pointed at "three significant developments," including Trump's remark about "my friend Prime Minister Modi."

"More Indian news media outlets have fact-checked the claim by BJP and Modi

government's minister as untrue. Funds went to Bangladesh, not India; although India received USAID funds, but not for increasing voter turnout," he said.

Now, an American newspaper, Washington Post, has come up with a fact check and "found no evidence that USD 21 million was due to be spent for voter turnout in India or for any other purpose," even as the MEA spokesperson called this "very deeply troubling" and announced that "relevant departments and agencies are looking into this matter," he said.

Khera alleged that the RSS-BJP and its ilk are "habitual offenders" in two aspects - crafting fake narratives and propagating lies and seeking external assistance to destabilise the Indian state, democracy and the Constitution.

Khera alleged that there is no record of a Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) programme matching US government's description in India.

CEPPS did have a USD 21 million USAID contract - not for India, but for neighboring Bangladesh, he said.

"During 2012, the Anna Hazare movement was at its peak, Arvind Kejriwal was forming his own party, Chief Minister Narendra Modi was gearing to be BJP's PM candidate. So, who benefitted from these funds? Who got 282 seats in Lok Sabha? The remaining amount started pouring in between US FY2020 and US FY2024," Khera said.

## Need new legal framework on OTT platforms: I&B

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry is examining the existing statutory provisions and the need for a new legal framework to regulate "harmful" content amid complaints of "obscenity and violence" being shown on digital platforms.

In its reply to a parliamentary panel, the ministry said there is a growing concern in the society that the constitutional right of "freedom of expression is being misused to showcase obscene and violent content on digital platforms".

It told the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey that while certain provisions exist under the current laws, there is a growing demand for a stricter and effective legal framework to regulate such harmful content. "This ministry has taken note of these developments and is in process of examining current statutory provisions and need for a new legal framework," it said.

The ministry said that many high courts and the Supreme Court, MPs and statutory bodies like the National Commission of Women have spoken on the issue.

## WEATHER

|     |              |
|-----|--------------|
| AQI | 158          |
| MAX | 26.6°C(+1.1) |
| MIN | 12.3°C(+0.5) |

## Flight turbulence: Shivraj Singh Chouhan vs Air India

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has sought a response from Air India, its pilot, and crew regarding the incident involving Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who slammed the airline after he was allotted a broken seat during his flight A1436 during his journey from Bhopal to Delhi.

He expressed disappointment that the airline had not improved its management and how his expectations turned out to be misconception. "Isn't this cheating the passengers?" Chouhan asked.

The DGCA has asked for a reply within a day. Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu has spoken to Chouhan regarding his "uncomfortable" flight experience with Air India



Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses during the inauguration of Pusa Krishi Vigyan Mela PTI

and assured him of prompt action. He expressed disappointment that the airline had not improved its management and how his expectations turned out to be misconception. "Isn't this cheating the passengers?" Chouhan asked.

The airline has apologised for the "inconvenience" caused to the Minister and said it was looking into the matter.

## Punjab minister ran ghost department for 21 months

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

In a bizarre political development within 10 days after the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) poll defeat in the Delhi Assembly Elections 2025, senior party leader and Punjab Cabinet Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal has been found running a department that never existed for 21 months.

This came into light after a gazette notification was issued by the chief secretary of the state saying that the department allotted to Dhaliwal was "not in existence".

The opposition BJP missed no opportunity to take a jibe at the AAP government in Punjab and sarcastically termed the move a "Kejriwal Model".

"In partial modification of the previous Punjab Government notification No 2/1/2022-2Cabinet/2230 dated 23.09.2024, regarding the allocation of portfolios, among ministers, the Department of Administrative Reforms earlier allotted to Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal is not in existence as on date. Therefore, on the advice of the Chief Minister, the Governor of Punjab is pleased to make the amendment wef 07-02-2025," the notification read.



Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann with minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal

With this amendment, Dhaliwal is now left with only the NRI Affairs department. The amendment was done on February 7 on the order of Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. Dhaliwal had earlier been stripped of the Agriculture and Rural Development departments in May 2023 and was instead given Administrative Reforms Department.

## Organisers leave brides in lurch at event

PTI ■ RAJKOT

For more than 50 prospective brides and grooms, a mass wedding ceremony in Rajkot was going to be etched in lifelong memories, instead, their emotions swung from hope to despair and finally into anger after the unscrupulous organisers gave the event a

miss.

Moved by the plight of the marriage hopefuls, police took the initiative to make arrangements for marrying off at least six couples on the spot on Saturday, officials said.

When the families of 28 pairs of brides and bridegrooms arrived at the venue, they were shocked to

find that no arrangement was made for the function and organisers were missing with their mobile phones switched off, said Assistant Commissioner of Police Radhika Bharai.

The families, who came from different parts of Rajkot and other districts, created a ruckus, prompting the police to intervene.

## First session of new Delhi Assembly to begin Monday

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Sunday convened a meeting of newly elected MLAs on Sunday, ahead of the first session of the eighth Legislative Assembly of Delhi, beginning from Monday with newly elected members taking oath at 11 am.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has appointed senior BJP leader and MLA from Gandhi Nagar Arvinder Singh Lovely as the pro-tem Speaker of the Delhi Assembly to chair the proceedings during the first sitting of the legislature on Monday. The appointment came ahead of the first sitting of the new 70-member Assembly that will take place on February 24.

According to a list by the Delhi Assembly, the three-day session will see the election of the House, Speaker and Deputy Speaker as well as the tabling of the 14 pending CAG reports on the performance of the previous AAP government.

"The oath/affirmation of the newly elected members will take place at 11 am on February 24. The election of the Speaker will be held at 2 pm. Four-time MLA Arvinder Singh will perform the duties of the Office of the Speaker till the new Speaker is elected. The new members of the House will take oath before the pro-tem speaker," according to the bulletin.

Senior BJP MLA and former Delhi BJP president Vijender Gupta will be the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta during a meeting PTI

Delhi Assembly Speaker and Mohan Singh Bisht will be his deputy.

According to the business list, LG Saxena will address the assembly on February 25, after which the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports will be tabled. Later in the day, the assembly will be open for motion of thanks on LG's address.

On February 26, the discussion on the motion of thanks on LG's address will commence at 11:00 am, after which the Deputy Speaker of the Delhi assembly will be elected.

"Being the first sitting of the Eighth

Legislative Assembly of NCT of Delhi constituted after the General Election held in February in 2025, the Members shall observe two minutes silence to mark the solemnity of the occasion. First, Chief Minister & other Ministers shall make or subscribe to oath or affirmation and thereafter other Hon'ble Members, constituency wise, shall make or subscribe to oath or affirmation.

"Notice of motion for the election of the speaker can be given up to Saturday, February 22, before noon to the secretary, legislative assembly," the bulletin read.

## 'Probing all angles in IRS officer death'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOCHI/RANCHI

The Kerala Police on Saturday said it is probing various angles regarding the mysterious deaths of an IRS officer and his kin here and has intensified the investigation, days after the Customs official and his sister were found hanging inside their house here while their mother's body was also found there.

One of the victims, Shalini Vijay who was summoned by a court in a CBI case earlier, was a state government officer in Jharkhand. A personnel department official in Ranchi said there was no information about her since 2020 after she went to Kerala on vacation.

The deceased have been identified as Maneesh Vijay (43), an IRS officer and additional commissioner with Central Excise and Customs in Kochi, his sister Shalini Vijay, and their mother, Shakuntala Agarwal.

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# Parvesh Verma inspects ongoing projects, emphasises quality construction

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi PWD minister Parvesh Singh Verma, on his second day after taking the charge of the department, took stock of ongoing projects and inspected the Barapullah Phase-3 project in southeast Delhi's Sarai Kale Khan and Bharatmandapam. During his visit, Verma reviewed the construction progress on the Bhairo Marg-Sarai Kale Khan stretch and the Barapullah Phase-3 flyover, the statement read. He directed officials to ensure the timely completion of these projects to ease traffic congestion and improve connectivity, it stated. Emphasising the need for quality construction, Verma said, "The roads should last for at least 10 — 15 years, even though their official lifespan is five years. The quality should be such that they remain in good

condition for a long time." He also inspected the Moolchand underpass, which has been prone to severe waterlogging during the monsoon. To address this issue, he reviewed the ongoing installation of advanced Japanese pumps aimed at improving drainage and preventing flooding, it read. "There are several areas in Delhi that experience waterlogging during the monsoon, and Moolchand underpass is one of them. I have instructed officials to take all necessary measures before the rainy season to prevent water accumulation. Proper drainage systems must be in place, and pumps should be installed on time," he said. Verma further emphasised that these initiatives align with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a cleaner, greener, and more developed Delhi. He added, "We are committed to transforming Delhi into a



Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Parvesh Verma with workers during the inspection of the Barapullah elevated road project that connects Mayur Vihar to Sarai Kale Khan in New Delhi

world-class city with better roads, efficient drainage systems, and overall beautification." Verma also asked the contractor not to break any drains, so that the road would not have to be dug up

again. In a post on X, Verma emphasised that smooth traffic flow and essential amenities would be made available to every resident in the area. "It is my priority to complete these projects so

that every individual can have better opportunities for growth and development," he stated. "This journey of development will not stop now. Good road facilities will be provided to the

public soon. This is our commitment to the people of Delhi," Verma wrote on X. BJP MLA Ashish Sood on Saturday took charge as Delhi's Home Minister and held his first official meeting with department officials. The first-time MLA from Janakpuri, Sood is a prominent Punjabi face in Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta's Cabinet. After taking charge of the office, the minister, in a post on X, said, "I have assumed office as the Home Minister of Delhi and conducted my first important meeting with the officials of this department." Discussions during the meeting focused on strengthening law and order in the national capital and improving administrative efficiency, he mentioned. "I will ensure that the Home Department operates with complete transparency and dedication," he added.

## CM Rekha Gupta holds meeting with officers on budget and Mahila Samridhi Yojna

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and her ministers held a meeting with officers on Saturday, discussing budget preparation and the implementation of the Mahila Samridhi Yojna, a poll promise of the BJP to pay ₹2,500 monthly to the city's women. "The officers were instructed to formulate guidelines, including eligibility criterion, and conduct a comparative study of similar schemes launched by other state governments," a source said. At the meeting, the chief minister was given an

overview of the budget of the Delhi government. It was emphasised that money should be spent efficiently for maximum benefit to the people. Other issues like repairing and cleaning roads, flyovers, and a plan to prevent waterlogging during the rainy season were also discussed in the meeting. The opposition AAP has accused the ruling BJP of not passing the Mahila Samridhi Yojna in the first Cabinet meeting. Former chief minister Atishi has also written to Gupta seeking an appointment to meet her alongside AAP MLAs on the issue.

## Akbar and Humayun Road signboards vandalised with Shivaji posters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an act of vandalism, signboards on Akbar Road and Humayun Road were blackened and posters of Chhatrapati Shivaji were pasted over them. Police sources revealed that the incident occurred after a group of individuals watched the Vicky Kaushal-starring film Chhava, a period drama based on Maratha warrior king Chhatrapati Sambhaji. Many purported videos of the act surfaced on different social media platforms, showing some youth applying black spray on the signboards and pasting pictures of Maratha Empire founder Shivaji Sambhaji, Shivaji's son, was the second king of the empire. The sources said police teams and civic officials were immediately sent to the spot and the defaced boards were cleaned.

## Atishi seeks meeting with Delhi CM over BJP's unfulfilled promise to women

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP leader and former Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Saturday wrote a letter to her, questioning the BJP government's failure to pass a promised financial assistance scheme for women in its first cabinet meeting on Thursday. In her letter, Atishi sought time to meet Gupta along with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Legislature Party on Sunday to discuss the implementation of the scheme that would provide ₹2,500 per month to women in Delhi. The BJP had promised to roll out the scheme once it assumes power. First of all, heartfelt congratulations to you on assuming the charge of the post of Chief Minister of Delhi," Atishi's letter reads. "Bharatiya Janata Party leader and Prime Minister of the country, Shri Narendra Modi ji, had promised the mothers and sisters of Delhi in a rally organised on January 31, 2025, during the election campaign that after the formation of the BJP government, a scheme of ₹2,500 per month would be passed for them in the very first cabinet



Former CM Atishi

meeting. He said — this is Modi's guarantee." She further said that the BJP-led Delhi government held its first cabinet meeting on February 20, but the scheme was not passed. "The mothers and sisters of Delhi had believed in Modi ji's guarantee, and now they feel cheated," she added. Atishi urged the Chief Minister to meet with the AAP delegation on Sunday to address their concerns and take concrete action on the scheme. Atishi, who won from the Kalkaji

assembly constituency by beating the BJP's Ramesh Bidhuri in the Delhi elections, criticised the ruling party for failing to deliver on its electoral promises at a press conference yesterday as well. She said that before the Delhi elections, both Prime Minister Modi and BJP national president JP Nadda had assured that the scheme would be approved in the first cabinet meeting and that every eligible woman would receive ₹2,500 in her bank account by March 8.

## Delhi Health Minister orders hospital deficiencies to be addressed soon

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Singh, accompanied by BJP MP Kamaljeet Sehrawat, inspected Rao Tula Ram Memorial Hospital on Saturday. According to a press statement issued by the Delhi government, during the inspection, a lot of deficiencies were found in the hospital, for which the Health Minister directed the officials to rectify all the deficiencies within three months. He also directed to construct the new block building of Rao Tula Ram Hospital soon. On this occasion, they met people undergoing treatment in various wards and OPDs of the hospital. Singh talked about the facilities along with the treatment and got information about the system. Along with this, instructions were given to focus on good treatment to the patients in the hospital. The Health Minister directed that the patients coming for treatment should get quality treatment. He also directed to further improve the



Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Singh

cleanliness in the hospital. Singh reviewed the arrangements for various wards. He wanted to know the reality of the claims being made by the hospital management. He said that health is a priority area for the government. Therefore, any kind of negligence will not be tolerated in providing health facilities to the people. "Thousands of patients from Delhi come to Rao Tula Ram

depth information about medicine from the doctors and staff of the hospital. He said that the Delhi government will continuously work towards providing quality health services to all the people of Delhi. Speaking about Mohalla Clinics, Singh said that a detailed report on their conditions will soon be released to ensure transparency in their functioning. "Once I have the report, I will answer all questions regarding the clinics. Without official documents, I cannot make any claims. The report will reveal the actual condition of these clinics and uncover any irregularities in their operation," he said. BJP MP Kamaljeet Sehrawat said she has directed to purchase an ambulance for the hospital soon from the MP fund. She said that discussions were held with the hospital management and doctors today and added that all necessary steps would be taken to provide all necessary resources at Rao Tula Ram Hospital. Hospital for treatment. In such a situation, instructions have been given to make additional arrangements to manage the crowd so that patients and their families do not suffer for getting quality treatment. Apart from this, the hospital administration has been directed to remove the clutter of the hospital and make it a better hospital," read the statement. The Health Minister took in-

## Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan urges DU to become world's knowledge hub

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday urged Delhi University students to take a pledge to make the national capital the knowledge hub of the world as he awarded degrees to them at the 101st convocation ceremony of the institute. Emphasising the Delhi University's (DU's) role in shaping India's intellectual and professional landscape, he remarked it is not just a university but a miniature representation of India with around seven lakh students, including from 85 countries, enrolled in direct and open learning modes. Pradhan, the chief guest of the event, highlighted DU's legacy by mentioning eminent alumni such as former finance minister Arun Jaitley and newly elected Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. He stressed the importance

of social skills and practices that students gain at DU and underscored the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as a roadmap for India's global academic growth. The Union education minister acknowledged DU's pioneering role in implementing NEP and urged the institution to lead the mission of making India a developed nation by 2047. Expressing optimism about DU's expansion, Pradhan noted that in addition to its northern and southern campuses, eastern and western campuses are also being established under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh. During the event, the education minister awarded degrees to 1,66,494 students digitally and personally presented medals to 10 outstanding students. Presiding over the convocation, Vice Chancellor Singh encouraged students to embrace perseverance and

stated that hard work makes even the impossible achievable. Presenting DU's 102-year journey, he underscored the university's commitment to excellence and its responsibility in shaping future leaders. The V-C advised students to balance personal ambitions with national interests and reminded them that deep-rooted values ensure long-term success. He also emphasized the importance of passion in teaching, urging educators to find joy in their profession. According to the statement, a total of 623 students, including 316 males and 307 females, received PhD degrees at the convocation. Additionally, 83,902 students, comprising regular and Non-Collegiate Women's Education Board students, were awarded degrees. Furthermore, 82,592 students from the School of Open Learning (SOL) received degrees.

## AAP's Gopal Rai announces restructuring of party organisations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior AAP leader and Delhi unit convener Gopal Rai held a crucial meeting at the party headquarters on Saturday with state office bearers of all frontal organisations. Rai announced that the party has decided to restructure and strengthen these organisations. "To assess their role in the Lok Sabha, district, assembly, and ward-level campaigns, an audit of all office bearers will be conducted and completed within a week. During the meeting, leaders also discussed key factors behind AAP's victories and losses in various constituencies," he said. The meeting was attended by Purvanchal Wing President Akhilesh Pati Tripathi, Youth Wing President Pankaj Gupta, Legal Cell President Sanjeev Nasir, Sanatan Wing State In-charge Ghanendra Bhardwaj, President Vijay Sharma, Auto Wing President Haider Ali, and OBC Wing President Ravinder Balyan,

along with other state office bearers. State Organisation Ministers Yashpal Singh, Kamal Chaudhary, Ajay Rajput, and Suyogya Rajbela were also present. State Vice President Rituraj Jha also attended the meeting. After the meeting, Rai shared details saying representatives of all frontal organisations of the party including the Purvanchal Wing, Auto Wing, Women's Wing, Youth Organization, Rural Wing, Lawyers' Organisation, RWAs, and Minority Wing, were present. He further added that all state-level office bearers have been instructed to conduct an audit of the role played by different functionaries in the election within the next week. This includes Lok Sabha-level officials, district-level officials, assembly-level officials, ward-level officials, and members of frontal organisations. "The party will evaluate their contributions, just as we have initiated the restructuring

process of the main wing. Similarly, a restructuring of all our wings will be undertaken to strengthen our presence in areas where we had strong support and to address communication gaps wherever they existed," he added. The AAP leader said, "Each wing will be responsible for ensuring that the newly elected government fulfills the promises made in its manifesto. Just as our legislative party will raise these issues in the assembly, our wings will highlight these concerns within their respective communities. Whether in the assembly or among the people, the AAP will play the role of a strong and constructive opposition." Regarding the appointment of the Leader of the Opposition, Gopal Rai said, "The government has just taken the oath, and MLAs will be sworn in on the 24th, February. After this, we will finalize the Leader of the Opposition".



Delhi Police arrested three members following an encounter in Rohini

## Delhi police arrests three Bhai Gang members after encounter in Rohini

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police arrested three members of Portugal-based gangster Himanshu Bhai following an encounter in Rohini's Begumpur area in the early hours of Saturday. According to police, the arrested people identified as Atul, Rohit, and Prince were travelling on a motorcycle when they were spotted near Prem Adhe Road in Begumpur. With these arrests and a subsequent seizure of illegal firearms from the accused, possible targeted killings were averted in Delhi and Haryana, police said. A tip-off was received on Friday that the three gangsters were on their way to Bawana on a motorcycle with the intention of shooting someone. A police team was immediately formed and a trap set up near the Prem Adhe Road at Rohini's Deep Vihar, the official said. At around 10:30 pm, police intercepted a motorcycle carrying the three accused. When asked to stop, the criminals attempted to flee but lost control of the two-

wheeler. One of them opened fire at the police team, hitting the bulletproof jacket of a head constable. Police returned fire in self-defence, injuring the shooter in the leg, while the other two suspects were overpowered and arrested. A semi-automatic pistol, two country-made pistols, five live cartridges and the motorcycle were seized from the accused. The arrested men have a history of violent crimes, including murder, extortion and armed robbery. Atul was previously involved in seven criminal cases, including murder, extortion and for Arms Act violations. He had also made extortion calls to a politician from Bawana while in jail. Rohit, a former Indian Army soldier who took to crime subsequently, was involved in six cases of murder, robbery and theft. Prince, the youngest of the three, was influenced by Atul to join the gang, police said. "An FIR has been registered and further investigation is underway," Additional Commissioner of Police Sanjay Bhatia said.

## Delhi celebrates spring with 'Palaash 2025' flower festival

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To celebrate the onset of spring, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Saturday inaugurated the two-day 'Palaash' flower festival, organised by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). He urged residents to visit District Park, Sector 16, Dwarka Golf Course Road, and later Smriti Van in Mayur Vihar Phase-III from February 28 to March 2. The festival, celebrating the beauty of spring, features a vibrant display of flowers and plants, aiming to enhance Delhi's green cover and floral charm. The first phase of the



Palaash flower festival at Dwarka

Palaash festival is being celebrated at Dwarka on February 22 and 23 while the second phase will be organized on February 28, March 1 and 2 at Smriti Van Mayur Vihar Phase III. "Inaugurated the two-day Palaash 2025, DDA's vibrant Flower Festival at Dwarka, which celebrates the beauty of spring in Delhi with a stunning array of flowers and plants," Saxena said in a post on X. "This enchanting event unites nature, culture, and joy, marking Delhi's journey toward becoming a City of Flowers. I encourage everyone to visit District Park, Sector 16, Dwarka Golf Course Road, and later at

Smriti Van, Kondli Gharoli, Mayur Vihar Phase-III from Feb 28 to March 2, 2025, to experience this floral spectacle. Explore diverse displays, purchase Tulip bulbs to cultivate your own garden, and enjoy delicious treats from various food stalls. Don't miss this opportunity to connect with nature and celebrate the love for flowers!" LG said in the post on X. The festival offers a chance to explore diverse floral displays, purchase tulip bulbs and enjoy food stalls. Saxena appreciated the efforts of the DDA in organizing the festival on such a grand scale. He said that government would work in a mission

mode to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the national capital. Saxena said apart from creating recreational public greens like Baansera, Asita and YanumaVatika, massive plantation of Tulips across the capital added significantly to the aesthetics of the city while also receiving huge appreciation and applause from the people. DDA has been organizing flower festivals every year since 2023 over its Green spaces. However, this year, the grandeur of the event can be experienced by the public for five days over two weekends at Dwarka and Mayur Vihar respectively.

# C'garh Cabinet approves budget draft

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Cabinet on Saturday approved the draft of the state budget for the fiscal year 2025-26, to be presented in the State Legislative Assembly in the budget session starting from Monday.

It also approved the draft of Chhattisgarh Appropriation Bill-2025 for the presentation of the third supplementary estimates for financial year 2024-25.

A senior government official briefing the cabinet decisions said, the cabinet also decided to ensure availability of new and high-quality seeds for the farmers.

It has decided to expand the list of institutions exempted under Rule 4 of



Chhattisgarh State Procurement Rules-2002. As per this decision, the Seed Corporation will first procure seeds from registered seed-

producing farmers in the state. Chhattisgarh Loktantra Senani Samman Bill-2025 was also approved at the Cabinet meeting.

Cabinet also approved the Governor's Speech for the budget session of Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly, scheduled for

**Cabinet also approved the Governor's Speech for the budget session of Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly**

February-March 2025.

Cabinet has granted approval for an additional government guarantee of Rs 3,300 crore to the Chhattisgarh State Marketing Federation for the payment of the remaining dues to farmers for paddy procured at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) during the Kharif Marketing Year 2024-25.

# Final phase of panchayat polls in Chhattisgarh today

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

The third and final phase of three-tier panchayat elections will be held on Sunday in 50 development blocks of Chhattisgarh.

As many as 53,28,371 voters including 26,91,000 women, 26,37,306 men and 65 transgender are eligible to exercise their franchise in the final phase of the panchayat elections.

A total of 76,199 candidates are in the fray for 30,990 panch, 17,191 for 3,802 sarpanch, 4,659 for 1,122 janpad panchayat members and 839 for 145 zila panchayat member posts respectively.

The state election authorities have set up a total of 11,430 polling stations for



the third and final phase of panchayat polls in the state.

The polling will be held in Bastar division between 6.45 am to 2 pm whereas the voting

timing will be 7 am to 3 pm elsewhere in Chhattisgarh.

The counting of votes for phase-three elections will be held on February 25.

# Jail inmates to get Sangam water

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Jail inmates lodged in prisons across Chhattisgarh would be offered Triveni confluence's water with officials bringing in some of the holy water of Sangam to the jails of various cities across the state.

According to officials, five central jails, 20 district jails and 8 sub-jails across the state would be facilitated for this purpose on February 25.

The Sangam Triveni water would be mixed with regular water and stored in small tanks, allowing the inmates to take the sacred bath and offer prayers at the jail itself, the official said. In a statement to the media, Minister for Home and Prisons, Vijay Sharma, said a decision in this regard



was taken keeping in view that there should be a sense of purity and morality in the

inmates. They are also given a chance to associate with this spiritual occasion, he said.

**Five central jails, 20 district jails and 8 sub-jails across the state would be facilitated for this purpose on February 25**

The state government was committed to bring improvement in the lives of jail inmates and to provide them a chance for rehabilitation, he said.

# Congress MLA, 12 others booked

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Saturday booked Congress legislator Devendra Yadav and 12 others for obstructing traffic movement after Yadav walked out of jail in Raipur.

Bhilai Nagar MLA Devendra Yadav, YC state president Akash Sharma and 11 others have been booked under section 126 (2) (wrongful restraint) read with 3 (5) of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police Lal Umed Singh said.

Yadav on Friday walked out of central jail in Raipur a day after the Supreme Court granted him bail in a case linked to violence in Balodabazar city during an agitation by the Satnami community last year.



He was warmly greeted by his supporters outside the jail in Raipur.

Yadav's supporters came across the state and blocked

the road between Kutcheri Chowk and Fafadih due to which commuters faced trouble besides movement of ambulances and passenger

buses were disrupted, the FIR said. Yadav climbed on top of a vehicle, parked in the middle of the road and addressed his supporters.

# Youths showcase storytelling skills to mark 'World Thinking Day'



STAFF REPORTER ■  
BILASPUR

Youths and Bharat Scouts and Guides members showcased their storytelling skills to mark 'World Thinking Day' in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district on Saturday.

The day is observed on February 22 to commemorate the birth anniversaries of World Scout founders Lord Baden Powell and Lady Baden Powell. The festivities were held on the theme 'Our Story'. They showcased their creative brilliance in activities

like painting, rangoli, essay writing, and speech competition.

State Chief Commissioner of Bharat Scouts and Guides Dr. Somnath Yadav was the chief guest. The presentation on the topic 'Our World' was one of the key highlights.

# IIM-R's cultural fest MIRAI-2025 kick-starts



STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

A two-day long annual cultural management fest, MIRAI 2025 commenced at the Indian Institute of Management Raipur (IIM-R) on Saturday on the theme "Neon Genesis", signifying the fusion of tradition and innovation.

The event was attended by participants from across the nation, offering an enriching and captivating experience across cultures, art, technology, and management through various events.

The students of IIM Raipur staged a mesmerising semi-classical dance performance.

# BJP sweeping panchayat polls, claims Arun Sao

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Ahead of the final phase of panchayat elections, Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao claimed on Saturday that the BJP will achieve a landslide victory in these elections as well.

He made the claims while addressing media persons in Raipur.

He added that the BJP-backed candidates have received a massive mandate in the first two phases of panchayat elections, just like the urban body elections.

The opposition Congress won't be able to open an account, just like the Delhi Assembly elections, he



claimed. He expressed confidence that voters will express faith in the development works of BJP.

Polling for the third and final phase of the panchayat elections will be held February 23 and results will be announced on February 25.



The NITI Aayog has commended and awarded Rs 10 crore to Chhattisgarh's aspirational district Narayanpur for outstanding work in promoting agriculture, rural economy, and overall development.

# Newly discovered bat coronavirus can spread to humans like Covid-19: Experts

AGENCIES ■

The newly discovered bat coronavirus — HKU5-CoV-2 — can spread to humans like Covid-19, said experts on Saturday, raising fresh health concerns.

HKU5-CoV-2 was identified by a team of Chinese virologists led by Shi Zhengli, a renowned scientist at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China. She is also known as "Batwoman" for her extensive research on coronaviruses, particularly the SARS-CoV-2 virus — responsible for the deadly pandemic that claimed millions of lives.

The discovery raises concerns about the possibility of another zoonotic spillover. HKU5-CoV-2 belongs to the merbecovirus subgenus, which includes the MERS-CoV virus that caused the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome outbreak. Zhengli's team had, a few years ago, discovered the HKU lineage of coronaviruses in bats from Hong Kong, but it lacked

the ability to infect human cells.

On the other hand, "HKU5-CoV-2 is able to bind to human ACE-2 receptors and infect lab cell models of human lungs and intestines. It is also capable of binding to ACE-2 receptors in other mammals, which means it could theoretically spread from animals to man and vice versa," said Rajeev Jayadevan, Chairman of the Kerala State IMA Research Cell, told IANS.

The expert noted that Wuhan researchers have not provided a comparison between HKU5-CoV-2 and SARS-CoV-2 in their ability to infect human cells.

However, Gautam Menon, Dean, Research, at Ashoka University said that the HKU5-CoV-2 does not have pandemic potential. "From what we know as of now, this is unlikely to be significant. HKU5-CoV-2 has interesting similarities to Covid-19 and to some other coronaviruses known to infect humans, but that isn't enough to infer that it will spread between humans in a way that could

cause a pandemic," Menon told IANS.

He further noted that wide exposure to SARS-CoV-2 virus may provide immunity against the new bat coronavirus. "The fact that most people on the planet have been exposed to Covid-19 by now should also protect against viruses, such as HKU5-CoV-2," Menon said, while stressing the need to continue research in this area to prepare for any contingency.

Jayadevan said that while research on viruses that naturally live in bats is important, studying these viruses in laboratories also carries inherent risks.

"If proper biosecurity measures are not followed, there is a potential for accidental spillover to humans. To mitigate these risks, many labs studying high-risk pathogens operate under stringent Biosafety Level 4 (BSL-4) protocols," he said. He emphasised the need to decrease interactions between bats and humans. "Viruses are known to recombine with each

other, creating new versions with greater abilities. This study is a reminder that viruses living naturally in other animals remain a threat for future pandemics in man, and reducing bat-human interactions is one way to lower the risk of spillovers," Jayadevan said.

## SOUTH EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender Notice No.: Sr.DEE-G-R-OTF-24-25-34 Dated: 19.02.2025  
Work: Annual Maintenance Contract of 08 Nos. Escalators over Raipur Division for a period of 3 years.  
Tender Value: ₹ 3,19,01,722/-  
EMD: ₹ 30,95,000/-  
Submission of Tender: Up to 11:30 Hrs. on Date 21.03.2025. For further details/purchase of tender documents, eligibility criteria and the complete details of the above work, please contact the office of the Sr. DEE/G/R or refer/download tender documents available on [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in). Manual Offers are not allowed against these tenders and any such manual offer received shall be rejected.  
Sr. Div. Elect. Engineer -RS&G, South East Central Railway, Raipur  
PRR/SR.DEE(RS&G)/FL/247  
South East Central Railway @secrail

# Shantikanta Das appointed Principal Secretary to PM



Former governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Shantikanta Das during a press conference. Das was on Saturday appointed the second Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shantikanta Das was on Saturday appointed the second Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. P K Mishra, a retired IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre, is currently serving as the Principal Secretary to the prime minister. According to an official order, the tenure of Das, a retired IAS officer of the Tamil Nadu cadre, will be "co-terminus" with the term of the prime minister or until further orders, whichever is earlier. This is the first time that two persons will simultaneously serve as principal secretaries to the prime minister. Both Mishra and Das are from Odisha.

Das played a key role when multiple indirect taxes were merged into one GST, which came into effect on July 1, 2017. Post-retirement, he was appointed as a member of the 15th Finance Commission and G20 Sherpa of India. Das became the 25th governor of the RBI in 2018 after Urjit Patel resigned. Initially appointed for three years, his tenure was extended for a further period of three years in 2021. He demitted office in December 2024 when Sanjay Malhotra was appointed as RBI governor. Das was the second longest serving governor of the RBI in its 90-year history after Benegal Rama Rau, who had a seven-and-a-half-year tenure in the 1950s. Das, a 1980-batch IAS officer, holds a Master's degree in history from Delhi's St Stephen's College and a postgraduate degree in public administration from the University of Birmingham.

As the RBI governor, he distinguished service, primarily in the areas of finance, taxation, investment and infrastructure. He was the central government's revenue secretary. During his tenure as economic affairs secretary in 2016, the Modi government had announced the demonetisation. Das is credited with navigating the RBI's economic policies through the Covid pandemic. As a key economic policymaker, he faced challenging times in managing the disruptions caused by the lockdown. He chose to cut the policy repo rate to a historic low of 4 per cent, continuing with the low-interest rate regime for almost two years to help the economy hit badly by the lockdown. During his tenure, the RBI handed over the highest-ever dividend of Rs 2.11 lakh crore to the Centre for 2023-24. He was also conferred with the 'Central Bank Governor of the Year' award by Central Banking, UK. Das had also served as India's Alternate Governor in the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), New Development Bank (NDB) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

# Health central to to global cooperation: EAM

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

India envisages health as central to development, and development as key to international cooperation, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday as he cited the 'Vaccine Maitri' initiative of the Centre during the Covid period, and the medical aid extended to people in Ukraine, Afghanistan and other countries in recent years. Addressing the 12th International Patient Safety Conference being hosted here by the Apollo healthcare group, Jaishankar said the private health industry in India has also contributed to facilities and capacities in different geographies, and "we value this industry as a partner". "We in India envisage health as central to development, and development as key to international cooperation. In recent years, many of our global initiatives have revolved around health security. This is a domain where India has been the first responder, a development partner, a supply chain link, a health solution provider, and in many ways, an

exemplar over the last decade," Jaishankar said. He underlined that India today has delivered more than 600 significant development projects to 78 nations across the world and many of those are in the health sector. "Recently, we dispatched 66.5 tonnes of medical supplies to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. A little before that, a consignment of 1,400 kg of anti-cancer medicine were sent to strengthen the medical capabilities of hospitals in Syria. "Even in Afghanistan, India has stepped forward with 300 tonnes of medicines in the last few years, as well as the despatch of specialists to a hospital that we built in Kabul." Jaishankar also cited the instance of aid provided to Sri Lankan hospitals during the 2022 economic crisis in the island nation, to Ukraine as the casualties in the conflict with Russia spiked, or to Myanmar when it was struck by Typhoon Yagi. "In this pursuit, Indian diplomacy has worked with Indian partners, big and small, islands and landlocked, close and distant, but united in their



Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar addresses the 12th International Health Dialogue, in New Delhi

desire to ensure better lives for their citizens," he said. Jaishankar also recalled India's role during the Covid-19 pandemic, and its 'Vaccine Maitri' initiative. "When the Covid pandemic started engulfing the world, the initial deliberations, and I myself was present at some of them, envisaged India as potentially the biggest concern. Ironically, India ended up not only looking after its own needs, but actually stepped

forward to contribute to the world," Jaishankar said. At that time, India provided medicines to 150 nations, vaccines to 99 countries and two international organisations as well masks, PPE kits, gloves and ventilators, among others, Jaishankar said. "Equally important is the fact that India chose to do this when its own vaccination programme was still unfolding. A large number of

developing nations received Made-in-India vaccine either through our Vaccine Maitri initiative or through other global programmes," the minister said. "This was in contrast to many developed countries which stockpiled vaccines to the multiples of their population, he said. "Indian medical teams also went out in the Indian Ocean Region to deal with the pressing situations in some smaller countries. And this was not just an exception made during the Covid era. It is part of our approach to the world, both before and after (the pandemic)," Jaishankar said. He also mentioned that through the 'Heal in India' initiative, the Centre is committed to promoting medical value travel and making it easier for foreign patients to avail treatment in India. And, "as we seek to balance tradition and technology as the twin forces of national progress, it is also natural that we will explore the relevance of our own heritage and culture, to the health of our people," he underlined.

# Army to boost air defence with guns, radars

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

With drones and other disruptive technologies impacting the dynamics of warfare as demonstrated in recent conflicts, the Army Air Defence has drawn a roadmap to boost its capabilities through replacement of two of its old platforms, induction of new fragmentation ammunition for existing air defence guns, and deployment of more potent radars. Besides, the army is also hoping to place a contract for the indigenously developed Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM) system within 4-5 months, a top official said on Friday. The Corps of Army Air Defence holds a large variety of missile systems and guns in its inventory such as the L70, Zu-23mm, Schilka, Tanguska and Osa-AK missile system. "The fashion of guns is back. The army sustained them for good reason and these guns can be effectively used with fragmentation ammunition," Director General of Army Air Defence (AAD), Lt Gen Sumer Ivan D'Cunha, said. Asserting the need for modernisation with an emphasis on 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', Lt Gen D'Cunha also cautioned that the Indian industry must offer "reduced timelines" when it comes to delivery. The AAD, initially part of the Territorial Army, was later separated

from the Artillery in 1994 as a separate corps that looks after destruction of air threat "before it manifests", officials said. The army is planning to replace the L70 and ZU-23mm with "successor" platforms. However, as of now, it is not looking to import, as far as guns are concerned, they said. The first trials of the indigenous successor platform to replace the old L70 guns is likely to be carried out in July, the officials said, adding that an RFP (request for proposal) is already out for the procurement of 220 such guns. The L70 guns were originally manufactured by Swedish defence firm Bofors AB in 1950s, and India started inducting over 1,000 of them in the 1960s. On QRSAM, the AAD DG said, "We are hoping to place a contract within 4-5 months. And once it is done, the First of Prototype Model (FoP) will be there over a period of several months." In September 2022, the defence ministry in a statement said that the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Army had successfully completed six flight-tests of the QRSAM system from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur off the Odisha coast. The flight tests were conducted as part of evaluation trials by the Indian

Army. The While Schilka and Tanguska are planned to be replaced by indigenous successor platforms, while Osa-AK missile system is planned to be replaced by QRSAM, thus boosting the air defence capabilities of the Corps, the officials said. On February 1, the ministry said the DRDO has successfully conducted three successive flight-trials of Very Short-Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) from Chandipur. These tests were carried out against high-speed targets flying at very low altitude. VSHORADS is a man-portable air defence system designed and developed indigenously by the Research Center Imarat in collaboration with other DRDO laboratories and development-cum-production partners. The missile system has the capability to meet the needs of all the three services of the armed forces -- the army, navy and air force -- it said. "As you look at higher variety of drones, we have VSHORADS, we need to carry out a cost-benefit analysis and it would be cost prohibitive to use missiles against all drones. So, fragmentation ammunition is the way forward," Lt Gen D'Cunha said. The AAD is also in the process of acquiring radars such as the Low-

Level Light Weight (LLLR) radar. "We had bought LLLR radars as part of an emergency procurement which is capable of picking up Mavic drone without grenade, and can definitely pick up with grenade. Nano drones beyond this size may be able to carry out surveillance but can't carry weapons. So, we are looking at increasing the density of these radars," he said. Greater density is required for mountains and valley, the senior officer said. Lt Gen D'Cunha also cited the Russia-Ukraine conflict and other recent conflicts to emphasise the importance and growing threat of drones, counter-drones and other disruptive technologies. The employment of drones as a concept manifested in a different way in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Both drones and counter-drone systems came up in a "big way", he said. The development of this capability was so "escalatory in matrix" that every day there is new technology coming in, which becomes a challenge for air power, the AAD DG said. "Integrated with proper surveillance grid of radars, it ensured that Russian started flying higher and their vulnerability increased. This has allowed Ukraine to maintain control over its airspace and support its ground forces more effectively," Lt Gen D'Cunha said.

# Dialogue and diplomacy way forward: India on Russia-Ukraine



Randhir Jaiswal File photo

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
In the backdrop of the US-Russia talks held in Riyadh, India said on Friday that its position on the Ukraine-Russia conflict is "consistent" and New Delhi maintains that dialogue and diplomacy are the way forward. Top officials from Washington and Moscow met in the Saudi capital recently to discuss ways to bring an end to the prolonged conflict that began in February 2022. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal was asked at his weekly briefing about India's position on the conflict amid the changing global political dynamics. "Our position on this particular issue is very clear. We have maintained consistently that we want both parties involved to resort to dialogue and diplomacy and take this process forward," Jaiswal said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, when he was addressing a press conference in Washington recently, yet again made it clear that this is not an era of war, and that there is no solution for any conflict on the battlefield, the MEA spokesperson said. "So, our position has been consistent that dialogue and diplomacy are the way forward," Jaiswal said, when asked if India has re-calibrated its position.

After his wide-ranging talks with US President Donald Trump in Washington, Modi had said India has not been neutral on the war and that it is on the side of peace. Modi also welcomed Trump's efforts to end the war in Ukraine. During the briefing, Jaiswal was also asked for the MEA's response on recent reports alleging sexual assault of a minor by a Kenyan student here. "We have requested the Kenyan government to waive diplomatic immunity of the person concerned, so that the investigation in the matter can go forward. We are pursuing this matter with the Kenyan government," he said. Jaiswal was also asked whether the GE F404 engine delivery issue was taken up during PM Modi's US visit. "The delayed delivery of GE engines was taken up during Prime Minister's visit. We remain engaged with the US side on all aspects relating to contracted defence articles, including their timely delivery. "The two sides have also agreed to conclude a new 10-year framework for the US-India major defence partnership in the 21st century. This was also reflected in the joint statement. So yes, to answer your question, this particular issue was discussed during the prime minister's visit."

# Bank employee held in ₹ 4.97 crore cyber fraud case

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GURUGRAM**

Two people, including a business development manager of a private bank in Delhi, were arrested for cyber fraud worth Rs 4.97 crore under the pretext of investment in stock market, police said. The accused IndusInd bank employee facilitated bank accounts for cyber criminals, officials said. Police said a complaint was received on November 30, 2024, regarding fraud of approximately Rs 4.87 crore. A case was registered at the Cyber Crime East police station under relevant sections. During investigation a team arrested Avinash Sharma and Aditya Chaturvedi -- from Delhi on Thursday, police said.

# Government to revise draft Advocates (Amendment) Bill

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Amid opposition to its various provisions from bar bodies, the government on Saturday said it will revise the draft Advocates (Amendment) Bill as it ended the public consultations on it that started earlier this month. The Department of Legal Affairs in the Union law ministry floated the draft bill on February 13 for public consultations. The government plans to amend the Advocates Act, 1961. The draft bill, which faced criticism, proposed sweeping changes in the definitions of a "legal practitioner" and a "law graduate". According to the draft Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025, a law graduate is a person who has obtained a bachelor's degree after completing a course of three or five years or such other duration as prescribed by any centre of legal education or university established by law or a college affiliated to any



Lawyers stage a protest over the proposed Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025 in Jammu

university and recognised by the Bar Council of India. In a statement, the law ministry said the bill was put in the public domain, demonstrating the government's commitment to transparency and broader engagement with

stakeholders and the public. "However, considering the number of suggestions and concerns received, it has been decided to conclude the consultation process now," it said. Based on the feedback received, the draft bill, "as

revised", will be processed afresh for consultations with stakeholders, the ministry said. Several bar bodies had opposed certain provisions of the draft bill. The opposition Congress had also backed the protesting lawyers, saying the bill was

not only "poorly drafted", but it also failed to address pertinent issues facing the legal fraternity. The draft bill defines a legal practitioner as an advocate or a law graduate engaged in the practice of law before courts, tribunals or quasi-judicial forums or doing legal work in any private or public organisation, including but not limited to statutory and autonomous bodies, domestic and foreign law firms and corporate entities. As of now, a legal practitioner means an advocate or a "vakil" of any high court, a pleader, a "mukhtar" or revenue agent. While putting the draft bill in the public domain, the ministry had said these amendments aimed at aligning the legal profession and legal education with global best practices. The reforms will focus on improving legal education, equipping lawyers to meet the demands of a rapidly-changing world and raising professional standards, it had said.

# Working on measures to restrict distress crop sale: Agriculture minister

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Union Agriculture Minister Shivrav Singh Chouhan on Saturday said the government is working on measures to ensure that farmers do not have to sell their produce, especially fruits and vegetables, at throwaway prices. Speaking after inaugurating the 'Pusa Krishi Vigyan Mela' 2025 -- being held in the national capital from February 22-24 -- he emphasised the need to take new seeds varieties and farm technologies from labs to agriculture filed at the

earliest. Chouhan said the government is holding discussions with farmers directly as well as through their organisations to understand the problems and then making schemes to address the issues. "Jahan-Jahan takleefin dekh rahe hain, hum yojana bana rahe hain (wherever we are seeing problems, we are making schemes to address those)", the minister said, listing out steps taken by the government in the last few years to protect the interest of farmers.

Chouhan said the government has removed exports restrictions on rice and onions while raising import duties on edible oils. He said the Centre has taken steps to help tomato farmers in view of price crash and will take measures for red chilli farmers of Andhra Pradesh as well. "I want to assure our farming community, we will take all important decisions that are required for the welfare of farmers. Do not worry," he said, while asserting that the government is committed to this.

"There are some issues which are under consideration. Prices are low at farm gate level and consumers are paying high rates. Who takes the profit in middle? Profit margins should reduce. The difference between the farm gate price and consumer price for fruits and vegetables should come down," he said. The minister added, "We are working out (a way) to ensure that farmers do not have to sell their produce at throwaway prices." Lauding efforts of scientists at Indian Council of Agricultural Research

(ICAR) for its efforts in making India self-sufficient in foodgrains production, Chouhan said there is a need to take new seed varieties and technology to the field quickly so that farmers can benefit. "Availability of good varieties of seeds is important. Farmers require it. ICAR is developing them... We need to ensure these seeds reach farmers quickly," he said. The minister also asked the ICAR to handle 'Modern Agriculture Chaupal' programme where scientists will tell farmers about recent

technological breakthrough, besides solving their problems. The programme will be telecast across India. Chouhan said he does not sit in Krishi Bhawan in Delhi and rather go to fields to understand farmers' problems. He asked officers in his ministry and ICAR scientists to do the same. The minister reiterated that the government is focusing on increasing farm production through yield improvements, reducing cost of production and ensuring that farmers get the right price for their produce.

# Six arrested in Manipur for extortion



Security personnel during search operations and area domination in the fringe and vulnerable areas of hill and valley districts of Manipur. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence since May two years ago. PTI

**PTI ■ IMPHAL**  
Six cadres of a banned outfit were arrested from Manipur's Imphal West district, and two members of a group were apprehended for allegedly being involved in extortion in Imphal East, police said on Saturday. Six members of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (Ibungo Ngangom) were apprehended from Koutruk Makha Leikai Church in Imphal West on Friday, a senior officer said. The police also arrested two members of G5 Organisation from Achanbigei Maning Leikai in Imphal East district for allegedly being involved in extortion from sand-laden

trucks in Sekmai, Iriblung, Koirengi and Patsoi areas. They were also allegedly involved in incidents of snatching keys from truck drivers in Sekmai area. They have been identified as Ningthoujam Yamba Singh (43) and Usham Netaji Singh (35), the officer added. Arms and ammunition were also surrendered in Churachandpur district on Saturday after joint efforts in public awareness by the local police, Assam Rifles and CRPF, another officer said. "This is the first step towards de-weaponising the society and creating a safe and secure atmosphere where regular activities can be boosted," Churachandpur SP Prakhar

Pandey said in a statement. The Manipur Police also said at least two firearms and ammunition were handed over to the administrations in Kakching and Kangpokpi districts. The surrender of arms and ammunition comes after Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla appealed to the people to surrender illegal arms and ammunition. Security forces also recovered at least 12 firearms from Kakching Wairi area and handed them over to the Kakching Police Station, another officer said. During an operation in Maojang village under the Moreh Police Station limits in Tengnoup district, Security forces recovered two impro-

vised explosive devices weighing 22 kg with detonators, one 7 kg IED, one bomb of 6 kg with detonators and one bomb of 4 kg. "The IEDs, suspected to be unstable, had to be destroyed at the spot by a bomb disposal team," police said, adding that an FIR has been registered in this connection. The Manipur Police along with central forces have been conducting search operations after ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May two years ago.

# Odisha CM assures safety, respect of Nepali students

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Saturday asserted that Nepalese students studying in Odisha are children of the state and they will continue to pursue their education with full respect and dignity, an official release said. Majhi made the assertion during a telephonic conversation with Nepal's Foreign Minister Dr Arzu Rana Deuba, the statement issued by the chief minister's office said. He assured Deuba that the state government will ensure strict action against those involved in the alleged suicide of a 20-year-old engineering student and subsequent attack on Nepalese pupils at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT). "The state government is keeping a close watch on the developments (at KIIT) and all steps will be taken to restore hope and confidence of the students. The Nepal foreign minister thanked Majhi and expressed satisfaction over the steps taken by the state government," the release said.



Odisha CM Mohan Charan during a meeting with Nepal Embassy officials in Bhubaneswar. Nepal Embassy officials have been camping in the Odisha capital for the last five days. PTI

Majhi met Nepal Embassy officials Sanjeev Das Sharma and Naveen Raj Adhikari at his chamber at Lok Seva Bhawan and informed them that 10 people have been arrested in connection with the incident of attack on the Nepalese students. "Strict action will be taken against all those involved in the incident. All arrangements have been made by the government to restore the academic atmosphere on KIIT campus," Majhi told the embassy officials. According to the CMO, the

Nepalese officials said that the state government has taken prompt steps in this incident. Due to this, the students coming from Nepal and their guardians have felt reassured. For this, they thanked the Odisha government, especially the chief minister, on behalf of the Nepalese government, the release said. The two embassy officials have been camping in the Odisha capital for the last five days following instructions of Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli.

# 60 crore took holy dip at Maha Kumbh, claims UP government

**PTI ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR**

The Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday said an unprecedented 60 Crore devotees at the Maha Kumbh Mela have taken a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam. The Kumbh Mela which started on January 13 will continue till February 26 on the occasion of Maha Shivratri. Over half of India's 110 Crore Sanatan followers have bathed in the holy confluence, and this number is expected to surpass 65 Crore by the final 'amrit snan' on February 26, an official statement said. This Maha Kumbh has seen the largest participation in any religious, cultural, or social event, it said. According to the World Population Review, Pew Research, India's population is approximately 143 Crore (1.43 Billion), with 110 Crore (1.10 Billion) followers of Sanatan Dharma, the statement said.

# TMC alleges BJP, EC colluding to inflate voter lists

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA**

Trinamool Congress on Saturday accused a section of Election Commission (EC) officials of conspiring with the BJP to add names of outsiders to the voter list in various Assembly segments of West Bengal. TMC state general secretary Kunal Ghosh told reporters that a section of EC officials are incorporating names without proper physical verification, particularly in the border areas of the state. He said stopping infiltration is the responsibility of the Border Security Force (BSF), and any reports of unauthorised outsiders being added to the voter list should be handled by the Centre, as it controls the BSF and "remote controls" the EC, which has



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a press conference after the presentation of the state Budget 2025-26. PTI

apparently relaxed the verification process. Ghosh, who was referring to reports about alleged rise in the number of electors in the voter list in Champahati area under Baruipur assembly of South 24 Parganas district, said,

"If that is the situation, the credit goes to the local administration and police for tracking the unauthorised voters and not the EC, which had allowed inclusion of the names without proper physical verification."

"Instead of pointing fingers at the state and ruling party, the BJP and those raising hue and cry over the issue should take up the issue of checking infiltration with the Centre," he added. He reminded that West Bengal chief minister and TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee had recently cautioned against the attempts by BJP in collusion with EC to induct bogus names in the electoral list to change the vote ratio in favour of the saffron party, as they had repeatedly failed to secure power in assembly polls. BJP Rajya Sabha MP and spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said, "TMC's gameplan to include ghost voters has been exposed as the ruling party leaders have been involved in providing fake Aadhaar and voter ID cards to win elections."

# Puri hints at reduced fuel prices, inflation

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VIJAYAWADA**

Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep S Puri has said with more oil coming up in the global market including from the USA, energy prices are likely to come down which would help tame inflation. Addressing a Press conference, exuding confidence that India has established contacts with the new US administration led by President Donald Trump, Puri said the Indo-American relationship on the energy front will deepen. According to him India imports oil from as many as 40 countries, including Argentina and since there is enough oil in the world, even oil producing nations which are implementing cutbacks will be compelled to reconsider their decisions. He also said de-dollarisation of oil purchases was never the objective, emphasising that "most transactions are in dollars and always have been". "Inside the United States, he (Trump) said, 'Drill, baby, drill,' which is a signal to drill more

and extract more oil. He has been on record stating that he wants to bring international oil prices down," said the Oil Minister. "So, I think the global energy situation will improve. More energy will enter the market, and hopefully, that will help bring prices down. When energy is available in sufficient quantities at lower prices, it also helps in managing inflation," he further said. He clarified that India's primary objective is to procure sufficient oil "at lower prices" to help control inflation. "De-dollarisation is not an objective at all. Most of these (oil) transactions are in dollars and always have been. We had one transaction in rupees, but I think it was a very small one. Transactions in rupees are a good thing, but it takes two to tango," Puri told reporters. According to the Union Minister, India is already purchasing energy worth up to \$20 Billion from the US, emphasising that Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently had a very successful round of discussions with US President Donald

Trump. Observing that there has never been a shortage of energy in the global market, the former diplomat highlighted that more oil is entering global markets than ever before, especially from the Western Hemisphere. "Brazil used to produce 3 Million barrels of crude per day. They (Brazil) have now started producing an additional 140,000 to 150,000 barrels per day. More oil is coming, much of it from Guyana, Suriname, and Canada. The United States is the world's largest producer of crude, at 13 Million barrels per day. I think they are going to produce 1.6 Million barrels more," he said. Likewise, he said Venezuelan oil will also flow into global markets as 'the situation' between the US and the Latin American country is easing. President Trump, not only during his first tenure in office but also in the run-up to his second election, has been very clear that he wants to bring more energy into the global market, said Puri. Responding to questions about the fuel costs, he said India is the only country where petrol prices have decreased in the past three

years, citing excise tax cuts by the Centre in November 2021 and May 2022. "And BJP-ruled states reduced their VAT. Now, when it comes to benefits, governments don't benefit. First of all, governments don't import oil. It is private sector players or oil marketing companies (OMCs) that import oil. And what does the government do with the revenue it collects? It provides 80 crore people with three meals of dry rations a day," he said. According to Puri, petrol prices rose across several countries between February 2022 and February 2025-by approximately 48 per cent in Pakistan, 14.7 per cent in Bangladesh, 37 per cent in Sri Lanka, 16.2 per cent in Nepal, 14.2 per cent in the USA, 4.8 per cent in Italy, 4.2 per cent in Spain, 2 per cent in Germany, 4.2 per cent in France, while in India, they declined by 0.7 per cent. Highlighting that petrol prices have decreased both relatively and absolutely, Puri added that diesel prices in India rose at the lowest rate-1.15 per cent-during that period, while they increased across various other countries.

# Six trapped in Telangana roof collapse

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD**

At least six workers were feared trapped when a section of a roof collapsed in the under construction stretch of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) in Nagarkurnool district of Telangana on Saturday. A 19-member team from state owned coal mining firm, Singareni Collieries Company Ltd., has left for Srisailem Left Bank Canal in Nagarkurnool district on Saturday to join rescue operations to extract workers who are feared trapped when a portion of a roof collapsed in the under construction stretch of the SLBC. According to a top official of the company, SCCL has the expertise in rescuing people in such incidents and also has necessary equipment. The

rescue team from the company is headed by a general manager level officer. "SCCL has the necessary expertise to handle critical situations such as roof collapses. And also we have necessary equipment imported from Australia, USA and Poland. The machinery and rock cutters are so advanced that they can cut huge rocks and boulders within minutes," said. The construction company's team has gone inside for assessment and it is verifying, they said. Six to eight workers are feared trapped as per information given by the company engaged in the work, a senior police official said. "The roof collapsed when some workers had gone inside as part of the work at 12-13 kms inside the tunnel," the official said. Irrigation Minister N Uttam

Kumar Reddy and senior officials are overseeing relief operations. The incident happened in the ongoing construction of SLBC tunnel work on the inlet side from Srisailem, official sources said. As per information there was an influx of water when the work was being carried out, they said. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy directed the district Collector, Superintendent of Police and other officials to reach the place of accident to carry out relief measures, it said. Expressing concern over the accident, Union Coal Minister G Kishan Reddy enquired about the reasons for the collapse and asked officials to bring out those feared trapped to safety. He also told the officials to provide treatment to the injured (if any), a release from his office said.

# CAG flags mismanagement of afforestation funds in Uttarakhand

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has cited many loopholes in the management of compensatory afforestation funds in the forest divisions of Uttarakhand, including their diversion to inadmissible activities and delayed submission of annual plan of operations to the Centre leading to cost escalations in various cases. The CAG's latest audit report on Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) laid recently in Uttarakhand Assembly during its ongoing budget session said ₹ 13.86 Crore was diverted at the

divisional level to inadmissible activities like state scheme Harela, tiger safari work, renovation of existing buildings, expenses on personage visits, court cases, purchases of I-phones, laptops, fridges, coolers and stationery. The state authority did not control the diversion or inadmissible expenditure from the State Compensatory Afforestation Fund, it said. The audit report on the functioning of CAMPA covers a period of 2019-2022. According to CAMPA rules, commensurate compensatory afforestation is mandatory in case of allocation of forest land for non-forest activities like infrastructural or industrial development. It points out that in 52 cases 188.62

hectares of forest land was diverted to user agencies for non-forest purposes where in-principle approvals were granted but permission to start work was not granted by the competent authority. However, the user agencies started the road construction in the forest areas without permission, it said, adding that the forest divisions did not take any cognisance of the unauthorised use of forest land and booked these as cases of forest offence. According to CAMPA guidelines of 2009, after receipt of money, the state CAMPA shall accomplish the afforestation for which money is deposited in the Compensatory Afforestation Fund within a year or two growing seasons.

However, scrutiny of records in divisions revealed that in 37 cases, compensatory afforestation work was executed after more than eight years of getting final clearance. This resulted in a cost escalation of ₹ 11.54 Crore in raising compensatory afforestation, the report said. The implementation of compensatory afforestation activities suffered due to delayed submission of the annual plan of operations to the government of India for approval and defective planning, the audit report said. There were instances of dysfunctional bottom-up planning and adoption of ad hoc or arbitrary approaches for the inclusion of irregular items in the Annual Plan of Operation

(APO). The release of funds was unrealistic and not commensurate with the approved APO. The state authority failed to ensure equitable and need-based funding of activities in all the implementing agencies. There was inefficiency in funds release, not adopting of accounting procedure as per Compensatory Afforestation Fund rules, and not discharging of interest liability, the CAG report said. The CAG has recommended that the state authority must exercise internal control and institute proper budgetary control checks for robust financial management so that misutilisation or diversion of CAMPA funds can be prevented.

# HP BJP MLA alleges step-motherly treatment from state

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BILASPUR**

Sitting BJP MLA from Jhanduta assembly in Himachal Pradesh J R Katwal on Saturday alleged that the ongoing works in the constituencies of opposition legislators in the Bilaspur district were being stalled and obstructed, leading to resentment among the people. There are 40 Congress and 28 BJP MLAs in the 68-member Himachal Pradesh Assembly. Addressing various meetings in his Jhanduta constituency on Friday evening and Saturday, he alleged that the Congress government in the state is giving step-motherly treatment to the constituencies of the BJP MLAs. "Forget about making provi-

sions in the budget for new development works in their areas, even the ongoing works are being obstructed," Katwal, a former IAS officer who has served the state in various capacities, said. He said roads play an important role in the development of any area. In a hilly state like Himachal, the importance of roads increases even more, he added. Katwal said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the other hand has pledged to make India a developed nation. This pledge can be fulfilled only when all the villages are connected by roads. In view of this, the PM has turned the focus of the budget and the direction of development towards villages, he said.

With this, along with strengthening the network of roads in rural areas, people are also getting all the necessary basic facilities, he added. Kaltwal said in the BJP, any worker can reach any post with ability and hard work, and Rekha Gupta, the newly appointed chief minister of Delhi, is a recent example. On the contrary, he said, nepotism is dominant in many other opposition parties, including the Congress. This is why the people of the country are rejecting them and joining the BJP, the MLA said. He assured the people of the Jhanduta assembly constituency that besides solving all their problems, no stone will be left unturned in providing all the necessary facilities in the area.

# Fresh talks between farmers Centre held

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH**

A fresh round of talks between protesting farmers and the Centre will be held here on Saturday evening centred around the legal guarantee of minimum support price on crops, among other demands. The meeting between the central team and farmer leaders will take place at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Public Administration in Chandigarh at 6 pm. In the last meeting held on February 14, Union minister Pralhad Joshi had said that Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan would lead the central team for the February 22 meeting with the protesting farmers. Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher on Saturday said a delegation of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha will take part in the meeting with a



Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher, center, with protesting farmers ahead of a meeting with the Centre. PTI

positive mind. Farmers expect from the government to resolve their issues at the earliest, he said. Farmers had earlier asked for the next meeting to be held in Delhi but the government scheduled it in Chandigarh. "Today the sixth round of talks with the Centre will take place. We have informa-

tion that the Union Agriculture Minister and other ministers will be part of the meeting. The KMM and SKM (Non-Political) delegation will take part in the meeting," said Pandher. Farmers leaders said that the 28-member delegation of the farmers would put forth their side

strongly in the meeting. They said that the protests for various demands, including a legal guarantee on MSP, has been going on for the past one year. In a February 19 letter to Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Sarwan Singh Pandher, Agriculture Ministry Joint Secretary Purna Chandra Kishan said, "This is in continuation of the previous meeting with the leaders of SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) which was held on February 14 in Chandigarh." "In this sequence, a meeting with the ministers of the Government of India and the Government of Punjab regarding the demands of farmers' unions has been organised on February 22 at Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Public Administration in Chandigarh. You are cordially invited to the meeting..." the letter in Hindi stated. Both sides said the February 14 meeting went cordially. Dallewal, who is on an indefinite fast over

the farmers' demands, also took part in last week's meeting. The discussion came after a year-long protest by farmers, centred mainly around the demand for a legal guarantee of MSP on farm produce. After the meeting, Joshi had said the next meeting will be held with Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan leading the central team. Joshi had said he would also be part of that meeting. Prior to the February 14 meeting, four rounds of meetings took place between central ministers and the protesting farmers in February 2024 but the talks remained inconclusive. Farmers, under the banner of the SKM (Non-Political) and the KMM, have been camping at the Shambhu and the Khanuri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 last year after security forces did not allow them to march to Delhi to press for their various demands.

# Hamas frees 6 more hostages

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Hamas freed all six hostages in the latest exchange on Saturday, even as heightened tension between the adversaries clouded the future of the fragile ceasefire deal. The six included three Israeli men seized from the Nova music festival and another abducted while visiting his family in southern Israel when militants stormed across the border in the October 7, 2023, attacks that triggered Israel's nearly 16-month campaign in the Gaza Strip. Two of the hostages had been held by Hamas for around a decade since they each entered Gaza on their own. Five of the captives were handed over in staged ceremonies that the Red Cross and Israel have condemned in the past — brought out by masked, armed Hamas fighters in front of hundreds of Palestinians before being transferred to Red Cross vehicles. In the central town of Nuseirat, Omer Wenkert, Omer Shem Tov, and Eliya Cohen were posed alongside Hamas fighters on the stage. A beaming Shem Tov even kissed two



Friends of Omer Wenkert, 23, gather to watch the TV broadcast of his release by Palestinian militants in Gaza, in Herzliya, Israel, on Saturday. PTI

militants next to him on the head and blew kisses to the crowd. Hamas has come under heavy criticism for such public displays, with Israel, the UN and the Red Cross saying they are cruel and do not respect the dignity of the hostages. Watching the release, Cohens

family and friends in Israel chanted "Eliya! Eliya! Eliya!" and cheered when they saw him for the first time. Shem Tov's grandmother ululated in joy, shrieking, "Omer, my joy! My life!" as she saw him. The Israeli military says the final hostage was released with

schizophrenia. The latest releases, to be followed by the freeing of hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, went ahead after tensions mounted over a grisly and heart-wrenching dispute triggered this week when Hamas initially handed over the wrong body for Shiri Bibas, an Israeli mother of two young boys abducted by the militants. The remains that Hamas transferred with her sons' bodies on Thursday were later determined to be those of an unidentified Palestinian woman. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed revenge for "a cruel and malicious violation," while Hamas suggested it had been a mistake. On Friday night, the small militant group believed to have been holding Bibas and her sons — the Palestinian Mujahedeen Brigades — handed over a second body. Bibas' family said Israeli forensic authorities had confirmed the remains were hers. "For 16 months we sought certainty, and now that it's here, it brings no comfort, though we hope it marks the beginning of closure," the family said.

# Difficult negotiations likely over ceasefire's next phase

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

The ceasefire deal has paused the war but is nearing the end of its first phase. Negotiations over a second phase, in which Hamas would release dozens more hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal, are likely to be even more difficult. The six hostages being freed Saturday are the last living ones to be released under the first phase. Cohen, Shem Tov and Wenkert, all in their 20s, were abducted by Hamas fighters at the Nova music festival. During their release, they were brought out wearing fake army uniforms, though they were not soldiers when they were kidnapped. Earlier Saturday, two other hostages — Tal Shoham, 40, and Avera Mengistu, 38 — were freed in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. Arriving back in Israel, both were taken to medical centres for examination. "This is an unforgettable moment, where all emotions are rapidly mixing together. Our Tal is with us," Shoham's family said in a statement, calling for a deal to free all those still captive. "There is a window of opportunity; we must not miss it." Shoham, who also holds Austrian citizenship, was visiting his family in Kibbutz Beeri when Hamas militants stormed into the community during the October 7, 2023 attacks. Shoham's wife, two young children, and three other relatives who were abducted with him were freed in a November 2023 exchange. Mengistu, an Ethiopian-Israeli, had been held in Gaza since entering on his own in 2014.

Watching the handover on Israeli media, Mengistu's family and friends broke out into a Hebrew song, "Here is the Light," as they saw him for the first time in more than a decade. "Do you remember me?" one of his brothers asks as they embraced at the hospital. **Hundreds of Palestinian prisoners set for release:** Later Saturday, Israel is to release 620 imprisoned Palestinians. They include 151 who were serving life or other sentences, around 100 of whom will be deported to other countries, according to the Palestinian prisoners media office. They also include 445 men as well as 18 children between the ages of 15 and 17, five aged between 18-19, and a woman, all of whom were seized by Israeli troops in Gaza during the current war, according to the media office. Hamas has said it will also release four more bodies next week, completing the first phase of the ceasefire. If that plan is carried out, Hamas would retain about 60 hostages, about half of whom are believed to be alive. Hamas has said it won't release the remaining captives without a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal. Netanyahu, with the full backing of the Trump administration, says he's committed to destroying Hamas' military and governing capacities and returning all the hostages, goals widely seen as mutually exclusive. Israel's military offensive killed more than 48,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants. Israel says it has killed more than 17,000 fighters, without providing evidence.

# Preparations underway for Trump-Putin summit

PTI ■ KYIV

Preparations are underway for a face-to-face meeting between US President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin, Russia's deputy foreign minister said Saturday, marking a dramatic shift away from Western isolation of Moscow over its war in Ukraine. Speaking to Russian state media, Sergei Ryabkov said a possible

Putin-Trump summit could involve broad talks on global issues, not just the war in Ukraine. "The question is about starting to move towards normalising relations between our countries, finding ways to resolve the most acute and potentially very, very dangerous situations, of which there are many, Ukraine among them," he said. But he said efforts to organise such a meeting are at an early stage, and that making it happen will require "the most intensive preparatory work." Ryabkov added that US and Russian envoys could meet

"within the next two weeks," to pave the way for further talks between senior officials. Russian and US representatives on Tuesday agreed to start working toward ending the war in Ukraine and improving their diplomatic and economic ties, according to the two countries' top diplomats, at a high-level meeting in Saudi Arabia that marked an extraordinary about-face in US foreign policy under President Trump. After the meeting, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told the AP that the two sides agreed broadly to pursue three goals: to restore staffing at their respective embassies in Washington and Moscow; to create a high-level team to support Ukraine peace talks; and to explore closer relations and economic cooperation. He stressed, however, that the talks — which were attended by his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, and other senior Russian and US officials — marked the beginning of a conversation, and more work needs to be done.

# Mallya pursues annulment of UK bankruptcy order

PTI ■ LONDON

Embattled businessman Vijay Mallya believes Indian banks pursuing bankruptcy proceedings against him in the English courts have assumed an "unreal quality" in the wake of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's recent statement in Parliament and has instructed his lawyers to pursue an annulment application. It emerged as Justice Anthony Mann reserved judgment, to be handed down at a later date after hearings of three interlinked appeals related to Mallya's bankruptcy order concluded at the High Court in London this week. The judge heard a set of complicated arguments involving a

consortium of banks led by the State Bank of India (SBI) seeking repayment of an estimated judgment debt of around GBP 1.05 billion owed by the 69-year-old businessman's now-defunct Kingfisher Airlines. "From Dr Mallya's perspective, these English bankruptcy proceedings have an unreal quality," Leigh Crestohl, Managing Partner of Zaiwalla and Co—Mallya's recently appointed lawyers, told PTI. "Evidence has now come to light that shows that the banks' debt has not only been paid but, moreover, the banks have recovered in excess of what was due from Dr Mallya. This was confirmed by the Honourable Finance Minister of India, Shrimati Nirmala Sitharaman, in a statement she made in the



Indian Parliament on 17 December 2024, in which she confirmed that a sum of INR 14,131.6 crore has been collected and restored to the banks," he said. Crestohl stressed that "it must be presumed" that the public sec-

tor banks will accept the accuracy of the minister's statement made in Parliament. "This is why immediately after instructing Zaiwalla and Co. in place of his previous lawyer Reynolds Porter Chamberlain last week, Mallya has now applied to annul the Bankruptcy Order on that basis. He intends to pursue that application regardless of what the court may decide on the appeals that were heard this week," added Crestohl. Separately wanted in India on fraud and money laundering charges, Mallya took to social media a day after Sitharaman's Lok Sabha statement to claim he was "entitled to relief" in the matter. In a post on X dated December 18 last year, he said: "Unless the

ED (Enforcement Directorate) and banks can legally justify how they have taken more than two times the debt, I am entitled to the relief which I will pursue." Meanwhile this week, Justice Mann heard appeals related to a decision of Chief Insolvency and Companies Court (ICC) Judge Michael Briggs made in the context of bankruptcy proceedings initiated by the banks against Mallya around six years ago. The first appeal, referred to as the security appeal, challenges Judge Briggs' conclusion that the banks — represented by TLT LLP and barrister Tony Beswetherick — were "estopped because of an Indian court judgment" from denying that they hold security over certain of Mallya's assets.

**PUBLIC NOTICE FOR DISSOLUTION OF PARTNERSHIP FIRM CONTINENTAL OVERSEAS SERVICES**  
(Regn. No. 1362 of 2022)  
PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given that the partnership heretofore between the undersigned Harleen Kaur Lamba and Armandeep Singh Lamba under the name and style of Continental Overseas Services, carrying on the partnership business at Flat No. 1011-A16, 10th Floor, Devika Tower, Nehru Place, New Delhi 110019, is dissolved by mutual consent as from the 25.01.2025 (Date of Dissolution).  
Armandeep Singh Lamba Harleen Kaur Lamba  
Continental Overseas Services Continental Overseas Services

**THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS**

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Shiv Kumari, W/o No.6942218P Hav Kamalesh Gola, R/o- Vill- Tajpur Majha, Teh- Zamania, Dist- Ghazipur, U.P.- 232340, have changed my name from Shiv Kumari to Shiv Kumari Devi, vide affidavit dated 22/02/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1562)C I, JC-709016Y Nb/Sub Maneesh M, Serving at- Base Hospital, Delhi Cantt- 110010, declare that in my service records, my father's name is wrongly recorded as Mohanan. His correct name is Mohanan E, vide affidavit dated 22/02/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1563)C I, JC-709016Y Nb/Sub Maneesh M, Serving at- Base Hospital, Delhi Cantt- 110010, declare that in my service records, my mother's name is wrongly recorded as Mallika. Her correct name is Mallika K, vide affidavit dated 22/02/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1564)C I, Munia Devi, Mother of JC-392977H Nb/Sub Harendra Kumar Singh, R/o- Madhurampur, Akorhi Gola, Rohtas, Akorhi Bazar, Bihar-821301, have changed my name from Munia Devi to Munnaiya Devi with my correct DOB as 01/01/1964, vide affidavit dated 22/02/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1565)C I, M Sujitha W/o- No.14664931Y Nk K Mathan Kumar, V/PO- Kamayagoundanpatti, Teh- Uthama Palayam, Dist- Theni, Tamilnadu- 625521, have changed my name from M Sujitha to Sujitha, vide affidavit No.KL037746228202425E dated 20/02/2025 before 1st Class Magistrate, Thiruvananthapuram.

PD(1566)C I, Sunita Rani D/o Krishan Lal R/o C-157 Pushpanjali enclave Pitam Pura, Delhi -110034, have changed my name Sunita Kumari to Sunita Rani for all purposes.

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Kash Patel took oath as the 9th director of the FBI on the Bhagavad Gita and spoke about how a first-generation Indian kid is living the American dream, reflecting on his heritage. The US Senate voted 51 to 49 to confirm Patel on Thursday.

Patel's family members and girlfriend were present during the oath ceremony on Friday. The oath ceremony was administered by US Attorney General Pam Bondi in the Indian Treaty Room in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building (EEOB) on the White House campus.

She asked Patel to place his hand on the Gita and raise his right hand to take the oath. "I am living the American dream. Anyone who thinks the American dream is dead, just look right here. You're talking to a first-generation Indian kid who's about to lead the law enforcement community, the greatest nation on God's green earth. That can't happen anywhere else," Patel, 44, said.

**ECL EASTERN COALFIELDS LIMITED**  
(A Subsidiary of Coal India Limited)  
Sanctorin, P.O. Dishaigarh, Dist. Paschim Bardhaman, Pin. 713333 (WB).

**Notice From Pension Dept., ECL, Hq. Revised PPO**

All member pensioners of CMPFO please note, to ensure hassle-free payment of pension to your spouse, CMPFO is issuing revised (Joint) PPO. Please submit the application form to the concerned colliery office as soon as possible to expedite the process for issuance of Revised PPO. For application format and other details please visit [www.easterncoal.nic.in](http://www.easterncoal.nic.in)

**VISIT US AT [www.easterncoal.nic.in](http://www.easterncoal.nic.in)**

**CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED**  
Registered Office: Aggarwal Corporate Tower, Plot No. 23, 5th Floor, Govind Lal Sikka Marg, Rajendra Place, New Delhi-110008

**POSSESSION NOTICE (Appendix IV) Rule 8(1)**

Whereas the Authorized officer of CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED (CLIX), a Housing Finance Bank Company under the National Housing Bank Act, having its registered office Aggarwal Corporate Tower, Plot No. 23, 5th Floor, Govind Lal Sikka Marg, Rajendra Place, New Delhi- 110008, under the provisions of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI Act) (hereinafter referred to as "Act") and in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 13(2) of the Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule, 2002 issued a Demand Notice to the following borrower and co-borrowers to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower/Guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of Section 13 of the Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on as per under mentioned Date. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of "CLIX" and interest charges thereon. The attention of the Borrower is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured asset.

**Name & Address of Borrower/Co-Borrower: 1. Amit Kumar Chaurasia S/O Sant Lal Chaurasia, 2. Anita Chaurasia W/O Amit Kumar Chaurasia, Both At - A-356, Budh Nagar, JI Colony, Indrapuri (A.R.) central Delhi-110012, Sr. No. 1 Also At - Ugf-3 A-133 Rail Vihar Loni, Ghaziabad-201014, 3. Friend: Ice Cream & Kulfis, 2-42 1st Floor, Loha Nand Naraina, New Delhi-110028**

**Demand Notice Dated: 19.11.2024, Date of Possession: 20.02.2025**  
**Amount of Demand Notice: Rs. 8,34,002.93/- as on 13.11.2024**

**Details of Property: A Residential Plot No. A-133 And Kharsa No. 348 In Flat No. Ugf-3 Back Side Lig Without Roof Rail Vihar Sadullabad, Tehsil Loni District Ghaziabad. Area 83.61 Sq. Mt. On Which The Said Flat Is Constructed: East Plot No. A-134, West Road 30 Ft, North: Plot No A-132, South: Road is 30 Feet Wide**

**Date: 20.02.2025, Place: Delhi** **Authorised Officer, CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED**

**CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED** Registered Office: Aggarwal Corporate Tower, Plot No. 23, 5th Floor, Govind Lal Sikka Marg, Rajendra Place, New Delhi-110008

**E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE "APPENDIX-IV-A" [SEE PROVISION TO RULE 8(6)] SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES**

**The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.**

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/ charged to the CLIX Housing Finance Limited (CLIX) (Secured Creditors), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of CLIX Housing Finance Limited (CLIX), Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis on 23.02.2025, for recovery of amount as mentioned below, due to the Secured Creditors from following Borrower(s), Guarantor(s) and Corporate Guarantor(s). The reserve price and earnest money to be deposited is mentioned below respectively

| Name of Borrower, Co-Borrower/ Guarantor(s) with address/es   | Reserve Price (RP) & EMD Amount (10% of the Reserve Price & Incremental Amount) | Recovery Amount as per Demand Notice | Date & Time of On-Site Inspection of Property     | Date & Time for Submission of Bid Application Form and EMD | Date & Time of E-Auction with unlimited extensions of 5 Minutes each |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 1. MOHD NASIR S/O BUNDI KHAN, 2. MRS. ISRAT JAHAN W/O MOHD NASIR, BOTH RESIDING AT - HOUSE NO.457 GALI NO.9, SHAHEED BHAGAT COLONY NORTH DELHI, DELHI-110094, ALSO AT - D-298, GALI NO.7, MUKUND NAGAR 30 FT ROAD, KARAWAL NAGAR NEW DELHI-110094, ALSO AT - A-4, GROUND FLOOR-2, LIG FRONT SIDE RAIL VIHAR, LONI, GHAZIABAD UTTAR PRADESH, ALSO AT - HOUSE NO.22 KHARSA NO. 60C/F NEAR SARKAR SCHOOL, NEW SABHAPUR, SABHAPUR, DELHI-110094 LOAN NO. - AC2019011136167 (Along with future interest and charges accruing after 28.03.2024 till the total realization of the loan amount) | 9,28,650/-<br>92,865/-<br>10,000/-  | Rs. 9,81,465.97/- as on 28.03.2023   | 10-03-2025 to 11-03-2025 From 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM | 11-03-2025 Till 12.00 PM                                   | 12.03.2025 10 Am to 12 Pm  |
| <b>Description &amp; Owner(s) of Properties - ALL THOSE PIECE AND PARCEL OF ONE KITA RESIDENTIAL PLOT NO. A-4 KHARSA NO. 211 IN FLAT NO. GF 2 GROUND FLOOR (LIG) WITHOUT ROOF RIGHT AREA 315 SQUARE FEET I.E. 29.26 SQUARE METERS SITUATED IN RAIL VIHAR HARDASTI VILLAGE SADULLABAD TEHSIL LONI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD (COMPLETE DETAILS OF WHOSE CONSTRUCTION IS ATTACHED MAP) THE ABOVE FLAT IS SITUATED AT A DISTANCE OF MORE THAN 200 METERS FROM THE MAIN ROAD, THE SAID FLAT HAS ONE BEDROOM, ONE DRAWING ROOM, ONE KITCHEN AND BATHROOM, AND THE LIVING ROOM IS COMMON.</b>         | 8,26,500/-<br>82,650/-<br>10,000/-  | Rs. 8,59,767.3/- as on 15-Apr-2024   | 10-03-2025 to 11-03-2025 From 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM | 11-03-2025 Till 12.00 PM                                   | 12.03.2025 10 Am to 12 Pm  |
| <b>Description &amp; Owner(s) of Properties - ALL THOSE PIECE AND PARCEL OF ONE KITA RESIDENTIAL FLAT NO. FF-2 (FIRST FLOOR) REAR SIDE, LIG PLOT NO. B-138. RESIDENTIAL COLONY RAIL VIHAR VILLAGE SADULLABAD PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD. ALSO AT: H 14C, SHARMA COLONY, PHASE-2 BUDH VIHAR, SULTANPURA, C-BLOCK NORTH DELHI, DELHI-110086 LOAN NO. - AC201904877678</b> (Along with future interest and charges accruing after 15.04.2024 till the total realization of the loan amount)  | 8,26,500/-<br>82,650/-<br>10,000/-  | Rs. 8,59,767.3/- as on 15-Apr-2024   | 10-03-2025 to 11-03-2025 From 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM | 11-03-2025 Till 12.00 PM                                   | 12.03.2025 10 Am to 12 Pm  |

**EMD amount shall be remitted through NEFT/RTGS/Funds Transfer in favour of "CLIX Housing Finance Limited", Account No. 341905000653\_ICICIBANK\_IFSC-ICIC0003419**

The balance 25% of final purchase price minus EMD amount shall be deposited by the successful bidder, latest by the next working day by way of RTGS / NEFT in the E-Auction account of CLIX. The balance 75% of the final purchase price shall be deposited by way of RTGS / NEFT within 30 days from the date of auction in the same E-Auction account as above. The refund of EMD to the unsuccessful bidders shall be made only in the account number mentioned by such bidder in the Bid form within 5 working days. **Terms and Conditions: - E-Auction is being held on "AS IS WHERE IS" AND "AS IS WHAT IS" AND "WHATEVER THERE IS" basis and will be conducted "Online".** The auction will be conducted through CLIX's approved service provider (C1 India Pvt. Ltd. at the web portal [www.bankauctions.com](http://www.bankauctions.com). Bid Documents, Declaration, General Terms and Conditions of online auction sale are available in [www.bankauctions.com](http://www.bankauctions.com). To the best of knowledge and information of the Authorized Officer, there is no encumbrance on the properties. However, the intending bidders should make their own independent inquiries regarding the encumbrances, title of properties put on auction and claims/rights / dues/ affecting the properties, prior to submitting their bid, in this regard, the a-auction advertisement does not constitute and will not be deemed to constitute any commitment or any representation of CLIX. For any details with respect to any help, procedure and on-line training in respect of the auction process please contact Mr. Ayush Gupta, (M) 9999916811, (M) 9999916811, (M) 9999916811, E-mail ID: [delhi@clixindia.com](mailto:delhi@clixindia.com). For any details regarding the property please contact +91-7291981124 / 25 / 26. It may be noted that in case of any discrepancy/inconsistency between auctions notices published in English and in Hindi then the contents of the notice published in English shall prevail. The Authorized Officer / Secured Creditor shall not be responsible in any way for any third party claims / rights/ dues. The sale shall be subject to rules/ conditions prescribed under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 STATUTORY 15 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002.

**Date: 23.02.2025, Place: Ghaziabad** **Authorized Officer, Clix Housing Finance Ltd.**

**NOTICE**

The last page of the Perpetual Sub-lease deed dated 15/05/1980 regarding Plot No. G-46 Preet Vihar Delhi with Sub Registrar's stamp and signature has been lost. The report of the same has been lodged at the Crime Branch police station on 20/02/2025 vide L R No. : 2604992/2025 finder contact 094151 07509

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

It is to inform to the public at large Mrs. Soni had acquired Built-up Property bearing Plot No. 27, Area 58-1/2 sq. yds., Kharsa No. 5/22, situated at in the area of Village Hastal Delhi, in the abadi colony known as Shiv Vihar, Vikas Enclave, Hastal, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi vide G.P.A along with AT&S & Will Dt. 11.01.2024 executed by Mrs. Kela Devi alias Kela and Now Mrs. Soni is the undisputed owner of the said property.

OR

Any person / firm / institution / company having any claim or right in respect of the said Property by way of inheritance, share, sale, agreement, lease, license, gift, possession, legal heirs, partners or encumbrance howsoever or otherwise is hereby required to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice of his/her share or claim, if any, with all supporting documents at below mentioned address. After expiration of notice period, the claims, if any, of such person shall be treated null and void and also treated as waived and not binding on our client.

Ajay Kumar Giri (Advocate) H.No. 26/161, Basement, Vikram Vihar, Lajpat Nagar 4, New Delhi 110024

**Notice Inviting Tender for Refurbishment of Fire Fighting System**

Tender No. 252 /KC/GHS/2024-25  
The Khatkar CGHS Ltd. (also known as Arjun Apartment), Plot No.8C, Sector-7, Dwarka, New Delhi invites bids by tender system from experienced Bidders for Refurbishment of fire fighting system at The Khatkar CGHS Ltd., Sector-7, Dwarka, New Delhi. Interested firms fulfilling the Pre-qualification criteria as mentioned in the tender document may submit their bid in sealed envelope. The tender document can be collected from society office after paying Rs.100/- (Rupees One Hundred only) cash. In case of any query, may contact Manager, Phone No.989929037 / office 011-4250251.  
**Start of tender Sale date: 23-02-2025 from 11:00AM onwards.**  
**Last Date of Submission of Tender: 01.03.2025 up to 05:00PM.**  
**Bid opening date: 02.03.2025 at 11:30AM.**  
Note: The Khatkar CGHS Ltd. reserves the right to reject any / all bids without assigning any reason whatsoever. -sd-  
Place - New Delhi The Khatkar CGHS Ltd. Date-22/02/2025 (Manager)

# Chinese virologists warn of new Covid-19 type virus

PTI ■ BEIJING

A Chinese team of virologists have found a new bat coronavirus that carries the risk of animal-to-human transmission because it uses the same human receptor as the virus that causes Covid-19, a media report said. The study was led by Shi Zhengli, Chinese virologist from the controversial Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), where the COVID-19 was alleged to have emanated from. Shi, who is known as the Bat Woman for her research on viruses from the Bats, as well as the Chinese government deny that the virus was leaked from the Wuhan lab. The latest discovery is a new lineage of the HKU5 coronavirus first identified in the Japanese pipistrelle bat in Hong Kong. The new virus comes from the merbecovirus subgenus, which also includes the virus that causes Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), the Hong Kong based South China Morning Post reported. The virus is able to bind to the human angiotensin con-

verting enzyme (ACE2), the same receptor used by the Sars-CoV-2 virus, which causes Covid-19, to infect cells. "We report the discovery and isolation of a distinct lineage (lineage 2) of HKU5-CoV, which can utilise not only bat ACE2 but also human ACE2 and various mammalian ACE2 orthologs [— genes found in different species with a common origin]," the team of virologists headed by Shi wrote in a paper published in the peer-reviewed journal Cell on Tuesday, according to the Post report. The researchers found that when the virus was isolated from bat samples it could infect human cells as well as artificially grown masses of cell or tissue that resembled miniaturised respiratory or intestinal organs. Earlier this month, China said its bio-lab in Wuhan which faced allegations linking the COVID-19 causing the global pandemic has never engaged in "gain-of-function studies" on coronavirus amid allegations that USAID has funded the study of the infectious disease.

# Trump fires chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump abruptly fired Air Force Gen CQ Brown Jr as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on Friday, sidelining a history-making fighter pilot and respected officer as part of a campaign led by his defence secretary to rid the military of leaders who support diversity and equity in the ranks. The ouster of Brown, only the second Black general to serve as chairman, is sure to send shock waves through the Pentagon. His 16 months in the job had been consumed with the war in Ukraine and the expanded conflict in the Middle East. "I want to thank General Charles CQ" Brown for his over 40 years of service to our country, including as our current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is a fine gentleman and an outstanding leader, and I wish a great future for him and his family," Trump posted on social media. Brown's public support of Black Lives Matter after the police killing of George Floyd had made him fodder for the administration's wars against "wokeism" in the military.

# India aim for semifinal, Pakistan eye survival in Champions Trophy

PTI ■ DUBAI

Hyped as a marquee showdown but mostly lopsided on the field, India and Pakistan lock horns in the ICC Champions Trophy here on Sunday with Rohit Sharma's men aiming to seal a semifinal spot and Mohammad Rizwan's team desperate to avoid early elimination from the tournament. While India are on a high after claiming a measured six-wicket win over a spirited Bangladesh, Pakistan are evidently tense after the 60-run loss in the tournament-opener against New Zealand. The sub-continental rivals' last Champion Trophy clash was the 2017 final in which Pakistan walked away with the win and the trophy. Rizwan and Co would look to draw inspiration from that triumph in London but would also need to scale up their performance in every department. Though the buzz surrounding the match is nowhere close to being what it used to be at the peak of diplomatic tensions

between the two countries, there is an air of quiet anticipation for the Group A clash at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. India will have a distinct advantage in every aspect. The side has settled in nicely while Pakistan have flown in a couple of days ago after the drubbing handed by the Black Caps in Karachi. More often than not, an India-Pakistan clash is as much a battle of nerves as cricketing abilities and India would be in a much better space on both counts come Sunday afternoon. For starters, skipper Rohit, whose form was a major concern in the run-up to the tournament, seems to be getting back to his best if the lucid stroke-making against Bangladesh was anything to go by. His 41-run cameo was a crucial contribution in the tricky chase of 229 which was masterfully anchored by Shubman Gill with his eighth ODI hundred. In contrast, Pakistan would be fretting over the form and approach of their biggest star Babar Azam. The 90-ball 64 against New Zealand in a chase



Indian cricketers during a practice session ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy match between India and Pakistan in Dubai

PTI

of 320 has been roundly criticised for being too slow. Azam's inability to accelerate even when the asking rate kept climbing has come under scrutiny and he would be under

tremendous pressure against India. Adding to their woes is the injury-forced ouster of game-changing opener Fakhar Zaman from the squad. Imam ul Haq has replaced him in the side and has

joined the squad here. However, middle-order batter Khushdil Shah's counter-attacking 69 in the tournament-opener is a positive. Shah has amusingly stated that he has no

idea how he made the squad given his lean run in the recent past but Pakistan would be happy that the punt has paid off. Pakistan would also be hoping to prove a point by getting the better

of India, who refused to travel across the border for the tournament which is otherwise wholly scheduled in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. The man who is feeling the heat in the Indian team right now is Virat Kohli after yet again failing to convert a fairly decent start. His focus hasn't looked the same for a while but Kohli does have the knack of coming up with special efforts against Pakistan. However, in the larger scheme of things, it could well boil down to key defining moments from the bowlers and here too Pakistan have lots to ponder after the hammering that the Shaheen Afridi-led attack took from the Kiwis. On the other hand, India have a fit-again and in-form Mohammed Shami, who is being brilliantly backed up by Harshit Rana. Shami's fifer against Bangladesh ensured that India did not miss injured talisman Jasprit Bumrah just yet. All-rounder Hardik Pandya has always turned up with his best against Pakistan in major ICC tournaments. He will be hoping to make up for the 2017

Champions Trophy final disappointment where he fought as a lone warrior for India but failed to take his team over the line. India is likely to continue with their winning combination and remain unchanged. The spin trio of Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, and Axar Patel will be included once again on the tweaker-friendly surface to exploit the conditions. **Squads:** India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill (vice captain), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (wicketkeeper), Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana, Rishabh Pant (wicketkeeper), Ravindra Jadeja, Varun Chakravarthy. Pakistan: Mohammad Rizwan (captain), Salman Ali Agha (vice captain), Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Kamran Ghulam, Saud Shakeel, Tayyab Tahir, Faheem Ashraf, Khushdil Shah, Usman Khan, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hasnain, Naseem Shah, Shaheen Shah Afridi.

## Kohli focuses on spin play before Pakistan clash



Virat Kohli during a practice session ahead of India-Pakistan CT match

PTI

PTI ■ DUBAI

Indian superstar Virat Kohli meant business a day before the marquee clash against Pakistan in the Champions Trophy as he arrived at the International Cricket Council

(ICC) Academy two hours before scheduled practice time to iron out his issues against spin. Kohli, who was troubled by the ball outside off-stump from the pacers on the Test tour of Australia, has been found vulnerable against spin in the

recent ODIs he has played. The 36-year-old fell to leg-spinner Rishad Hossain in India's opening Champions Trophy game against Bangladesh on Thursday, his sixth dismissal in a row against spinners in ODIs. He was caught at backward point while trying to cut Hossain. In the preceding series against England at home, leg spinner Adil Rashid had got the better of Kohli.

The former India captain will have to deal with the likes of Abrar Ahmed when India takes on Pakistan at the Dubai International Stadium on Sunday. Irrespective of his form, Kohli's commitment to the game remains unquestionable, and his exemplary work ethic was on full display as he arrived for training well before his teammates, who also showed up an hour earlier than the scheduled time, and was the last to leave.

It was not a surprise that the majority of the net bowlers he faced were spinners, including a couple of leg-break bowlers, as

many off-spinners and a left-arm spinner. Pakistan have a part time left-arm spinner in Khushdil Shah, while Salman Agha bowls off-spin.

With due respect to the opposition, Indian batters would be fancying themselves against the Pakistan spin attack. The main challenge for them will come from the pace trio of Shaheen Afridi, Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah who all are under pressure after an underwhelming opening game against New Zealand. While India are sitting comfortably after the win over Bangladesh, Pakistan find themselves in a must-win situation.

The wicket is expected to be on the slower side, bringing a battery of Indian spinners into the game. India have five spinners in the squad, including two specialists in Kuldeep Yadav and Varun Chakravarthy, while the all-rounders who bowl spin are Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Washington Sundar.

## Babar prioritised personal preferences over bench strength: Umar Akmal

PTI ■ KARACHI

Discarded Test batsman Umar Akmal has placed the blame for the current state of the Pakistan cricket team squarely on Babar Azam's shoulders, saying the former captain failed to build bench strength during his nearly five-year tenure at the helm.

Defending champions Pakistan, hosting a major global tournament for the first time in nearly three decades, made a disappointing start to their Champions Trophy campaign, losing to New Zealand in the opening match and jeopardizing their chances of qualifying for the semifinals.

The 34-year-old Umar, who has been out of the national side since 2019, did not hold back in criticising Babar's leadership, accusing him of lacking vision. "Babar was captain for nearly five years most of the time in all formats and he never tried to build up the bench strength due to his likes and dislikes," Umar told a TV channel.

Babar served as Pakistan's captain from late 2019 until late 2023 before stepping down following the 2023 World Cup. He was reinstated as captain in 2024 for white-ball formats but relinquished the role after a disappointing World T20 Cup campaign last year. Umar said that during a period when he was in good form and scoring runs in domestic cricket, he had approached Babar, asking for a chance to make a comeback.

"I told Babar that look give me a fair chance. You are doing well in the top order and I can be your finisher and we can win matches regularly and it will be good for Pakistan cricket," he said. However, Umar said his request was ignored. "He didn't listen to me and for five years when he was captain he never bothered to try to build a strong bench because only teams with good back up players do consistently well in all formats," he added. Umar, who is Babar's cousin,



Babar Azam and Imam-ul-Haq during a practice session ahead of India and Pakistan CT match in Dubai

PTI

represented Pakistan in 16 Tests, 121 ODIs, and 84 T20Is before being dropped from the national team in 2019. He stated that the Pakistan team has stagnated because talented players, who have performed consistently in domestic cricket, have not been given a fair

chance under Babar's leadership. Babar has been facing a lot of heat since Pakistan's loss in the final of the three-nation event on February 14 and his poor performance in the opening match of the Champions Trophy has only intensified the pressure.

## Aldrich Potgieter powers to four-shot lead in Mexico Open

PTI ■ VALLARTA

Aldrich Potgieter showed his ability to shoot low in the Mexico Open, powering and putting his way to a 10-under 61 that gave the big-hitting South African a four-shot lead going into the weekend at Vidanta Vallarta.

Potgieter chipped in for par after a tee shot into the water on the 10th hole. He failed to birdie two of the shorter par fives on the back nine. He still had an outside chance at another sub-60 round, having shot 59 on the Korn Ferry Tour a year ago. Those hopes ended with a tee shot into the bunker on the par-5 18th hole, and an approach that came up short into a bunker. The ball stayed near the lip, making it difficult for him to get the 20-yard bunker shot close. He two-putted from 25 feet for par. "But it was OK," he said of the par. "I knew I made a lot of extra birdies throughout the day where that wasn't going to hurt me." Potgieter tied the course record and was at 16-under 126, four shots ahead of Stephan Jaeger (64) and Brian Campbell, who birdied his last hole for a second straight 65. It was superb display for Potgieter,



File Photo

who won the 2022 British Amateur at age 17 and last year became the youngest player (19) to win on the Korn Ferry Tour. "I love the golf course. It definitely suits my game, I think, in a lot of aspects," Potgieter said. "If I can keep putting well, I think it should be pretty good." His power and ball-striking stand out. His putter is what led to the 61, with Potgieter holing seven putts from the 10-foot range or

longer. That doesn't include the 10th, where his tee shot found the green and chipped in from 20 feet for par. He reached the 661-yard 12th hole in two by hitting driver off the fairway to just over 20 feet. "I've been practicing, doing a drill on the driving range with teeing it really low and hitting it really good with the driver that way," Potgieter said. "I was telling my caddie, Let's just do the same

thing.' It was a perfect number, so yeah, hit the perfect shot." Seven of his drives went 325 yards or longer. Jaeger had another bogey on one of the five par 5s, this time by hitting wedge over the green at number 12, and still managed a 64 to stay in the mix. He had six birdies on his last 10 holes. "It's one of those golf courses I feel like if you hit it nicely and you give yourself a lot of chances, the greens are so good it's nice to make some putts," he said. Aaron Rai of England, the highest-ranked player in the field at No. 29, had a 64 and was five shots behind. Antoine Rozner came to his final hole needing birdie to move the cut line and knock out 12 players. Rozner had to make a 10-foot par to avoid missing the cut himself. Two Masters-bound amateurs were among the 77 players who made the cut at three-under 138. Latin America Amateur champion Justin Hastings of the Cayman Islands birdied three of his last four holes for a 67 and was at 136. US Amateur champion Jose Luis Ballester shot another 69 and was at 138. Also making the cut was Blades Brown, the 17-year-old who turned pro this year.

## I only eat one meal a day: Shami



Mohammed Shami during a practice session ahead of India-Pakistan CT match in Dubai

PTI

PTI ■ DUBAI

Giving an insight into how he keeps match-fit even at the age of 34, Indian bowling stalwart Mohammed Shami says he prefers to eat only one meal a day and avoids sweets. Shami has been the standout bowler for India in the ongoing Champions Trophy with the pace spearhead grabbing five wickets against Bangladesh in the marquee event in Dubai, thus becoming the fastest Indian bowler to take 200 ODI

wickets. "After 2015, I only have one meal a day. I only have dinner; no breakfast, no lunch. It is very difficult to do such a thing but once you get used to it then it becomes very easy," said Shami during an interaction with cricketer-turned-commentator Navjot Singh Sidhu on Star Sports. He had been sidelined from international cricket for 14 months due to an ankle injury sustained during the 2023 ODI World Cup final against

Australia, which interrupted a remarkable run where he topped the tournament's wicket-taker's chart with 24 scalps. The injury required surgery, and his recovery was further delayed by swelling on his left knee, keeping him out of international action for more than a year. Shami said he gained quite a bit of weight during the recovery phase and had to shed nearly nine kgs to get back into shape. "I have lost nine kgs (during rehabilitation). The most difficult thing is you have to challenge yourself. When you are in this condition. When I was at the NCA, it was a very difficult phase," he said. "My weight was touching 90kgs. The best thing about me is that I do not crave for delicacies. I stay away from sweets. I stay away from a lot of things, things that generally one shouldn't eat. So, I stay away from them," said Shami, who will have to shoulder a lot of responsibility in India's clash against arch-rivals Pakistan in the Champions Trophy here on Sunday.

## PCB asks ICC on Pakistan's omission from broadcast

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has expressed its displeasure to the sport's governing body International Cricket Council (ICC) over the absence of country's name from the tournament logo shown during the live broadcast of India versus Bangladesh clash in the Champions Trophy. The match was played in Dubai on Thursday. According to PCB sources, the ICC has admitted the error and assured that it will use the three-line logo with Pakistan name in all matches in Dubai - the same broadcast graphic which has been shown in matches in the host country. India are playing all their games in Dubai as part of the hybrid model agreed by the concerned stakeholders. "Yes, it's confirmed that PCB has written to ICC, and the ICC has assured the PCB that they will use the three-line horizontal logo with Pakistan name in all Dubai matches - the same broadcast logo graphic which was used in Karachi matches on February 19 and 21," a PCB source said. It has been learnt that the ICC has informally told PCB that it was a technical error. During the India-Bangladesh match, the logo in the top left corner of the broadcast carried just the event name - Champions Trophy 2025 - but not Pakistan, the host country. India defeated Bangladesh by six wickets in that match, which was their opening match in the eight-team competition. The graphics are prepared and produced by UK-based Sunset and Vine under ICC's supervision, well in advance and are provided for live feed. The issue came to light before the marquee Champions Trophy clash between arch-rivals India and Pakistan in Dubai on Sunday.

## Manu Bhaker to lead 35-member team for SA World Cups

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ace pistol shooter Manu Bhaker will lead a 35-member Indian team in the season-opening International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cups in April in South America with almost all the shooters who featured in the Paris Olympics making the cut. A notable member of the team is air pistol ace Saurabh Chaudhary, who returns to the national side after more than three years. Saurabh, who battled a shoulder injury and poor form following the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, recently shot a national record score in 10m air pistol qualification besides impressing in the trials. He had paired with Manu in the 10m air pistol mixed team event in Tokyo. The international shooting season will begin with a double-leg South American sojourn,

with the first World Cup (rifle or pistol or shotgun) scheduled in Buenos Aires, Argentina from April 1-11, which will be followed by a second combined World Cup in Lima, Peru from April 13-22. Manu, who was recently awarded the Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna award for her two bronze medals at the Paris Olympics in 10m women's air pistol and 10m air pistol mixed team event with Sarabjot Singh, will compete in the South American competitions in two individual events - women's air pistol and 25m pistol. She will be accompanied by other Paris Olympians like Anish Bhanwala and Vijayveer Sidhu (men's 25m rapid-fire pistol), Esha Singh (women's 25m pistol), Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (men's 50m rifle three positions), Sift Kaur Samra and Shriyanka Sadangi (women's 50m rifle 3 positions), Arjun Babuta (men's 10m air rifle), Prithviraj Tondaiman

(men's trap), Anant Jeet Singh Narulla (women's skeet) and Raiza Dhillion (women's skeet). Ahead of the team's departure, the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) will organise a training camp at the Karni Singh Range here from March 14. The biggest draw on the ISSF calendar this year will be the World Championships scheduled in October (shotgun) and November (rifle or pistol). "There will be a total of three World Cup stages for each discipline while two junior World Cups, the second among them in New Delhi in September, are also scheduled. Also on the international roster this year is the 16th Asian Championships in Kazakhstan in August," said NRAI in a statement. NRAI secretary-general Sultan Singh said it was time for the Indian shooters to raise the bar further following their success at the Paris Olympics, where the 21-

member contingent bagged three bronze medals. "A new responsibility rests on the entire shooting fraternity to raise the bar even higher. We are confident that those selected for the international season openers will come out with flying colours," said Singh. NRAI recently announced a long list of coaches and experts to guide the Indian shooters on their journey to the 2028 LA Games with Manu's coach Jaspal Rana heading the chart. Rana was brought back into the Indian shooting's mainstream with the NRAI making him the high-performance coach for 25m pistol, while picking the decorated Jitu Rai for the 10m air pistol coaching job. Also appointed as head coach (rifle) was the latest Dronacharya award recipient Deepali Deshpande, who guided rifle shooter Swapnil Kusale to bronze in Paris.

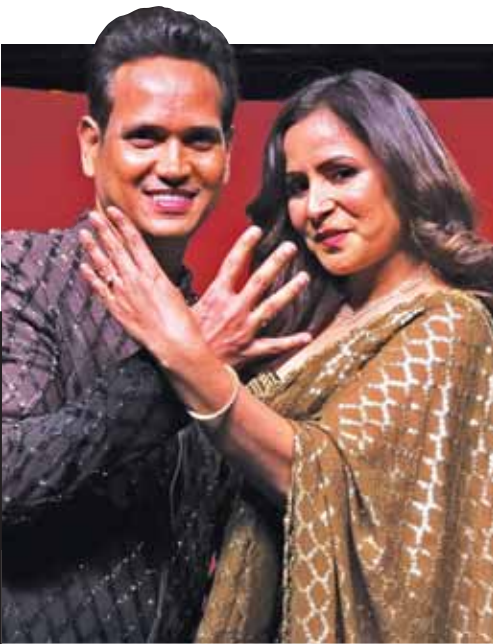
## Ahlawat makes cut with birdie-birdie finish in Kenya

PTI ■ NAIROBI

Veer Ahlawat's rounds of 70-72 gave him an even par total, allowing him to make a last minute cut at the Magical Kenya Open here. Ahlawat started his second round very early and then had to wait for the rest of the afternoon to know whether he had made the cut. The 28-year-old rookie, who shot a one-under 71 in the first round after a disappointing finish with three bogeys in his last four holes, was starting at a missed cut when he came to the 17th tee in the second round. This time Ahlawat produced two great birdies on the closing holes to move from three-over to one-over and give himself a chance to make the cut. Meanwhile, fellow Indian Shubhankar Sharma, endured another tough week as he carded 71-72 and missed the cut

by one. Ahlawat, who was runner-up at the Hero Indian Open last year, bogeyed the second and the seventh and got his first birdie on the eighth. He dropped two more shots on the 14th and 16th and was two-over for the tournament when he came to the 17th tee. He birdied the 17th and added one more on 18th, which he had eagled a day earlier. That helped him squeeze inside the cut line and earned a chance at improving his position over the weekend. Ahlawat, who had made two cuts and missed two in four starts on DP World Tour in 2025, was making his third cut. He was T-27 in Ras Al Khaimah and T-49 in Bahrain and missed cuts in Dubai and Qatar. Ahlawat earned playing rights on DPWT after topping the Indian PGTI Tour's Order of Merit in 2024.

The PGTI and the DPWT have an arrangement by which the top Indian OOM gets a card to the DPWT and this is the third year of the alliance. Sharma, however, has missed four cuts in a row on the DP World Tour and his only cut of 2025 came at the International Series in India. John Parry produced a back-nine birdie blitz in his round of 5-under 66 to lead by one shot at the halfway stage. Parry, who won the AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open in December, started the day alongside Benjamin Hebert at the top of the leaderboard. Herbert finished early with 66 and was 13-under, till Parry (63-65) overtook him to get to 14-under. A 15-year-old Kenyan amateur golfer, Shashwat Harish, whose parents are of Indian origin, was thrilled with a chance to play the event.



# A Love Written in Diamond

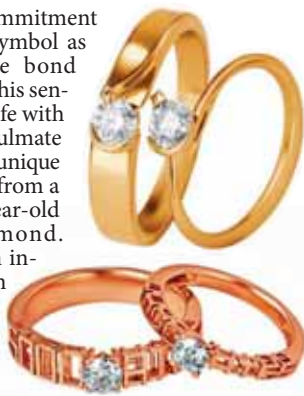
A diamond's journey, like Tanishq's Soulmate Diamond Pair, is meant to last forever, says SAKSHI PRIYA

Love and commitment deserve a symbol as rare as the bond they represent. This sentiment came to life with Tanishq's 'The Soulmate Diamond Pair', a unique creation crafted from a single billion-year-old natural diamond. Introduced at an intimate event in collaboration with De Beers, the collection celebrates the idea that true love, much like a diamond, is shaped over time and meant to last forever.

The highlight of the evening was the rings themselves, two intricately designed pieces that started as one. Their shared origin represents a connection that is both precious and unbreakable. Designed to mark life's most cherished moments, these rings become a part of a couple's journey, whether it's an engagement, anniversary or a special milestone.

Each ring carries a part of the same diamond, making them truly one of a kind. They became storytellers of love and shared journeys, crafted to be passed down through generations.

Beyond their sparkle, these rings hold a significance that makes them stand apart. One thing was certain. Some things in life never fade and love is one of them. These rings are a reflection of bonds that are rare, strong and meant to last a lifetime.



# GILDED IN TRADITION

A collection that celebrates heritage, crafted with skill and passion, keeps traditions alive with grace, says SAKSHI PRIYA

Fashion with meaning is rare. Every stitch tells a story and every fabric holds a memory. In a world of fleeting trends, it is refreshing to see a designer who values artistry and tradition, ensuring that heritage remains a part of contemporary fashion.

Shilpi Gupta, the creative force behind House of Shilpi Gupta, presented her latest collection, Kanakmani, at Earthloom, The Threads of Heritage during Bharat Tex 2025. The showcase brought together craftsmanship, heritage and modern sensibilities, capturing the essence of Indian handloom traditions.

The collection, inspired by the richness of gold zari and heirloom textiles, reimagined heritage in a way that felt deeply personal. Each piece carried the weight of history while embracing the aesthetics of today. The garments were not only about embellishments or intricate work but about preserving the artistry that generations have passed down.

The showstopper, Sheetal Mallar, embodied the spirit of Kanakmani in an exquisite ensemble that exuded elegance. The collection blended structured silhouettes with fluid drapes, pairing blouses

with jackets and capes, offering a fresh take on traditional styles. It was a celebration of textures, colours and meticulous craftsmanship.

What stood out was the emotional connection in each piece. The idea of passing down heirloom textiles, of a mother gifting a piece to her daughter, who then treasures it for her own children, made the collection feel timeless. It was not about trends, it was about legacy.

Shilpi Gupta's vision goes beyond creating garments. She honours India's deep-rooted textile heritage, bringing forth the grandeur of pitambari, nilambari, shatavari, karwa, and bhoota work with gold and silver threads. The collection was a reminder that fashion can hold cultural significance while remaining relevant.

House of Shilpi Gupta has always been about reviving and reinterpreting India's textile traditions. Every fabric, every silhouette, carries a sense of nostalgia while embracing the present, proving that true fashion is never only about the clothes, it is about the stories they tell.



# Showcasing India's Textile Strength

BY ABHI SINGHAL

Bharat Tex 2025, India's premier global textile event, was held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi. The event featured over 5,000 exhibitors, providing a comprehensive showcase of India's textile ecosystem. The expo encompassed the entire textile value chain, from raw materials to finished products, including accessories. It featured special innovation and start-up pavilions, hackathons, and design challenges, providing funding opportunities for start-ups through leading investors. With stalls of everything like Vatsal Exports LLP, Jubilee Industries, JCI RC Velvet, Khadi stalls and so much more, the event was a textile hub.

On talking to Vatsal Gaudani, Founder of Vatsal Exports LLP, shared his impressions of Bharat Tex 2025 and the interest of the buyers, he said, "This diverse attendance underscores the event's significance as a premier platform for showcasing India's textile prowess. The address of Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the government's commitment to the textile sector."

The event concluded successfully, reinforcing India's position as a key player in the global textile supply chain and its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and global collaboration.



# The Truth Behind Headlines and Bylines

With a big stellar cast and hooked storyline, Crime Beat delivers crime and suspense but its execution falls short at times, writes ABHI SINGHAL

Crime Beat currently streaming on Zee5 is a crime thriller directed by Sudhir Mishra and Sanjeev Kaul. The web series with a blend of investigative journalism and the crime world takes you through the lives of journalists and criminals showcasing the risk involved in both lives.

Starring Saqib Saleem, Rahul Bhat, Vipin Sharma, Sai Tamhankar, Danish Husain, Rajesh Tailang, and Saba Azad, the story starts from the world of how getting a byline or a good story is a struggle in the newspaper and frustrates the protagonist Saqib Saleem.

The cast has played sharp roles, adding masala (fun) and hook to the webseries. Saqib Saleem as Abhishek Sinha has portrayed emotions of all sorts in his scenes showcasing the frustration of struggling for a page one byline, changing jobs and a stolen hit byline. Rahul Bhat as Binny Chaudhary has fewer scenes but is there for a great grip to the story. Sai Tamhankar as Archana Pandey has



RATING  
★★★★



played the queen of disguise perfectly. The role of Danish Husain as Amir Akhtar, a senior crime journalist and his link to Binny

uplifts the scenes of thrill. Rajesh Tailang as DCP Uday Kumar has always aced his acting part as the evil police officer and Vipin Sharma has sup-

ported a great cast. Although the cast is not a disappointment, the confusing beginning and unclear screen time for the characters are what will disappoint you. For instance, Saba Azad as Maya Kapoor opened as a strong character and could have possibly made a better impact but her fewer scenes and later introduction as the love interest of bhishek was a dismay.

Crime Beat doesn't always make the most of its strengths and occasionally falls short of its potential, with its clunky dialogues sometimes making scenes feel mechanical. However, if you enjoy shows packed with relentless crime, action, and suspense, Crime Beat is worth a watch, as the actors don't leave a room for disappointment.



## SUGGESTED BINGES



**Crime Beat**  
IMDB Rating - 7.1/10  
OTT - Zee5  
Cast - Saqib Saleem, Saba Azad, Rahul Bhat



**Oops! Ab Kya?**  
IMDB Rating - 6.4/10  
OTT - JioHotstar  
Cast - Jaaved Jaaferi, Sonali Kulkarni, Shweta Basu Prasad



**Reacher Season 3**  
IMDB Rating - 8/10  
OTT - Amazon  
Prime Video  
Cast - Alan Ritchson, Maria Sten



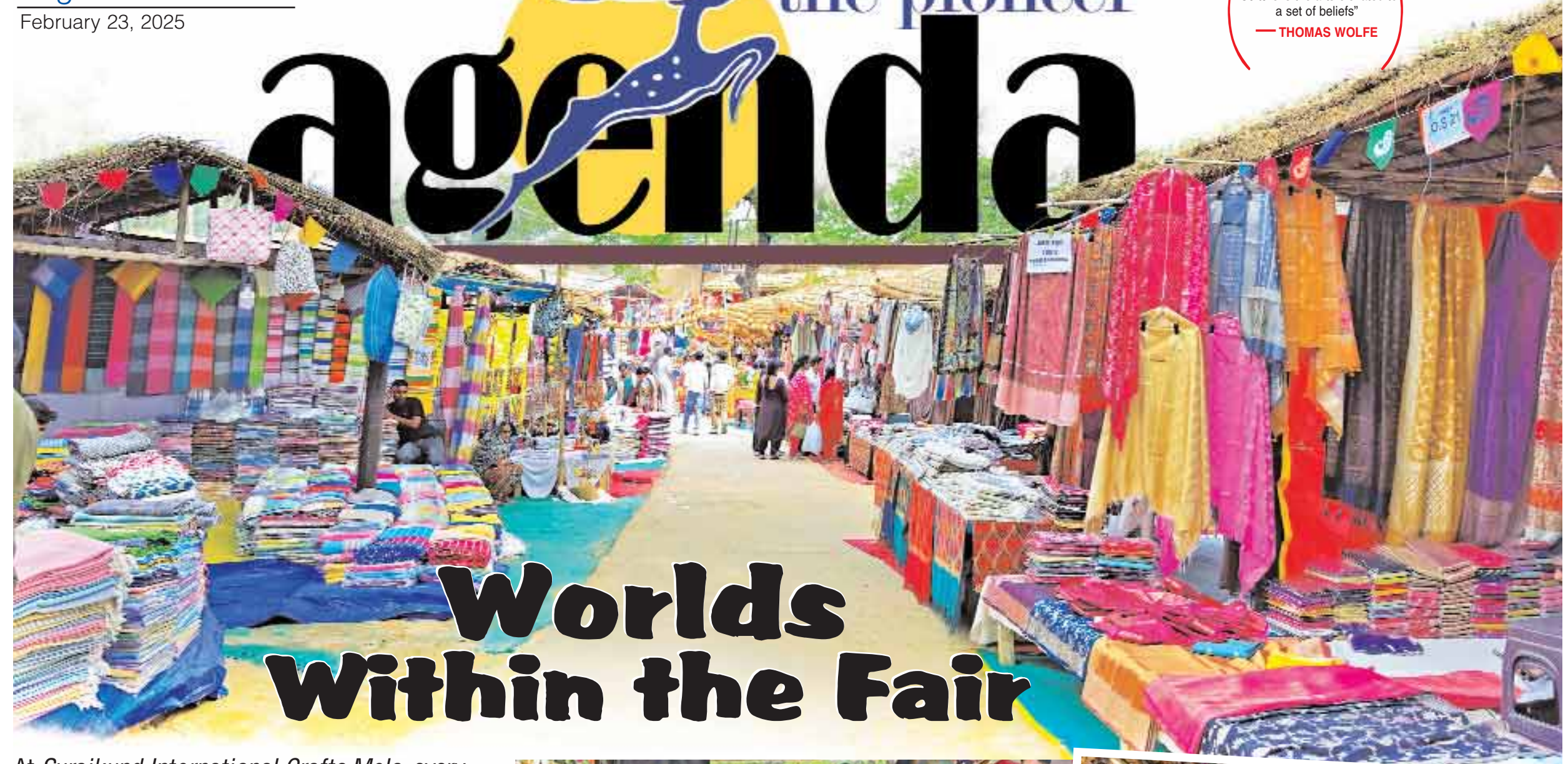
**Surface Season 2**  
IMDB Rating - 6.4/10  
OTT - Apple TV+  
Cast - Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Oliver Jackson, Ari Graynor



**The White Lotus Season 3**  
IMDB Rating - 8/10  
OTT - JioHotstar  
Cast - Leslie Bibb, Carrie Coon, Walton Goggins, Sarah Catherine Hook, Jason Isaacs



"Culture is the arts elevated to a set of beliefs"  
— THOMAS WOLFE



# Worlds Within the Fair

At Surajkund International Crafts Mela, every colour, every texture and every melody told a story of heritage and passion, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

**T**he first thing that catches your senses is the smell, fresh jalebis sizzling in hot oil, the tangy aroma of bhel puri mixed with the sweetness of roasted nuts. People walk past, their hands full of colourful bags, carefully wrapped souvenirs and steaming cups of chai. A group of school children rushes by, laughing as they hold up the masks they just bought. Nearby, an elderly couple stands at a saree stall, running their fingers over the soft silk as they decide which one to take home.

The 38th Surajkund International Crafts Mela, taking place in Faridabad, Haryana, at Surajkund Mela Grounds, is a grand celebration of art, culture and heritage, featuring over 1,000 stalls, vibrant performances and a special Rajasthan-themed showcase. Every corner of the mela offers a glimpse into the past. It is a place where cultures converge, creativity flourishes and every turn unveils a new treasure waiting to be explored.

### HANDCRAFTED TREASURES

Walking through the fair feels like stepping into a marketplace where every item has a story. The Department of Archaeology and Museum, Haryana, showcases artefacts from different periods of history. Odisha's stall is lined with handloom textiles, intricate Sambalpuri sarees and delicate silver jewellery. Banaras displays its famous silk sarees, their golden threads catching the light. Madhya Pradesh presents handcrafted lamps and umbrellas embroidered with elephant designs. Each stall holds something unique, drawing visitors eager to take home a piece of heritage.

"I have been coming here for years," says an artist from Madhya Pradesh. "People appreciate handmade crafts here and that gives us hope that our work will live on."

People walk around holding boards with messages spread across the mela. Among the many stalls, Bhutan's artisans display handcrafted meditation items. "These are used for meditation," says a vendor as a visitor calls their partner over to take a look. A wooden birdhouse sits at another stall, a symbol of the sustainable crafts that continue to be passed down through generations.



### GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

Surajkund brings together artisans from around the world. The Grand Bazaar of Istanbul showcases fine textiles and jewellery while Madagascar's stall offers handcrafted vegan bags. Lebanon's stall is filled with intricately designed hookah pots, Iran displays fragrant ittar and woven mats and Syria's section holds paintings, lamps and table décor.

A shopkeeper from Afghanistan carefully unrolls a handmade carpet. "This one costs ₹2,00,000," he says, running his fingers over the fabric. "A deep artist worked on this for an entire year. It may look like a mat but it is a painting in itself."



PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR



PERFORMERS FROM MOZAMBIQUE TAKE THE STAGE. THE EXCITEMENT SPREADS AND VISITORS CANNOT RESIST JOINING IN. FACES LIGHT UP AS PEOPLE DANCE TOGETHER, SHARING IN THE JOY OF THE MOMENT

### DANCE AND MUSIC

The sound of dhols leads the crowd towards the Odisha dance performance. Dancers dressed in traditional attire move with grace, their anklets jingling in sync. A group of visitors stands around them, making videos, clicking photos and cheering. Children try to copy the steps, laughing as they stumble.

College students and professionals move through the fair, capturing performances and interactions for their projects. "We're covering the mela for our college assignment," says a media student. "There's so much to learn from this experience."



### VINTAGE SIPS

The crockery section at Surajkund Mela is a visual delight, showcasing exquisite vintage and aesthetic tea sets from Iran and different parts of the world. Delicate porcelain, hand-painted kettles, and intricately designed cups transport visitors to another era. The Iranian sets, adorned with fine patterns and gold accents, stand out for their elegance. Each stall feels like a time capsule, drawing people in as they admire the charm of old-world tea traditions.



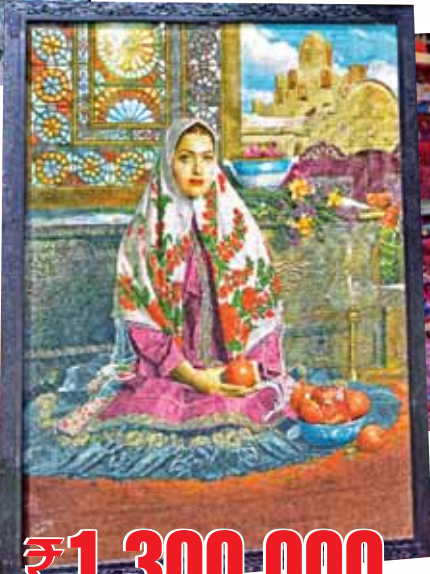
### A CULTURAL MELTING POT

Surajkund is a place where cultures meet, where an artist from Tunisia can sit next to a designer from Bangladesh and exchange ideas. It is where a student can witness centuries-old crafting techniques and imagine a future in design. It is where a photographer captures the joy of a child dancing to a tune she has never heard before.

"This place has everything," says a vlogger recording the event. "If you love art, culture, photography or just good food, there's no place better than this."

From authentic crafts and mesmerising folk performances to global flavours, every moment is a celebration of colours, creativity, and culture. Visitors can engage with craftsmen, learn their traditions, and witness the beauty of handcrafted heritage. Performing arts take centre stage with cultural troupes showcasing folk dances and music at the open-air theatre, Matyashala. From ghazals and classical thumri to soul-stirring ragas, the cultural evenings add magic to the event.

This year, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha shine this year with Gond paintings, Maheshwari sarees, Dhokra figurines, Pattachitra art, Sambalpuri weaves, and Gotipua dance. BIMSTEC nations add cultural richness, while Apna Ghar showcases Haryana's heritage. Today is the last chance to experience it all!



**₹1,300,000**

In 2024, 1.3 million visitors attended the Surajkund Mela

### CHALLENGES OF ARTISANS

While the fair is filled with colour and excitement, it also highlights the struggles of artisans. Many crafts that have been passed down through generations now face the threat of being forgotten. "It's not easy to make a living from this," says a block print artist from Rajasthan. "Handmade work takes time but people now prefer cheaper machine-made products. Events like this give us a chance to show the beauty of our craft." Despite the challenges, there is hope.



"ONE CANNOT THINK WELL, LOVE WELL, SLEEP WELL, IF ONE HAS NOT DINED WELL"  
— VIRGINIA WOOLF

Experience Lucknow's legendary flavours with live cooking, rich kebabs, aromatic biryanis and decadent desserts, says SAKSHI PRIYA

# The Royal Taste of Awadh

Lucknow is a city where history and flavour walk hand in hand. Known for its tehzeeb, rich culinary traditions, and slow-cooked delicacies, every bite tells a story of Nawabs and royal kitchens. The aroma of saffron and kebabs fills its streets, the sound of clinking glasses and quiet conversations adding to its charm.

Now, this experience finds a new home in Noida at *Chica Loca* by Sunny Leone. A space where every detail reflects a love for food and culture. The atmosphere feels personal, as though the restaurant itself is telling you a secret. Here, *Zaika-e-Lucknow* is an experience that unfolds before your eyes.

### A Feast for the Senses

There's something mesmerising about watching food being prepared right in front of you. The sizzle, the aroma, the way each ingredient is carefully added. At *Chica Loca* by *Zaika-e-Lucknow* is an experience.

Every dish carries the heart of Lucknow's legendary cuisine, steeped in history and rich in flavour. The chefs perform, turning centuries-old recipes into moments worth savouring.



### The Chaat Experience

At the chaat counter, the experience begins with a flourish. A delicate kataifi basket is placed before you, crisp and golden.

A freshly fried aloo tikki is placed inside, followed by a drizzle of thick tamarind and jaggery sauce, its deep sweetness balanced by the tang of yoghurt. A spoonful of *Arala Galka chutney*, deep green, fragrant, bursting with spice, is added, the final flourish to a masterpiece of textures and tastes.

This chaat is layers of flavour, a balance of crisp, soft, sweet, and spicy. The first bite is a revelation, crunchy, creamy, tangy and warming, all at once. It's street food elevated to an art form.

### Gulati Kebab & Katal Delight

On the live grill, the *Gulati Kebab* sizzles gently, its rich aroma of ghee, saffron, and warming spices filling the air. A delicate blend of khoya, lentils and paneer, infused with cashew paste and *Lazzat-e-Taam* masala, makes it irresistibly soft. Served with saffron-infused Sheermal and bold panch-phoron chutney, it melts on the tongue, releasing layers of spice and smoke.

Never thought of *Katal* as something this indulgent but here it was, stealing the spotlight. Slow-cooked in Lucknowi spices, the raw jackfruit transformed into a rich meaty delight. Paired with warm *Rumali Roti*, it absorbed the deep smokiness of cloves, cardamom and ghee, each bite a revelation.

### The Non-Veg Secrets

For those who crave the richness of Lucknow's meat dishes, the live kitchen offers a spectacle of its own. The legendary *Chowk Ke Galawati Kebab*, soft, smoky, spiced to perfection, is prepared right before your eyes, each portion hand-minced with precision. Beside it, a pot of *Abu Bakar Ki Biryani* is gently stirred, the fragrance of saffron and rose water rising with the steam. The *Rann Mussallam*, slow-cooked to perfection with rich Lucknowi spices, makes a grand entrance, the meat tender, falling off the bone.

### Pan-Asian Flair

While the heart of *Zaika-e-Lucknow* lies in its heritage, there's an unexpected twist, a live Pan-Asian station. The contrast is striking. Here, the preparation is fast, dynamic. Flames leap as a chef tosses fresh vegetables in a hot wok, the aroma of basil and soy hitting the air.

A dish of *Sticky Rice* with Vegetables in *Basil Sauce* comes together in mere minutes. The chef glances up, asking, "More spice?" A nod, and in goes a handful of

fresh chilli, the deep red cutting through the glossy sauce. Spice is adjusted on request. The final dish is bold and full of character, every grain of rice coated in a rich, aromatic sauce. It's a theatrical contrast to the slow, deliberate artistry of Lucknow's kebabs and chaats, yet equally hypnotic to watch.

### A Sweet Mystery

Khushnuma Begum Ki Kulfi, what a name for a dessert. The story goes that a young chef once found an old spoon engraved with "Khushnuma" in the bustling bartan bazaar, and it changed his fate forever. This dessert carries that same magic. A saffron and almond kulfi, layered with falooda and dry fruits, served with a paan-infused rabri blended with betel leaf and gulkand. Each bite is a journey through Lucknow's rich culinary history, a perfect ending to an unforgettable meal.

Dining at *Chica Loca* is about feeling connected, to the past, to the craft, to the very moment when something beautiful is created. Watching the hands that shape the food, hearing the stories behind the dishes, inhaling the scents that fill the air, it all makes each bite more meaningful. At *Zaika-e-Lucknow*, tradition is alive, food is theatre and every meal is a story waiting to be told.

### FACT SHEET

**Restaurant:** Chica Loca by sunny leone  
**Venue:** 4th Floor, Plot Number-C3, One29, E1, Noida-Greater Noida Expy, above Gulshan, Sector 129, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201301  
**Price:** 2500+ for two (without alcohol)

### COCKTAILS & MORE

The drinks here deserve a moment of their own. *Ishq*, what a name. A smooth rum-based drink with almond milk, cream, cinnamon, honey and egg white. Velvety and rich, it felt like a warm embrace. Then came *Suroor-e-Raan*, a vodka cocktail with betel leaf, cloves, honey and lime, served alongside a fragrant meetha paan. An unexpected yet perfect pairing. Finally, *Mehfi*, a mocktail inspired by qawwali, blended rose water, pomegranate, lime and honey. Refreshing, floral, and full of life, just like the city itself.

# Taste of Purani Dilli in Every Bite

*Zaiqa-e-Dilli* returns with a love letter to flavours with iconic street flavours, says GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Ever dreamt of old times when you wanted to have lip smacking street food you headed to the walled city of Delhi and savoured everything that was sinful yet tasted like heaven - choley bhature, parathas of paratha wali gali, and maggi, papri chaat, Daulat ki chaat and what have you. Times have changed Delhi is far more crowded than it used to be but Delhi Street food is same. And the good news is you can have the same taste in same ambiance in *Crowne Plaza Mayur Vihar* which is celebrating *Zaiqa-e-Dilli* till March 2. And here you get to taste not only the old Delhi street food from Lajpat Nagar but also get a feel of Majnu ka Tila.

*Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar's* signature dining destination, Infinity, has curated street food of Delhi for lovers on a flavourful journey through 'Zaiqa-e-Dilli' - a food festival that brings the essence of the capital's legendary street food to life. This year's theme, *Khat - A Culinary Love Letter to Dilwalo Ki Dilli*, is an ode to the city's deep-rooted love affair with its vibrant food culture, where every dish is a cherished memory, and every flavour a story waiting to be relished.

This year's edition of *Zaiqa-e-Dilli* takes an immersive approach to authenticity. Executive Chef Roushan Sharma and his team, in collaboration with *Namaste Culture*, embarked on a culinary treasure hunt across Delhi's bustling streets - from Jama Masjid's lanes to Daryaganj's historic eateries and Connaught Place's timeless food hubs. This meticulous exploration led them to the soul of Delhi's food scene - *Lotan Ke Chole Kulche*, *Sanjay Kumar's Daulat Ki Chaat*, *Aslam's Butter Chicken*, *Kuremal's Kulfi*, *Jain Fruit Sandwich*, and many more. To



CROWNE PLAZA MAYUR VIHAR



recreate these flavours with precision, the team observed, tasted, and learned firsthand from the masters behind these legendary dishes.

"Food in Delhi is more than sustenance - it is an emotion, a tradition, and an inseparable part of the city's identity," shares Executive Chef Roushan Sharma. To add an authentic touch, original vendors will prepare signature delights, ensuring that guests experience these dishes exactly as they were meant to be savoured.

*Dahleej-e-Dilli* festival's atmosphere will transport you to the bustling streets of Chandni Chowk, writes ABHI SINGHAL



CROWNE PLAZA OKHLA

*Tumse milna purani Dilli mein.....* this always reminds me of Old Delhi and the flavourful food that one can eat while being there. To experience the same, all at a single restaurant, *Crowne Plaza Today New Delhi Okhla* hosted the 15th edition of its signature food festival - *Dilli 6 - Dahleej-e-Dilli* till 5th March, bringing the spirit of Purani Dilli to life. This food festival, which takes place every year, offers a genuine taste of Old Delhi's rich flavours and ageless customs while re-creating the ambience of its lively streets with desi decors.

A variety of classic delicacies that embody the essence of Dilli 6 were available for the guests. Every mouthful reveals a tale, from the rich and creamy *Paneer Changezi Paratha* from the Paranthi Vaali Gali to the tart joy of *Matar Kulche*, one could feel the flavour. From the making of *Chana Jor Garam* and ambience of love, shayari songs gave the feeling of spending time at Purani Dilli.

While those who prefer sweets could not pass up the *Shafiz Ki Phirni* and the smooth *Kulfi*, meat lovers could savour the slow-cooked excellence of *Mutton Nihari* and the hearty warmth of *Haleem*. Every element of the setup was homage to Dilli 6, from installations with a nod to heritage and the smells of sizzling kebabs.



### ICONIC FOODS

Guests at *Zaiqa-e-Dilli* will indulge in over 100 of Delhi's most iconic dishes, served through a rotating menu featuring the capital's best street food. The culinary lineup includes Chandni Chowk's famous parathas, Connaught Place's comforting Rajma Chawal, Lajpat Nagar's crispy Ram Ladoo, and Jama Masjid's irresistible Chicken Changezi. Majnu Ka Tila's Momos, Rajouri Garden's Chole Bhature, and Karol Bagh's succulent kebabs will also take the center stage, alongside live hawkers crafting refreshing Bunta.



# VHAH: What a festival!

The Vedaaranya Heritage and Healing Festival (VHAH FEST 2025) breathes new life into the historic town of Ramgarh Shekhawati. Every winter, this once-forgotten town transforms into a vibrant cultural hub, drawing visitors from around the world to revel in its artistic splendor, architectural grandeur and deep-rooted traditions, says **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

For five days, the quiet, dusty town of Ramgarh Shekhawati transformed into a vibrant spectacle of music, dance, colors, and captivating performances that left audiences enthralled. Welcome to VHAH FEST 2025—a celebration that goes beyond mere entertainment. VHAH is a dedicated effort to rekindle tourism in Ramgarh Shekhawati, serving a greater purpose: reviving the town's rich heritage. This eagerly awaited event every year promises an immersive journey into the rich tapestry of heritage, music, dance, wellness, and artistic splendor, all set against the breathtaking backdrop of Rajasthan's architectural grandeur.

But how do these two elements – A cultural festival and Heritage conservation – come together? A silent yet a profound revolution is taking shape in a small town in Rajasthan' Sikar district – Ramgarh Shekhawati. Known for its exquisitely carved havelis and frescos, it is now one of the finest examples of how to protect and conserve the heritage. And more than money you need passion and dedication to do so; money follows. What began as an effort to restore an ancestral haveli by Shruti Poddar, now the convener of INTACH Shekhawati chapter, has grown into a full-blown revival of the town and an effort to put it on the world map of tourism. Indeed, it has been a long and arduous journey but is worth the pain and the



effort. Shruti tells us that when she returned from the UK, searching for her roots, she was amazed to see the heritage her ancestors left and was in tears that her own folk had abandoned such a rich heritage to settle in big towns.

She began brick by brick reviving the haveli that belonged to her. She lived with bats and bare minimum basics. Her dedication inspired people around and they gradually started taking interest in the revival of more havelis. Most of these havelis are over two hundred years and done in limestone, bricks and stones, carved with exquisite designs and painted with frescos on their facades with wet colours on limestone plaster.

But then for everything you need money, people with deep pockets need to be interested in visiting it so that money pours into once the richest place on the planet in terms of per capita income. Ruiyas, Khetans, Khemkas Poddars—the big Marwari business families have their genesis in Ramgarh and it shows. It is writ large in the Havelis they lived; Frescos done in gold, Belgium glasses on the wall and silk smooth flooring done in limestone and seashells—all tell you what the town is all about.

For the VHAH Festival 2025, the guests came from across the world. They came to be part of this immersive experience, a rare treat. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister for Culture and Tourism spent a day to understand the town and what it would take to revive it. He promised government support to provide infrastructure, like airport link and train halt of fast trains at Ramgarh station.

The festival has grown bigger in size, both in terms of numbers and scope and has been adding newer elements to it. This year's theme was love – *Shringar rasa*. One major highlight of VHAH FEST 2025 was a heartfelt tribute to the legendary filmmaker Guru Dutt on his 100th birth anniversary. This special commemoration also brought together film enthusiasts and scholars for screenings, discussions, and live performances celebrating his unparalleled contributions to Indian cinema. Among the notable events was an exploration of Guru Dutt's cinematic journey, led by Nasreen Munni Kabir and Shruti Poddar. Additionally, Amrish Mishra directed grand musical concert dedicated to Guru Dutt's timeless melodies. The Moonlight Mehfil on February 14 featured a live performance of classic Guru Dutt film songs, presented by Anuraag Poddar over an intimate dinner setting.

Adding to the festival's allure was the launch of “The Grand Archway” at MOHAR Haveli, an exclusive Museum Art Gallery. This inaugural exhibition presented rare oleographs by Raja Ravi Varma and M V Dhurandhar, offering a rare glimpse into the artistic heritage of India. The exhibition was inaugurated by Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, alongside Prince Rama Varma, a descendant of Raja Ravi Varma, further enriching the festival's cultural offerings.

Evenings at VHAH FEST 2025 were dedicated to the evocative essence of *Shringar Rasa*, celebrating beauty, love, and romance through spellbinding music and dance performances. The classical performances by Geeta Chandran celebrated the theme of *Shringara* and took it to the next level. A tap dance performance by Irish dancer Jason Donnelly was mesmerising and so was the performance by the Rajasthani Kalbelia dancers. Odissi maestro Vidushi Sujata Mohapatra's interpretation of Jayadeva's “Gita Govinda” on February 15 left the audience spell bound.

The divine love of Radha-Krishna was brought to life through a soulful jugalbandi by Acharya Shrivatsa Goswami and Padmashri Geeta Chandran, while Prince Rama Varma's musical concert, set against the backdrop of Raja Ravi Varma's paintings added another layer of artistic enchantment.

Beyond performances and exhibitions, VHAH FEST 2025 engaged the participants on hands-on learning through an array of workshops and healing experiences. As the sun set over the Shekhawati sand dunes and the echoes of music and laughter fill the air, Ramgarh is indeed showing the country how our cultural heritage can be preserved and restored. VHAH FEST is an effort to make Ramgarh Shekhawati shine on the world tourist map. India has a treasure trove we must preserve before it is lost forever.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

## UNVEILING SHEKHAWATI

For those eager to explore the architectural wonders of Shekhawati, the festival offered a Heritage Walk, allowing visitors to discover the intricate frescoes, havelis, temples, and chhatris that define the region's historical landscape. festival provides an opportunity to witness and partake in the preservation of age-old crafts.



THE TOWN OF RAMGARH SHEKHAWATI IS DOTTED WITH CHATTRIS AND HAVELIS THAT ARE EXQUISITELY CARVED





**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

You are naturally innovative and have a knack for utilizing strategic approaches effectively, ensuring that tasks are executed precisely and promptly. This week, anticipate taking on significant responsibilities. Embrace the challenge and the control it brings, as your efforts are likely to result in tangible rewards. Financial opportunities are on the horizon; however, attention may be required to bring more harmony into your personal relationships. Expect developments in your professional life, possibly through new job offers or business expansions. While you may find that not everyone is supportive, key individuals will stand by you. Family dynamics could involve travel for a relative. With initiatives already underway, patience will be your ally as you await the fruits of your labor, and you'll find this period also strengthens friendships

**Lucky number** 12 | **Lucky colour** Burgundy  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week kicks off with the promise of new journeys. You're encouraged to proceed with confidence and enthusiasm, as you're on the right path, though the journey ahead is substantial. When you finally arrive, expect a warm and royal welcome. Some of you may find yourselves in the spotlight, receiving praise and recognition that fuels your drive to excel. Your inner strength and determination are peaking, smoothing out the path ahead. However, towards the week's end, be mindful of overconfidence, which might cloud your creativity. It could be wise to distribute responsibilities effectively and reassess your life's objectives and ambitions. Remember, balance in all things ensures sustained success and well-being.

**Lucky number** 8 | **Lucky colour** Gold  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, you may find yourself swept up in the romance of Valentine's Day, and it could mark the beginning of a significant relationship. This connection shows great promise and might develop into lasting love and happiness. Your fearless, bold nature will shine through, adding to the excitement and potential of this time. Additionally, some travel is anticipated this week, so it's wise to be cautious and keep an eye on your personal belongings. Your proactive and determined attitude will help you address any challenges that arise, and your innate kindness and compassion will drive you to support those around you. Your generous spirit doesn't go unnoticed, as you're often found assisting those in need. This period may also bring about a change in your living situation, suggesting a move could be on the horizon.

**Lucky number** 4 | **Lucky colour** Lavender  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

Currently, it seems you are on the cusp of a positive shift regarding your financial situation. Expect potential increases in wealth, possibly through unexpected channels like gifts or other forms of gain. This Valentine's Day could bring significant romantic gestures, potentially deepening commitments. However, some may experience lingering emotional challenges, with feelings of regret or anxiety leading to restless nights. Such stress can magnify perceived problems, heightening worry. Yet, as the week progresses, a surge in self-assurance regarding your capabilities will emerge, empowering you to achieve desired outcomes. It's an opportune moment to transform aspirations into concrete plans and take active steps toward realizing your ambitions. Embrace this phase as a chance to steer your life toward more fulfilling paths.

**Lucky number** 3 | **Lucky colour** Charcoal  
**Lucky day** Monday



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

This week presents a blend of challenges and triumphs. Your focus is sharp, and you move forward with a clear vision, ready to face any obstacles with bravery and resilience. Your determination and willpower position you as a true leader, inspiring others with your courage. You naturally take charge, guiding with fairness and integrity, qualities that motivate those around you to seek your counsel. This period marks a significant phase where you might step into a leadership role or take on an important position that highlights your skills and communicative prowess. Your actions this week could very well set the course for a positive shift in your life's direction.

**Lucky number** 16 | **Lucky colour** Indigo  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

This week may start off feeling a bit challenging for you, with a sense of restlessness and disappointment due to your efforts seemingly not yielding the expected rewards. However, you're actually very close to a significant breakthrough. This phase can be seen as the final stretch you need to navigate before achieving your goals. Midweek brings a shift, as your aspirations and desires begin to materialize, bringing joy, success, and possibly even significant life events such as the celebration of new beginnings. This period of achievement is a time for relaxation and enjoying the fruits of your labor. As the week progresses, your confidence and bold use of your creative talents will lead to recognition and the successful attainment of your goals. Additionally, this could be a favorable time for forming meaningful connections, whether in friendship or romance.

**Lucky number** 17 | **Lucky colour** Mauve  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

You possess a spirited and independent nature, which illuminates your vibrant emotions and boundless imagination. At your core lies a deep-seated romanticism. You approach the world with kindness and compassion, cherishing moments of quiet and peace. Your moods may shift, reflecting your dynamic inner life, and you are driven by a desire to apply your insight and knowledge ambitiously. Incorporating meditation and yoga into your daily routine enhances your spiritual freedom and empowerment. You are inclined to reject outdated perspectives, instead bringing fresh ideas and creative approaches to the forefront. As the week winds down, you revel in social gatherings and celebrations, finding joy and fulfillment in these shared experiences. You deeply value the joyful and celebratory moments spent with friends and family.

**Lucky number** 10 | **Lucky colour** Chocolate  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

This week kicks off with a festive spirit, as many will find themselves surrounded by joyous events such as parties, weddings, and other significant celebrations that promise an unforgettable experience. Spending time with friends and loved ones might inspire profound reflections. Indulging in fine food, drinks, and the pleasures of life will be a theme, though it's wise to keep an eye on expenditures to maintain a balance between enjoyment and practicality. This is a time to recognize the internal strength and divinity that have perhaps gone unnoticed. Trusting in higher powers and your own capabilities can pave the way for these qualities to emerge more prominently in your life.

**Lucky number** 6 | **Lucky colour** Ivory  
**Lucky day** Friday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

Take a moment to appreciate all the good in your life, cherishing each moment and person. You'll find yourself surrounded by celebrations such as parties and gatherings, offering a chance to step away from daily stresses and relish the joy of togetherness. Your emotions run deep and bring a unique richness to these experiences. As the week progresses, embrace a period of calm. Dedicate time to meditation and spiritual practices, which will strengthen your inner resolve. Toward the week's end, you might feel challenged by current circumstances. This could be a pivotal moment to consider significant changes in your lifestyle or work approach, especially if your old ways seem inadequate now. Embracing this shift could be crucial for your growth.

**Lucky number** 14 | **Lucky colour** Mustard  
**Lucky day** Monday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

At the beginning of the week, some might experience setbacks or emotional challenges in their romantic relationships. An unexpected event could lead to feelings of hurt as it might come from a close and trusted partner. This situation could temporarily cloud your judgment or affect your emotional clarity. However, as the week progresses, there's a shift towards healing and understanding. You might find yourself emerging stronger and more open-hearted than before, with a renewed capacity for love and connection. For those involved in professional pursuits, the week could bring opportunities to travel internationally for work. This journey not only promises career growth but could also spark a spiritual enlightenment, helping you overcome any significant challenges that have been blocking your path.

**Lucky number** 14 | **Lucky colour** Cream  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, you may find yourself deeply in tune with your emotions, perhaps to a point where your sentiments heavily influence your thoughts and actions. Your imagination is likely to be particularly vivid, which could cause you to set aspirations that are challenging to reach. Some may experience a fluctuation in their natural rhythms, leading to moments of irritation, but this time also holds potential for profound connection with creative and spiritual activities. Be cautious of potential deceit or dishonesty around you, as the possibility of encountering duplicity is higher. You might wrestle with feelings of regret, wishing to undo past actions, which can weigh heavily on your mind, especially during the night. These thoughts might disturb your sleep, leaving you restless and wary of the quiet hours.

**Lucky number** 1 | **Lucky colour** Jade  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

You can expect a period of joy as recent challenges and rivalries are left behind, allowing you to celebrate your achievements. Your efforts are set to receive recognition, whether through grand gestures or more understated acknowledgments. This is a sign that you're moving in the right direction, though the journey ahead is still unfolding. Maintain your optimism and proceed with confidence. Financially, it's wise to manage your resources carefully and make mindful spending choices. This week might also bring new emotional beginnings, unexpectedly leading to joyful events like the addition of a new family member. While you might find yourself indulging or feeling youthful, remember the financial stability and contentment that come from wise decisions.

**Lucky number** 7 | **Lucky colour** Olive  
**Lucky day** Sunday

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THOUGHTFUL INSIGHTS



Dr. Tanu Jain

**Dawn's Sacred Whispers: A Lesson in Devotion of Hanuman**

As the first light kissed the ancient stones of Haridwar, vapours rose from our mouths like silent prayers into the crisp January air. The Ganges flowed with a gentle murmur, carrying centuries of devotion past Har ki Pauri's weathered steps. In this pre-dawn stillness, my friend and I stood among hundreds of devotees.

The morning Aarti began with the soft tinkling of bells, swelling into a symphony that seemed to make the very air vibrate with divine energy. Around us, devotees raised their hands in unified prayer, their collective faith creating an invisible warmth that defied the winter chill. The brass diyas cast flickering shadows on faces transformed by devotion, each flame a beacon in the lingering darkness.

Through the corner of my eye, I saw my usually talkative friend transformed into a pillar of silence. His eyes, fixed on the ceremony, held a depth I had never seen before. Even when our shoulders touched in the swaying crowd, he remained immersed in a connection that transcended physical awareness. Before us, the sacred waters carried their own ceremony—brave souls descending into the freezing embrace of Mother Ganga, their gasps turning into smiles of blessed contentment as the icy water touched their skin.

As we walked away from the Aarti, the familiar verses of the Hanuman Chalisa floated through the air from a

nearby temple. The moment took me back to a profound lecture delivered at the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) by Director General Surendra Nath Tripathi. A retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the 1985 Odisha cadre.

During his lecture, Shri Tripathi had eloquently drawn parallels between Hanuman's qualities and the attributes of an ideal public servant. His deep reverence for Hanuman was evident—not just as a deity but as a timeless embodiment of dedication, wisdom, and service.

I nudged my friend's elbow, but he remained lost in contemplation. Finally, he broke his silence, his voice tinged with reverence. "Hanuman's power was not in his physical strength but in his absolute devotion to Rama. His service was his power."

The words hung in the crisp morning air as we settled on the riverbank, watching pilgrims change into dry clothes after their sacred dip. Their movements created ripples in the water that caught the growing daylight. It reminded me of Shri Tripathi's insights—how Hanuman's unwavering focus, his ability to listen deeply, and his strategic acumen were qualities that modern leaders must embody. Hanuman exemplifies deep listening through his complete devotion to understanding Ram's mission. He doesn't just hear instructions but comprehends the deeper purpose, demonstrating active engagement and complete understanding.



Like Hanuman, who carried an entire mountain when he could not identify a single herb, today's public servants must often find creative solutions to complex problems. As Hanuman leaped across the ocean in search of Sita, undeterred by challenges, so must those in governance navigate obstacles with resilience and agility. Shri Tripathi had emphasised that a true leader, much like Hanuman, must build bridges—connecting communities, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring that no one is left unheard.

Hanuman's service to Rama was marked by humility despite his immense power—he never sought personal glory, only the fulfillment of his duty. Shri Tripathi had spoken about how governance, at its core, is not about authority but about selfless service. A public servant, he stressed, must wield power with humility, ensuring that policies and initiatives are executed with integrity and a deep sense of responsibility.

In his service to Rama, Hanuman exemplified inspirational leadership, his very presence uplifting those around him. He encouraged and motivated, reminding his fellow warriors of their strength. A true public servant, Shri Tripathi had noted, must similarly lead by example, inspiring change through action rather than mere words.

Yet Hanuman was not just a warrior—he was a strategist, an innovator. His creativity shone when he set Lanka ablaze with his burning tail, turning adversity into an advantage. In governance, as Shri Tripathi highlighted, problem-solving requires a similar inventive spirit, where obstacles are met with ingenuity rather than hesitation.

His emotional intelligence was just as remarkable—when he met Sita in Ashok Vatika, he comforted her, offering hope and reassurance. Understanding emotions, building trust, and resolving conflicts are just as crucial in governance today as they were in his time. Shri Tripathi's keen analytical thinking and his ability to balance empathy with strategy have been central to his leadership across ministries and institutions.

Through every mission, Hanuman remained grounded in humility. Despite his immense strength and intelligence, he never wavered from his core purpose—serving Rama. This, Shri Tripathi had pointed out, is the hallmark of true leadership: to serve without expectation of reward, to

work tirelessly for the greater good, and to uphold integrity in every action.

This morning in Haridwar had revealed a profound truth—that true service, whether to the divine or to society, stems from the same source: unwavering dedication. Just as Hanuman's devotion to Rama transformed him from a powerful being into an immortal symbol of selfless service, public servants have the opportunity to transform their official duties into acts of sacred service to society.

Their power lies not in their position but in their dedication to service, their willingness to work tirelessly for the greater good, and their ability to remain humble despite their authority.

The morning's experience had deepened our understanding of both divine and public service. As we left Har ki Pauri, the sound of the Ganges followed us—a constant reminder that like her eternal flows.

As we walked away from the riverbank, the golden morning light reflected off the waters, casting a shimmering path ahead. Just as Hanuman once leaped across the ocean to fulfil his duty, each step taken in service—whether in governance, society, or personal life—creates ripples that extend far beyond what the eye can see.

—The author's views are personal. The author is a civil servant at the Ministry of Defence and a spiritual speaker