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12 runover by train in Jalgaon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JALGAON (MAHARASHTRA)

At least 12 passengers were killed on Wednesday evening when they jumped from their train in panic due to a 'fire incident', only to be run over by another train on the adjacent tracks in North Maharashtra's Jalgaon district, officials said. Twelve bodies were sent to the nearby civil hospital while six to seven persons were injured, special Inspector General of Police Dattatraya Karale said. The accident took place between Maheji and Pardhade stations near Pachora, more than 400 km from Mumbai, where the 12533 Lucknow-Mumbai Pushpak Express had halted after someone pulled the chain around 5 pm, Central Railway officials said, without confirming the death toll. Some passengers of the Pushpak Express jumped off, and were hit by the oncoming Karnataka Express heading from Bengaluru to Delhi, said Central Railway's chief spokesperson Swapnil Nila. IG Karale said that a "fire incident" occurred on Pushpak Express, at km 372/07 between Maheji and Pardhade stations. The train stopped at the location, and some passengers disembarked. Train No. 12627, Bengaluru-New Delhi Karnataka Express hit people standing on the railway tracks, he added. "Six to seven people have been injured. All injured passengers are being treated at the hospital, none of their injuries are serious. Both trains have reached their respective next stations and the accident site has been cleared," the senior police official added. Pushpak Express departed from the spot in just 15 minutes, while the Karnataka Express was removed within 20 minutes after the accident.



People gather at the site following the death of several passengers after they stepped down due to a rumour of fire and were run over by another train passing on the adjacent tracks, in North Maharashtra's Jalgaon district

14 killed in Karnataka road mishaps

PNS ■ YELLAPURA/RAICHUR (KARNATAKA)

As many as 14 people were killed and 24 sustained injuries in two separate road accidents occurred in Uttara Kannada and Raichur districts on Wednesday. In the Yellapura incident, a truck carrying 29 fruit sellers fell into a 50-metre-deep valley in the wee hours of Wednesday, police said. The victims from Savanur in Haveri district, were heading towards the Yellapura fair to sell fruits. The accident occurred in a forested section, the Uttara Kannada Superintendent of Police M Narayana said. He added that there was no protection wall in the road there. "Eight persons were killed on the spot and two got critical injuries. The injured have been shifted to the KIMS Hospital in Hubballi," the officer said. Two critically wounded persons too died, failing to respond to treatment, sources said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah condoned the tragic incident. "An ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from PMNRF would be given to the next of kin of each deceased. The injured would be given Rs 50,000," the Prime Minister Office said in a social media post. In the Raichur incident, at least four persons including three students were killed and nine others injured when the vehicle they were travelling in overturned due to a tyre burst on Wednesday morning, police said.



BJP-AAP WOO MIDDLE CLASS

Modi targets AAP



SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Turning the heat up ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday slammed the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for failing to provide basic needs such as water to the people of the national Capital while taking a jibe at the party on the money laundering linked excise policy scam, stating that 'liquor is available but water is not'. Prime Minister made these remarks during his interaction with the booth level workers in the 'Mera booth, sabse mazboot' programme while urging the members of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Capital to target winning over 50 per cent booths in the Assembly polls. Assuring a landslide victory in the Assembly polls, he asked booth workers to set two goals- breaking all voting records and ensure that the BJP gets more than 50 per cent at each booth. He said that the AAP is making new announcements daily because they are getting the new news of defeat every day. "These AAP-da people are now making a new announcement every day. This means that they are getting new news of defeat every day.

They are so scared that they have to make a new announcement every morning but now the people of Delhi have understood their game," he said.

"These days these AAP people are raising slogans that 'fir aayege, fir aayege (we will come again)'. But the public is replying to them that 'ye fir khayege, fir khayege (they will eat again, they will eat again)", Modi said, attacking the AAP on corruption charges. Claiming that there is a lot of anger against the AAP government in public, Modi asserted that the common man is saying that 'We will remove AAP and bring BJP to power'. He also said that the AAP leaders have turned away from their ideology. "This party was formed in the name of Jan Lokpal. But today it is neither in Delhi nor in Punjab nor do they speak in its name. They make excuses in Delhi, but they have a government in Punjab and they are not doing it there either," he said. "BJP kept Ram Mandir, Article 370, UCC at the core of its ideology and worked on them with complete honesty. There is only one focal point of our ideology - Nation First," he added. He also slammed both the AAP and Congress for not fulfilling their promises to the women. "Lakhs of sisters of Himachal are still waiting for the fulfillment of Congress' promise. First the sisters of Haryana and then those of Maharashtra too were misled by Congress by making false announcements," the PM said.

Stating that the AAP is two steps ahead of the Congress, he said, "AAP-da had promised to give Rs 1,000 every month to the sisters of Punjab. It's been three years but they haven't given a single penny yet. In Delhi too, it was announced a long time ago that Rs 1,000 will be given to every woman; that money has not been received yet. But now they are announcing an increase in it. This is the first such AAP-da model in the world, which only makes announcements in the air, lies, and deceives."

Continued on page 8



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal speaks during launch of manifesto for middle class ahead of the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections

Kejriwal bats for salary class

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

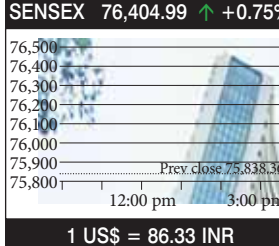
KEJRIWAL'S SEVEN DEMANDS:

Termining the middle class a victim of tax terrorism and has been reduced to the government's ATM, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday unveiled his party's manifesto for the upcoming Delhi elections and Union Budget-2025, listing seven Budget demands from the Centre that AAP MPs will raise in Parliament for the interests of the middle class. Kejriwal accused other political parties of treating the middle class as "just an ATM for the government" saying the middle class is the real superpower of the Indian economy but has long been ignored and exploited solely for tax collection. The party's key demands from the Centre include increasing the education budget from 2% to 10%, providing scholarships for higher studies, enhancing the health budget, removing taxes on essential commodities, introducing a pension scheme for senior citizens, and offering a 50% concession on railway tickets for senior citizens. This is the first time that a political party in Delhi has tried to address issues of middle class, which comprises a significant 45 per cent of its population and could provide to be a key deciding factor in the upcoming polls. The poor account for 35 per cent, the middle class 45 per cent, and the upper class around 20 per cent of Delhi's population.

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MARKETS



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Saif Ali's family properties marked as enemy property

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHOPAL

In a setback to actor Saif Ali Khan, recuperating from attack, Madhya Pradesh High Court has asked him to approach the appellate authority against an order of the Central Government that declared historical properties of the Pataudi family in Bhopal, estimated to be worth Rs 15,000 crore, as "enemy property".



Among the properties in question are the Flag Staff House, where Saif spent his childhood, the luxury hotel Noor-U-Sabah Palace, Dar-U-Salam, Bungalow of Habibi, Ahmedabad Palace, and Kohefiza Property. The court has been hearing Khan's challenge since 2015. On December 13 last year, after the Government apprised the court that an "appellate authority has been constituted for adjudication of disputes in regard to enemy property", Justice Vivek Agarwal said the parties could file a representation within 30 days.

In 1947, the princely state of Bhopal was ruled by Nawab Hamidullah Khan. He had three daughters, the eldest of whom, Abida Sultan, migrated to Pakistan in 1950.

Tahir Hussain denied bail for Delhi Assembly poll campaign

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former Councillor and February 2020 riots accused Tahir Hussain on Wednesday failed to secure an interim bail to campaign for Delhi assembly polls after a Supreme Court bench gave a split verdict. While Justice Pankaj Mithal dismissed Hussain's plea saying no case was made out, Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah opined he could be released on interim bail. The matter would be placed before Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna for the constitution of a new bigger bench to decide the issue.



Observing the right to contest elections was not a fundamental right, Justice Mithal said allowing interim bail could open a Pandora's box as every undertrial would invoke the same ground. "In the event interim bails are to be allowed for purposes of contesting elections, it will open a Pandora's box. Since elections are all year round, every undertrial would come with the plea that he wants to participate in elections and therefore be granted interim bail. This would open floodgates, which in our opinion can't be permitted," he said. The judge added, "Once such right is recognised, as a sequel, the petitioner would ask for right to vote, which is circumscribed by Section 62 of the Representation of Peoples Act."

Releasing such a person on interim bail would amount to permitting the accused to go for door-to-door canvassing and hold meetings in the locality where the crime took place and witnesses reside, he said.

Continued on page 8

Five sentenced to death for gangrape-murder of minor

PTI ■ KORBA

A court in Chhattisgarh has sentenced five men to death for the gangrape-murder of a 16-year-old girl and the killing of her two family members in 2021, holding that the crime has shocked the collective conscience of society. The Fast Track Special Court in Korba district sentenced to death Santram Manjharwar (49), Abdul Jabbar (34), Anil Kumar Sarthi (24), Pardeshi Ram (39) and Anand Ram Panika (29) and handed a life sentence to the six accused, Umashanakar Yadav (26). While delivering the judgement on January 15, Additional Sessions Judge Mamta Bhojwani held that this inhuman and cruel act of the accused is extremely perverted, heinous, brutal and cowardly, said special public prosecutor Sunil Kumar Mishra on Wednesday. A copy of the order was made available on Monday. Those given the death penalty were convicted under sections 302 (murder), 376 (2)(G) (gangrape) and other sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and provisions of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention



of Atrocities) Act and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The lawyer said he had sought the death penalty for all six accused but Yadav was sentenced to life imprisonment on medical grounds. Yadav's medical examination had shown that he underwent a surgery following an accident that damaged his private parts. His involvement in the rape was not established but his role in the conspiracy and murder was found and he was sentenced accordingly, Mishra added. In 2021, the teenage girl was allegedly gang-raped and bludgeoned with stones before she was dumped in a forest leading to her death near Gadhpura village under Lemru police station area of Korba district. The accused also killed the girl's father, aged around 60, and his four-year-old granddaughter who were with her. According to police, the deceased man, a resident of Barpani village, had been working as a cattle grazer at the house of prime accused Manjharwar since July 2020. On January 29, 2021, Manjharwar offered lift to the man, his 16-year-old daughter and four-year-old granddaughter to their village on his motorcycle. On the way, they stopped at Korai village and Manjharwar consumed liquor following which the other men also joined him, they said.

The men took the trio to the foot of a hill surrounded by forest near Gadhpura where the 16-year-old girl was gang-raped in front of her father. After thrashing all the victims with stones and sticks, they dumped them in the forest before fleeing from the scene, police said. Four days after the crime, when the deceased man's son approached the Lemru police station saying three members of their family were missing, cops swung into action and rounded up the six men on February 2, they said. After questioning them, police reached the crime site the same day and found the injured teenager alive and two others dead. The rape victim died while being rushed to a local hospital, police said. The victims belonged to the Pahadi Korwa tribal community, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). Citing police investigation, Mishra said that Manjharwar was pressuring the teenage girl to become his second wife. When she and her family objected to this, Manjharwar and his five associates raped and killed her and also murdered her two family members.

Continued on page 8

At Mahakumbh, UP Cabinet approves two new regions modelled after SCR

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In a historic cabinet meeting held on Wednesday along the Triveni banks during Maha Kumbh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's government approved transformative projects to boost development in Uttar Pradesh. These include development of two new regions modelled after the State Capital Region, along with two new expressways and major bridges over the Ganga and Yamuna to improve connectivity and infrastructure. Addressing the media after the meeting, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, accompanied by Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak as well as other ministers, shared details of the key decisions. The chief minister highlighted the approval of several projects aimed at strengthening infrastructure and boosting economic development in districts such as Chitrakoot, Prayagraj, Mirzapur, Bhadohi, Varanasi, Chandauli and Sonbhadra.

The chief minister said that the cabinet approved the development of the 'Prayagraj-Chitrakoot Development Region' on the lines of the State Capital Region (SCR). This region, significant from religious, cultural and tourism perspectives, is expected to generate new employment opportunities and drive growth. He further stated that the proposal to prioritise the development of the 'Varanasi-Vindhya Development Region' has also been approved. "Special schemes will be formulated to transform this area into a hub for religious tourism, cultural heritage and economic activities," the chief minister noted. These initiatives aim to strengthen infrastructure and elevate economic, social and cultural development across the state. Highlighting major connectivity projects, Chief Minister Yogi announced the extension of the Ganga Expressway from Prayagraj to Mirzapur, Bhadohi, Varanasi, Chandauli and Ghazipur. This



extended route will connect to the Purvanchal Expressway, enhancing regional connectivity. Additionally, a new link expressway will be developed to connect Varanasi, Chandauli and Sonbhadra. Both projects will be collectively named the 'Prayagraj-

Vindhya-Kashi Expressway', symbolising integrated progress across the region. Chief Minister Yogi announced the approval of a proposal to construct a new six-lane bridge parallel to the Signature Bridge over the Yamuna

River. Additionally, a four-lane bridge had been approved to connect Salori-Hetapatti-Jhansi, enhancing connectivity between Prayagraj and Mirzapur, Jaunpur, Varanasi, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur. The cabinet also approved the proposal to link the Bundelkhand Expressway with the Ganga Expressway and the action plan for connectivity to the Rewa National Highway. Other key proposals approved by the cabinet included Uttar Pradesh Aerospace and Defense Unit and Employment Promotion Policy 2024, establishment of prosecution directorate under Section 20 of the Indian Civil Defense Code, 2023, issuance of municipal bonds for Prayagraj Municipal Corporation, Varanasi Municipal Corporation and Agra Municipal Corporation and approval for providing funds for credit rating enhancement from Infrastructure Development Fund, upgradation of 62 government industrial training institutes of the state and establishment of five Centers for Innovation,

Invention, Incubation and Training with the cooperation of Tata Technology Limited, selection of successful bidders for running medical colleges on PPP mode under viability gap funding of the Government of India in the unserved districts of Hathras, Baghpat and Kasganj of the state. The cabinet also approved the proposals for the establishment of an autonomous state medical college in Balrampur and regarding the final bid document under the scheme for free distribution of smartphones under Swami Vivekananda Yuva Sashaktikaran Yojana. Approval was granted for the proposal to provide special facilities and concessions for mega-category industrial units in the state under the Uttar Pradesh Industrial Investment and Employment Promotion Policy 2022. The recommendations made during the meeting of the high-level empowered committee chaired by the chief secretary were also approved.

Related reports on Page 3

₹1.5 lakh theft in beer shop

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A theft was committed at a beer shop near Gwari crossing under the Gomti Nagar police station here on the intervening Tuesday and

Wednesday. The thieves entered the shop by cutting the locks of the shutters and took away beer bottles and cans worth Rs 1.5 lakh and cash. Besides, the culprits also took away the CCTV hard disc. An FIR was lodged by shop's manager RK Srivastava on Wednesday afternoon. Meanwhile, the police arrested Kartik Verma of Ganeshganj and native of Lakhimpur Kheri district, for stealing a mobile phone. The police claimed that one RK Vishwakarma filed a complaint that his mobile phone set was stolen a week ago and suspected Verma to be involved in the theft. He was picked up on Wednesday morning and during interrogation, he admitted that he stole the mobile phone.



NOTICE

In marksheet and school documents of my daughter Nishi Sharma. Her father name written as a Ram Chandra Sharma instead of Man Chandra Sharma and her mother name written as a Soni Sharma instead of Nidhi Sharma and her date of birth written as a 23 nov 2010 instead of 1 may 2010,

NOTICE

In some of my documents my name is mentioned as Abdul Matin and in other documents my name is mentioned as Abdul Matin Nadvi. Hence both the names belong to the same person. Abdul Matin son of Mohammad Umar, resident-Mahad Nadwa Campus, Hardoi Road, Sikroni, Kakori, Lucknow.

NOTICE

I, Raveesh Tiwari (Roll No. 7154292, S/O Vivek Tiwari), have lost my ICSE marksheets, migration certificates and pass certificates for 10th grade (2019-2020) and 12th grade (2021-2022) in Lucknow on January 3rd 2025. These documents are vital for me. If anyone finds these, please contact me. 9517524194 Contact Address: 4/6 Botlar Palace Colony jopling road hazratganj Lucknow 226001

NOTICE

I, VARSHA Rani Spouse of No. 719996A Rank JWO Pramod Kumar Chourasia R/O - H.No. 5485/499K, Surya Nagar, Lucknow, (Uttar Pradesh), Pin-226011 have declared that my name Varsha Rani Devi entered Wrongly in my Husband's service Record. But my correct name is Varsha Rani for all future purposes.

NOTICE

I, ex-serviceman Havildar Badan Singh, inform that the name of my son is not mentioned in my records BP PRAVIN KUMAR got registered wrongly while real name in civil documents is BP PRAVEEN KUMAR. Which is considered correct. Badan Singh s/o Ramsevak Resident-Dayakapurwa Sisahi Rasoolabad, Kanpur Dehat

NOTICE

My name has wrongly been mentioned in Aadhaar Card No.677246065191 as Yaseem Khan. My correct name is Ruchi Khan W/o Shri Rais Khan R/o 14/49 Flat no. 202 A, S.Tower, Civil lines, Kanpur Nagar, UP- 208001. I should be known & identified by this name.

आवश्यकता है

मदरसा तालीमुल कुरान ऐनुद्दीनपुर प्रयागराज (उच्च आलिमिया) में एक स०अ० फौकानिया व दो स०अ० तहतानिया का पद रिक्त है। स०अ० फौकानिया हेतु शैक्षिक योग्यता न्यूनतम 50 प्रतिशत अंकों सहित स्नातक तथा आलिम अथवा उर्दू सहित इण्टर का प्रमाण पत्र आवश्यक है। वेतनमान 44900-142400 लेवल-07 एवं अन्य भत्ते न्यूनतम आयु 20 वर्ष तथा स०अ० तहतानिया हेतु शैक्षिक योग्यता आलिम अथवा इण्टर उर्दू से वेतनमान 35400-112400 लेवल-06 एवं अन्य भत्ते न्यूनतम आयु 18 वर्ष। इच्छुक अग्यथी विज्ञापन की तिथि से 21 दिन के अन्दर अपना आवेदन पत्र समस्त शैक्षिक योग्यताओं के साथ प्रबन्धक के पदनाम से मदरसा उपरोक्त पर प्राप्त करायें।
प्रबन्धक
मदरसा तालीमुल कुरान ऐनुद्दीनपुर प्रयागराज

Information

It is informed to the general public that my name in my passport has been erroneously changed to Brajesh Kumar son of Vijay Narain Singh which is incorrect and wrong. The correct name should be Brajesh Kumar Singh son of Vijay Narayan Singh. Therefore, I should be known and identified as Brajesh Kumar Singh. Brajesh Kumar Singh son of Vijay Narayan Singh Resident - Village and Post Thanpalpur Police Station and Pargana Sareni Tehsil Lalganj District Raebareilly.

People from Uttarakhand have contributed to progress of UP and nation: CM Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said here on Wednesday that the people from the state of Uttarakhand had contributed immensely to the progress of Uttar Pradesh and the nation. The chief minister expressed these views at the concluding ceremony of the Uttarayani Mela organised by the Uttarayani Mahaparishad in the city. Chief Minister Yogi pointed out that for the last two decades the people from the hills have been associated with the Uttarayani Mela and have maintained their tradition. Recalling the great personalities from Uttarakhand, he said, "The first chief minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh, Govind Ballabh Pant, was born in Uttarakhand. He was a freedom fighter and the home minister of the country in 1954. In 1956, he was felicitated with Bharat Ratna. Similarly Hemvati Nandan Bhaguna was a freedom fighter and came to Uttar Pradesh

and served as the chief minister of UP and was a Central minister too. Narayan Dutt Tewari, also from Uttarakhand, was the chief minister of both UP and Uttarakhand and gave a vision for progress. There are several such personalities which includes former Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat who was also from Uttarakhand. The state of Uttarakhand has also given brave soldiers for the army," he said. Yogi said that people from the hills connect with their tradition and orginee festivals for their community with enthusiasm wherever they reside. "I had invitations from Ghaziabad and Bareilly too but owing to my busy schedule could not attend these programmes," he said. Chief Minister Yogi said that Uttarayani Mela was not merely a programme but a platform where cultural programmes and competitions were showcased and where people from the community who contributed to the nation and the state were felicitated.



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at the concluding function of Uttarayani Mela held in Lucknow

"You have felicitated soldiers and their families also because we cannot disconnect with our tradition," he said. He said that the day was a very auspicious one because on this day last year the consecration of the Ram temple took

place in Ayodhya. "This is also our heritage and your programme takes forward the same heritage," he added. Chief Minister Yogi said that he was happy that such a programme was being organised. "The aim is only one which is

to make the country strong and to fulfil the idea of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' which emerges from folk songs and folk tales. These folklores are various forms of India at a macro level," the chief minister said.

Devotees flock to Ayodhya on first anniversary of Ram Lalla's enshrinement

PNS ■ AYODHYA

Ramnagari witnessed an overwhelming influx of devotees on Wednesday, the first anniversary of Shri Ram Lalla's enshrinement as per English calendar, as thousands braved dense fog and biting cold to offer their prayers and seek blessings. The sacred chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' filled the air, creating an atmosphere reminiscent of Treta Yuga. Devotees thronged the Janmabhoomi path till late evening for the darshan of Shri Ram Chandra, while robust security arrangements ensured a smooth and safe spiritual experience for all. Shri Ram Lalla was enthroned in the grand Ram temple on January 22, 2024. On Wednesday, a massive crowd of devotees gathered to offer prayers. Earlier, astrologers had determined January 11 as the auspicious date for the anniversary, and the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust celebrated the occasion with three days of grand events. During that time as well, lakhs of devotees visited Ayodhya for Ram Lalla's darshan. For the January 22 celebration, a significant number of devotees arrived, prompting the Yogi government to instruct robust cleanliness and security arrangements

for visitors. The district administration worked diligently to ensure a seamless experience. At Hanuman Garhi, devotees lined up for darshan in queues stretching over a kilometre, with similar crowds at Dashrath Mahal, Kanak Bhawan and other temples. Meanwhile, at Maniramdas Chhawani, a rath yatra was taken out in the morning, marking the beginning of a 41-day ritual. This includes chanting over 1.25 lakh 'Shri Ram Rakshasrot' as part of the religious observance. A large number of devotees flocked to Ayodhya to have darshan of Shri Ram Lalla, with many returning to relive the moment they experienced on January 22 last year. Anticipating the heavy turnout, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust had made meticulous arrangements. From the early hours of Brahma muhurta, the area around the Ram temple resonated with devotional chants. Hotels and dharamshalas were fully booked in advance by eager pilgrims. Ram Lalla's chief priest, Satyendra Das, noted that while the first anniversary was celebrated according to the Hindi calendar on January 11 (Dwadashi), many devotees arrived on January 22 as per the English calendar.

Patriotic poems reverberate in 1.33 lakh schools of UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Under a unique initiative of the Uttar Pradesh government, patriotic poems are resonating among more than 1.40 crore children in over 1.33 lakh schools of the state. Students are preparing for the poetry recitation competition being organised with the aim of fostering creativity and patriotism among them. The top performing students at school and state-level contests will also be honoured. A total of 10 excellent students will be selected based on their presentations in the contests. They will be honoured in district and state-level ceremonies. As per the National Education Policy, the state government has organised this competition to encourage creativity, logical reasoning, and patriotism among students. The best participants at school and state level contests will be honoured through a selection process. The state government has issued special instructions to make the selection process of the competition transparent and fair. Instructions have been given to the headmasters and teachers to video record the presentations of students participating in patriotic songs and

poetry recitations held at the school level. The video recording of the best participant selected from each school will be sent to the block education officer. After reviewing these recordings, the best participant at the block level will be selected. The selected recordings will be sent to the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET). As per the criteria set by the state government, a three-member committee under the supervision of the DIET principal will evaluate these video recordings. Information about the top three participants from each district will be sent to the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). Afterward, experts will evaluate these videos at the state level and select the top 10 participants, who will be awarded in the state-level ceremony. For the selection of poetry recitation, the Yogi Adityanath government has set criteria such as the relevance of the topic, presentation, language purity, originality, and quality of the video. The video recording of the poetry recitation should be a maximum of 2-3 minutes, and the clarity of the voice is also mandatory.

This competition is an effective step towards honing students' talent and instilling a sense of national spirit in them. The Yogi government has approved Rs 3,52,500 for organising this competition and distributing awards. Participants who secure the first, second, and third positions at the state level will be awarded Rs 5,000, Rs 4,000 and Rs 3,000, respectively, along with certificates. The top three participants at the district level will be awarded Rs 2,100, Rs 1,500, and Rs 1,100, respectively, along with certificates. Minister of State for Basic Education (Independent Charge) Sandeep Singh said that this initiative had been started under the inspiration of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and it would provide children with an opportunity to showcase their hidden talents and inspire them towards patriotism and creative thinking. He said that the Yogi government was organising this competition under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan to encourage creativity and patriotism among children. These prizes and certificates will be given to boost the morale of the children.

STF inspector injured in Shamli encounter succumbs at hospital

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Sunil Kumar, inspector in Special Task Force (STF), who was injured during an encounter and was admitted to Medanta Hospital in Gurugram, died during treatment on Wednesday. He was injured on Monday night in an encounter with miscreants in Shamli. A team of doctors had removed a bullet from Sunil's stomach on Tuesday but his condition remained critical. Superintendent of Police, Shamli, Ramsevak Gautam said that after the information of the inspector's death, a team had been sent to Gurugram. It was said that Inspector Sunil was hit by four bullets during the encounter. Meanwhile, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath paid tributes to Inspector Kumar, and announced financial assistance of Rs 50 lakh to his family. The chief minister also promised a government job to a member of Kumar's family, an official statement said. The inspector, who sustained three bullet wounds to the stomach, was initially admitted to a hospital in Haryana's Karnal before being shifted to Medanta hospital in Gurugram, police said. At Medanta, doctors found that a bullet pierced Kumar's liver and started a surgery. During the operation, he succumbed to injuries on Wednesday, said a senior police officer. Kumar's body will be taken to his native village Masuri in Meerut district, the officials said. He is survived by his wife and two children. Inspector Kumar joined the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) as a constable in 1990 and was promoted as head constable in 2002. Kumar was working with the STF since 2009 and got several awards for his bravery. He was made platoon commander in 2011 and 'Dalnayak' in 2020. Chief Minister Adityanath expressed his condolences to the family of Kumar and said that the state government is with them in this hour of grief, the statement said. Apart from financial aid of Rs 50 lakh and a government job, he also promised to name a road in Kumar's home district after him, it said. STF SP Brijesh Kumar Mishra said that Inspector Sunil was involved in many encounters, including with dreaded dacoits Dadua and Thokia. He played an important role in killing many criminals. Apart from this, Sunil also played an important role in killing Anil Dujana, Aadesh, Dheeraj and others. Mishra said the death of Sunil was a huge loss to the STF and the entire police force.

Maha Kumbh tableau to shine on Kartavya Path on Republic Day

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI

This year, the Uttar Pradesh tableau on Kartavya Path will showcase the theme 'Maha Kumbh 2025: Golden India - Heritage and Development'. It will celebrate the Maha Kumbh, a UNESCO-recognised event, depicting the divine spectacle at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the invisible Saraswati in Prayagraj, the largest gathering of humanity on earth. Maha Kumbh 2025, one of the most significant global events, represents a confluence of spirituality, heritage, development and digital progress. This theme is central to the tableau's design. At its forefront stands a grand, forward-leaning replica of the 'Amrit Kalash', symbolising the flow of divine nectar (Amritdhara). Surrounding it, scenes of saints and sages blowing conches, meditating, and



sipping holy water, along with devotees taking ritualistic dips at the confluence, bring to life the spiritual essence of the event. Visitors from across the globe will witness this unprecedented gathering under the

leadership of the Yogi Adityanath government. The tableau's trailer panel will showcase murals and LED screens portraying akharas and devotees participating in the Amrit Snan (royal bath). The centerpiece of the tableau will depict the mythological tale of Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), emphasising Maha Kumbh's historical and spiritual significance. The rear section will feature representations of the 14 divine treasures (ratnas) that emerged from the churning, including Halahal poison, Kamdhenu cow, Uchhaishrava horse, Airavat elephant, Kaustubh Mani, Kalpavriksha, Rambha Apsara, Lakshmi, Varuni, the Moon, Parijat tree, Shankh, Dhanvantari and Amrit (nectar). Additionally, the tableau will highlight the advanced technology, management, and digitisation being employed for the organisation of Maha Kumbh 2025. A prominent feature will be the high-tech Integrated Command and Control Center (ICCC), exemplifying crowd management and security excellence.

Sultanpur (UP): A woman village head from Sultanpur district has been invited to attend the Republic Day celebrations in the national capital on January 26 as a special guest for her exemplary work in village's development initiatives, officials said on Wednesday. Rinku Singh (37), the post-graduate village head of Katwa village in Dubapur block, has implemented several development projects in the village and transformed it into a model village, Panchayati Raj officials said. Although there are thousands of village heads across the country, Rinku has been selected by the Centre due to her committed work ethic, sense of responsibility, and dedication. On January 26, the country will celebrate its 76th Republic Day, and as part of the annual parade tradition, foreign heads of state and representatives from various countries gather to witness India's changing landscape. Alongside the foreign dignitaries, people who have made significant contributions to their villages and society from across the country have also been invited to the event. District Panchayat Raj Officer Abhishek Shukla said, "Rinku Singh was invited as a guest at the parade on January 26 due to her outstanding work in implementing development projects in Katwa village with high quality."

Sultanpur pradhan to attend R-Day in Delhi

Akhilesh slams cabinet meet at Mahakumbh Nagar

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, on Wednesday, slammed Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for holding a cabinet meeting at Mahakumbh Nagar in Prayagraj district. All ministers in the Yogi Adityanath council of ministers led by the chief minister met at Mahakumbh Nagar on Wednesday. "Kumbh or Prayagraj is not a place where politics or political decisions should be taken," Akhilesh Yadav said after paying floral tributes to veteran socialist leader Janeshwar Mishra here on Wednesday.

Speaking to reporters, he said, "Kumbh or Prayagraj is not the place where politics or political decisions should be taken. To organise a cabinet meeting at Kumbh is political. Many of us (Samajwadi Party people) must have gone to take a holy dip but did not post pictures on social media or shared the details with the media." Expressing his apprehensions on free and fair elections in bypoll in Milkypur constituency in Ayodhya district, Akhilesh Yadav alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party government was misusing the state machinery and police for influencing the election. He also questioned the proceedings



"Kumbh or Prayagraj is not a place where politics or political decisions should be taken"

of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Waqf Bill, which was held in Lucknow on Tuesday and met representatives of Muslim religious organ-

isations and the state government. "The BJP government is sowing the seeds of dissensions in society by creating new disputes on Waqf properties as their sole agenda is to spread hatred. The BJP leaders want to capture the Waqf properties in the state," the SP chief alleged. This is not the first time that Chief Minister Yogi has led his cabinet to the Sangam. During the Kumbh in 2019, the meeting of the council of ministers was held in Prayagraj. During the Narayan Dutt Tewari-led Congress government in 1988, the cabinet meeting was held at Kumbh, then Allahabad district.

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SANGAM OF DUTY AND DEVOTION



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with his Cabinet colleagues performs rituals at the Sangam during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj, on Wednesday. PTI

CM Yogi, cabinet colleagues take the plunge

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and his cabinet took the holy dip at the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj on Wednesday, praying for global welfare.

Highlighting the significance of the ritual, the chief minister described the Sangam bath as a profound symbol of Indian culture and Sanatan Dharma, embodying spiritual peace, religious devotion and social welfare. He said, "Bathing in the sacred confluence is not just a personal act of purification but a collective call for the welfare of all."

He added, "As part of the grand Maha Kumbh 2025, millions of devotees are visiting the Sangam to take this holy dip, which is a powerful message of religion, culture and faith."

The chief minister reiterated that the Maha Kumbh reflects the divinity and universality of Indian traditions, with the Sangam bath inspiring purity and prosperity through the strength of religion and culture. The Triveni Sangam, where the Ganga, Yamuna and the mystical Saraswati rivers meet, is revered as a spiritual centre for salvation and soul purification. Scriptures regard the Sangam bath as a path to liberation from sins and spiritual elevation.

In a solemn sequence, the chief minister and his cabinet first performed the traditional puja



at the Triveni complex in Arai. They then proceeded to the Sangam by motorboat, completing the ritual with mantra recitations and a havan. Along with the chief minister, Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh

Pathak, Finance and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Khanna, Jal Shakti Minister Swatantra Dev Singh, Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi, Industrial Development Minister Nand Gopal Gupta 'Nandi', Tourism

Minister Jaiveer Singh, Laxmi Narayan Chaudhary, Dharampal and Anil Rajbhar, all 21 ministers and rest of the independent charge and state ministers, took bath and performed puja at Sangam. "Yatra Ganga cha Yamuna,

Saraswati cha punyada, snaanen tatra tirth, mokshah syat sukhamatmanah" (Where the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati converge, the sacred bath at the Triveni Sangam is believed to bring salvation and peace to the soul) with this profound spir-

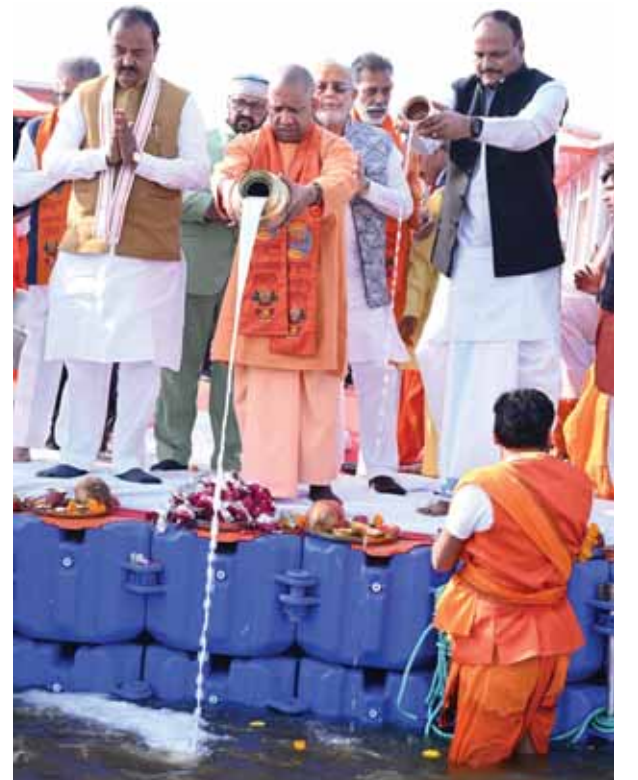
itual experience, the entire cabinet of Uttar Pradesh conveyed a powerful message to the world.

The ritual symbolised deep faith and belief and served as an opportunity to inspire and energise the people spiritually. This event reinforced the core values of Sanatan Dharma while also promoting peace, prosperity and dedication in society. Beyond the religious tradition, it conveyed public welfare and world peace.

This marks the second time during the Yogi Adityanath government that the entire cabinet has come together for a holy dip at the Sangam during the Kumbh festival.

In 2019, during the Kumbh held in Teerthraj Prayagraj, the chief minister, along with his entire cabinet, took part in the sacred ritual at the Sangam, accompanied by Akhara Parishad president Narendra Giri and other saints.

In addition, the Yogi government previously held a cabinet meeting during the Maha Kumbh, inviting all 54 ministers of the Uttar Pradesh government. The meeting occurred at the Triveni Complex in Arai, a venue chosen to ensure the convenience of devotees coming for the holy dip. Initially planned for the Mela Authority auditorium, the meeting's location was changed to avoid any inconvenience to the pilgrims due to VIP security concerns.



Ganga, Purvanchal Expressways to be linked

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

On the auspicious occasion of Maha Kumbh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's government has approved major connectivity projects in Uttar Pradesh. In a historic cabinet meeting on the Triveni coast, the government granted in-principle approval for the 320-km-long Vindhya Expressway and the 100-km Vindhya-Purvanchal Link Expressway.

Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that these expressways will drive the region's social and economic development, complementing the state's existing connectiv-

ity network across Paschimanchal, Madhyanchal, Purvanchal and Bundelkhand. As part of this vision, a new 320-km expressway will be built, linking Prayagraj, Mirzapur, Varanasi, Chandauli and Sonbhadra. Starting from the Ganga Expressway in Prayagraj and ending at NH 39 in Sonbhadra, it will provide direct connectivity between the Ganga and Vindhya Expressways, while enhancing links to neighbouring states like Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Additionally, the proposal includes the construction of the 100-km Vindhya-Purvanchal Link Expressway, which will connect Chandauli on the

Vindhya Expressway to Ghazipur, the final point of the Purvanchal Expressway. In a significant move for Prayagraj, the chief minister announced plans for a new bridge connecting Salori to Hetapatti. Additionally, in-principle approval was given for the construction of a new bridge parallel to the Shastri Bridge and Yamuna Signature Bridge. He said that these bridges would play a key role in realising the vision of a Smart Prayagraj. During the meeting, the entire government, under the leadership of the chief minister, reaffirmed its commitment to the creation of a 'safe and prosperous Uttar Pradesh'.

Independent prosecution directorate in state to help realise vision of crime-free UP

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In a significant step toward realising the vision of a crime-free Uttar Pradesh, the Yogi Adityanath government has approved the establishment of an independent prosecution directorate. The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting held at Triveni Sankul in Arai, Mahakumbh Nagar on Wednesday.

The move aligns with the implementation of the Indian Civil Defence Code, 2023, aiming to ensure effective and impartial prosecution in the state. The prosecution directorate will function independently, with a director of prosecution and deputy directors appointed as per the state government's directives. The existing staff of the prosecution department will be integrated into the new directorate under Section 20 of the Indian Civil Defence Code, 2023. Additionally, separate funding will be allocated for the directorate's future operations, ensuring its effective functioning. As part of the new proposal, each district will have its own prosecution directorate. The prosecution directorate will be led by a director of prosecution, who will work under the administrative control of the Home Department. To qualify for the role of director, a candidate must have at least 15 years of experience as an advocate or prosecutor or must have served as a session judge. The state government will have the authority to remove the director from

their position before completing their three-year tenure if they are found involved in criminal, or corruption cases, or deemed unable to perform their duties effectively.

The selection and appointment of the director of prosecution will be carried out by a search committee led by the additional chief secretary or principal secretary of the Home Department.

Other members of the committee will include the principal secretary of justice and legal counsel, the director general of police, and the secretary of the Home Department. The committee will decide the selection process independently. The minimum tenure for the director of prosecution will be three years. The state government will create permanent and temporary positions for the directorate's headquarters, regional offices and district offices to ensure its smooth operation.

TTL TO UPGRADE 62 ITIS, ESTABLISH 5 CIITs

The Uttar Pradesh government has approved an agreement with Tata Technologies Limited (TTL) to upgrade 62 industrial training institutes (ITIs) and establish five centres for innovation, invention, incubation, and training (CIITs). The project, with a total cost exceeding Rs 3,634 crore, will see TTL contribute Rs 2,851 crore and the government over Rs 783 crore. The memorandum of understanding

(MoU) has a duration of 11 years, with the first year dedicated to project implementation preparation. After 10 years, the project may be renewed based on mutual consent. Under the memorandum of understanding, TTL will introduce 11 long-term and 23 short-term courses across the 62 ITIs, aligned with industry 4.0 demands. TTL's trainers will also train ITI instructors and students, enhancing their skills. Successful trainees will receive apprenticeship and job opportunities with TTL's partner companies. The project aims to train around 12,500 candidates annually, with approximately 6,000 in long-term courses and 6,500 in short-term courses.

NEW RESIDENTIAL PROJECT FOR AGRA APPROVED

The Yogi government has approved a new residential project in Agra. Additionally, the Agra Development Authority's proposal for a 100-metre-wide inner ring road and land parcel scheme has also been approved. The cabinet has also approved an ex gratia amount of Rs 204.34 crore to cover the difference between the 2010 circle rate and the current circle rate for 442.4412 hectares of land in Agra. Furthermore, the proposal to amend the notification by the Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) to separate the industrial development areas of villages Rahankala and Raipur has been agreed upon.

New aerospace & defence policy approved

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in Prayagraj on Wednesday, the Uttar Pradesh government approved 10 key proposals aimed at accelerating the state's development.

Among these, the groundbreaking Aerospace and Defence Unit and Employment Promotion Policy 2024 was introduced to position Uttar Pradesh as a leader in the sector. The policy sets an ambitious

target of attracting Rs 50,000 crore in investments, with the potential to generate direct employment for one lakh youth across the state.

The cabinet meeting was held at the Triveni Complex in Prayagraj. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath aims to drive the growth of companies that align with India's vision of self-reliance in the aerospace and defence (A&D) sector. The new policy encourages establishment of artificial intelligence and software development centers in A&D. It targets

an investment of Rs 50,000 crore over the next five years and promises employment opportunities for one lakh youth. The policy offers significant incentives, including front-end subsidies for A&D units, land subsidies, stamp duty exemptions and capital subsidies.

The cabinet has approved the transfer of the 166-bed Government Combined Hospital in Balrampur to the Medical Education Department. This move aims to establish the Autonomous

State Medical College, Balrampur, by converting the Balrampur satellite centre of King George Medical University (KGMU). The establishment of this medical college is intended to provide specialised healthcare to the public and create medical education opportunities for youth. Additionally, 1,394 academic and non-academic posts have been created in line with MCI/NMC standards to facilitate the conversion and operation of the medical college.

'Pran Pratishtha' anniversary celebrated in Kashi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Various religious and other programmes were organised in this holy city on Wednesday to mark the first anniversary of the 'Pran Pratishtha' of Ramlala idol at Ram Temple in Ayodhya as per Gregorian calendar. Earlier, the Dwadashi Mahotsav of idol consecration was held in Ayodhya as per Hindu calendar from January 11 to 13. Since the consecration, Ayodhya has emerged as the top visitor destination across the state, surpassing Agra (Taj Mahal). Varanasi (Kashi Vishwanath Temple) is at third place it too has been attracting a large number of visitors since the inauguration of Kashi Vishwanath Corridor on December 13, 2021.

On the first anniversary of 'Pran Pratishtha' of Ramlala idol at Ram Temple, a grand event of Hanuman worship and 'Sunderkand Path' was organised at Hanuman Temple located in Nagwa. In the ceremony organised under the aegis of Shri Jagannath Sanstha Trust, a grand *shringar* (decoration) of Bade Hanuman was done and a special *aarti* was



Internationally famous artiste Pt Devrat Mishra attending Sunderkand Path programme at Hanuman Temple, Nagwa in Varanasi on Wednesday.

performed. This programme was organised in coordination with secretary Shailesh Tripathi. It started with the worship of Lord Hanuman by Acharya Sandeep Tripathi, Shukdev Tripathi (Kashi Province Coordinator, Kutumb Prabodhan). After this, the grand Sunderkand recitation was started by worshipping all the Brahmins present. The entire temple premises reverberated with the recitation of Sunderkand. Thereafter, internationally famous personality

in the field of music Pt Devrat Mishra was honoured and all the Sunderkand Paathis were also felicitated. On the occasion, Brijesh Tripathi, Tej Pratap Tripathi, Ramesh Singh, Lomas Tripathi, Manjeet Tripathi and a large number of devotees were present. Meanwhile, on the first anniversary of Shri Ramlala's Pran Pratishtha, the activists of Namami Ganga, along with students of Maharishi Yogi Ved Vigyan Adhyayan Peeth, cleaned the banks of Ganga at

Ramghat here on Wednesday. Taking the national flag and the pictures of Ramlala, they performed *aarti* of Maa Ganga, seeking blessings of the Almighty for a developed and healthy India.

Appealing to conserve Maa Ganga, the activists of Namami Ganga cleaned the banks of Ganga at Ramghat and made the people aware about cleanliness under the leadership of regional coordination (Kashi) and Municipal Corporation's Swachhata Brand Ambassador Rajesh Shukla. Speaking on the occasion Shukla said the construction of the grand temple of Ramlala in Ayodhya has been a very lively and powerful opportunity to increase harmony, coordination, harmony and social harmony in the country.

"We get inspiration for environmental protection from Lord Ram whose entire life is full of nature love and environmental consciousness", he said. Prominent among others present were city co-ordinators Sarika Gupta and Bina Gupta, Preeti Jaiswal, Sanjay Gupta and *batuks* (Sanskrit students).

Minister's emphasis on achieving revenue target on time

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Excise and Prohibition Nitin Agarwal in a review meeting with the officials of the Excise department of Varanasi and Mirzapur divisions at the Circuit House here on Tuesday emphasised that the set target should be achieved and necessary action should be taken after investigation on receiving any kind of complaint.

The minister said the officers should achieve the set revenue target on time and take strict action against overrating and illicit liquor. He said under no circumstances illicit liquor should be allowed to enter the state from outside. "If over-



Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Excise and Prohibition Nitin Agarwal reviewing progress of Excise department work in Varanasi on Tuesday.

rating is found, an FIR should be registered against the shopkeeper and licence of the shop should also be cancelled. Under no circumstances should there be any com-

plaint of adulteration", he instructed.

On the occasion Agarwal also directed to ensure 100 per cent sale of liquor by operating POS machines at all shops

and scanning through machine.

The minister directed to take concrete action to end incidents of manufacturing and sale of illicit liquor by taking effective enforcement action in the divisions concerned.

He instructed the officers to conduct road checking at toll tax plazas by running a campaign to stop smuggling of liquor from other states.

On this occasion Joint Excise Commissioner (Varanasi Zone), Deputy Excise Commissioner (Varanasi in-charge), Deputy Excise Commissioner (Mirzapur in-charge and district excise officers of all the districts of the divisions besides assistant excise commissioners (Enforcement) of both the divisions were present.

Rlys making preparations on war footing for Mauni Amavasya Snan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Railways is making preparations on a war footing for Mauni Amavasya Snan to be held on January 29. IG RPF AN Mishra visited Prayag Junction on Wednesday. During the

inspection of stations, he got complete information about the management of 24-hour monitoring by CCTV surveillance, baggage scanning system, movement in case of heavy crowd at the entry and exit gates, crowd control on the

platform and passenger management.

He talked about working in collaboration with all the departments regarding security and also in proper coordination with the state government. He told about keeping preparations

in advance for emergency situations and doing duty with alertness. He inspected Prayag Junction, Prayagraj Sangam, Phaphamau Junction along with Senior Divisional Security Commissioner Devansh Shukla and other officials.

Criminal carrying reward of ₹50,000 nabbed by STF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur unit of the Special Task Force (STF) arrested a wanted criminal carrying a cash reward of ₹50,000 in Maharajpur late on Tuesday night. The accused had gone to jail several times in truck loot cases. The STF handed over the accused to Fatanpur police station of Pratapgarh for further action in the matter. Kanpur unit in charge Shailendra Singh said on a tip off that the wanted criminal Mohammad Nadeem alias Sebu Rais of Dadupur Padan, Pratapgarh, carrying a cash reward of ₹50,000 was present

in Kanpur and planning to loot a truck here the STF squad cornered and arrested him from the parking area of Jio Petrol Pump at Narval turn in Maharajpur late on Tuesday night. The squad comprised S-I Rahul Parmar, HCPs Arvind Singh, Devsh Dwivedi, Ashok Rajput, Chandra Prakash Singh and constable Satyam Yadav. During interrogation the accused said that he along with accomplices, Gufran, Mehmood and Aquil, had looted a truck parked on the roadside near Tewari Dhaba, Pratapgarh, in December 2023. They beat up the driver

who was fast asleep in the vehicle and looted ₹22000 cash from him. The truck contained cement sheets which were sold at a shop in Bahraich. The accused said that he was himself a truck driver. The looted trucks were dismantled, he added. Five criminal cases were lodged against him, including four at Pratapgarh Kotwali and one at Fatanpur police station. He was implicated under the Gangsters Act in 2022. Besides, cases of loot, kidnapping, dacoity, fraud, etc. were also lodged against him, STF in charge Shailendra Singh said.

Two arrested with heroin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Ballia (PTI): Two persons were arrested on Wednesday, and 700 grams of heroin worth more than Rs 1.4 crore was recovered from them, a senior police officer said. Superintendent of Police Omveer Singh told reporters that the arrests were made as part of an ongoing anti-narcotics operation. The suspects, Anil Singh and Ripunjay Tiwari were apprehended near the Hanuman Temple at Chakia's Bari Bandh in the Dubhar police station area, he said. Singh was allegedly found in possession of 400 grams of heroin, while Tiwari was carrying 300 grams, he added. Both are residents of the Bairia police station area of the district.

Steel plates, cloth bags distributed in Maha Kumbh area



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The office-bearers of North Central Railway Women Welfare Organisation (NCRW-WO) led by its president distributed stainless steel plates and cloth bags in Maha Kumbh Mela area here on Wednesday. NCRWWO president Chetna Joshi, secretary Richa Verma,

along with other office-bearers, Taruna Prakash, Pratibha Kadam, Santosh Kumari Bajpai, Sarita Kadam and the members of Environment Section, North Central Railway (NCR) headquarters distributed a total of 2,000 steel plates and cloth bags to ISKCON, Prapajita Brahmakumari Ashram, Art of Living Centre

and Rambhadracharya Ashram to promote plastic-free Eco Kumbh. The purpose of distributing steel plates is to reduce the use of single-use plastic. Madhu Pandit Das, Chanchalapati Das, Kanjlochan Krishna Das, Ram Gopal Sharma and Parmanand Ji were present. So far, Environment Section North Central Railway Headquarters has distributed 9,000 plates and 3,000 cloth bags at various places to promote Eco Kumbh.

GIRL DROWNS: An eight-year-old girl drowned in a pond in Saidabad area in Ghisapur village of Vazha Mishran on Tuesday evening. The girl had come with her mother and siblings to attend an engagement ceremony. Reports said that Kusum

Vishwakarma of Gaderipur village in Bhadohi, had come to Ramesh Vishwakarma's place to attend an engagement ceremony with her three children — Soumya (10), Siddhi (8) and Siddharth (5). After Kumbh bath in the evening, Soumya and Siddhi were playing near the pond located in Ghisapur village. While playing, Siddhi's foot slipped on the stairs of the pond and she went into deep water. While trying to save her younger sister, the elder sister Soumya also started drowning. Ratan Shankar Mishra, who was present there, saved Soumya, but could not save Siddhi. Handia SHO Brajkishore Gautam reached the spot and with the help of divers, Siddhi's body was taken out after several hours of effort.

3 die as car rams into tree



The car which was badly damaged after hitting a tree

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Three people died and three others were seriously injured when their car ramed into a tree in Orai on Tuesday night. Police sent all the seriously injured to the medical college from where they were referred to Kanpur. Reports said that Laxman (25) of Bhal village under Rajpur police station area of Kanpur Dehat was going to Orai from Jaisalpur along with Vinay alias Pitu (27), Raghav (19), Rishu (28), Hariom (24) and Dharendra (22) of Jaisalpur to attend a marriage ceremony by car. When their car reached near Suhakar temple on Churkhi-Orai road, the driver lost control over it due to high speed and it ramed into the tree, killing Laxman, Vinay and Raghav on the spot. Three others were seriously injured in the incident. On information

of passersby, police rushed to the spot and sent the injured to the medical college from where they were referred to Kanpur. Police said all the youths were in a drunken state due to which this accident occurred. **WOMAN SLIPS FROM STAIRS, DIES:** An elderly woman who had gone to the rooftop to offer prayers slipped while coming down and died in Prayagpur village under Mangalpur police station area of Kanpur Dehat on Wednesday morning. Kin took her to the community health centre (CHC) Jhinhak doctors declared her dead. Laxmi Devi (65), wife of late Ramdas, was living with her younger daughter Saraswati in the village. On Wednesday morning, she had gone to the rooftop for offering prayers, while coming down she slipped and sustained serious injury. Her family members — Murari,

Babul and Madan — took her to Jhinhak CHC where Dr Shiromani Singh on emergency duty examined her and declared her dead. Inspector Mangalpur said kin did not inform police about the incident.

GIRL ENDS LIFE: A 20-year old girl allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself from a neem tree on the outskirts of the village in Bairi Basta under Sheoli Kotwali police station area of Kanpur Dehat on Wednesday morning. Police rushed to the spot and sent the body for autopsy after investigation. Sharda Devi (20) was upset for the last few days and left the house on Wednesday morning without telling anyone and hanged herself. When people passing by saw her hanging they informed the kin. On hearing about the incident, her mother fainted while brothers — Shyam Babu, Ram Shanker and Sachidanand, and sisters — Usha and Radha were inconsolable. Kotwali in charge Harmit Singh along with force rushed to the village and quizzed the kin. The forensic team collected evidence and thereafter police sent the body for an autopsy. Kotwali in charge said according to kin due to failure of her marriage talks at several places this upset Sharda Devi and may have prompted her to end her life. However, a probe was on. On receipt of autopsy report, further action will be initiated, he said.

CMO stresses on institutional deliveries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said that institutional delivery is very important for safe delivery, whether it is in a government hospital or a private hospital and stressed on strengthening the preparations at all the health sub-centres of the district. "Institutional delivery means delivery under the supervision of trained and competent health workers in a medical institution where better facilities are available. As a result of institutional delivery, infant and maternal mortality rate can

be reduced, while better care can be taken of the health of both mother and child", said the CMO. Dr Chaudhary said there are a total of 316 health sub-centres in the district, presently deliveries are being done in 149 health sub-centres and 167 health sub-centres are being upgraded. Deliveries are being done in a total of 251 government delivery centres in the district, which include sub-centres, additional PHCs, block PHCs, CHCs, district hospitals and medical colleges. In the last financial year, a total of 41,903 deliveries took place in the district, out of which 37,812 were normal deliveries and 4,091

were caesarean deliveries. "Most pregnant women feel safe in the hospitals due to the safe environment and quick health care at the time of risk of medical complications. If both the mother and the child face any kind of problem, then special attention is given to them in emergency situations. If any possibility of risk is seen in the pregnant woman at the health sub-centre, then she is referred to a higher institution. Immediate medical facilities are available for the care of mother and child in district hospitals where regular check-ups are done by a gynaecologist and pediatrician, he added.

EPS-95 NAC members submit memo to MP



The members of EPS NAC handover memorandum to BJP MP Ramesh Awasthi.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The members of EPS-95 National Agitation Committee (NAC), Kanpur Unit, have urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to enforce enhancement in minimum pension and benefit of pension on actual salary as per the provisions of EPS-95 read with Apex Court judgement of November 4, 2022. They handed over a memorandum, addressed to PM, to BJP MP Ramesh Awasthi on Wednesday urging him to forward it to the PM with his recommendations. The delegation led by district president Sudhir Mishra comprised senior trade union leader Rajesh Shukla and other members. Mishra said Union Minister of Labour and

Employment Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, after hearing the woes of 78 lakh pensioners, had assured to hike the minimum pension to ₹7,500 per month. However, the gazette notification for implementation is still awaited. He said presently the government contribution since the year 1961 is only 1.16 per cent and even today it is the same. He said the Apex Court had delivered a judgment on November 4, 2022, particularly on paragraph 11(3) and directed to accept the option and pay the pension on actual salary but abnormal delay in actuating the claims leads to distrust in EPFO. This was informed to the union labour minister Dr Mandviya who had directed to reduce the time limit.

Beneficiaries made aware of varieties of vegetable crops

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Varanasi (PNS): Solanaceous Day (Technical Promotion Day) was organised by Agri Business Incubator (ABI) and Zonal Technical Management Unit (ZTMU) at Indian Institute of Vegetable Research Institute (IIVR) here on Tuesday under which newF hybrids, varieties and technologies developed in tomato, brinjal and chilli crops were showcased. In this programme organised under the direction of the ICAR-IIVR Director Dr Nagendra Rai, 50 representatives of 25 seed companies and farmer producer organisations (FPOs) and beneficiaries were made aware of the varieties of vegetable crops developed by the institute. Executive Director Dr Arvind Nath Singh discussed in detail with the representatives of the seed companies on the quality

standards of seeds of improved varieties of vegetable crops and suggestions and feedback for marketing, the coordinator of the programme and project coordinator Dr Rajesh Kumar said that the institute is promoting public-private partnership to deliver improved varieties of vegetable crops to farmers and beneficiaries. He talked about making contracts effective for working with private companies through Public Private Partnership (PPP) model and helping in other programmes. Principal Scientist and Chairman of ABI) and ZTMU Dr Sudarshan Maurya discussed with the representatives of seed companies during the field visit about the characteristics, evaluation and licensing procedures of open pollinated and hybrid varieties developed by the institute.

Research marks advancement in functional foods

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In a groundbreaking study, Prof Dinesh Chandra Rai, Vice-Chancellor of BR Ambedkar Bihar University (BRABU), Muzaffarpur, and a distinguished scholar at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), has spearheaded the development of a healthier version of the traditional Indian snack, Murukku. This innovative formulation incorporates green banana flour and millet grains, significantly enhancing the snack's nutritional value while aligning with contemporary dietary preferences. Led by Prof Rai, the research team, including MSc Food Technology student Tomaly Saha, Manish Kumar Singh from Mizoram University, and Dr Arvind Kumar from BHU, meticulously analysed the nutritional composition of this

novel Murukku. Utilising high-resolution mass spectrometry, they identified 40 major bioactive metabolites, including compounds like ginsenoside, orotic acid and tocotrienol. These compounds are well-known for their numerous health benefits, such as reducing the risk of cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, as well as possessing anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective properties. This research marks a significant advancement in the field of functional foods. By combining traditional culinary practices with cutting-edge nutritional science, Prof Rai and his team have demonstrated the potential of underutilised ingredients like green banana flour and millet grains to create sustainable and health-enhancing snacks. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance

of foodomics tools, such as metabolomics, in precisely profiling and ensuring the quality of functional foods. This research has been published in the esteemed journal 'Food and Humanity', further solidifying its impact on the global food science community. Prof Rai expressed his enthusiasm for the findings, stating, "This research demonstrates the immense potential of traditional Indian foods when combined with modern scientific knowledge. By incorporating underutilised and nutritious ingredients like green banana flour and millets, we can create healthier and more sustainable snack options." Emphasising the importance of incorporating these ingredients into our daily diet, he said, "Millets and green bananas are rich sources of essential nutrients and offer numerous

health benefits. This research encourages us to embrace these traditional and nutritious foods for a healthier lifestyle." Prof Rai also stressed the importance of promoting millets as a key component of a balanced diet. He stated, "Millets are not only nutritious but also environmentally sustainable. They require less water and are more drought-resistant than many other crops. By promoting millet consumption, we can contribute to both human health and environmental sustainability." He emphasised the need for awareness campaigns and educational programmes to educate the public about the nutritional benefits and versatility of millets. "We need to encourage people to try different millet-based dishes and incorporate them into their daily meals," he added.

Lucky draw organised



Kanpur (PNS): The Kisna Diamond & Gold Jewellery organised lucky draw of its 'Shop and Win Car' scheme at K Dularey Jewellers, Kidwai Nagar, and awarded a Maruti Celerio car to the winner Sudha Yadav of Lucknow who had purchased jewellery worth ₹1.50 lakh from the shop. Rajesh Verma, Anoop Verma, regional sales head of Kisna Diamond Kamal Narayan Singh, state head Vinay iwar and Sales Manager Manish Srivastava were present

at the event. Retail partner Arpit Verma of K Dularey Jewellers said, "We are happy to be a part of exciting journey with Kisna. This was an opportunity to connect with our customers and see them happy. I congratulate the winner and am look forward to hosting such events in future also". Founder and MD of Hari Krishna Group Ghanshyam Dolakia and Director of Kisna Diamond and Gold Jewellery Parag Shah also addressed the audience.

Assam detention centres: SC slams Government, summons Chief Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Calling it a "defective" affidavit, the Supreme Court on Wednesday slammed the Assam government for not giving in its reply reasons for detaining 270 foreigners at the Matia transit camp. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Nongmeikapam Kotiswar Singh directed the Assam chief secretary to remain present through video-conferencing on the next date of hearing.

The top court said it granted six weeks time to the state government on December 9 to file the affidavit and expected it to give reasons for detaining 270 foreign nationals in the transit camp besides details on the steps taken for their deportation.

"The affidavit does not give any justification for detaining...Steps taken to deport are not set out. This is gross violation of orders of this court. We direct the chief secretary to remain present through video-conferencing



and explain the non-compliance," the bench said. The counsel appearing for the state government submitted that persons were detained only after they were declared foreigners by the foreigners tribunals and explained the mechanism of deportation of illegal migrants.

The top court sought to know why detentions were continuing without the deportation process even being initiated.

The court expressed displeasure after the Assam govern-

ment counsel said the affidavit was confidential and should remain sealed.

"This shows that the state does not want to come clean. Tell us what is confidential in the affidavit?" asked the bench.

The lawyer said the affidavit contained the addresses of foreigners and the details could go to the media.

"Assam counsel states that affidavit filed should be kept in sealed envelope, as contents thereof are confidential. Though we are directing that

it be kept in sealed envelope, prima facie we disagree with the counsel that there is something confidential about the contents," the bench said.

The top court had directed Assam State Legal Services Authority to conduct surprise visits at the Matia transit camp for foreigners to check the facility's hygiene and food quality.

The bench was hearing a plea concerning the deportation of persons declared foreigners and facilities at the detention centres in Assam.

While hearing the matter on May 16 last year, the apex court observed that the Centre must take immediate steps for deporting 17 foreigners at the detention centre in Matia. It said priority should be given to deport four, who had spent more than two years in the detention centre.

The plea also sought a direction to the Assam government not to detain any person declared a foreigner by the tribunal until it could show proof of a possible deportation in near future.

Kolkata rape-murder case: CBI seeks death sentence for Roy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI will file an appeal before the Calcutta High Court, seeking death sentence for Sanjay Roy, who was sentenced to "life imprisonment until death" by a Sealdah court in the rape-cum-murder case of an on-duty doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, officials said Wednesday.

The agency received a legal advice suggesting that the case may be categorised as the "rarest of rare", deserving capital punishment, they said.

The agency is likely to file the appeal against the Sealdah court order as soon as possible with detailed arguments in favour of capital punishment, they said.

The agency's plea seeking death penalty for Roy was turned down by the trial court, where Additional District and Sessions Judge Anirban Das said that the crime did not fall under the "rarest of the rare" category.

"The CBI prayed for the death penalty. The defence lawyer



prayed that a jail term be given instead of the death penalty. This crime does not fall under the 'rarest of the rare' category," the judge said on Monday while sentencing Roy.

"I am sentencing you to life imprisonment, meaning till the last day of your life, for causing injury during the act of committing rape on the victim that led to her death...", he told Roy.

The West Bengal government has already approached the

high court, challenging the verdict and seeking death penalty for Roy.

The CBI has opposed the state's right to file an appeal in the case, claiming that as it was the prosecuting agency, it had the right to appeal on the grounds of inadequacy of the sentence.

Appearing for the CBI, Deputy Solicitor General Rajdeep Majumdar on Wednesday opposed the state's submission, maintaining that the West Bengal government does

not have the right to appeal against the trial court's order on the ground of inadequacy. He submitted that the CBI had prayed for awarding capital punishment to Roy before the trial court.

The high court said it would hear the CBI, the victim's family and the convict before deciding on the admission of the state government's appeal. The high court said it will hear the matter on January 27.

The trainee doctor was raped and killed in the early hours of August 9 in the seminar hall of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital when she had gone to have rest during her graveyard shift.

Her body with severe injury marks was found inside the hall by a doctor next morning. Civic volunteer Sanjay Roy was arrested the next day based on CCTV footage in which he was seen entering the seminar hall at 4.03 am on the day of the incident.

On August 13, the Calcutta High Court ordered the transfer of the probe from Kolkata Police to the CBI, which took over the case on August 14.

A Raja writes to Waqf panel chief to defer proposed JPC meeting

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

DMK MP A Raja on Wednesday wrote to Waqf panel chief Jagdambika Pal on behalf of the opposition to postpone the proposed sittings of the joint parliamentary committee proposed on January 24 and 25.

In a letter to the waqf parliamentary panel chief, Raja said it is practically not possible for the members to recollect the evidence and materials essentially needed for the moving of the amendments and discussion on the waqf bill at such a short notice. He said during the tour programme to meet various stakeholders in Lucknow on Tuesday, the members had requested Pal to postpone the meeting of JPC proposed on January 24 and 25 for taking up the bill clause by clause. The panel is examining the waqf bill after it was introduced in Lok Sabha during the monsoon session of Parliament in August last year.

"Hence, it was requested by most of the members at the



Lucknow sitting (21.01.2025) that the proposed sittings of JPC on 24th and 25th have to be necessarily postponed on 30th (full day) and 31st of this month after the presidential address in the Parliament," Raja said in his letter to Pal. He said unless the sittings of the JPC are postponed, the purpose of constituting the committee itself will be defeated as it raises doubts in the minds of the people of India that the secular fabric of the Constitution embodied in the Preamble is endangered and due process in conduct-

ing the JPC is also not followed.

"It is, therefore, prayed on behalf of the members of the opposition parties that the sittings of the JPC proposed on 24th and 25th may kindly be postponed to 30th and 31st of this month as already discussed with you at Lucknow," Raja said.

The Congress also shared Raja's letter in a post on X and said, "Lok Sabha MP and member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, Shri A Raja writes to the

Chairman of the joint panel, Shri Jagdambika Pal, on behalf of the members of the Opposition parties, requesting the sittings of the JPC be postponed from 24th and 25th Jan to 30th and 31st Jan 2025."

In his letter to the chairman of the JPC on waqf, Raja said the Lok Sabha Secretariat (JCVAP Cell) through a letter dated January 20 has requested the members of the panel to send their amendments to the proposed bill by 4 pm on Wednesday. Also, the next sitting of JPC has also been convened on January 24 and 25 for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, he also said.

"It is needless to say that the tour programmes of the JPC to meet the stakeholders at Patna, Kolkata and Lucknow were completed only yesterday ie 21.01.2025; And the members were dispersed from the tour programme to their constituency/states to continue their scheduled programmes earlier.

"It is very strange that the next dates for a sitting of JPC were hurriedly announced with-

out any formal discussion when the JPC was already on tour. Even during the sitting of JPC at Lucknow itself, it was requested by the members that the proposed sittings of 24th and 25th of this month are practically not possible as the members are expected to discharge their duties/programmes in the locality.

"Moreover, the members are not in a position to recollect the evidence/materials at such a short notice which are essentially needed for the moving of the Amendments and discussion thereon," he said.

The DMK MP also said Pal has directed the stake holders who participated in the tour programme at Patna, Kolkata and Lucknow to submit their views and submission in writing within seven days and the committee is waiting for the same for circulation.

"I sincerely recall that you have reacted to the request that it will be considered positively after consultation with the government realising the justification offered by us for the postponement," he said.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao has become people powered initiative: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative completing 10 years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said it has been instrumental in overcoming gender biases and at the same created the right environment to ensure that the girl child has access to education and opportunities to achieve her dreams. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) was launched by the prime minister on January 22, 2015 at Panipat, Haryana. BBBP addresses the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of women empowerment over a life-cycle continuum.

"Today we mark 10 years of the #BetiBachaoBetiPadhao movement. Over the past decade, it has become a transformative, people-powered initiative and has drawn participation from people across all walks of life," Modi said.

'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' has been instrumental in overcoming gender biases and at



the same time it has created the right environment to ensure that the girl child has access to education and opportunities to achieve her dreams, the prime minister said.

"Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the people and various community service organisations, 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' has achieved remarkable milestones," Modi said in his post on X.

"Districts with historically low child sex ratios have reported significant improvements and awareness campaigns have

instilled a deeper sense of the importance of gender equality," Modi said.

"I compliment all stakeholders who have made this movement vibrant at the grassroots level. Let us continue to protect the rights of our daughters, ensure their education and create a society where they can thrive without any discrimination," he said.

"Together, we can ensure that the coming years bring even greater progress and opportunity for India's daughters," Modi added.

'Skyrocketing' airfare, lack of tariff regulation dominate PAC meeting



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Concerns over "skyrocketing" airfare and "little action" by government agencies and regulator dominated the Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) meeting on Wednesday as several MPs sought accountability from private airport operators and airlines to provide relief to passengers.

PAC Chairperson K C Venugopal described the meeting of the panel, which has witnessed fiery and at times acrimonious discussion along party lines in the past, as "one of the best" sittings. Members, he said, expressed concerns that the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) "is not acting properly as a regulator".

"We need clear cut answers," he told PTI after the meeting. He said the regulatory body could not answer adequately the questions raised by members.

General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) or the Civil Aviation Department."

Sources said some MPs called for an amendment in the AERA Act to make it more effective in regulating fare amid general unhappiness over issues like "arbitrary" rise in user development fees and price surge, as they alleged that the existing system fell short of fixing accountability and transparency in the functioning of private operators.

"A few MPs were upset over the manner in which both aeronautical tariff and non-aeronautical tariff are decided and flagged the need for having a mechanism in place for prior consultation," a source said. An MP said there should be a quasi-judicial body to hear such issues.

Civil aviation secretary and AERA chairperson were among those who appeared before the panel in the meeting in which presentations were made on related issues. While AERA is tasked with regulating tariff for services covering major airports, the DGCA is primarily concerned with safety issues.

Sources said the PAC members, in general, were unsatisfied with the replies of officials, and the panel has asked them to submit a detailed response. Several members, sources said, gave examples of a few airports where the user development fee (UDF), which is included in the airfare, has gone up many times since they were handed over to private operators.

Some of them sought details from officials about the revenue collected under different heads and to what use they were put to. An MP, sources said, spoke about the real estate development and subsequent rentals collected by private operators at airports, and called for transparency and accountability for the revenue's appropriate use.

An MP lauded the government's UDAN scheme, which envisages air connectivity for smaller cities, but noted that many of its routes are either not served or not served adequately by private airlines as they focus on more profitable routes. It strikes a blow to the vision of having the common man to fly, he added.

Railway Board extends some facilities to BRMS amidst protests

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Railway Board has extended some facilities to an unrecognised federation, the Bhartiya Railway Mazdoor Sangh, amid strong protest from other unrecognised unions and their alliances. The Board recently held a Secret Ballot Elections in which the Bhartiya Railway Mazdoor Sangh (BRMS) failed to secure 15 per cent vote, a mandatory requirement to get recognition. Only two federations, All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) and National Federation for Indian Railwaymen (NFIR) got the required percentage of votes and recognition of the Board.

"Bhartiya Railway Mazdoor Sangh (BRMS), an unrecognised Federation, who secured 10.12% of the total votes on all Zonal Railways and Production Units (Chittaranjan Locomotive Works and Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala) in the last Secret Ballot Elections (SBE) - 2024, had represented and requested that keeping in view of their performance in the SBE-2024, they may be granted some facilities for raising the grievances of railway employees," a Railway Board's letter dated January 16, 2025, addressed to all zones, said.

The letter further said the Board considered the representation of BRMS and the fact that it registered its presence in all the Zonal Railways and PUs (CLW & RCF) in the last SBE - 2024 and secured third largest vote share after AIRF and NFIR.

According to the Board, it decided to extend the union facilities such as 'Informal meeting with senior officers' and 'Office Accommodation' in Railway premises. "Representatives of BRMS will



be permitted to meet officials at Railway Board level as special invitees. However, no Special Casual Leave or Passes will be provided to BRMS officials for the same," the Board in its letter said.

"Accommodation, if any, may be provided to BRMS in any Railway office/premise located at New Delhi," it added. Other railway employee associations and unions have strongly objected to the move. Manoj Pandey, President, Indian Railway Employees Federation (IREF) has written to the Board seeking recognition for IREF on the same lines it granted to BRMS.

"It is pertinent to note that the Railway Board laid down clear and specific criteria for the recognition of federations, according to which, a federation should secure at least 15% of valid votes in the SBE-III elections and its constituent unions should get recognition in at least six zones," Pande said in his letter.

"Member unions of IREF, such as WCRWU and ARKU, performed commendably in the SBE-III Elections 2024, securing over 15% of valid votes, thereby qualifying for negotiation powers," he added, claiming that IREF also deserves recognition like BRMS.

Pandey claimed IREF includes recognised unions such as ECREU, NERMC, and RCF, which are already serving the interests of railway employees effectively.

"These unions have been consistently recognised across multiple zones, fulfilling the Railway Board's mandate," he said.

Pandey added the IREF may approach court if its demand is overlooked.

Akhilesh Pandey, Central President, North Eastern Railway Men's Congress, too objected to the Board's decision. "It is unfortunate that the Railway Board disrespect its own norm to give benefit to a federation," Akhilesh said.

All India Railway Track Maintainers Union have also raised serious concerns and said that the Board cannot 'pick and choose' federation on its own whims and fancies. "Once the Board laid the guideline before election, it cannot offer benefits to any federation which failed to secure the required vote percentage. The Board is violating its one norms for reasons best known to itself," Chand Mohammed, working president of All India Railway Trackmaintainers Union (AIRTU), said.

Delhi HC seeks Jamia stand on PIL over coaching academy



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought the stand of Jamia Millia Islamia on a PIL over admissions of OBC (non-creamy layer) students in its residential coaching academy as an OBC (non-creamy layer) candidate.

"You are virtually asking us to reframe a policy. Admission is not to regular courses but coaching centre. It is for authorities to provide for reservation. You are asking us to create a right," it said.

In the petition filed through advocates Akash Vajpai, Ayush Saxena Puru Mudgal, the petitioner said UGC gave financial support to four Central universities, including JMI, and therefore it was under an obligation not to discriminate among the underprivileged students. The petition said the current admission policy for the residential coaching academy was arbitrary and discriminatory as it left out a category of students who deserved admissions.

petitioner to inform if a university established by a statute was bound to follow the UGC mandate and said, "Issue notice to the respondents."

The court had questioned the petitioner on the "right" to seek admission in the coaching academy as an OBC (non-creamy layer) candidate.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

A Boost for Indian Professionals

H-1B visa reforms by Trump will go a long way in addressing the anomalies in the visa system and help Indian professionals

The H-1B visa has long been a critical pathway for skilled foreign workers, particularly Indians, to contribute to the US economy. With Indians accounting for over 72 per cent of H-1B visa recipients in 2023, any reform in this programme significantly impacts the Indian professional community. In his second term, President Donald Trump introduced groundbreaking reforms to the H-1B visa programme, shifting the selection process from a lottery-based system to a salary-based model. These changes, effective from January 17, 2025, aim to prioritise highly skilled professionals and streamline the visa process. The H-1B visa programme was established in 1990 to allow US companies to hire foreign workers with specialised skills. It has been a cornerstone of the tech and engineering sectors, enabling companies to bridge skill gaps. In 2023 alone, 386,000 H-1B visas were issued, with nearly three-quarters going to Indian nationals. This programme not only benefits the US economy by



addressing skill shortages but also strengthens India-US ties through the exchange of talent and innovation. The most notable change is the replacement of the lottery system with a salary-based selection process. This reform ensures that highly skilled professionals with competitive salaries are prioritised, making the programme more meritocratic. Besides, now the Indian professionals living in the US will be able to renew their H-1B visas domestically, eliminating the need for costly and time-consuming international travel. Another good news for the Students studying in the US on F-1 visas can now transition to H-1B visas more efficiently, fostering smoother

career progression. Now on, research-oriented institutions are exempt from the annual visa cap, encouraging academic and scientific innovation. These reforms are poised to significantly benefit Indian professionals and students. With salary as the primary criterion, skilled Indian workers in high-demand sectors like technology, engineering and healthcare are likely to secure visas more easily. The streamlined process and in-country renewals will reduce uncertainties for professionals and their families. By retaining top talent, these changes will further strengthen the economic and technological collaboration between the US and India. President Trump's reforms reflect a strategic approach to talent acquisition and economic growth. By aligning visa policies with the needs of US businesses and rewarding merit, these changes demonstrate a commitment to fostering innovation and efficiency. While these reforms are a step in the right direction, they would require stricter scrutiny of visa holders and employers. This measure ensures transparency but might pose challenges for smaller companies offering competitive but lower salaries. Moreover, the shift in focus could pressure Indian professionals to align their career trajectories with higher-paying roles, potentially impacting sectors like academia and non-profits.

PICTALK



A woman prepares yarn to make the tricolour ahead of Republic Day 2025, in Nadia

The legacy and survival of the Fourth Estate



SANTHOSH MATHEW

Initiatives promoting media literacy, particularly among youth, can help bridge the gap between traditional journalism and contemporary audiences

In 1780, James Augustus Hicky published India's first printed newspaper, 'Hicky's Bengal Gazette', also known as the Calcutta General Advertiser, normative power of print media.

It was the printing press that propelled humanity into a new era of knowledge dissemination. In India, newspapers have become an essential pillar of democracy, freedom of expression, and public discourse. The celebration of Indian Newspaper Day reminds us of the transfer of a potent tool in the freedom struggle, awakening the masses to issues of injustice and fostering a collective national consciousness. The legacy of stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi, who wielded publications like Young India and Harijan as instruments of change, underscores the unparalleled influence of newspapers in shaping society. Historically, the press has been a mirror reflecting societal truths, a watchdog ensuring accountability, and a platform amplifying diverse voices. Newspapers have been central to the articulation of ideas, the dissemination of information, and the fostering of debate and dialogue. The printed word has held power, credibility, and a permanence unmatched by fleeting digital narratives. Yet, the world of print media today faces an existential crisis. In an era dominated by smartphones, the internet, and instant news apps, the relevance of traditional newspapers is being questioned. Circulation and readership have declined sharply.

Advertisements, which once constituted the backbone of newspaper revenue, have shifted to digital platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this decline, as lockdowns disrupted distribution networks and readers turned to online alternatives. The Fourth Estate, embodied by traditional media, has paved the way for the Fifth Estate, represented by social media, as youth increasingly gravitate toward digital platforms for their news and engagement. India, despite its rich newspaper history, has not been immune to these global trends. While the country boasts a vibrant linguistic diversity in its



press—with publications in Hindi, English and regional languages—even stalwarts like *Dainik Bhaskar* and *Malayala Manorama* are grappling with reduced readership. Legacy newspapers such as *Deepika*, India's oldest surviving Malayalam publication, and *Mumbai Samachar*, the nation's longest-running newspaper, now struggle to adapt to the digital age.

The shift is not merely technological but also cultural. The younger generation's preference for quick, digestible content over in-depth reporting signals a change in information consumption patterns. Traditional newspapers, with their rich investigative journalism and nuanced storytelling, are increasingly viewed as slow and outdated. The immediacy of apps like *Daily Hunt* and platforms offering free e-papers has made paying for physical newspapers seem redundant. This decline, however, should not overshadow the irreplaceable value of print media.

Unlike digital platforms prone to misinformation and algorithmic biases, newspapers have long been trusted for their credibility and editorial rigour. They offer a depth of coverage that ensures stories are not just told but examined and contextualised. Newspapers are archives of history, recording



HIGH LITERACY RATES AND A CULTURE OF RESPECT FOR WELL-RESEARCHED JOURNALISM HAVE ENABLED NEWSPAPERS TO THRIVE EVEN IN A DIGITAL AGE

events with an accuracy and permanence that digital platforms, with their ephemeral nature, cannot replicate. Japan provides a remarkable case study in media literacy and the enduring power of print. Despite being at the forefront of technological innovation, Japan boasts the world's largest-circulated dailies, such as *Yomiuri Shimbun* with a circulation nearing 10 million and *Asahi Shimbun* not far behind. High literacy rates and a culture of respect for well-researched journalism have enabled newspapers to thrive even in a digital age. This example underscores the potential for print media to coexist with digital platforms when supported by an informed and engaged readership.

Indian Newspaper Day is a reminder to recognise and preserve this legacy. While print media must innovate to survive, readers, too, bear a responsibility to support credible journalism. The rise of e-papers and hybrid models—combining print and digital—offers hope for the industry's evolution rather than extinction. Newspapers continue to play a vital role in fostering democracy. They provide a platform for marginalised voices, hold power to account, and offer citizens the information they

need to make informed decisions. At a time when digital echo chambers threaten the very fabric of public discourse, newspapers serve as a counterbalance, offering diverse perspectives and challenging groupthink.

The theme of survival is intrinsic to the narrative of Indian newspapers. Just as Hicky's *Bengal Gazette* persevered despite colonial censorship and competition, today's publications must navigate the challenges of the digital age. The story of newspapers is one of resilience and adaptation. From the handwritten *Acta Diurna* of Julius Caesar's Rome to Gutenberg's printing revolution, and from Hickey's modest four-pager to modern broadsheets like *The Times of India*, the medium has continually evolved to meet the needs of its time. As we celebrate Indian Newspaper Day 2025, it is an opportunity to reflect on the enduring significance of the printed word. While the medium may change, the principles of journalism—truth, accountability, and the public good—remain timeless. It is up to readers, journalists, and policymakers to ensure that these principles continue to thrive in an age of rapid technological change.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

US EXITS FROM PARIS AGREEMENT

Madam — American President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Monday, pulling the US out of the Paris climate agreement. The Paris Agreement provides a durable framework guiding the global effort for decades to come, marking the beginning of a shift towards net-zero emissions. Thus, at a time when the whole world prepares to celebrate the International Day of Clean Energy on January 26, Trump's decision to exit is a severe blow to worldwide efforts to combat global warming.

The way Donald Trump signed an order to withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement for a second time reflects his party's hawkish stance on the agreement. In fact, the track record of the Republican Party shows its reluctance to make any commitment on an action plan on climate change. Even in the case of the Kyoto Protocol, President George W Bush had withdrawn the signature of the Democrat Vice President Al Gore, who had signed the Protocol on behalf of the US. The Republicans want any future American involvement in climate change agreements to be matched by equivalent commitments by developing country parties. Will recent severe natural disasters due to climate change, ranging from floods in Florida to wildfires in California, open the eyes of the Republicans?

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

LACK OF SKILLED WORKERS

Madam — When the issue of the growing threat of unemployed youth came to the fore, a few industrialists expressed the fact that they were facing difficulty in getting skilled and employable youth to recruit in their firms. It was then the Union government came with the apprenticeship scheme under which willing unemployed youth are allotted firms to take training with a monthly incentive to trainees as well as the firm. Though 500 firms were to be identified to engage under this scheme, the number could not

Ban criminals from contesting election



The Supreme Court observation barring criminals from contesting elections should be taken into cognisance by the government, the Elections Commission and the political parties. The SC should have passed the order incorporating such observation in the interim bill order, thus binding the EC, the government, and the parties. How can a criminal, violating laws, killing people, illegally possessing properties,

confiscating others' lands and buildings, extorting, and rioting, serve as a public representative in the Parliament, assemblies, and local municipal bodies? Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are glaring examples of such billionaire mafia dons whose crime list knew no bounds.

Both states suffered in development, education and growth for decades. Fielding the criminals and convicted killers in the elections is the antithesis of democracy and the Constitution. Money and muscle power win elections for them even if in jails. Such a list is quite exhaustive across all political parties. If 25-30 per cent of elected representatives have a criminal background, people are also to be blamed for their own decline and eclipsed future. Some political parties prominently field criminals and extremists in elections and depend on the cadre of criminal backgrounds.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

SENIOR CITIZEN DEMAND CONCESSIONS

Madam — The Union Budget 2025-26 is going to be presented in Parliament on the first of February. One of the pressing demands on the minds of many senior citizens is whether the Indian Railways will bring back concessions on train fares for senior citizens. The issue holds significant importance as it directly impacts about 15 crore senior citizens across the nation. The Indian Railways had, in March 2020, decided to withdraw the concessions providing a 50 per cent discount to female senior citizens and a 40 per cent discount to males on train fares. According to Railways norms, males and females aged 60 and above and females aged 58 and above, are treated as senior citizens. It represents a pivotal opportunity for the government to demonstrate its commitment to elder care, social equity, and responsive governance by restoring concessions to senior citizens in the ensuing budget.

S K Khosla | Chandigarh

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Breaking the cycle of violence: Lessons from personal trauma



SANJAY CHANDRA

Violence against the weak manifests in countless forms—child abuse, bullying, ragging, molestation and domestic violence—leaving deep and often irreparable scars

Violence against the weak is a timeless and universal phenomenon. Child abuse, bullying, ragging, eve-teasing, molestation and domestic violence are only a few that can result in irretrievable damage to the psyche or can even have tragic consequences. I joined the hostel for the first time as a 12-year-old adolescent. I was out in the world, away from the shelter of my parental love, trying to overcome my insecurities.

One time a senior shouted at me to fetch a packet of cigarettes from the dormitory. I still remember my tears as I was roughly reprimanded for being tardy. I was scared of the hostel life. Three years later, I joined the college hostel. Ragging had not yet been banned and was openly indulged in by seniors. It was supposed to be a harmless fun activity to initiate the newly joined youngsters into college life. It had degenerated into something completely different. One Sunday, we were forced to sit above the wardrobe and hurl choice profanities at each other. I mouthed words



from my limited vocabulary. We were so traumatised that we started returning home over the weekends. When our parents questioned us, we started bicycling into the desert on the weekends when ragging was at its peak. We slept in remote towns before returning to the campus at the start of the week. We even spent a night in the waiting room of a railway station. We were particularly wary of one young man called the 'ragging king'. In time, after the freshers had been welcomed, I settled down. I forgot my earlier

trauma and looked forward to the next year when I would be bestowed the dreaded title by the new arrivals. One incident changed my outlook. I was ragging a fresher, who was terrified and not responding to my questions. Frustrated, I barked at him to jump into a nearby well. Much to our horror, he turned around and ran towards it. Momentarily stunned, I must have run the fastest race of my life and managed to stop him in the nick of time. I was a changed person. The government stepped in to ban the practice. Sadly, it continues. A recent news report mentioned ragging in several medical colleges where male seniors force fresh entrants to memorise and read aloud from booklets filled with profanities and promoting sexual violence against women, specifically against classmates and nurses. The booklet also teaches freshers to look at women of all ages, including those in the 0-15 years age bracket, as sex objects. Many of us may have been at the receiving end of the local or the school

bully. It exists even at the workplace, sometimes in the guise of the rude superior who would not think twice before throwing the file back at you, or the one preying upon the junior female colleague. Women do not have a pleasant experience travelling on public transport. They are afraid to step out after sunset.

Every day we read of brutal assaults and deaths. The list is endless. Many are unable to bear the trauma and give up on life. I am not a psychologist. The reasons might be more complex than blaming it on not inculcating the right values in the children. But, that can be a starting point. We can teach our young what English author Brian Jacques wrote in one of the Redwall series of fantasy novels for children, "Defend the weak, protect both young and old, never desert your friends. Give justice to all, be fearless in battle, and always ready to defend the right."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

SHUN THE VIOLENCE,
EMBRACE PEACE

True transformation lies not in vengeance but in reconnecting with the divine qualities of love and peace



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Today we are living in a world where violence has become our culture. It may be seen in the hundreds of wars going on in different parts of the world or it may be seen through innumerable violent incidents that occur every day in cities and homes across the universe. So, what exactly has led to the spread of violence so much even though people strongly denounce it? We all know that the history of human civilisation is an epic saga of violence punctuated by episodes of relative calm. Violence, subtle and gross, manifest and incognito, has been the defining force of humanity's quest for power in the last two millennia. The rise and fall of empires, the religious crusades and socio-political uprisings down the ages were impelled by violence on a massive scale. One of the major reasons why violence has become so deeply embedded in the human psyche is that on the one hand, we denounce it but on the other hand we condone or even justify it. In the 21st century, which we all boast of living in, violence has been glorified in ingenious ways by the media, especially television, the internet and films. A world that has been fed so much on violence is no wonder becoming increasingly



dangerous to live in for its occupants. It's a known fact that today violence has become the means to seek political and social justice. Men kill men in the name of the almighty and later on, these killings are then justified as dharma by the custodians of religion when it is used for a righteous purpose. Amidst all these, a question that comes up is, Can one justify so much violence? Or, can violence ever root out adharma (unrighteousness)?

Well!!!! To conquer dharma we need to first understand the true dharma of the self. We all must realise that good or evil are the traits of the human soul and even after death these traits or *sanskars* are carried on to the next birth. This *sanskars* may change or become stronger as per the person's karma in the next life. Hence, it follows that one may kill an evil person but one cannot destroy the evil in that person. It would instead increase due to feelings of hatred and revenge. Remember!! An evil act is bound to be punished as per the Law of Karma in the present or the next birth because there is a natural justice system that works infallibly and eternally. Hence, one must never think that if someone avenges a wrong by doing wrong in turn, he/she will not suffer. No!! The truth is that in this case, both persons will have to pay for their respective wrong actions by undergoing some suffering because any act done with ill will towards others is violence and it is bound to bring sorrow for the doer. Hence, a person may escape the laws of the land but his karma will catch up with him sooner or later for sure. We all need to understand the philosophy behind the word religion or dharma. Dharma in the true sense simply means living by eternal spiritual values such as peace and love. When we share love and goodwill with others it is bound to stir up similar feelings in that person. On the contrary, when we hate and harm others it is bound to spark ill will in them. The world that God created for us was a completely non-violent and harmonious world where no evil existed. Goodness exists eternally; it is when we begin to lose touch with our real values that we are enslaved by negative tendencies. We are all children of "Almighty" who is the ocean of love, peace and joy, so his qualities are our qualities too eternally, aren't they? That is why all humans resist hatred. They never resist love or joy. He is always merciful and benevolent towards all, so how can he justify violence? And the only way to bring peace and harmony back on earth is to empower ourselves spiritually and rid our minds of all negativities. This will uproot violence completely out of the world and the world would become the one that it was, serene and peaceful.

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist, views are personal)

Renuka Ji Dam: Addressing
Delhi's water woes

K S TOMAR

Conceived over half a century ago on Giri River in Himachal Pradesh, the Renuka Ji Dam is finally set to redefine water and energy security across six Indian states



The visionary Renuka Ji Dam project, conceived 58 years ago on Himachal Pradesh's serene Giri River, is finally transcending decades of delays to emerge as a game-changer. This landmark initiative promises to alleviate Delhi's chronic water scarcity while energising Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh with sustainable power generation. Beyond its functional benefits, the dam exemplifies federal cooperation and political resolve. Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually laid the foundation stone of this Rs 6,946-crore project on December 27, 2021. Now, with 95 per cent of procedural hurdles cleared, global tenders will soon be floated, paving the way for construction. Cost estimates have surged to Rs 8,262 crore, factoring a 5 per cent annual escalation. Targeted for completion by 2030, with operations commencing in 2032, this project's progress is critical for Delhi and beyond.

For Delhiites, the dam symbolises the realisation of a 58-year-old aspiration. The stored water will be routed to Delhi-NCR, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana through the Hathnikund Barrage, further reaching the Wazirabad and Okhla Barrages. Delhi's water demand exceeds 1,200 million gallons daily (MGD), with severe shortages during summer. The Renuka Ji Dam, promising 275 MGD, will bridge this deficit, bolstering domestic supply, industrial growth, and infrastructure development.

Haryana leads with a 5.73 BCM share (47.82 per cent), contributing Rs 555.95 crore. Uttar Pradesh's 3.721 BCM (31.05 per cent) follows with Rs 361.04 crore. Rajasthan holds 1.119 BCM (9.34 per cent), contributing Rs108.58 crore. Himachal, Uttarakhand, and Delhi contribute Rs 36.67 crore, Rs 30.17 crore, and Rs 70.25 crore, respectively. Uttarakhand's share of water in the upper Yamuna basin is 0.311 BCM, which constitutes 2.60Rs30.17 crore of the total share. Together, the states allocate Rs 1,162.66 crore for this critical project. Originally slated to showcase progress before Delhi's 2025 Assembly elections, the dam faced delays, pushing construction timelines by 5-6 months. Intervention by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO)



RENUKAJI, NESTLED IN HIMACHAL'S SIRMAUR DISTRICT, IS IDEAL FOR THE DAM DUE TO ITS GEOGRAPHICAL AND HYDROLOGICAL ADVANTAGES. THE GIRI RIVER, A YAMUNA TRIBUTARY, ENSURES A STEADY WATER FLOW

could expedite design approvals and tendering. Local tensions remain high. The Jan Sangharsh Samiti criticised project authorities for inadequate rehabilitation efforts, including compensation gaps for displaced families. Activists demand higher pay-outs aligned with Public Works Department estimates, claiming the current compensation is insufficient. Harikesh Meena, Managing Director of HP Power Corporation, refutes these allegations, stating Rs 1,573 crore has been disbursed, with 90 homeless families offered relocation options.

Himachal Pradesh is set to gain 200 million units of electricity annually, worth Rs 66 crore. Delhi has already transferred Rs 270 crore, funding 90 per cent of the Rs 300-crore power machinery cost, underscoring the project's importance. Renuka Ji, nestled in Himachal's Sirmaur district, is ideal for the dam due to its geographical and hydrological advantages. The Giri River, a Yamuna tributary, ensures a steady water flow. The site also holds immense cultural significance. Named after Goddess Renuka, the mother of Parashurama (an avatar of Lord Vishnu), the area is steeped in mythology. Renuka Lake, India's largest natural lake, draws pilgrims year-round. Ancient temples dedicated to Goddess Renuka and Lord Parashurama further enhance its spiritual and historical value. The project blends technological ambition with religious reverence, ready to address Delhi's water woes and power needs for generations.

The Rs 8,262.28-crore Renuka Ji Dam project, a 148-meter-high rock-filled structure, will transform water and power availability across six states. Submerging 1,508 hectares and displacing 7,000 residents, including 346 homeless families, the project spans 41 villages across 25 panchayats. Proposed in 1976, the dam faced decades of procedural hurdles. Initially estimated at Rs 4,596 crore

in 2015, costs have ballooned. A significant milestone was achieved in January 2019, when a MoU among the six beneficiary states, brokered by then Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, resolved water-sharing disputes. In 2022, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by PM Modi, approved financial support, pushing the project into execution mode.

Located near Dadahu village, the dam will store 498 million cubic meters of water, routed to Delhi-NCR, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan via key barrages. As part of the PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, it will deliver 23,000 litres per second to Delhi. Additionally, incidental hydroelectric power generation (40 MW) will earn Himachal Rs120 crore annually. Technical Experts predict a 110 per cent increase in the Giri River's flow, ensuring reliable water supplies during lean periods. Despite challenges faced by displaced communities, the Renuka Ji Dam promises long-term benefits: improved water security for Delhi, agricultural irrigation, and energy generation marking it a milestone in cooperative federalism and infrastructure development.

Despite its potential, the project's journey was fraught with challenges. Environmental concerns, inter-state disputes, land acquisition hurdles, and funding delays plagued progress. Securing environmental clearances was a monumental task. Forested landscapes raised alarms over wildlife displacement and green cover submergence. Years of negotiations and compensatory afforestation plans eventually paved the way.

Inter-state discord over water-sharing ratios and financial contributions delayed progress. Himachal Pradesh had to acquire 1,477 hectares of land, including 909 hectares of forest. Protests and legal battles over compensation and rehabilitation compounded delays until enhanced packages and livelihood restoration initiatives placated

affected communities. The project's escalating cost was another sticking point. Initially pegged at Rs 3,600 crore, delays ballooned the budget to Rs 6,946 crore by 2021. Financial deadlock broke when the central government agreed to fund 90 per cent of the cost under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY). This eased the financial burden on states, with Delhi swiftly sanctioning Rs 1,066 crore as its share.

The central government played a crucial role in reviving the project. Integrating it into initiatives like the Jal Shakti Abhiyan and National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), underscored the dam's importance. Accelerated clearances, robust mediation, and funding commitments demonstrated political resolve. With construction set to commence by mid-2025 and completion targeted for 2032, strict oversight will ensure timely execution.

The Renuka Ji Dam epitomises cooperative federalism at its finest—where the centre and states unite to tackle shared challenges. For Himachal Pradesh, it heralds economic growth, energy self-sufficiency, and enhanced infrastructure. For Delhi, it is a lifeline, promising a reliable solution to its chronic water crisis. Beyond immediate benefits, the dam's capacity to regulate river flow and mitigate downstream flooding enhances its value as a climate-resilient infrastructure.

As a testament to sustainable development, the Renuka Ji Dam underscores the synergy of political will, inter-state collaboration, and community engagement in overcoming complex challenges. By transforming Himachal Pradesh into a green energy hub and securing Delhi's water needs, the project exemplifies inclusive growth and environmental stewardship.

(Writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist based in Shimla; views are personal)

Empowering panchayats: The key to achieving Viksit Bharat 2047 through community actions

India must transition from top-down governance to a model where community leadership is the driving force behind sustainable development

India's development trajectory has been shaped by significant contributions from the office of Prime Minister (PM), Chief Minister (CM) and District Magistrate (DM). To achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 empowering Panchayat leadership, headed by Village Mukhiya (VM) is a critical strategy.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 mandated the transfer of authority of 29 functions, underscoring their vital role in delivering services directly to the communities. Despite this mandate, Gram Panchayats (GP) lack functionaries and have limited infrastructure and capacity for planning and implementation. This often leads to either underutilisation



MANMOHAN SINGH

of allocated funds or prioritising local infrastructural projects decided by either the district or state. Addressing these challenges is crucial for India to meet its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and improve its Human Development Index (HDI) ranking. It requires building

the capacity of GPs to adeptly identify, plan, and implement projects that align with the needs established through Gram Sabha.

The Panchayat Raj System established panchayats as the foundation of decentralised power, emphasising that sustainable development must begin with our smallest unit of democracy: the Panchayat, led by the VM (Sarpanch). Elevating the role of the VM akin to the PM and CM at the centre and state, supported by a strong administrative structure, can drive effective grassroots decision-making. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has grouped the 17 SDGs into nine themes, demonstrating India's commitment to achieving these goals through the implementation of Localised

SDGs (SDGs) by Panchayats. GPs across India, are tasked with creating Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPPDs) that align with LSDG priorities. However, a survey of 800 panchayats revealed that only 7 per cent of Sarpanches independently chose their LSDG themes using the Gram Panchayat Planning Facilitation Tool (GPPFT), while 34 per cent of themes were decided by Block officials, 22 per cent by Sarpanches or Sachivs, and 16 per cent were directed by the state, reflecting a need for strengthening planning at the panchayat level. To develop Viksit Panchayats, four key actions are proposed: **Support panchayat for last-mile convergence:** When a 13-year-old girl drops out of school, the responsibility



extends beyond the education department, requiring collaborative efforts across health, social welfare, and community development. A central coordinating body at the village level, led by the VM can drive such convergence. For instance, Anita Devi, Village Mukhiya of Bhetaura Panchayat in Gaya, Bihar has

embraced the 'Healthy Panchayat' LSDG theme. Collaborating with ASHAs, Anganwadi Didis, and Gandhi Fellows to achieve 'Zero Home Delivery' eventually boosting institutional delivery rates from 25 per cent to nearly 90 per cent in just one year. Replicating such successes requires empowering panchayat through convergence of funds, and functional and administrative support.

Reimagine development of Panchayat Leaders: India has 2.6 lakh elected VMs, dedicated to strengthening panchayat governance. Prime Minister's call to bring 1 lakh youth into politics is a great encouragement for local youths. To unlock their full potential, we need to reimagine the institutional framework

that focuses on capacity building for elected VM and Ward Members. For example, Jyoti Behar Devi, Mukhiya in Gumla, Jharkhand, banned alcohol in her panchayat, focused on livelihood opportunities and also started the "Siti Bajo aur School Aao" campaign to boost school attendance, effectively transforming her community.

Democratise data through Panchayat: Village Mukhiyas, as key information providers of government schemes, need real-time access to comprehensive beneficiary data and scheme details. Implementing technology solutions that provide such access is paramount for informed decision-making and efficient governance. The Ministry of Panchayat Raj and the Ministry of Rural

Development has taken some initiatives which need further integration with planning and execution at the panchayat level.

Revitalise Village Committees: Village-level committees such as School Management Committees, Village Health and Sanitation Committees, Jan Arogya Samitis, and Village Water and Sanitation Committees, play a pivotal role in fostering decentralised governance and community participation in development efforts. To achieve Viksit Bharat, these committees need to align to avoid duplication of efforts and promote community ownership.

(The writer is Co-Founder and CEO Aspirational Bharat Collaborative; views are personal)

Confusion over JD(U) support to Manipur BJP government

PTI ■ IMPHAL/NEW DELHI

Confusion over JD(U) support to Manipur BJP government after contradictory statements (Eds: Collating stories, adding inputs) Imphal/New Delhi, Jan 22 (PTI) Confusion prevailed on Wednesday over JD(U)'s support to the BJP-led Biren Singh government in Manipur with its state unit writing a letter to the governor, informing him of withdrawal of support and the central party leadership dismissing it, asserting the support to NDA. In the letter to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, JD(U) state president Ksh Biren Singh "reiterates non-support" to the BJP-led government in Manipur. Shortly after Singh's letter, the JD(U) central leadership sacked him, in a bid to quell growing speculation about the party's ties with the

BJP. Party's national spokesperson Rajiv Ranjan said Singh's removal was due to indiscipline and asserted that the party would continue to support the BJP-led government in the northeastern state. Ranjan affirmed that the JD(U) remains committed to supporting the BJP-led NDA, not just in Manipur but across the country. In his letter, the Manipur unit chief also said the lone JD(U) MLA, Md Abdul Nasir, will sit in the opposition benches. Repeated efforts to contact Nasir did not fructify. The withdrawal, however, will not have any impact on the Biren Singh government as the BJP has 37 seats in the 60-member assembly and is also supported by five MLAs of the Naga People's Front and three independents.

In the letter to Bhalla, Ksh Biren Singh said, "In the election to state assembly of Manipur held in February/March 2022, six candidates set up by JD (U) were returned. After a few months, five MLAs of JD (U) defected to BJP. Trial under tenth schedule of India of the five MLAs is pending before the Speaker's Tribunal." "After JD (U) became part of India Bloc, support to the BJP led government was withdrawn by JD (U)...As such, seating arrangement of the lone MLA of JD (U) in Manipur Md Abdul Nasir is made in the opposition bench in the last session of the Assembly by the Speaker", it said. "JD(U) further reiterated that it does not support the BJP-led government in Manipur and that the lone MLA shall be treated as an opposition MLA in the House" it added.

Clarifying the party's stand, JD(U) secretary general Mainsam Dorendro Singh claimed that the letter sent by Ksh Biren Singh to the new governor was to reiterate the party's earlier position, and there is no mention of any fresh withdrawal from the BJP-led government in the state. "With the coming of the new governor, JD(U) Manipur state unit just wanted to reiterate the position of the party. In the letter, there is no mention of any fresh withdrawal of support (to the BJP govt). It has been widely misunderstood," he stated. Asked about the sacking of Ksh Biren Singh, Dorendro Singh said, "We have heard of it from different quarters and many have called to ask about it. However, we are yet to receive any official information."

Factional feud in Karnataka BJP come to fore during core committee meeting

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The factional feud within the BJP Karnataka unit surfaced during the core committee meeting chaired by the party's national general secretary and Karnataka in-charge Radha Mohan Das Agarwal, party sources said on Wednesday. Top party sources told PTI that the issue of Vijayapura BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal and his faction publicly targeting the BJP state president Vijayendra and his father and former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa surfaced during the meeting. Vijayendra's loyalists sought to know during the meeting about the action taken against Yatnal for putting the party in an embarrassing situation time and again, which was hampering the BJP's prospects, the sources added.

Yatnal had recently called Vijayendra "corrupt" who had amassed wealth through unfair means. He also appealed to Yediyurappa to pave way for others instead of succumbing to infatuation for his son. Agarwal told the MLAs that the party high command was aware of it and would take necessary steps. The MLAs should not lose their focus on strengthening the party at the ground level, he said. The committee, according to sources, discussed the appointment of district level party office bearers, including the district presidents. This will finally culminate in choosing the party state president, which is presently occupied by Shikaripura MLA B Y Vijayendra. In this regard, names of three probable candidates from each district will be sent to the party

high command, which will choose one among them on the merit basis, BJP MLC C T Ravi told reporters. "We are keeping the social justice and women empowerment in mind while selecting candidates for the district level BJP organisation," Ravi explained. According to Malleswaram MLA and former Deputy Chief Minister C N Ashwath Narayan, suggestions were sought to strengthen the party. "There was no discussion about the party state president. The suggestions of the MLAs were sought and accordingly they gave their view point," Narayan told reporters on Tuesday night. He added that a clear message had been delivered to ensure that the party's internal matters should remain "within the four walls" and should not go out.

BJP releases Ram Mandir song for Delhi polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday released a campaign song 'Jo Ram ko lekar aye unka raj hoga Dilli mein' on the first anniversary of the consecration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Polling for 70-member Delhi Assembly will take place on February 5 and counting of votes will be undertaken on February 8. There are over 1.5 crore voters in the city. The 2.23-minute video song rendered by Amit Dhull was shared widely on various social media handles of the BJP. The newly built Ram temple in Ayodhya was consecrated with elaborate rituals by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 22 last year. The song's opening lines 'AAP-da hatani hai, BJP hee lani hai (AAP has to be removed, only BJP has to be brought)' is followed by 'Jo Ram ko lekar aye unka raj hoga Dilli mein (Those who built Ram temple will rule in Delhi)'. "This song is being released today on the anniversary of the Ram temple's consecration as a mark of respect to Modi ji, who realised the dream of millions of people for the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya with constitutional and legal means," said senior BJP leader and creative director of the song Neelkant Bakshi. There is also a message in the song for the people of the national capital to pave the way for a better Delhi by rejecting the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the coming Assembly elections, he said. "The inspiration for the song came from the word AAP-da (disaster) used by Modi ji for the ruling AAP for its failure and mess created in Delhi over its ten-year rule in BJP's Parivartan Rally recently held in Rohini," Bakshi added. The song says the people of Delhi have made up their minds to remove AAP and bring prosperity and happiness and the BJP to power in Delhi and have a "double engine" government here. In the Lok Sabha polls in April-June last year, "Jo Ram ko laye hain, hum unko layenge" was widely used by the BJP in its campaigns, seeking to cash in on the religious sentiments in the wake of inaugural of the newly constructed Ram temple in Ayodhya. The BJP is making all-out efforts to come back to power in Delhi after a gap of over 26 years. The party is pitted against the ruling AAP and the Congress in a keen triangular contest.

R-Day rehearsal traffic advisory

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has issued a traffic advisory, cautioning commuters that vehicular movement in the central part of the city will be affected on Thursday due to the full dress rehearsal for the Republic Day parade. Commuters are advised to plan their travel accordingly. The rehearsal will follow the same route as the Republic Day parade, according to the Delhi Police advisory. The parade rehearsal will start at 10:30 am from Vijay Chowk and proceed to Red Fort via Kartavyapath, C-Hexagon, the

roundabout at Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Tilak Marg, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, and Netaji Subhash Marg. Elaborate traffic arrangements and restrictions will be in place along the route for the smooth conduct of the parade, the advisory stated. To ensure the parade's smooth passage, traffic movement will be restricted on certain roads leading to the parade route. No traffic will be allowed on Kartavyapath from Vijay Chowk to India Gate from 6 pm on Wednesday until the rehearsal ends on Thursday. Additionally, there will be no cross-traffic on Kartavyapath at Rafi Marg, Janpath, and Man

Singh Road from 11 pm on Wednesday until the parade concludes. C-Hexagon-India Gate will be closed to traffic from 9:15 am on Thursday until the parade passes Tilak Marg. From 10:30 am on Thursday, traffic in both directions will be restricted on Tilak Marg, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, and Netaji Subhash Marg. Cross traffic will be allowed only depending on the movement of the parade. Commuters are requested to avoid the parade route from 9:30 am to 1 pm and plan their journeys accordingly. Metro services will remain available at all stations during the rehearsal. Although there will be no restrictions for those traveling from north Delhi to New Delhi Railway Station or Old Delhi, commuters are advised to plan their journey in advance and allocate extra time to avoid delays. The movement of city buses will be curtailed at Park Street/Udyan Marg, Aram Bagh Road (Paharganj), Kamla Market roundabout, Delhi Secretariat (IG Stadium), Pragati Maidan (Bhairon Road), Hanuman Mandir (Yamuna Bazar), Mori Gate, ISBT-Kashmiri Gate, ISBT-Sarai Kale Khan, and Tis Hazari Court. Buses from Ghaziabad bound for Shivaji Stadium will take National Highway-24, Ring Road, and terminate at Bhairon Road. Buses coming from National Highway-24 will turn right onto Road No. 56 and terminate at ISBT-Anand Vihar.

Jammu village sealed amid mysterious deaths

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Raising a 'red flag,' District Magistrate Rajouri has declared Badhaal village, which has so far witnessed 17 deaths due to 'mysterious illness' since December 7, 2024, a 'containment zone' under section 163 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) with immediate effect. Section 163 of the BNSS gives magistrates the power to issue written orders in urgent situations. According to the order issued by the office of the District Magistrate, Rajouri on January 21, 2025, "In view of the recent health situation in the Badhaal area and to curb the spread of infection the following orders are issued under section 163 of BNSS". Meanwhile, four villagers including three sisters have been admitted to the hospital in the last 24 hours. On Tuesday, Aijaz Ahmad a 25-year-old youth had some symptoms of the mysterious disease, he was later taken to GMC Jammu from where he was shifted to PGI Chandigarh under special arrangements. Three sisters were rushed to the GMC, Rajouri on Wednesday morning. The doctors are monitoring their health condition; if required, the trio will be shifted to GMC, Jammu. According to the order issued by additional district magistrate (Rajouri) Rajeev Kumar Khajuria, the village



Security personnel keep vigil after the remote Badhaal village was declared a containment zone and prohibitory orders imposed on all public and private gatherings in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district

has been divided into three containment zones - the first covering all families where deaths have occurred. "The houses of the affected families will be sealed and entry will be totally restricted for all individuals, including their family members, unless otherwise authorised by the designated officers/officials." In the containment zone 2, the order said the members of all families identified as close contacts of the affected individuals would be shifted to Government Medical College, Rajouri, for continuous health monitoring which is mandatory. All households will be covered under the containment zone-3 and staff will be deployed to ensure the

continuous monitoring of food consumption, police personnel deployed to enforce compliance and designated officers put in place to maintain log books, the order said. "All public and private gatherings are hereby prohibited within the jurisdiction of these containment zones, in order to prevent further spread of the infection," the order said. It said the designated officials would be responsible for monitoring all meals provided to families in containment zones. "It is mandatory for affected families and their close contacts to consume only the food and water provided by the administration. Any other

food items available in the households are strictly prohibited for consumption," the order said. It ordered immediate replacement of all food and water supplies, and seizure of all edible materials in the infected households. J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah visited the village on Tuesday and assured the villagers that the actual reason for the deaths would soon be found. He also condoled the deaths of the villagers. The health department has scanned 3,500 locals, including residents of Budhaal and adjacent villages. Those results also did not confirm any viral or bacterial infection. An inter-ministerial team constituted under the orders of Union Home Minister Amit Shah is presently in the village to point out the exact cause of the mysterious disease.

Tahir Hussain denied bail for Delhi Assembly poll campaign

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"Subject to apt conditions, the petitioner can be granted interim bail for limited period. Ordered accordingly. Petitioner is enlarged on interim bail however till February 4 noon," he said. The Delhi High Court on January 14 granted custody parole to Hussain to file nomination papers from the Mustafabad constituency on an AIMIM ticket. It, however, refused his plea for interim bail from January 14 to February 9 to fight polls, saying the gravity of allegations against Hussain,

being the main perpetrator in the violence, which resulted in the death of several persons, could not be overlooked. The high court said about 11 FIRs were registered against him in connection with the riots and he was admittedly in custody in a related money laundering case and UAPA case. Violence broke out in northeast Delhi on February 24, 2020, leaving 53 dead and several injured. Hussain is accused in a case of February 2020 riots connected to the death of Intelligence Bureau staffer Ankit Sharma.

are misleading the people," AAP's Punjab chief Aman Arora is also holding road shows and 'padayatra' across the city. Each Punjab MLA has been tasked with managing one constituency, while ministers are overseeing two to three constituencies each, sources said. The Punjab leadership is also engaging in grassroots campaigns, focusing on door-to-door outreach and public engagement highlighting AAP's welfare schemes implemented in Punjab, such as the establishment of Aam Aadmi Clinics, creation of 48,000 jobs and the provision of 300 units of free electricity, to reinforce the party's credibility.

Bhagwant Mann leads AAP's Delhi push

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the Delhi assembly elections approach, the AAP has deployed top leaders from Punjab, including Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, to defend its strongest fort against a fierce challenge from the BJP. According to party sources, over 300 leaders from Punjab, including the chief minister, cabinet ministers, MLAs, chairpersons of boards and corporations and volunteers, have been stationed. The BJP, determined to breach this stronghold, has not only mirrored AAP's welfare promises but, in some cases, have countered them. For instance, while Arvind Kejriwal announced

a Rs 2,100 monthly allowance for women, the BJP countered with Rs 2,500, intensifying the competition for voters' trust. To counter this aggressive push, AAP has mobilised its Punjab unit in full force. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann is leading the charge, holding two to three roadshows every day with AAP candidates in various constituencies across Delhi. Mann in a road show in the Tri Nagar constituency on Tuesday said, "By pressing the 'jhadu' button on the 5th, your responsibility ends, and ours begins. By fulfilling the promises made to people in Delhi-Punjab, we roam in the court of people. People who call our public facilities 'revdis'

are misleading the people," AAP's Punjab chief Aman Arora is also holding road shows and 'padayatra' across the city. Each Punjab MLA has been tasked with managing one constituency, while ministers are overseeing two to three constituencies each, sources said. The Punjab leadership is also engaging in grassroots campaigns, focusing on door-to-door outreach and public engagement highlighting AAP's welfare schemes implemented in Punjab, such as the establishment of Aam Aadmi Clinics, creation of 48,000 jobs and the provision of 300 units of free electricity, to reinforce the party's credibility.

Five sentenced to death for gangrape-murder of minor

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In its judgment, the court said this inhuman and cruel act of the accused is extremely perverted, heinous, brutal and cowardly because they have killed three innocent and weak people to satisfy their lust. This has shocked the collective conscience of the entire society. "With respect to the rest of the accused except Umashankar (Yadav), it is certainly concluded that despite the present gruesome incident being proved, if they are allowed to re-enter the society (prison is also a part of the society), then they may again proceed to commit any kind of

crime and due to this reason there seems to be no possibility of their rehabilitation or reformation", it said. The incident happened with a poor family belonging to the Pahadi Korwa tribe, declared as the adopted son of the Honorable President of India, the court said. As soon as the news of this gruesome incident spread, there was widespread protest and anger not only in the state but also at the national level. This incident has shaken humanity, it said. After the crime, the six men did not behave in any way to show that they had even the slightest remorse, the court observed.

"Punishment in proportion to the act committed by the accused is the demand of justice because justice is not done keeping in mind only the criminal but it is also necessary to pay equal attention to the victim who has been affected by that crime. Therefore, in the present case, this court is of the opinion that it is necessary to award the death sentence to the accused (except accused Umashankar)," the judge said. Since the convicts raped and killed the girl and also murdered her two family members, the court said, it had to choose the death penalty as compared to the general rule of life imprisonment.

Saif Ali's family properties marked as enemy property

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The second daughter, Sajida Sultan, stayed in India and married Nawab Iftikhar Ali Khan Pataudi, who played cricket for both England and India, and whose son was the legendary Mansoor Ali Khan 'Tiger' Pataudi. Sajida's grandson - Tiger Pataudi's son - Saif Ali Khan inherited a share of the properties in Bhopal. However, the migration of Abida Sultan became the focus of the Government's claim to the properties as "enemy property". In 2014, the Custodian of Enemy Property Department declared the Pataudi family's properties in Bhopal as

"enemy property". Saif Ali Khan challenged the custodian's notice. In 2016, an Ordinance was issued explicitly stating that heirs would have no rights over these properties. Enemy property refers to the assets, both movable and immovable, left behind in India by individuals who migrated to countries designated as "enemy nations" during times of conflict. Following the wars between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, and the Indian-China War in 1962, the Indian Government assumed control of properties and businesses owned by those who adopted the nationality of Pakistan or China.

12 killed in Jalgaon rail mishap

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Maharashtra minister Girish Mahajan also reached the spot. The injured are being treated in a hospital in Pachora and most of them were out of danger, he said. Visuals from the accident spot showed a few bodies and severed body parts. "Our preliminary information is that there were sparks and smoke inside one of the general coaches of Pushpak Express due to either 'hot axle' or 'brake-binding' (jamming), and some passengers panicked. They pulled the chain, and some of them jumped down. At the same time, Karnataka Express was passing," a senior railway

official said. An Accident Relief Train has been dispatched to the spot from Bhusaval, and Central Railway is making all efforts to provide medical aid to the injured passengers, an official statement said. Government and private hospitals in the area have been instructed to be ready to treat injured passengers, said Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on X. In a video message from Davos in Switzerland, Fadnavis said, "Some passengers in the train mistakenly assumed that smoke is coming out of the train and they jumped. Unfortunately, they were ran over by another train. I

announce Rs 5 lakh to each kin of the deceased persons in this accident." The state government will bear the entire cost of treatment of the injured passengers, he added. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday spoke to Fadnavis, who briefed him about the train tragedy in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district. "The train accident in Jalgaon, Maharashtra is extremely sad. I spoke to Chief Minister Shri @Dev_Fadnavis ji in this regard and took stock of the situation arising after the accident. The local administration is providing all possible help to the injured. I express my deepest condolences to the families of

those who lost their lives in this accident and wish for the speedy recovery of the injured," Shah wrote on X in Hindi. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also expressed his grief at the deaths and called for immediate compensation to the victims and punishment to the guilty. He also urged the party workers to pitch in with the relief work. While Maharashtra minister Girish Mahajan said 10-12 people were killed as per the district collector, Union minister Raksha Khadse, who hails from the district, said the death toll could be as high as 40.

Modi targets AAP

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He also said that the youth of Delhi are going to vote for BJP-NDA and said that they want a government that increases employment opportunities, makes Delhi a startup hub, and works according to the youth's aspirations. "Therefore, the first choice of the youth of Delhi is BJP. Delhi's youth hates AAP and is in a mood to punish them," he asserted. "Every booth worker of BJP has to become the voice of the youth of Delhi. Meeting every first time voter of your booth should also be your priority," he said. He also added that BJP's booth workers have a big responsibility to expose them (AAP). "You should

take pictures and make videos of every street of your booth where dirty water is flowing, drains are broken, there is heaps of garbage and share those pictures with people along with the location," he said. Modi also shared that to ensure the middle class enjoys a comfortable standard of living, the government spends significant amounts of money. "BJP considers the middle class to be the backbone of the country's economy. Understanding the aspirations of the middle class, we are creating every modern facility from education to health. But the disaster created by these AAP people has given only troubles and problems to the middle class in Delhi," he stated.

Kejriwal bats for salary class

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"Tax should be removed from health insurance. Fourth, income tax exemption limit should be increased to Rs 10 lakh from Rs 7 lakh. GST should be removed from essential commodities. Sixth, a strong retirement plan and pension schemes for senior citizens. Free medical services for senior citizens in all government and private hospitals across the country and seventh, senior citizens should get a 50% concession in rail travel," the former Delhi CM said.

Reacting to Kejriwal's demand, BJP MP from South Delhi and Chairman of the Assembly Election Manifesto Committee, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said the AAP convener is shedding crocodile tears for the middle class is just a political gimmick for the assembly polls. "Kejriwal should tell the people what he has done for the middle class in Delhi in the last 10 years," he added. In a joint statement, BJP MPs Kamaljeet Shehrawat and Praveen Khandelwal have said that every word Kejriwal spoke showed how cunning and manipulative he is.

Sanctions on Russia likely if Putin skips talks: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump on Tuesday said he is ready to meet his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin anytime, but at the same time warned that he would likely impose sanctions on Russia if the latter does not come to the negotiations table on the issue of Ukraine. "It sounds likely," Trump told reporters when asked if the US will impose additional sanctions on Russia if Putin doesn't come to the negotiation table. "The war should have never started. If you had a competent President, which you didn't, the war wouldn't have happened. The war in Ukraine would have never happened if I were the president," Trump said. "Russia never would have gone into Ukraine. I had a very strong understanding with Putin. That would have never, ever happened. He disrespected Biden. Very simple. He disrespects people. He's smart. He understands. He disrespected Biden," Trump said. "Also, the Middle East would have never happened because Iran was broke," he added. Responding to a query, Trump said he is



ready to meet Putin anytime. "Anytime they want, I'll meet. Millions of people are being killed... It's a vicious situation and they're now largely soldiers. A lot of people have been killed and the cities look like demolition sites," he said. "The thing with Ukraine is that many more people died than what you're reporting. You're not reporting the real numbers, and I'm not blaming you for that. I'm blaming maybe our government for not wanting to release those numbers," Trump told reporters. Asked if the US will continue sending weapons to Ukraine, or will he turn off the tap soon, Trump said he is looking into the matter. "We'll look into that. We're talking to (Volodymyr) Zelensky. We're going to be talk with President Putin very soon, and we'll see how it all happens. We're going to look at it very soon," he said. "One thing I do feel is that the European Union should pay a lot more than they're paying, because under Biden, I mean, we're in there for USD 200 billion more. Now it affects them... We have an ocean in between, right? The European Union should equal us. We're in there for USD 200 billion more than the European Union. I mean, what are we, stupid? I guess the answer is yes," the president said. Trump also said that Ukraine President Zelensky told him that he would like to have peace. "He's told me that wants to have peace very strongly, but it takes two to tangle. We'll see what happens. Anytime they want, I'll meet. I'd like to see that end. Millions of people are being killed. It's a vicious situation," he said.

Trump admn sends federal diversity staff on leave

Washington (AP): President Donald Trump's administration is directing that all federal diversity, equity and inclusion staff be put on paid leave, and that agencies develop plans to lay them off, according to a memo Tuesday from the Office of Personnel Management. The memo follows an executive order Trump signed on his first day ordering a sweeping dismantling of the federal government's diversity and inclusion programs that could touch on everything from anti-bias training to funding for minority farmers and homeowners. The memo directs agencies to place DEI office staffers on paid leave by 5 p.m. Wednesday and take down all public DEI-focused webpages by the same deadline. Several federal departments had removed the webpages even before the memorandum. Agencies must also cancel any DEI-related trainings and end any related contracts, and federal workers are being asked to report to Trump's Office of Personnel Management if they suspect any DEI-related pro-

gram has been renamed to obfuscate its purpose within 10 days or face "adverse consequences." By Thursday, federal agencies are directed to compile a list of federal DEI offices and workers as of Election Day. By next Friday, they are expected to develop a list to execute a "reduction-in-force action" against those federal workers. The move comes after Monday's executive order accused former President Joe Biden of forcing "discrimination" programs into "virtually all aspects of the federal government" through "diversity, equity and inclusion" programs, known as DEI. That step is the first salvo in an aggressive campaign to upend DEI efforts nationwide, including leveraging the Justice Department and other agencies to investigate private companies pursuing training and hiring practices that conservative critics consider discriminatory against non-minority groups such as white men. The executive order picks up where Trump's first administration left off: One of Trump's final

acts during his first term was an executive order banning federal agency contractors and recipients of federal funding from conducting anti-bias training that addressed concepts like systemic racism. Biden promptly rescinded that order on his first day in office and issued a pair of executive orders — now rescinded — outlining a plan to promote DEI throughout the federal government. While many changes may take months or even years to implement, Trump's new anti-DEI agenda is more aggressive than his first and comes amid far more amenable terrain in the corporate world. Prominent companies from Walmart to Facebook have already scaled back or ended some of their diversity practices in response to Trump's election and conservative-backed lawsuits against them. Here's a look at some of the policies and programs that Trump will aim to dismantle: Trump's order will immediately gut Biden's wide-ranging effort to embed diversity and inclusion practices in the federal workforce, the nation's largest

at about 2.4 million people. Biden had mandated all agencies to develop a diversity plan, issue yearly progress reports, and contribute data for a government-wide dashboard to track demographic trends in hiring and promotions. The administration also set up a Chief Diversity Officers Council to oversee the implementation of the DEI plan. The government released its first DEI progress report in 2022 that included demographic data for the federal workforce, which is about 60% white and 55% male overall, and more than 75% white and more than 60% male at the senior executive level. Trump's executive order will toss out equity plans developed by federal agencies and terminate any roles or offices dedicated to promoting diversity. It will include eliminating initiatives such as DEI-related training or diversity goals in performance reviews. Trump's order paves the way for an aggressive but bureaucratically complicated overhaul of billions of dollars in federal spending that conservative activists

claim unfairly carve out preference for racial minorities and women. The order does not specify which programs it will target but mandates a government-wide review to ensure that contracts and grants are compliant with the Trump administration's anti-DEI stance. It also proposes that the federal government settle ongoing lawsuits against federal programs that benefit historically underserved communities, including some that date back decades. Trump's executive order is a "seismic shift and a complete change in the focus and direction of the federal government," said Dan Lennington, deputy council for the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, which has pursued several lawsuits against federal programs. The institute recently released an influential report listing dozens of programs the Trump administration should consider dismantling, such as credits for minority farmers or emergency relief assistance for majority-Black neighbourhoods.

US President Trump announces USD 500 billion AI initiative

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump announced a USD 500 billion investment in AI infrastructure through a new company, which is being created in partnership with Oracle, SoftBank and Open AI. The venture, called Stargate, adds to tech companies' significant investments in US data centres, huge buildings full of servers that provide computing power. The three companies plan to contribute funds to the venture, which will be open to other investors and start with 10 data centres already under construction in Texas. "That's a massive group of talent and money. Together, these world-leading technology giants are announcing the formation of

Stargate," Trump announced on Tuesday at a White House news conference along with Oracle Chief Technology Officer Larry Ellison, Softbank CEO Masayoshi Son and Open AI CEO Sam Altman. "So, put that name down in your books because I think you're going to hear a lot about it in the future, a new American company that will invest USD 500 billion at least in AI infrastructure in the United States and very, very quickly, moving very rapidly, creating over 100,000 American jobs almost immediately," said Trump who was sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20. This monumental undertaking is a resounding declaration of confidence in America's potential under a new president, he said.

"It will ensure the future of technology. What we want to do is keep it in this country. China is a competitor and others are competitors," he added. Begin immediately, Stargate will be building the physical and virtual infrastructure to power the next generation of advancements in AI, Trump said. This will include the construction of colossal data centres, very massive structures. "I was in the real estate business, these buildings, these are big beautiful buildings that are going to employ a lot of people and physical campuses in locations currently being scouted nationwide," he said. "They're making their choices of locations. I think they have their choice. I'd like to ask Larry, Sam and Masa to say a few words and just talk a little bit about what they're doing and

if you have any questions and then we'll go into a couple of other subjects also. But this is, to me, a very big thing, a USD 500 billion Stargate project," he said. Ellison said they certainly couldn't do this without Trump. "It would simply be impossible. AI holds incredible promise for all of us, for every American. We've actually been working with Open AI for a while and with Masa for a while. The data centres are actually under construction," he said. "The first of them are under construction in Texas. Each building is half a million square feet. There are 10 buildings currently being built, but that will expand to 20, and other locations beyond the Abilene location, which is our first location," he added.

'I like competent people coming to US'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said he likes both sides of the argument on the H-1B foreign guest workers' visa, noting that the country needs "very competent" and "great" people which is possible through this visa programme. Trump also said that he has also used the H-1B visa programme. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. "I like both sides of the argument, but I also like very competent people coming into our country, even if that involves their training and helping other people who may not have the qualifications they do. But I don't want to stop — and I'm not just talking about engineers, I'm talking about people at all levels," Trump said on Tuesday. He made these remarks while talking to reporters at the White House during a joint news conference with Oracle CTO

Larry Ellison, Softbank CEO Masayoshi Son, and Open AI CEO Sam Altman. The president was responding to a question on the ongoing debate on H-1B visas within his support base. Indians are the main beneficiaries of the H-1B visas, which bring in the best of the talent and brains from across the world. Highly skilled professionals from India walk away with the overwhelming number of H-1B visas - which is Congressional mandated 65,000 every year and another 20,000 for those who received higher education from the US. While his close confidants like Elon Musk, the Tesla owner, support H-1B visas as they bring in qualified tech professionals, many of his supporters oppose it arguing that it takes away jobs from Americans. "We want competent people coming into our country. And H-1B, I know the programme very well. I use the programme. Maitre d', wine experts, even waiters, high-quality waiters — you've got to get the best people. People like Larry, he needs engineers. Masa also needs... they need engineers like nobody's ever needed them," Trump said.

"So, we have to have quality people coming in. Now by doing that, we're expanding businesses and that takes care of everybody. So I'm sort of on both sides of the argument, but what I really do feel is that we have to let really competent people, great people, come into our country. And we do that through the H-1B programme," Trump said. Since December, the debate on foreign guest workers visas for highly skilled professionals, the H-1B, has intensified which has literally created divisions in both the Democratic and the Republican parties. Such a backlash initially came from the supporters of Trump who argued that this is eating away at the jobs of Americans. Both Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy immediately weighed in and supported the H-1B visas. However, influential Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders asserted that the two close confidants of Trump are wrong. The debate appeared to originate from a suggestion last month from Sriram Krishnan, Trump's pick for White House policy adviser on artificial intelligence, that Musk examines removing caps on green cards for skilled immigrants.

Trump mulls 10% tariff on China starting Feb 1

Washington (PTI): US President Donald Trump on Tuesday said his team is discussing imposing a 10 per cent tariff on China starting February 1 based on the fact that the latter is sendingentanyl to Mexico and Canada. "We're talking about a tariff of 10 per cent on China based on the fact that they're sending fentanyl to Mexico and Canada," Trump told reporters at a joint news conference at the White House along with Oracle CTO Larry Ellison, Softbank CEO Masayoshi Son, and Open AI CEO Sam Altman. In response to a question, Trump said he is looking at February 1 as the date for the tariffs. "For Mexico and China, we're talking about approximately 25 per cent (tariff)," the president said. Responding to another query, Trump said he did not "talk too much about tariffs" when he spoke with Chinese President Xi Jinping last week. When asked if he has asked Xi Jinping to intervene to

stop the war in Ukraine, Trump said China has not done very much on that. "He's got a lot of power. I said you ought to get it settled. I had that talk with President Xi the other day too. I said we don't want that crap in our country. We've got to stop it. I would have stopped it. I had to deal with him where he was going to give the maximum penalty, which in China is death penalty, for drug dealing and he was all set," Trump said. "He was going to give the maximum penalty to fentanyl dealers if they send (the staff) to the United States. And of course, Biden didn't pick that up. I had that deal all done. It was all wrapped up," he added. "We were going to get it done and then the election went — let's put it nicely. It didn't go the proper way. I'm trying to be nice about it. It (election) was rigged and we had an incompetent president elected who never followed up on that deal," Trump said.

Toronto (AP): Canada's outgoing prime minister and the leader of the country's oil rich province of Alberta are both confident that Canada can avoid the 25 per cent tariff US President Donald Trump says he will impose on February 1. Justin Trudeau and Danielle Smith will argue that Canada is the energy super power that has the oil and critical minerals that America needs to feed what Trump vows will be a "booming" US economy. But Doug Ford, the premier of Ontario, the manufacturing and automobile hub of Canada, said a trade war is 100 per cent coming. Trump "declared an economic war on Canada," Ford said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"And we are going to use every tool in our tool box to defend our economy," Trudeau said Canada will retaliate if needed, but noted that Canada has been here before during the first Trump presidency when they successfully renegotiated the free trade deal. Ford said as soon as Trump applies tariffs, he will instruct Ontario's liquor control board to pull all American-made alcohol from the shelves. "We are the largest purchaser of alcohol in the world. And I'm going to encourage all the premiers to do the exact same," Ford said, adding that there will be a dollar-for-dollar tariff retaliation on American goods entering Canada. "We are going to target the Republican held areas as well.

They are going to feel the pain. Canadians are going to feel the pain, but Americans will feel the pain as well," he said. "A message to the countries around the world: if he wants to use Canada as an example, you are up next. He's coming after you as well." Trump pledged in his inaugural address that tariffs would be coming in a speech in which he promised a golden era for America. He later said Canada and Mexico could be hit with the tariffs as soon as February 1, though he signed an executive order requesting a report coordinated by the secretary of commerce by April 1. Trump said Tuesday that the 25 per cent tariff that he intends to place on Canada and Mexico as soon as February 1 would

have "nothing to do" with renegotiating the existing trade pact among the three countries. For him, the tariffs are all about stopping unauthorised migration and the flow of any illicit drugs. The US president told reporters at the White House that, in his opinion, the amount of fentanyl coming through Canada and Mexico is "massive". US Customs agents seized just 43 pounds of fentanyl at the Canadian border last fiscal year, compared to 21,100 pounds at the Mexican border. About 60 per cent of US crude oil imports are from Canada. Despite Trump's claim that the US doesn't need Canada, nearly a quarter of the oil America consumes per day comes from Canada.

'Key Justice Dept. officials reassigned'

Washington (AP): The US Justice Department has reassigned key senior officials across multiple divisions as part of a leadership shakeup ahead of the expected confirmation of President Donald Trump's pick for attorney general, Pam Bondi, multiple people familiar with the matter said on Tuesday. Among those moved to other positions inside the department is Bruce Swartz, the longtime head of the Justice Department's office of international affairs, which handles extradition matters, according to two people who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to discuss personnel moves. As many as 20 or so officials in all have been reassigned. Another affected official is George Toscas, a veteran deputy assistant attorney general in the

department's national security division who, in addition to helping oversee major terrorism and espionage investigations, has also been a key supervisor in politically charged probes over the last decade, including into Hillary Clinton's handling of classified information and Trump's hoarding of classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate. A Justice Department spokesman did not immediately return a call seeking comment. The reasons for the moves were not immediately known. Though it is common for a new administration to appoint its own political hires at the top of the Justice Department, it is not standard for career lawyers to be reassigned. They serve the department across administrations and typically retain their positions even when control of the department changes hands.



Nour Abu Al Zamar salvage items from under the rubble of her destroyed family home, in Rafiah, southern Gaza Strip, on Tuesday, days after the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas came into effect. AP/PTI

'Aid flowing smoothly into Gaza'

United Nations (AP): The United Nations humanitarian coordinator in Gaza said Tuesday trucks from the UN, aid groups, governments and the private sector are arriving and no major looting has been reported — just a few minor incidents. Nearly 900 trucks of aid entered Gaza on the third day of the ceasefire on Tuesday, the United Nations said. That's significantly higher than the 600 trucks called for in the deal. Muhannad Hadi, who returned to Jerusalem from Gaza on Tuesday afternoon, told UN reporters by video that it was one of the happiest days of his 35-year humanitarian career to see Palestinians in the streets looking ahead with hope, some heading home and some starting to clean up the roads. In his talks with families at a communal kitchen run by the UN World Food Programme

and elsewhere, he said, they all told him they need humanitarian assistance but want to go home, to work and earn money. "They don't like the fact that they have been depending on humanitarian aid," Hadi said. Palestinians talked about resuming education for their children and about the need for shelter, blankets and new clothes for women who have been wearing the same clothes for more than a year. He said a shipment of tents is expected in the coming days. Hadi, who is also the deputy UN coordinator for the Middle East peace process, said the UN hopes to start "early recovery" programmes, beginning with cash-for-work removing the tons of rubble in Gaza. But he said the UN must make sure the banking system is operating and electricity is back, stressing the critical role of UN member states and the private sector in early recovery.

Hadi said lawlessness and looting happen in any war situation but with the ceasefire in Gaza, the UN is hoping for a restoration of law and order, as he stressed that the minor incidents reported were not by organised criminals who looted UN convoys during the war. Since the ceasefire, he said some kids jumped on some trucks trying to take a food basket, and some other people tried to take bottled water. "And hopefully, within a few days, this will all disappear once the people of Gaza realise that we will have aid, enough for everybody." Hadi also said there are logistical challenges now, including trying to move trucks on roads which are destroyed and where people are also travelling. "They know that their houses are destroyed. But all of them simply told me that if I get a tent, I'll go back there and I'll live on top of the rubble in my place of origin," he said.

Israel to maintain control of Gaza-Egypt crossing

AP ■ JERUSALEM Israel said it will maintain control of the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip during the first phase of the ceasefire with Hamas. A statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office on Wednesday denied reports that the Palestinian Authority would control the crossing. It said local Palestinians not affiliated with Hamas who had been vetted by Israeli security would merely stamp passports at the crossing. It noted that, under international agreements, this stamp "is the only way Gazans may leave the Strip in order to enter, or be received in, other countries." The truce, now its fourth day, is supposed to bring calm to the war-battered Gaza for at least six weeks and see 33 Hamas-

held hostages released in return for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. The statement said European Union monitors would supervise the crossing, which will be surrounded by Israeli troops. Israel also will approve the movement of all people and goods. Israel captured the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing last May, forcing it to shut down. Egypt, a key mediator in more than a year of negotiations that led to the ceasefire, has demanded that Palestinians control the Gaza side. The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Around 100 hostages still remain in Gaza, after the rest were released, rescued, or their bodies were recovered.

RBI Monetary Policy Committee member Nagesh Kumar advocates two inflation rates

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

RBI Monetary Policy Committee member Nagesh Kumar has suggested that there should be two inflation rates - one including food prices and the other without food prices - so that relevant rates could be taken into account for policy making.

Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran in the Economic Survey 2023-24 had pitched for excluding food inflation from the rate setting calls, saying that the monetary policy has no bearing on the prices of food items, which are dictated by supply side pressures.

"I think there is a healthy debate on what should be the target, whether overall headline inflation rate or inflation rate excluding the food products, which are, you know, very seriously affected by seasonal demand, supply mismatch," Kumar told PTI while responding to a question on suggestions made in the Economic Survey for excluding food inflation while setting benchmark interest rates.



The weightage of food in the overall consumer price inflation, which stands at 46 per cent, was done in 2011-12, and needs to be revisited. "I think we should have two inflation rates, one including food inflation and one without food inflation... So the relevant rate could be considered for what, which particular policy

parameter one is looking at," he said. India introduced the inflation-targeting framework in 2016 under which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is mandated to keep retail inflation at four per cent, with a margin of two per cent on either side. The benchmark policy rates are decided bi-monthly by the

RBI on the basis of movement in consumer price index, which includes food, fuel, manufactured goods and select services. Responding to a question on high food prices, Kumar said retail inflation slowed to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December. "A large part of this 5.2 per

cent is because of the food prices inflation, and then also a seasonal mismatch of vegetable prices... And that corrects by itself, when more supplies come to the mandis, we should see inflation being restrained much more, Kumar added.

On India's current macroeconomic situation, he said slowdown in India's economic growth to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent in the second quarter was a temporary, transient kind of slowdown. According to Kumar, it reflected the lag effect of the very strong squeeze in capex of the government in the first quarter because of the election code of conduct, but the capex started to pick up in the second quarter.

"We expect a strong growth in the second half of the year, and overall, I think we should be making up somewhere around 6.5 per cent or 6.6 per cent," he said. Responding to a question on outlook of the Indian economy in FY26, Kumar said the performance of the Indian economy will be slightly better next fiscal year than this year.

Irregularities found in one rupee crop insurance scheme for farmers

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Agriculture Minister Manikrao Kokate has admitted irregularities in the implementation of the one rupee crop insurance scheme for farmers, noting places of worship were shown as agricultural lands to claim benefits.

More than four lakh crop insurance applications, some filed even by those residing outside Maharashtra, have been rejected, Kokate on Tuesday said, adding a "bogus industry" has come to light which involves non-eligible people seeking benefits of the scheme. The minister, however, asserted that no money has been actually lost as funds were not transferred by the government into the bank accounts linked to bogus applications.

Speaking to the media here, Kokate said instances of malpractice in the scheme have been identified in several aspects, including cases where mosques, temples and vacant lands were falsely declared as agricultural lands to claim benefits. "I have instructed district collectors to take immediate action," he said. The crop insurance scheme



was introduced in the 2023 budget by the then deputy chief minister and finance minister Devendra Fadnis. Under the scheme, farmers can get crop insurance for just Re one. Before the scheme, farmers had to pay the company two per cent of the insurance premium. The agriculture department had received several complaints from farmers about the scheme's implementation, chiefly on grounds of non-payment of the insurance amount as well as mismatch of records. Agriculture Secretary Vikaschandra Rastogi later headed a committee which compiled the complaints and conducted a probe into them. Kokate said, "Over four lakh crop insurance applications were rejected across the state. Some of these applications

were filed by people from outside Maharashtra. We have taken significant steps to address the irregularities. Farmers will be issued unique ID cards linked to Aadhaar to ensure transparency." An updated database of farmers is being prepared, the minister said, adding that significant reforms will be introduced in the scheme. Asked how the large-scale bogus claims could be made, Kokate attributed much of the malpractice to certain Common Service Centres (CSCs), where people involved in data entry of details of farmers are paid Rs 40 per application. "The operators of such centres filed bogus applications to earn more. We have ordered action against 96 such centres," he said.

I like competent people coming to US: says President Trump



PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump has said he likes both sides of the argument on the H-1B foreign guest workers' visa, noting that the country needs "very competent" and "great" people which is possible through this visa programme. Trump also said that he has also used the H-1B visa programme. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality

occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. "I like both sides of the argument, but I also like very competent people coming into our country, even if that involves their training and helping other people who may not have the qualifications they do. But I don't want to stop- and I'm not just talking about engineers, I'm talking

about people at all levels," Trump said on Tuesday. He made these remarks while talking to reporters at the White House during a joint news conference with Oracle CEO Larry Ellison, Softbank CEO Masayoshi Son, and Open AI CEO Sam Altman. The president was responding to a question on the ongoing debate on H-1B visas within his support base. Indians are the main beneficiaries of the H-1B visas, which bring in the best of the talent and brains from across the world. Highly skilled professionals from India walk away with the overwhelming number of H-1B visas - which is Congressional mandated 65,000 every year and another 20,000 for those who received higher education from the US. While his close confidants like Elon Musk, the Tesla owner, support H-1B visas as they bring in qualified tech professionals, many of his supporters oppose it arguing that it takes away jobs from

Americans. "We want competent people coming into our country. And H-1B, I know the programme very well. I use the programme. Maitre d', wine experts, even waiters, high-quality waiters -- you've got to get the best people. People like Larry, he needs engineers, Masa also needs... They need engineers like nobody's ever needed them," Trump said. "So, we have to have quality people coming in. Now by doing that, we're expanding businesses and that takes care of everybody. So I'm sort of on both sides of the argument, but what I really do feel is that we have to let really competent people, great people, come into our country. And we do that through the H-1B programme," Trump said. Since December, the debate on foreign guest workers visas for highly skilled professionals, the H-1B, has intensified which has literally created divisions in both the Democratic and the Republican parties

EPFO adds 14.63 lakh net members in November

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retirement fund body EPFO has added 14.63 lakh net members in November 2024, a growth of 4.88 per cent over the same month last year, according to the latest payroll data. The growth in net member additions signifies increased employment opportunities and heightened awareness of employee benefits, bolstered by EPFO's effective outreach initiatives, a labour ministry statement said.

On a monthly basis, net member additions rose by 9.07 per cent over October 2024, the ministry said. The EPFO enrolled around 8.74 lakh new members in November 2024, up by 18.80 per cent over the year-ago month and a 16.58 per cent rise against October 2024, the provisional data showed. The ministry said a noticeable aspect of the data is the dominance of the 18-25 age group, with 4.81 lakh new members added in this age group constituting a significant 54.97 per cent of the total new members added



in November 2024. Net member additions in the age group of 18-25 years are approximately 5.86 lakh for November 2024, reflecting an increase of 7.96 per cent compared to the previous month of October 2024. This is in consonance with the earlier trend which indicates that most individuals joining the organised workforce are youth, primarily first-time job seekers, the ministry said. The payroll data highlights that approximately 14.39 lakh members exited and subsequently rejoined EPFO. This figure represents an 11.47 per cent increase compared to the previous month of October 2024. It also depicts a significant year-

on-year growth of 34.75 per cent in November 2024. These members switched their jobs and re-joined the establishments covered under the ambit of EPFO and opted to transfer their accumulations instead of applying for final settlement thus, safeguarding long-term financial well-being and extending their social security protection. Gender-wise analysis of payroll data unveils that out of the new members added during the month, around 2.40 lakh new members are female, it said. The comparison with the previous month of October 2024 shows an increase of 14.94 per cent.

NSE adds one crore investors in five months

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Wednesday said its unique registered investors have crossed the 11 crore mark, with the latest one crore addition taking place in just five months, reflecting investor participation in the stock market through direct means. Investor registrations at the NSE have experienced a remarkable acceleration in recent times, with a 3.6 times jump in the last five years. It took 14 years since the NSE's commencement of operations in 1994 to reach one crore investors. The pace then quickened, with the next 1 crore registrations taking about seven years, followed by another 3.5 years for the next crore and the subsequent milestone of adding the fourth crore took just over a year. "The rate of growth has since quickened significantly, with each additional one crore investors being added in roughly six-seven months, while the last one crore investors were added in just over five months, reflecting a shift in investor enthusiasm and participation in the stock market through direct means," NSE said in a statement. In the last five months, daily new unique investor registrations have consistently ranged between 47,000 and 73,000. This growth has been driven by several key factors, including the rapid advancement of digitisation, heightened investor awareness, financial inclusion efforts, and strong market performance. In 2024, the Nifty 50 index delivered a return of 8.8 per cent while the Nifty 500 index saw an impressive 15.2 per cent gain. Indian markets have had positive returns for the past nine consecutive years.

Rupee rises 25 paise against US Dollar



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 25 paise to close at 86.33 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, supported by positive domestic equities and soft US dollar index.

Forex traders said the rupee is likely to witness high volatility with a negative bias ahead of key events in the global and domestic economic landscape. Moreover, the overall uncertainty about the global economy continued to weigh on both currencies and commodities, keeping investors on edge. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.56 against the greenback. During the day, the local unit touched an intraday high of 86.30 and a low of 86.71. It finally closed at 86.33 (provisional) against the US dollar, up 25 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee fell 13 paise to 86.58 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to remain largely weak on underlying

strength in the US dollar and overall weakness in the domestic markets. Importer demand for dollars may also pressurise the rupee. However, any extended sell-off in crude oil may support the rupee at lower levels," Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said. Choudhary further noted that markets may see some volatility on incoming statements and announcements by the Trump administration. "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 86.20 to 86.65," he added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading down 0.15 per cent to 107.89 as traders pondered over the Trump Tariff Plan. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.48 per cent to USD 79.67 per barrel in futures trade.

Crude oil prices had fallen due to fears of tough US policies and had touched USD 78 per barrel, a 4 per cent decline from recent highs following President Trump's mention of increasing US oil output. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 566.63 points, or 0.75 per cent, to settle at 76,404.99 points, while the Nifty rose 130.70 points, or 0.57 per cent, to 23,155.35 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) remained net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 5,920.28 crore, according to exchange data.

Sensex, Nifty rebound on buying in Infosys, HDFC Bank, firm global trends

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex rebounded nearly 567 points and Nifty regained 23,150 level on Wednesday following gains in blue-chip stocks Infosys, HDFC Bank and Tata Consultancy Services, and firm global trends.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 566.63 points or 0.75 per cent to close at 76,404.99. During the day, the benchmark surged 624.77 points or 0.82 per cent to hit an intraday high of 76,463.13 on the BSE. On similar lines, the broader NSE Nifty climbed 130.70 points or 0.57 per cent to settle at 23,155.35. In the intraday session, the Nifty rose 144.9 points or 0.63 per cent to



23,169.55 on the NSE. Among Sensex shares, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharmaceutical, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank and Kotak

Mahindra Bank were among the gainers. Tata Motors, PowerGrid, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, NTPC, Tata Steel and Adani Ports were the major laggards. "The benchmark indices rebounded amidst heightened

volatility following better-than-expected results from a major private bank. The IT sector led gains, recovering from recent losses, while mid and small-cap stocks continued to underperform due to valuation concerns," Vinod Nair, Head of

Research, Geojit Financial Services said. European markets were trading higher on Wednesday. In Asian markets, Tokyo and Seoul were settled on a positive note while Hong Kong and Shanghai closed in the negative territory. Wall Street had ended higher on Tuesday. International oil benchmark Brent Crude was trading 0.49 per cent higher at USD 79.68 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 5,920.28 crore on Tuesday. The BSE Sensex plummeted 1,235.08 points to settle at 75,838.36 and the broader NSE Nifty plunged 320.10 points to close at 23,024.65 on Tuesday.

Some equity research firms shutting shops after SEBI's new guidelines on research analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator SEBI's new guidelines on research analysts (RAs) are forcing several equity research firms publicly announcing plans to shut down their shops due to heightened compliance and operational requirements. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), on January 8, came out with guidelines for Research Analysts in a bid to curb fraudulent stock recommendations and illegal practices in the securities market. The new guidelines necessitate research firms to comply with stricter measures such as maintaining records of

client interactions, conducting compliance audits, and following Know-Your-Customer (KYC) procedures and these requirements have led to increased operational costs for smaller entities. Consequently, a few firms including Sentinel Research, Stalwart Advisors, and Mystic Wealth have announced their plans of shutting their research services citing significant operational and compliance burden. Market experts said that the new guidelines have notably lowered the threshold for individuals to register as RAs, making it easier for newcomers to enter the profession. However, for established RAs, these



guidelines have imposed heightened compliance and operational requirements. They believe that the new regulations are too stringent and could undermine the quality of research in the market.

Sandeep Parekh, founder of Finsec Law Advisors, posted on microblogging site X that Sebi is "going way overboard in its regulations and shutting down competent and honest advisors and researchers from the

market". "If it goes down this path, all that will remain will be incompetent and dishonest, or incompetent or dishonest advisors," he added. Neeraj Marathe, who operates independent research firm Sentinel Research, also expressed his dismay on social media. He had paused his research services last year when the draft RA regulations were first announced, hoping for more clarity and more balanced guidelines. However, upon reviewing the final regulations, he stated that the rules were even more burdensome than expected. "Last year, when the proposed RA regulations came, I had paused my

research services at sentinelresearch.in. The hope was that the actual regulations would be better in terms of conditions and compliance and I shall restart after getting clarity. Well, the actual regulations have turned out to be much worse! I too shall be discontinuing my research services portal," he added. Stalwart Advisors, which has been operating its equity research service "Treasure Trove" for over a decade, announced it would be closing its operations. The firm cited the increased operational and compliance requirements, including the rule that limits subscription fees to a quarterly payment model, as a key factor in its decision.

Liverpool beats Lille to reach Champions League round of 16

PTI ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool became the first team to guarantee a place in the last 16 of the new Champions League format by beating Lille 2-1 on Tuesday, while Barcelona fought back from two goals down to stun Benfica 5-4 in a thriller.

Harvey Elliott's bouncing, deflected shot gave Liverpool its seventh win from seven games, just after 10-man Lille had equalized following Mohamed Salah's opening goal.

Liverpool needed a point at Anfield to be sure of reaching the round of 16 as one of the top eight teams in the league stage, skipping the playoff round for teams ranked ninth to 24th.

Salah raced through in the 34th minute to sweep Liverpool ahead with his 22nd goal in all competitions this season. And when Lille's Aissa Mandi was sent off just before the hour mark, Liverpool looked certain to extend its 100% record in the league phase.

But Anfield was stunned when Canada striker Jonathan David converted from close range to level the score in the 62nd. It

didn't take long for Liverpool to regain the lead through Elliott's deflected effort five minutes later. "All my life I've dreamt of playing Champions League football, not only for my boyhood club but to play here at Anfield in front of our fans and especially to score, it's kind of a pinch-me moment," Elliott said.

Barcelona's comeback win It was a night of high drama in the Champions League with 33 goals scored across nine games. Nine of them came in Barcelona's battle with Benfica.

Raphinha scored in stoppage time to complete a rousing comeback as Barcelona won in Lisbon despite having been 4-2 down with less than a quarter of an hour remaining.

Benfica's Vangelis Pavlidis scored the third-fastest hat trick at the start of a Champions League game, with two of his goals coming after errors by Barcelona goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny. Barcelona stays second with 18 points from seven games, and is now unbeaten in six games in all competitions since the new year.

"We came with the mindset that we could turn the game," Raphinha said. "We never gave up



and managed to grab a win." Robert Lewandowski scored two penalties for Barcelona to stay the Champions League's top scorer on nine goals, one ahead of Raphinha, who also scored twice. Another Spanish club staged a comeback as Julian Alvarez scored a 90th-minute winner to lift Atletico Madrid past Bayer Leverkusen 2-1. Atletico lost Pablo Barrios to a 23rd-minute

red card and went into half time 1-0 down to a Piero Hincapie header for Leverkusen.

Alvarez scored in the 52nd and had the momentum when Hincapie was sent off for a second yellow card, before Alvarez struck again to take the win and lift Atletico to third.

Villa slides out of the top eight With Prince William watching on, Aston Villa's hopes of automatic qualification for the round of 16 took a blow after a 1-0 loss to Monaco.

Villa led the standings early in the league phase of the competition after winning its first three games. But defeat to Monaco left the Premier League club eighth.

Wilfried Singo's goal at a corner in the eighth minute was enough to secure the win for ninth-place Monaco.

Dortmund slump continues Borussia Dortmund's 2-1 loss at Bologna increased the pressure on coach Nuri Sahin in Dortmund's fourth consecutive loss at the start of the new year in all competitions.

Serhou Guirassy gave Dortmund, last season's runner-up, the lead with a chipped penalty and ran to celebrate with Sahin.

It looked like the Champions League could provide a much-needed boost for a team floundering in the Bundesliga, but two goals in two minutes from Thijs Dallinga and Samuel Iling-Junior changed the game for previously winless Bologna.

Results elsewhere meant Bologna will be heading out of the competition despite its win, since the Italian club can't finish in the top 24. Sturm Graz and Red Star Belgrade are also out after losing Tuesday.

Atalanta beat Graz 5-0, strengthening the Italian club's push to qualify directly for the round of 16. Atalanta finished the evening fourth.

PSV Eindhoven hung on for a 3-2 win at Red Star despite losing defender Flamingo to a red card just after halftime while leading 3-0. Stuttgart eased to a 3-1 win over Slovan Bratislava, which was already eliminated and has lost all seven of its games. Club Brugge and Juventus drew 0-0.

Europa League In the only Europa League game of the night, Galatasaray missed a chance to go third in the table, giving up a 3-1 lead to draw 3-3 with last-place Dynamo Kyiv.



Australian Open: Ben Shelton criticises TV interviewers

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

American tennis player Ben Shelton criticized on Wednesday some of the questions and comments made by post-match TV interviewers at the Australian Open.

After Shelton reached the semifinals at the Grand Slam tournament, he followed his final answer at his news conference by saying: "One thing that I just want to say before we're done: I've been a little bit shocked this week with how players have been treated by the broadcasters."

He began by referencing the flap over a television commentator's on-air insults about Novak Djokovic, which caused the 24-time Grand Slam champion to refuse to speak to the local broadcaster, Channel 9, after one match.

Djokovic eventually relented after receiving public apologies from the network and its employee, Tony Jones. "I don't think that was just a single event," Shelton said. "I've noticed it with different people, not just myself."

Shelton went on to mention the interview with 19-year-old American Learner Tien after his upset win over 2021 U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev ended at about 3 a.m. In the second round at Melbourne Park last week, calling it "embarrassing and disrespectful."

That awkward exchange included a series of statements to Tien, rather than questions, including observations by the interviewer that "19-year-

olds are not meant to be that good" and "I know where you live, by the way."

Shelton also noted two of his own on-court TV interviews. After the 22-year-old's win against 38-year-old French veteran Gael Monfils in the fourth round, interviewer Roger Rasheed, a former tennis coach, attempted to make a joke by saying, "He's almost your Dad."

Both Shelton and Monfils are Black. Shelton responded to Rasheed: "Was that a Black joke?" To which Rasheed replied, "I'm not sure."

Then, after Shelton's 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (4) victory over Lorenzo Sonego in the quarterfinals Wednesday, he was asked about facing either the defending champion, Jannik Sinner, or an Australian player, Alex de Minaur, next, with the interviewer pointing out that the spectators likely would be cheering against Shelton in the semifinals, either way.

Shelton answered: "I know I've got a few people out in the crowd who are going to be pulling for me, too."

At his news conference, Shelton said that what the interviewer said about the fans' support "may be true, but I just don't think the comment is respectful from a guy I've never met before in my life."

Shelton closed by saying: "I feel like broadcasters should be helping us grow our sport and help these athletes who just won matches on the biggest stage enjoy one of their biggest moments. I feel like there's just been a lot of negativity.

428 athletes from 19 teams to take part in KIWG 2025

PTI ■ LEH/JAMMU

The Khelo India Winter Games (KIWG) 2025 that starts on Thursday will feature 428 athletes from 19 competing teams.

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya is set to declare the Games open in Leh on Thursday.

Nineteen teams, comprising states, Union Territories, and institutional outfits, will compete over five days across two events - ice hockey and ice skating - marking the first part of KIWG 2025.

A traditional Ladakhi-style opening ceremony has been planned to welcome 594 participants, including 428 athletes.

The second part, featuring snow games like skiing, will be hosted by Jammu and Kashmir from February 22 to 25.

"Sports Minister will attend the opening ceremony at the iconic Nawang Dorjay Stobdan Sports Complex in Leh on Thursday and will declare the games open," an official spokesperson said.

Mandaviya will be joined by a host of dignitaries, including the Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, Brigadier Dr BD Mishra, and senior officials from the



Sports Authority of India and the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council. This will be the second time Ladakh hosts the Winter Games, now in its fifth edition, the spokesperson said. "All teams have arrived in Leh, which is at an altitude of 11,562 feet. Himachal Pradesh has the largest contingent, comprising 78 athletes and support staff," he added.

Haryana (62), hosts Ladakh (52), and Maharashtra (48) will compete in the Ladakh edition. Uttarakhand, which will host the National Games later this

month, has the smallest team, comprising just one athlete.

The fifth edition of the Khelo India Winter Games will be held across two phases in Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir, from January 23 to 27 and February 22 to 25, respectively, covering two ice and four snow disciplines, the spokesperson said.

Apart from identifying talent, the Khelo India Winter Games aim to showcase a region's art, culture, heritage, and promote tourism through sports. Several young skaters will compete at the Nawang Dorjay

Borussia Dortmund fires coach Nuri Sahin



PTI ■ DORTMUND

Borussia Dortmund fired Coach Nuri Sahin on Wednesday, a day after its 2-1 loss to Bologna in the Champions League.

The loss extended Dortmund's losing streak to four games since the new year and dropped last season's Champions League runner-up to 13th in the standings. Dortmund is also struggling in the Bundesliga, where it's 10th.

"We really value Nuri Sahin and his work, we had wished for a long cooperation and until recently we hoped that we could manage to turn things around in sporting terms," sporting director Lars Ricken said in a statement.

"After four losses in a row, with just one win from the last nine games and currently being 10th in the Bundesliga, unfortunately we lost our faith in being able to achieve our sporting goals in the current configuration. This decision is personally painful for me too, but it was no longer avoidable after the game in Bologna."

There was no immediate word on a successor. Dortmund's next game is Saturday in the Bundesliga against Werder Bremen.

The 36-year-old Sahin had been Dortmund coach since June. He had been an assistant to Edin Terzic, who resigned following Dortmund's 2-0 loss to Real Madrid in the Champions League final, saying the club needed to enter a "new era" without him.

Sindhu, Lakshya to lead team in Badminton Asia Mixed Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu and World Championships bronze winner Lakshya Sen will lead a 14-member Indian team for the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championship to be held in Qingdao, China from February 11-16.

India had clinched a bronze medal in the last edition of the competition in Dubai in 2023. "The national selectors have given importance to the world rankings and current form of the players while selecting the squad that will have HS Prannoy and Malvika Bansod as the second men's and women's singles players respectively," the Badminton Association of India said in a release.

The strong Indian team will also have star doubles players Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and



Chirag Shetty. The women's doubles pairing could be either Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly or Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto. Tanisha will also pair up with Dhruv Kapila in mixed doubles while Sathish Kumar K and Adya Variyath will be the second combination. BAI secretary general Sanjay Mishra said, "We did well by winning the bronze medal two years ago, but the target this year is to reach the finals, and then anything is possible, and we will go all out."

Mainz signs US midfielder Lennard Maloney

PTI ■ MAINZ

German-born U.S. Midfielder Lennard Maloney has joined Mainz from Bundesliga rival Heidenheim, where he was dropped last month after expressing his wish to leave.

The 25-year-old Maloney, who had informed Heidenheim he was going to join Mainz when his contract expired at the end of the season, got his wish Tuesday when the clubs agreed on a deal.

"Maloney has been able to prove himself in the Bundesliga over the last year and a half," said Mainz sporting director Niko Bungert said. "His preferred position is as a number six and as a player, he's the perfect fit for Mainz 05. He brings a strong mentality, as well as a willingness to run hard, and is also strong at winning challenges and aerial duels. Lennard will find it easy to fit into our squad with his warm, open



personality." Maloney signed a contract to 2028.

After 18 rounds of the league, Heidenheim is in the relegation playoff spot while sixth-place Mainz is on course for European qualification.

Heidenheim coach Frank Schmidt said in December he wasn't picking the defensive midfielder because he lacked commitment amid a series of

disappointing performances. "I can only count on players in this phase who are 100% focused on the interests of Heidenheim," Schmidt said.

"From a coaching perspective I simply want another focus and another level of performance from my vice-captain."

The Berlin-born Maloney has made two appearances for the United States - both in 2023.

Enrique must outwit Guardiola when PSG meets Manchester City

PTI ■ PARIS

Luis Enrique credits Pep Guardiola with inventing arguably the "perfect model" of attacking soccer.

He must now outwit him when Paris Saint-Germain faces Manchester City in the Champions League on Wednesday, in a match both teams must win to avoid the prospect of early elimination in the new-look format.

"It's a special game. Not just for the two teams but because I will come across a friend who I shared many great moments with as a player and a person," Enrique said on Tuesday through a translator.

"What brings us closer is our vision of football: To try and be better than the opponent on the ball, to constantly press the opponent. We can fine-tune our game but we have a similar way of

seeing things."

Guardiola rose to fame as a coach during a glory era for Barcelona, winning the Champions League twice and multiple other trophies. Guardiola's sides hypnotized opponents with a pulsating brand of attacking soccer led by Lionel Messi that was the envy of Europe.

Guardiola then turned City into a Premier League force.

"The 4-3-3 with Barcelona was almost the perfect model. He opened up a different way of playing in England and did so with success, he opened many doors for others," Enrique said. "Pep has innovated throughout his career and is not scared to do so again."

Guardiola won the Champions League again with City in 2023, while Enrique's PSG reached the semifinals last season.

Enrique and Guardiola have history



They go back far. "We were mates in Barcelona and our families are really close friends," Guardiola said. "Our friendship will be eternal. The (Enrique's family) love us (and) I

scored 109 goals for the club; Guardiola the astute moneysweeper protecting defense.

As coaches, they are more similar.

"If anything can define both Pep and I as coaches (it) is that we like to attack. We like to defend properly but we like to devise our game plan to be better than the opposition," said Enrique, who won the Champions League with Barca in 2015. "There are a lot of things I must think about when I have my cappuccino tomorrow morning."

Namely that PSG is in danger of going out.

So is City.

PSG is 25th out of 36 teams, and City is only one point ahead in 22nd. The bottom 12 are eliminated.

"Everyone has to be ready," Enrique said. "Man City do a lot of things tactically, they switch positions a lot. But we pose a lot

of problems. The team that is best prepared or best develops its ideas will win."

City is turning the corner after a slump that had Guardiola interrogating himself. City has rebounded with 22 goals in the past five games. Attacking midfielder Phil Foden is finding form and prolific striker Erling Haaland has signed a mega-contract until 2034.

"City are also very at ease with a transition game and have very dangerous players in attack," Enrique said. "We will see who makes the most of the possession. We want to keep the ball, it's when you retain possession that you have the most chance of winning."

As long as you score.

Wasteful PSG has netted just six goals in six games and was blanked by Bayern Munich and Arsenal.

"I hope for a horrible

performance from PSG tomorrow," Guardiola said, jokingly.

Mbappe's shoes not filled

The void left by Kylian Mbappé since he joined Real Madrid is still felt. He scored a career-high 44 goals last season.

"We obviously had a player of reference who scored an immense amount of goals," Enrique said. "I don't think any one of our players previously showed they could score 25 goals in a season, so we have to resolve it through the team."

PSG's main scoring threat comes from winger Ousmane Dembélé, who has recovered from a heavy flu.

"I feel much better," he said on Tuesday. "I had five or six days when I wasn't feeling well."

Dembélé has 11 goals from 22 games and is well on course to beat his best of 14 with Barcelona in 2018-19.

Australian Open: Swiatek will face Madison Keys in semifinals

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Iga Swiatek is dominating her Australian Open opponents the way no one has at Melbourne Park since Maria Sharapova in 2013. Swiatek's latest lopsided win came via a 6-1, 6-2 score in the quarterfinals against No. 8 seed Emma Navarro on Wednesday. The No. 2-seeded Swiatek not only has not dropped a set so far in the tournament, but also has lost a grand total of only 14 games as she seeks her first title at Melbourne Park and sixth Grand Slam trophy overall. Sharapova was the last woman to reach the Australian Open semifinals having dropped fewer than 15 games. "She does everything with 100% conviction and intensity," Navarro said about Swiatek. "She has a different style of movement and play. It's tough to not be sort of affected by that and not feel like, OK, I have to do everything at the same speed that she's doing it." So that was something, for sure, I felt a little bit today." Swiatek will face No. 19 Madison Keys of the U.S. On Thursday

night for a berth in the final. The other women's semifinal is No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka, the two-time defending champion, against her good friend, No. 11 Paula Badosa. Keys, whose best showing at a major was getting to the title match at the 2017 U.S. Open, was a 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 winner against Elina Svitolina and is into her third semifinal in Australia. "Iga is tough to beat, because she has a lot of spin, kind of naturally, on both sides. She's a good server. She's a good returner. She moves incredibly well," Keys said. "The biggest thing that makes her so difficult to beat is, because she moves so well, if you miss your spot just slightly, she has enough time to recover, and then the point goes back to neutral." There's an American in the men's semifinals, too: No. 21 Ben Shelton got that far in Melbourne for the first time with an entertaining 6-4, 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (4) win over unseeded Lorenzo Sonego of Italy. Shelton was a semifinalist at the 2023 U.S. Open and now will meet No. 1 Jannik Sinner, the defending champion, or No. 8 Alex de Minaur in that round. Sinner faced



de Minaur on Wednesday night. The other men's semifinal Friday is Novak Djokovic vs. Alexander Zverev.

Against Navarro, Swiatek benefited from a no-call of a double bounce on a point she won in the second set. Because Navarro

continued playing the point and did not immediately stop to ask for a video review, she wasn't allowed to have the sequence checked.

Either way, Swiatek's dominance was pretty clear, even if she was modest about things afterward. "Well, I think it was much more tougher than the score says," said Swiatek, a 23-year-old from Poland. "Emma's a fighter... And I wanted to stay focused and keep my intensity." Swiatek has won four of five career matchups against Keys, 29. "Madison is a great player and experienced, so you never know," Swiatek said. "I'll be just focused on myself." Using a new racket this season, Keys is on a 10-match winning streak, including a title at a hard-court tune-up event in Adelaide. Her run to the semifinals in Melbourne includes victories over two past runners-up at the Australian Open, Danielle Collins and Elina Rybakina. Keys' past losses in the semifinals in Melbourne came against eventual champions Serena Williams in 2015 and Ash Barty in 2022. "I think I play a little bit smarter for sure... Probably a little bit less fearless," Keys said. Svitolina, a three-time Slam

semifinalist, was in control during the first set. But Keys made some tactical adjustments, including looking for more opportunities to get to the net. She won 23 of the 26 points when she moved forward and ended up with a total of 49 winners, 23 on her powerful forehand side. The one difficulty Keys had was getting going in her return games. But she finally converted her seventh break chance to lead 4-2 in the second set. "Getting to the point where I'm starting to appreciate my career for what it has been, and it doesn't have to have a Grand Slam in order for me to look at it and say, I've done a really good job, and I've really left everything out there." Now, while that's obviously still the goal, there have been periods of my career where it felt like if I didn't win one, then I hadn't done enough," Keys said. "That kind of took a lot of the fun out of the game, and there were times where it felt paralyzing out on the court because it felt as if I needed it to happen, instead of giving myself the opportunity to go out and potentially do it.



There was a sense of fear during rehabilitation: Shami

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Seasoned India pacer Mohammed Shami has revealed that he was gripped by a sense of fear when he began his rehabilitation after a long injury layoff, but managed to overcome that phase by training his mind to stay focussed on the national comeback. Shami was sidelined after the lost ODI World Cup final against Australia in November 2023 due to an ankle injury that required surgery. "The recovery from that was followed by a swelling on his left knee during the domestic comeback some weeks back. Following his inclusion in India's Champions Trophy squad, his return has garnered national attention. He is also in the squad for the five-match T20I series against England beginning here later this evening. "I waited for an entire year and I worked very hard (to get back to full fitness). There was a sense of fear (of getting injured during rehabilitation) even while running," Shami said in a video posted by BCCI. "It is difficult for any player to get injured after being in full flow, go the NCA (National Cricket Academy) for rehabilitation and then make a comeback," he added. The cricketer, however, said an athlete is far more determined after dealing with an injury. "When you go through injuries, I feel you grow stronger as an athlete, this is

what I feel. Because you have to repeat a lot of things while being mentally strong." Shami went through the domestic grind, representing his home state Bengal in the Ranji Trophy, Syed Mushtaq and Vijay Hazare but a swelling in his knee finally ruled him out of the five-match Border-Gavaskar Test series in Australia. On his competitive return in the Ranji Trophy, he guided Bengal to their first win of the season with a seven-wicket haul. He followed it up with impressive performances in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (11 wickets) and the Vijay Hazare Trophy (five wickets). Shami's T20I career has been sporadic, with just 23 appearances since his debut in 2014. His last outing in the format was against England in the 2022 T20 World Cup semifinal. The 34-year-old said he has overcome the setbacks and is raring to go. "Whatever is done, is done. I have crossed that (injury) phase. If you work hard you will get the results. That's what I believe in. If you get injured you have to make a comeback for your team for your country. So fight and grow," he said. "If you are strong and believe in yourself and you have confidence in your abilities, have self-belief, then I don't think you will find any difference. Confidence is important for any task," he added.

Big wins for England, Australia in U19 Women's T20 World Cup

PTI ■ JOHOR

Opener Davina Perrin smashed a fine half-century and Trudy Johnson put up a fine all-round show as England crushed the United States of America (USA) by eight wickets to climb to the top of Pool B in the U19 Women's T20 World Cup, here Wednesday. Bangladesh, New Zealand and Australia were the other winners on the day. Bangladesh overcame Scotland by 18 runs, New Zealand defeated Samoa by 67 runs, while Australia were menacing in their 83-run win over Nepal. England flexed their muscle by chasing down 120 in 14.2 overs with opener Perrin scoring a 45-ball 74, studded with nine boundaries and three sixes. Johnson hit an unbeaten 44 after taking two wickets for



17 runs. Prisha Thanawala (2/20) also contributed in restricting USA to 119/5. USA captain Anika Kolan led the charge with the bat, shoring their innings with an unbeaten 46 off 42 balls. Bangladesh outlasted Scotland in Group D after managing 121/9 and then restricting the opponents to 103/8 in the allotted overs.

Captain Sumaiya Akter top-scored for Bangladesh with an unbeaten 29 off 36 deliveries. She was supported by Afia Ashima Era (21 off 19) and Juairiya Ferdous (20 off 32). Scotland were courageous in their chase with Pippa Sprout scoring a 41-ball 43 but they couldn't get over the line.

In another match, New Zealand sealed a 67-run win against tournament newcomers Samoa. The Kiwis scored 107/9 in 17 overs and dismissed Samoa for 40 in 14.2 overs. Eye Wolland (48) shone with the bat while Rishika Jaswal (3/12) and skipper Tash Wakelin (3/3) excelled with the ball. Olive Lefaga Lemoe made history by taking Samoa's first ever ICC Women's U19 World Cup wicket, dismissing New Zealand star Kate Irwin caught-and-bowled for a duck. Australia had an easy outing against Nepal, defeating the Asian side by 83 runs after scoring 139/6. Nepal could only muster 56/8 in 20 overs with Lily Bassingthwaite (2/4), Juliette Morton (2/10) and Hasrat Gill (2/9) taking two wickets each.



India will adhere to dress code set by ICC at CT: BCCI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian cricket team will adhere to the dress code set by the ICC during the upcoming Champions Trophy, BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia told PTI on Wednesday, rejecting speculation that the Board had objected to host Pakistan's name on the side's official jersey. The Champions Trophy will be held from February 19 and India will play its share of matches in Dubai after citing security concerns as the reason for refusing to travel to Pakistan. "BCCI will follow every uniform-related ICC rule during Champions Trophy," Saikia told PTI. "Whatever the other teams will do regarding the logo and dress code, we are going to follow in true letter and spirit," he added. However, Saikia said that whether national captain Rohit Sharma participates in the ICC's pre-tournament engagements, including a press conference and an official photo shoot in Lahore, is something that is still being discussed. "Whether Rohit Sharma travels to Pakistan for ICC media engagements is something that's still not decided," Saikia added. There were some unconfirmed media reports that the BCCI had objected to

the host nation's name being embossed on their jersey, which is an established practice for all ICC events, owing to the tense political ties between the two countries. It is understood that there was never any doubt about following the logo guidelines and the BCCI did not raise concerns with the global body. When Pakistan came to India in 2023 for the 50-over ICC World Cup, Babar Azam and his men duly sported the host country's name on their jerseys as part of the tournament protocol. The Champions Trophy is being conducted under a 'Hybrid Model' for the first time as BCCI didn't get permission from the Indian government to travel to Pakistan. India will play all its matches, including the marquee league match against the arch-rivals from across the border, in Dubai. In case, the Indian team reaches the semi-final and subsequently final, the two matches will be played in Dubai as well. As far as Rohit Sharma visiting Pakistan is concerned, the matter is still under consideration and there are certain issues that the Indian cricket board needs to consider if its captain visits Pakistan for a customary photo-shoot and pre-event press conference.

AB de Villiers wants to play cricket again

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

AB de Villiers wants to play "real cricket" again. Not in the high-pressure environment of IPL but somewhere "casual" to have a bit of fun and please his children. De Villiers retired from all forms of cricket in November 2021 to spend more time with his family. The 40-year-old former South Africa captain is now involved with multiple projects in charity and broadcasting. He is also the brand ambassador of the ongoing SA20. But in a chat with Melinda Farrell on her Youtube channel, de Villiers let it slip that he wishes to play the game again. "I might still play cricket one day. No confirmation whatsoever. My kids are putting me under a bit of



pressure and I feel like I could go to the nets with them," de Villiers said referring his three children - two sons Abraham and John, and daughter Yente. "My boy could feel me bowling machine balls... Maybe I will walk out and play a bit of casual cricket somewhere," he added.

De Villiers hinted at playing proper cricket outside the lens of professional leagues like the IPL. "I am talking on a more serious note, actually, of playing some real cricket not professional IPL or SA20 stuff but who knows? I have had my fair share (of high pressure cricket), that's done," he said.

A slight challenge to that ambition is his eye sight, especially the "bit blurry" left one. "This right one is the dominant one, it is working fine. I am doing it for my kids and see if I can go out there and enjoy cricket again. Even if it is very casual and see where we draw the line. "We are not talking RCB (Royal Challengers Bengaluru) and some stuff. I don't want to feel that pressure again. Wherever I go I would want to have bit of fun," added the batting great, whose wide range of strokes, some of them quite unconventional, earned him the moniker 'Mr 360'. De Villiers represented South Africa in 114 Tests, 228 ODIs and 78 T20s. The power-hitter holds the record for the fastest 50 (16 balls), 100 (31 balls) and 150 (64balls) in the ODI format.

Praggnanandhaa crushes Mendonca to take lead in Tata Masters

PTI ■ WUJ AN ZEE

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa crashed through the defences of fellow Indian Leon Luke Mendonca to jump into sole lead after the fourth round of the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament here. Praggnanandhaa started off with an innocuous Ruy Lopez closed but found his chances in the middle game when Mendonca, clearly being the rookie here, could not handle the pressure of another high-profile game. It was another day when Praggnanandhaa found the fire to score his third win on the trot after 46 moves. Interestingly, all of Praggnanandhaa's victories

have come at the expense of the Indians so far in the tournament, with the GM now looking forward to the clash against world champion D Gukesh. With his third win, the Chennai-based player has stamped his authority ahead of the first rest day of the long and gruelling tournament that lasts till 13 rounds with three rest days thrown in. Recently-crowned world champion D Gukesh played true to his instinct but could not get past Alexey Sarana, who now plays for Serbia instead of Russia. The Indian, playing with black pieces, tried every trick under the sun but Sarana stuck to the basics to not force anything which could be fatal.

The game remained level for a long time and eventually both players got a new queen on the board with Sarana only having the final say with an extra Bishop. With no pawns left, the result was anyone's guess and the game ended in a draw soon after. P Harikrishna dumped Max Warmerdam of Holland to stake his claim in the tournament. The Indian was brought in after Vidit Gujrathi withdrew at the last moment. Harikrishna's score of 2.5 points from four games more than justifies his presence here. It was a Catalan opening and Warmerdam did not know what hit him as he found all the white pieces around his king despite the trade of

queens earlier in the opening. Harikrishna made short work of his opponent, winning in a mere 23 moves. Just four days back, Arjun Erigaisi was on the top of the world but it has all come crashing down as he lost another game against Vladimir Fedoseev, the Russian who now plays for Slovenia. It was another bad day in office for Erigaisi as his tactical ability surrendered before his opponent's prophylactic thinking. Just out of the opening, Erigaisi was worse and then came close to winning in the queen pawn opening. But a blunder cost him dearly as he walked into a worse endgame. Fedoseev won a piece and never looked back.



In the challengers' section, R Vaishali made a huge comeback at the expense of Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan and Divya Deshmukh proved her critics

wrong with an exemplary victory over Ediz Gurel of Turkey. After a day that saw seven wins with white pieces in this section, Vaishali was at her best scrolling the tactical possibilities out of a queen's gambit declined and found her niche as Yakubboev forgot to take care of his weakened king. Vaishali, never shy of tactics, wrapped it up quickly. Divya had to wait for the fourth round for her first victory, and it was a clean triumph wherein the Indian outplayed Gurel, who played black. Winning a pawn was crucial for Divya and after that her endgame skills were clearly on the fore as she won in 56 moves.

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