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## TRUMP VOWS TO TARIFF INDIA BACK Canada slams US trade war

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW YORK/WASHINGTON**

US President Donald Trump criticised the high tariffs charged by India and other countries, terming them as "very unfair" and announced reciprocal tariffs from April 2 on nations that impose levies on American goods. Trump made these remarks in an address to the Joint Session of the Congress on Tuesday. It was the first address of his second term in the White House. On January 20, Trump was sworn in as the 47th President of the US. "If you don't make your

product in America, however, under the Trump administration, you will pay a tariff and in some cases, a rather large one," Trump said. "Other countries have used tariffs against us for decades and now it's our turn to start using them against those other countries. On average, the European Union, China, Brazil, India, Mexico and Canada - have you heard of them? And countless other nations charge us tremendously higher tariffs than we charge them," Trump said. "It's very unfair. India charges us auto tariffs higher than 100 per cent." In February, President



President Donald Trump gestures as he addresses a joint session of Congress at the Capitol in Washington. PTI

Trump said that his administration would "soon" impose reciprocal tariffs on countries such as India and China, reiterating what he had said during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US capital last month. Trump has made it clear to Prime Minister Modi that India will not be spared from Washington's reciprocal tariffs and emphasised that "nobody can argue with me" on tariff structure. "China's average tariff on our products is twice what we charge them. And South Korea's average tariff is four times higher. Think of that. Four times higher. And we give so much help militarily

and in so many other ways to South Korea. But that's what happens. This is happening by friend and foe," Trump said. "We've been ripped off for decades by nearly every country on earth, and we will not let that happen any longer," Trump said. Asserting that this system is "not fair to the United States" and never was, Trump said that reciprocal tariffs will kick in from April 2. "Whatever they tariff us, other countries, we will tariff them. That's reciprocal, back and forth," Trump said amid applause from Republican lawmakers.

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ TORONTO**

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday called American tariffs "very dumb" and said that US President Donald Trump is appeasing Russia while launching a trade war against Canada. In a news conference, Trudeau said that Canada would plaster retaliatory tariffs on more than \$100 Billion of American goods in response to Trump's tariffs. "Today the United States launched a trade war against Canada, their closest partner and ally, their closest friend. At the same time, they are talking about working positively with Russia, appeasing Vladimir Putin, a lying, murderous dictator. Make that make sense," a visibly angry Trudeau said. Trump imposed tariffs against Washington's three biggest trading partners, drawing immediate retaliation from Mexico, Canada and China and sending financial markets into a tailspin. Just after midnight, Trump put 25 per cent taxes, or tariffs, on Mexican and Canadian imports, though he limited the levy to 10 per cent on Canadian energy. "What he wants to see is a total collapse of the Canadian economy because that will make it easier to annex us," Trudeau said. "That is never going to happen. We will never be the 51st state." Trudeau addressed Trump directly by his first name. "I want to speak directly to one

### CBI Bofors next

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has sent a judicial request to the United States (US) seeking information from private investigator Michael Hershman, who had expressed willingness to share with Indian agencies crucial details about the Rs 64-Crore Bofors bribery scandal of the 1980s, officials said Wednesday. Hershman, head of the Fairfax Group, visited India in 2017 to attend a conference of private detectives. During his stay, Hershman appeared on various platforms, alleging that the investigation into the scam was derailed by the then Congress government and stated he was willing to share details with the CBI. He had claimed in an interview that he was appointed by the Union Finance Ministry in 1986 for investigation of violation of currency control laws and money laundering by Indians abroad and tracking of such assets outside

India and some of them pertained to the Bofors deal. The CBI also approached the Finance Ministry seeking documents pertaining to engagement of Hershman and if any report was submitted by him but the records of that time could not be furnished to the agency. The agency took note of Hershman's claims in several interviews and announced in 2017 that the matter would be investigated according to due process. The need for Letters Rotatory arose because letters and reminders to the US authorities on November 8, 2023, December 21, 2023, May 13, 2024, and August 14, 2024, did not yield any information. A Letter Rotatory is a written request sent by the court of one country to the court of another country to obtain assistance in the investigation or prosecution of a criminal matter. The requests to the Interpol also did not yield any outcome.

### CBI signals rail to haul promotion system

**DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI**

After several rail officials were nabbed in a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) trap pertaining to cases related to jobs, promotions in the Indian Railway networks, the Railway Board in a high level meeting on Wednesday decided that all departmental promotion examinations for the 13 Lakh rail employees will be done by the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) via centralised examination through Computer Based Test (CBI) aptitude. Sources in the railways said all zonal railways will have to prepare a calendar for the examination and all examinations will be conducted on the basis of a calendar only. "This has been decided after a long experience of transparent, fair, and highly appreciated examinations conducted by RRB in recent years," sources said.



A day earlier in a massive crackdown the CBI arrested 26 railway officials, including a senior divisional electrical engineer of East Central Railway for allegedly leaking papers of a departmental examination and seized ₹1.17 crore cash during its raids. The railway officials were arrested on Monday night for allegedly leaking papers of

examination for the elevation to posts of chief loco pilot at Mughal Sarai, the agency said, adding the exam was to be conducted on Tuesday. The arrest came just a fortnight after the central probe agency arrested five railway officers, including two of the Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS) posted in Vadodara Division, for alleged bribery in favouring candidates in departmental examination, officials said on Wednesday. As of now, there used to be internal vacancies and promotions were 'fixed', which had a huge nexus from top officers to other stakeholders, making it a huge racket and cartelisation for the stakeholders. The decision was taken after the days' meeting reviewed how the RRB is used to conduct examination without any complaints, with all the transparency.

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

### Naxal as maid nabbed

The Delhi police Crime Branch has arrested a 23-year-old woman Naxal operative from Jharkhand, who had been living in the national capital and working as a domestic helper under a false identity, from Pitampura area of outer Delhi. The accused, identified as "R", had been residing in Pitampura since 2020 and was taken into custody following a crime branch operation based on secret intelligence. Originally, a resident of Village Kudaburu in West Simbham district of Jharkhand, she was wanted in connection with multiple police encounters and was booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Arms Act, Explosives Act, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, according to Delhi Police. On March 26, 2023, a non-bailable warrant was issued against her by a court in Jharkhand. The alleged Naxalite arrived in Delhi in 2020 and after assuming a false identity took up work as a domestic helper in Noida and various parts of Delhi, eventually settling in

Pitampura. "Based on months of surveillance and intelligence gathering, the crime branch received credible information about the presence of a Maoist extremist in the National Capital Region (NCR)," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Vikram Singh said. The officer further said that on March 4, the team carried out a raid in Maharana Pratap Enclave, Pitampura, resulting in the arrest of the Naxalite. The accused was born into a farming family and was recruited into the CPI (Maoist) faction at the age of 10. "She received intensive training for five years at a camp led by a commander named Ramesh in Jharkhand's Kolhan forest. The training covered handling sophisticated weapons such as INSAS rifles, SLRs, LMGs, hand grenades and .303 rifles," DCP said. In 2016, she joined the CPI (Maoist) extremist group led by Ramesh, whose camp was situated in the hills of the Kolhan forest. At the time, the camp accommodated 300-450



individuals, including 40-50 women, 4-5 children of her age. Her involvement in Naxal activities began when she was 10-years-old. She joined the notorious Naxalite camp Bhakpa Maovadi Ugarvadi Jeevan Kandulna. During her time there, she underwent a rigorous and intense training regimen for five years, where she was groomed as a trained Naxalite. Between 2018 and 2020, she actively participated in three encounters with the Jharkhand Police -- first in Kolhan (2018), then in Porahat (2019), and later in Sonua (2020) alongside her

and began working as a house cleaner in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, and various parts of Delhi. She settled in the Pitampura area, where she remained undetected, living discreetly. Multiple FIRs were registered against her at Sonua Police Station, Jharkhand, under serious charges, including criminal conspiracy, attempt to murder, and waging war against the state. She will be produced before the court for further legal proceedings. The arrestee is wanted in case FIR No. 19 dated 11.04.2020, registered under Section 147/148/149/307/353/120B/121/121-A Indian Penal Code, 1860, read with Section 25(1A)/25(1B)(a)/35 Arms Act, read with Section 3/4/17 Explosive Act, read with Section 10/13 Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Police Station Sonua, Jharkhand. On 26.03.2023, the court of SDJM (P), Chaibasa, Jharkhand, issued a Non-Bailable Warrant for the arrest of the lady accused (R). Accused arrestee "R" has been booked by way of Kalandara under Section 41.1 Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 read with Section 35(1)(C) Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023.

### Naveen skips govt's Biju programme

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president and former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday skipped the official Biju Jayanti celebration



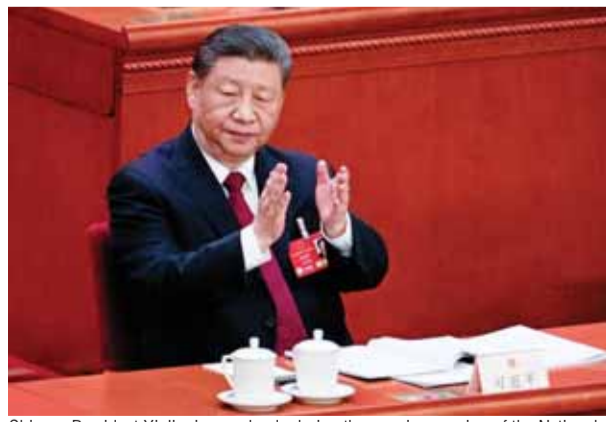
Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday skipped the official Biju Jayanti celebration

apparently to protest decoregnising March 5 as the Panchayati Raj Divas. Notably, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had invited Patnaik to attend the government's programme. However, senior BJD leader Prafulla Chandra Ghadai joined the programme as chief speaker. The official programme, among others, was attended by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Deputy Chief Ministers Kanak Pradhan Singh Deo and Pravat Parida, Ekamra MLA Babu Singh and Information and Public Relations Department Principal Secretary Sanjaya Kumar Singh. Several districts of the State are expected to witness a rise in daytime temperature by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius after the next three days, predicted the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department here on Wednesday. The IMD said that no significant change in daytime temperature is expected over the next three days. But a gradual rise of 2 to 3 degrees Celsius is likely thereafter. However, night temperatures are expected to remain unchanged for the next five days. Over the next 24 hours, dry weather is likely to prevail across the State. In Bhubaneswar and its neighbourhood areas, the maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to be around 35 degrees and 23 degrees, respectively.

### China raises stakes for India, US

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ BEIJING**

China on Wednesday announced a 7.2 per cent increase of its national defence budget totalling to \$249 billion this year amid its hectic efforts to modernise armed forces, including fast paced development of warships and new generation fighter jets. The planned defence expenditure for the country is 1.784665 Trillion yuan (about \$249 billion) this year, according to a draft budget report submitted to China's Parliament by Premier Li Qiang, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Last year, China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about \$232 Billion (1.67 Trillion yuan). China has the world's second-largest military budget after the US whose latest defence spending amounted to over \$890 Billion as proposed by President Donald Trump. The Chinese defence



Chinese President Xi Jinping applauds during the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China. PTI

spending is amounted to three times that of India's \$681,210 Crore (\$78.8 Billion). China's defence budget figures are viewed by critics with scepticism in the light of massive military modernisation, including building aircraft carriers, rapid construction of advanced naval ships and modern stealth aircraft being carried out at a feverish pitch

by the Chinese military. Announcing the annual budget which includes the defence spending at the opening of the annual session of China's parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC) Chinese Premier Li Qiang said last year, China made major new progress in national defence and military development. Li emphasised on the Chinese

capabilities, and establish a framework of modern military theories with Chinese characteristics, so as to firmly safeguard China's sovereignty, security, and development interests." Li said in his work report submitted to the NPC. On Tuesday, Lou Qinqian, spokesperson for the NPC, defended China's increasing defence expenditure, saying that "peace needs to be safeguarded with strength". Since 2016, China's annual defence spending has maintained single-digit growth for nine years in a row, he said, adding that China's defence expenditure as a share of GDP has been kept under 1.5 per cent for many years. In his budget speech, Li said China will complete the tasks laid down in the 14th Five-Year Plan for strengthening the military, intensify the implementation of major defence-related projects, and move faster to develop the network information system.

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# Naveen slams BJP for 'undermining' Biju legacy

## BJP retaliates

NALINI SAHU  
BHUBANESWAR



Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government while addressing BJD leaders and cadres during the Biju Jayanti celebrations at Forest Park here.

Naveen Patnaik, who is Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, condemned

### PM remembers Biju Patnaik

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday remembered former Odisha Chief Minister Biju Patnaik on his 109th birth anniversary. He recalled Biju Patnaik's contributions to Odisha's



development and to empowering people. Modi recounted how Biju Patnaik was staunchly committed to democratic ideals and strongly opposed the Emergency. He hailed his visionary leadership and indomitable spirit that still continue to inspire generations.

"Taking to X, Modi shared, 'Remembering Biju Babu on his birth anniversary. We fondly recall his contribution toward Odisha's development and his empowering people. He was also staunchly committed to democratic ideals, strongly opposing the Emergency.'

the BJP government for derecognising March 5 as Panchayati Raj Day, a tradition upheld since 1993. The BJP government's decision to shift the observance to April 24 drew sharp criticism from Patnaik.

"What justification is there for altering the date of Panchayati Raj Divas?" questioned Patnaik. "Governments come and go, but Biju Babu will always remain in the hearts of the people," he remarked.

He also took issue with attempts to rename institutions and awards associated with Biju Patnaik, including the Biju Patnaik Sports Award and Biju Patnaik Airport.

Expressing dismay over the vandalism of Biju Patnaik's statue at Mahanga, he lamented the government's inaction in holding those responsible accountable.

Patnaik further challenged the BJP, asking whether the saffron party could dismantle key industrial and educational institutions such as Paradip Port, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Talche, and the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Rourkela, the establishments he credited to Biju Patnaik's vision. He accused the current administration of engaging in "petty and divisive politics".

Highlighting Biju Patnaik's contributions, Patnaik emphasised his role in strengthening the Panchayati Raj system and ensuring a 33-per cent reservation for women. He also recalled Biju Patnaik's contributions to global affairs, including his support for Indonesia's independence and establishment of the UNESCO Kalinga Prize for

Science.

Responding to Patnaik's remarks, Panchayati Raj Minister Rabi Naik accused the BJD of betraying Odisha's core values. He asserted that the BJP government remains committed to honouring the State's eminent personalities and leaders.

"The previous BJD government weakened grassroots governance by curtailing the authority of sarpanches. Biju Patnaik envisioned strong Panchayati Raj institutions, but the BJD undermined this by centralising power and disregarding gram sabha resolutions," Naik claimed.

"As a government, we are committed to giving due respect to Odisha's great leaders. Biju Patnaik stood for empowering Panchayats, yet the BJD did the exact opposite. We will ensure that his true legacy is upheld," he added.

# Raid on BJD leader Raja Chakra EOW seizes 200 anonymous accounts, 20 vehicles

NALINI SAHU  
BHUBANESWAR

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Odisha Crime Branch has intensified its crackdown on Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leader Raja Chakra in connection with the



Gandhamardan Loading Agency Cooperative Society scam. The extensive raids, which

commenced on Tuesday, continued into the second consecutive day on Wednesday.

According to the latest reports, the EOW conducted simultaneous raids at six locations associated with Raja Chakra, including Keonjhar, Koida, Dhamra and Gopalpur. As part of the operation, authorities have seized 200 benami accounts and 20 vehicles allegedly linked to the BJD leader.

The EOW had initiated its interrogation of Raja Chakra, formerly known as Soumyashankar Chakra on Monday. This is part of an ongoing investigation into a transport scam involving Rs 500 crore.

Sources indicate that the 11-hour-long questioning session centered on Chakra's connections to the Gandhamardan Loading and Transport Cooperative Society, which faces multiple allegations of fraud and money laundering.

Reports suggest that the transport society charged exorbitant rates for loading iron ore, repeatedly increasing prices without proper authorisation. Additionally, it is accused of misrepresenting financial transactions, allegedly distributing funds to multiple individuals under the guise of company expenses.

The case came to light after a whistleblower alerted the EOW about the transport agency's illicit earnings, which amounted to several crores through fraudulent transactions. Allegations further suggest that only individuals favored by Raja Chakra benefited from these illegal profits, directly implicating the BJD leader in the ongoing probe.

# In capital city Plan afoot for crime prevention, surveillance

## Says new BBSR DCP Meena

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a bid to improve law and order, the Commissionerate police would review and come up with a comprehensive plan to improve crime prevention, surveillance and community engagement, said new Bhubaneswar DCP Jagmohan Meena after assuming charge on Wednesday.

Meena said that all possible efforts would be undertaken to strengthen existing mechanisms, leveraging technology and strategic partnerships to ensure public safety, maintaining law and order and other surveillance measures on criminals.

Meena further said that focus would be given on CCTV surveillance, providing law enforcement agencies with real-time monitoring capabilities to deter and detect crimes. The 112 emergency response system would be reviewed to minimise response time, ensuring swift assistance to those in distress.

To equip officers and staffs with the necessary skills, efforts would be taken to collaborate with local universities to provide training sessions on emotional intelligence, stress management, and investigative techniques. This initiative aims to foster a more empathetic and effective policing approach.

The performances of Sub-Inspectors and Assistant Sub-

Inspectors would be monitored regularly to ensure investigations are conducted swiftly and impartially. Assistant Commissioners of

ensure full cooperation and support to vulnerable groups, including women, children, and senior citizens to ensure their safety and security.

"Our priority will be on maximum utilisation of the resources to ensure that the existing infrastructure is utilized efficiently. The Crime



Police (ACPs) and Additional Deputy Commissioners of Police (ADCs) will serve as mentors and guides, providing valuable insights and expertise.

According to the DCP, efforts would be taken to

Already, there is a dedicated cyber police station and recently one ACP-level officer has been appointed. The station will focus on detecting cybercrime cases and creating awareness about online safety.

and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) will be implemented more comprehensively, facilitating seamless data sharing and coordination among law enforcement agencies," said Meena.

# In Puri Marriage function on beach stopped by officials

## For not availing necessary permission

PNS ■ PURI

The district administration on Wednesday stopped a wedding ceremony, scheduled to take place on the Puri sea beach without the necessary permission from the

concerned authorities. The Puri Municipality took notice after a viral video showed preparation ongoing for a lavish wedding set-up on the shore municipality officials arrived at the spot and stopped further decorative

activities along the beach. Permissions for functions on the beach are typically reserved for government or community

yet to be ascertained who was organising the event. "We had come to the spot after getting information



events, with private occasions like weddings, religious rituals or birthday parties generally not eligible for approval.

According to local reports, the Puri SP has been informed about the incident. But it was

about the illegal marriage event. We gave time to remove all the set up on the beach. The concerned person could not produce any valid documents," said a municipality official.

# Stop auction of govt jobs: Cong

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Members of the Odisha Pradesh Youth Congress on Wednesday gheraoed the residence of

State Pollution Control Board.

Due to this, a majority of the jobs would be auctioned. The people of the country know about the alleged



Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi alleging "auction" of government jobs.

State Youth Congress president Ranjit Patra said the State Government has given an alleged dubious company ITIAL to conduct examinations for Sub-Inspector posts in Odisha Police and staffs in the Odisha

fraudulent activities of the ITIAL company. Similarly, the company Ranjit Buildcon, given responsibility of the Metro project in the city, has also doubtful credentials. The Congress is always fighting for the rights of the candidates who suffer due to corruption in government jobs, said Patra,

# Panchayati Raj celebration on the national day is a logical decision

It is true that Biju Patnaik's contributions to emboldening the Panchayati Raj institutions in India are commendable. He was the first to reserve 33 per cent Panchayati Raj seats to women in Odisha in the early 1990s during his second stint as Chief Minister. He had strongly believed that Panchayati Raj was the

importance of Panchayati Raj in 1961. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had taken notice of that for which he had praised the young dashing Biju Patnaik no end.

However, much before Biju Patnaik became a political figure, the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act of 1948 was the first legislation that defined the constitution, power and functioning of Gram Panchayats in the State. Similarly, the Orissa Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act of 1959 established the three-tier system of Panchayati Raj in the State. Biju Patnaik only got these critical acts restructured in 1992 to empower the Panchayati Raj Institutions so well as they would be able to function as real institutions of self-governance. Notably, he was the first in the country to reserve 33 per cent seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

All the same, what may have been forgotten today is that Balwant Rai Mehta is the actual father of Panchayati Raj in India. He was a freedom fighter who served as the second Chief Minister in independent India. He was a champion for the cause of democratic decentralisation and local self-governance. He had headed a high-level committee constituted in 1957 to study the problems of democratic

decentralisation in rural jurisdictions. His committee had made this recommendation: A robust three-tier structure for Panchayati Raj including Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Zilla Parishad at the district level.

The committee had also

**HITTING THE BULL'S EYE** recommended that these bodies be constituted through direct and indirect elections. The two main objectives of the committee were: to advance the Gandhian goal of direct political participation at the grassroots level to decentralise power and functions at the divisional and sub-divisional levels.

All this was accomplished much later through the 73rd Amendment Act passed by the Indian federal government in 1992 that gave Constitutional status to all rural local self-governance bodies. Thus, Panchayati Raj became the established system of rule in most of the Indian States in 1992.

From then on, elected village councils called 'Panchayats' at different tiers namely village, block and district have been treated as Constitutional agencies with full powers to manage local affairs related to development and social justice. They are fully responsible for planning and implementing schemes

on various subjects like agriculture, health, education and sanitation while ensuring representation from the marginalised communities like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Prime Minister Nehru inaugurated for the first time Panchayats at Nagaur, Rajasthan on October 2, in

1959, the day being Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. Needless to say it was Gandhi who advocated for 'Gram Swaraj' through a Panchayati Raj system. Thus, Rajasthan was the first State to implement it. Nehru also inaugurated Panchayati Raj in Andhra Pradesh on October 11, 1959 on the occasion of Dussehra. Thereafter, the system gradually spread all over India.

After the 73rd Amendment in 1992, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are responsible for establishing legal order and control over the local village affairs. The institutions are entrusted with the activities of promoting primary education and healthcare facilities, modernising agriculture, encouraging women empowerment in villages and more that affect the people's life directly. The three-level hierarchical structure is followed for any Union Territory or State that exceeds two million residents. Similarly, for States with less

than two million people, a two-level Panchayat Raj system is put in place as the local governing body.

The 73rd Amendment also added a new part (Part IX) to the Constitution which specifically grants PRIs legal recognition and makes provisions for mandatory implementation across all States.

The Panchayati Raj system operates on a three-tier structure: Gram Panchayat (village level), Panchayat Samiti (block level) and Zilla Parishad (district level). Members of Panchayats are directly elected by the people to represent their respective areas.

The Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution also lists 29 subjects on which Panchayats are empowered to make decisions and implement programmes, including rural development, water management, sanitation and poverty alleviation.

State Finance Commissions are established to determine the share of state funds that must be allocated to Panchayats which are required to reserve seats for women and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to ensure inclusive representation.

The Odisha Grama Panchayat Act of 1948 was slightly modified in 1961 to install the 3-tier system in the State during Biju Patnaik's first tenure as Chief Minister.

# Baleswar vet doc seriously hurt in jumbos' attack

## Rogue tusker creates terror in Jajpur

**PNS ■ BALESWAR/ JAJPUR**  
A veterinary doctor suffered grievous injuries after he

The injured doctor, identified as Subhashish Mohapatra, was shifted to a private hospital at Cuttack after initial admission

mud near the Rishia dam under Balianala Beat had gone there and performed her treatment. While he was returning,

In another incident, a rogue tusker created terror in Jajpur district on Wednesday. The elephant got separated from its herd from the nearby Kapilash forest and strayed into the villages under Dharmasala and Sukinda blocks.

The elephant also damaged crops and six houses at Deuli, Balukhai and other villages. Many shops were closed at Jaraka Bazaar on the day due to the presence of the elephant. Traffic was halted for a brief period on National Highway-16 from Jaraka to Kuakhia when it was walking on the highway.

Forest Range Officer of Bairi Forest Range Aditya Pradhan said, "We have engaged additional forest personnel to drive the animal back into its abode in the forest. We warned the locals to remain alert and avoid night vigils at their agricultural fields, and, if necessary to move in groups."

# HC grants permission to Sarathi to visit K'pada

## But lays several restrictions

**PNS ■ KENDRAPADA**  
The Orissa High Court on

can visit Barimula village in the district to meet his brother once every two months with-

Laying down certain other restrictions, the court has directed that more than 200

strict adherence to these conditions to balance humanitarian needs with public order requirements. It is crucial that



was chased by a herd of elephants while he was returning after treating an ailing elephant inside the Kuldiha Forest Range of Nilgiri block in Baleswar district.

in the District Headquarter Hospital as he suffered multiple injuries. According to reports, Mohapatra after learning of the sickness of a female pachyderm which was stuck in

he confronted the herd of jumbos; and while trying to flee, he fell and suffered multiple injuries.

Rogue tusker creates terror In Jajpur



# Controversial DD Univ Registrar shunted

**PNS ■ KEONJHAR**  
Dukhabandhu Naik, Registrar of DD University, has been removed from his post. It came to notice on Monday when an officer on special duty (OSD), DD University, relieved Naik of the post Registrar.

Sources said that PK Mohanty, OSD, relieved Naik of his post immediately just after receiving a letter from Officer in Charge ( Higher Education ) of Governor Secretariate in this regard. Naik, a Senior OAS officer, who had joined as Registrar of DD University some four months back was always on loggerheads with OSD PK Mohanty on different issues. While Naik was rigid that certain established government rules should be followed in attendance system, tour diary, promotion of staff, transparency in recruitment of guest faculties and proper utilization of the govt fund allocated to the university, his style of functioning did not go down well with many.

# Safety Day and Week at Paradip Port

**PNS ■ PARADIP**  
With the theme, "Safety and well-being crucial for Viksit Bharat", the 54th National

safety pledge. He also flagged off an awareness rally of employees and workers along with a "Safety Rath", which

PPA graced the occasion. Director of M/s. Chennai Radha, VR Ramu, Regional Manager, A Ramesh, co-ordinated the



Safety Day and Week began at Paradip Port Authority. Gracing the occasion as chief guest, Chairman, PPA Safety Week Celebrations PL Haranadh by hoisted the safety week flag and administered

commenced from PPA Administrative Building and culminated at Gate No. 4.

Deputy Chairman Nilabhra Dasgupta, Susil Chandra Nahak CME, along with all HODs and senior officers of

event. As part of weeklong celebrations, various awareness activities like safety essay, debate and poster competitions amongst employees and ports users, seminars, dock safety training programmes will be conducted.

Wednesday granted conditional permission to self-styled god man Santosh Raul alias Sarathi Baba to visit Kendrapada district to see his ailing brother.

As per the court order, Raul

out staying overnight. He has to see his brother between 5.30 am and 5.30 pm. He has been asked to inform the trial court before every visit to the village and maintain transparency about his movements.

people must not gather during Raul's visits to the village. These measures are part of the conditions linked to his bail agreement, ensuring that large assemblies are controlled effectively. The order stipulates

all involved parties respect the stipulations put forth.

Given the socio-political sensitivities around Raul's visits to the district, local authorities have been directed to enforce these conditions to prevent any kinds of disturbance.

# Miscreants set school on fire in Ganjam

## A day earlier, computers were stolen

**PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR**  
Unidentified miscreants attempted to set on fire the Sri Kaleswar High School in Badakharidag village under the Kabisuryanagar police station

mation, the school authorities informed the police and higher officials about the incident. "Several unidentified miscreants barged into the school premises late on Monday night and set the NCC room on fire before fleeing the spot.



in Ganjam district on Monday night.

According to sources, the anti-social elements initially set on fire the school's NCC room.

However, the night watchman spotted the fire and managed to douse it, preventing major damage. But the miscreants managed to escape from the spot. Getting infor-

They have also entered into the office room on Sunday and stolen five computers. We have informed the matter to police and other senior officials," said the school authorities.

With repeated attacks on the school, now parents and locals have raised serious concern about the safety and security of students and teachers.

# In Kendrapada Sexagenarian held for raping 4-year-old

**PNS ■ KENDRAPADA**  
A sexagenarian was arrested by police for raping a four-year-old girl of his village.

The incident occurred under the Kendrapada Sadar police station on Tuesday, stated Kendrapada Sadar police station IIC Bimal Mallick.

The accused person has been identified as Pravakar Mallick (62). According to police, the victim minor girl's family member lodged an FIR on Tuesday night alleging that

while their 4 years old daughter was playing near their house, Pravakar somehow lured her to a lonely place and raped her.

Acting on the FIR, Kendrapada Sadar police registered a case under various sections, including Section 65 of BN and Section 4 of POCSO Act and arrested the accused.

Pravakar was on Wednesday produced before the local court where he was remanded in jail custody, informed police.

# No worry during changing weather Low-cost tech to extract maximum power from solar panel

**PNS ■ ROURKELA**

The researchers at the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela have patented a low-cost technology developed by them to extract maximum power from solar panels under changing weather conditions, according to officials.

The innovation also responds quickly to changes in sunlight and temperature, allowing the system to consistently operate at peak efficiency and avoid any power fluctuations, they said.

Supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) under the Clean Energy Research Initiative (CERI), the research team has been granted a patent "Method And System For Voltage Sensor-based Maximum Power Point Tracking For Photovoltaic System".

According to Associate Professor, Electrical Engineering, NIT Rourkela, Susovon Samanta, solar panels produce electricity from sunlight, but the amount of power they generate changes throughout the day due to shifts in temperature and the intensity of sunlight.

To ensure they always produce the most energy possible, solar systems use a technique called Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT). This is a smart system that helps solar panels produce the most electricity possible by adjusting voltage and current based on sunlight and temperature changes. It consists of a microcontroller that runs the MPPT algorithm, sensors to measure voltage and current, and a DC-DC converter that regulates power flow.

"The system continuously monitors the solar panel's output and makes minor adjustments to keep it operating at peak efficiency, ensuring minimal energy waste. Traditional MPPT methods can waste energy and respond slowly when weather conditions change. They also require expensive current sensors, making them less affordable for low-cost solar setups," Samanta said.

"To overcome these limitations, we have developed a voltage sensor-based MPPT method that eliminates the need for current sensors, reducing system complexity and cost. Our approach uses a simple voltage sensor or a resistor divider circuit to track the Maximum Power Point (MPP) more accurately while maintaining stable and efficient steady-state operation, leading to improved tracking efficiency and better PV energy harvesting," he added.

Samanta explained that their method prevents small power fluctuations that older techniques struggle with, ensuring stable and efficient power extraction.

"It also responds quickly to changes in sunlight and temperature, allowing the system to consistently operate at peak efficiency. Additionally, by using only a voltage sensor or a simple resistor divider circuit, it reduces system complexity and cost. Its adaptable design enables integration into various solar power setups, making it a versatile solution for a wide range of application," he said.

The researchers stated that the innovation has wide-ranging applications in the renewable energy sector, including the elimination of the need for expensive current sensors, reducing costs, and making it an ideal solution for affordable and small-scale solar projects.

# Nat'l Conference on Digital Libraries, Info Systems held At Berhampur University

**PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR**

The National Conference on "Digital Libraries and Information Systems: Building Universal Opportunities for Learning and Access" (DLISBUOLA)

ment of Library and Information Science, Berhampur University in collaboration with the Odisha Library Academy (OLA), the two-day conference brought together experts, academicians

Library Science in India, and Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja, a revered Odia poet.

Conference director Prof Jyotshna Sahoo emphasised the importance of innovation and adaptation in Li-

Tripathy, patron of the conference, underscored the Berhampur University's growing national recognition through research initiatives and successful grants from UGC, DST and DBT.

Chief guest Dr Jagadish Arora, a renowned expert in digital libraries, in his keynote address, highlighted the transformative impact of digital libraries, the challenges faced by LIS profes-

Vice-Chancellor Prof Geetanjali Dash reflected on her efforts to modernise library facilities at the Berhampur University. She emphasised the enduring relevance of print books, asserting that while digital resources are invaluable, they cannot entirely replace the immersive experience of physical books.

The inaugural session concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Raj Kishore Kampa, organising secretary while BK Panda, OLA secretary, extended his gratitude to the dignitaries and participants.

The conference featured technical and plenary sessions where LIS experts and researchers presented their insights on emerging trends, best practices and future directions in digital libraries. Over 50 research papers were presented by scholars from nine different States, fostering a rich academic discourse. A special highlight was the Lifetime Achievement Awards conferred upon Prof Pitambara Padhi and Prof Krishna Chandra Panda for their outstanding contributions to LIS. Invited talks were delivered by professionals from premier institutes such as IIT, IOP, IISER, IMMT, SoA and Kalyani University. The event not only fostered knowledge exchange but also reinforced the critical role of digital libraries in shaping the future of education and research.



(DLISBUOLA) commenced at Berhampur University, marking a significant milestone in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS).

Organised by the Depart-

and professionals to explore advancements in digital libraries and information systems.

Tributes were paid to Padma Shri SR Ranganathan, the father of

brary and Information Science to meet the challenges of the digital era. OLA president Dr Bibhuti Bhusan Sahoo highlighted the OLA's role in empowering the LIS community while Prof SK

Guest of honour Prof KC Panda discussed the evolving role of librarians in the digital landscape, emphasising the need for continuous learning and technological adaptation.

sionals and the necessity for interdisciplinary research, collaboration and advanced digital technologies to enhance research support services.

Berhampur University

# Government approves ₹6,811 Crore ropeway projects in Uttarakhand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday approved two ropeway projects in Uttarakhand — Sonprayag to Kedarnath and Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib Ji — at a total cost of ₹6,811 Crore to help significantly reduce the travel time to the pilgrimage sites and boost tourism. The construction of these two ambitious projects is likely to be completed in four to six years. The two ropeways will be constructed under the National Ropeways Development Programme — Parvatala Pariyojana. The decisions of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, were announced by Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. The Sonprayag to Kedarnath ropeway is planned to be developed in public-private partnership and will be based on the most advanced Tricable Detachable Gondola technology having the capacity to carry 1,800 passengers per hour per direction (PPHPD), which could ferry 18,000 passengers per day.

Vaishnaw informed that the 12.4-km ropeway project from Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib Ji too will be developed on Design, Build, Finance, Operate, and Transfer (DBFOT) mode at a total capital cost of ₹2,730.13 Crore. Currently, the journey to the Hemkund Sahib Ji is a challenging 21-km uphill trek from Govindghat and is covered on foot, by ponies or using palanquins. The proposed ropeway is planned to provide convenience to pilgrims visiting the Hemkund Sahib Ji and the tourists visiting the Valley of Flowers, and will ensure all-weather last-mile connectivity between Govindghat and Hemkund Sahib Ji. The journey to the Kedarnath temple is a challenging 16-km uphill trek from Gaurikund and is currently covered on foot, ponies, palanquins and helicopter. The proposed ropeway is planned to provide convenience to pilgrims visiting the temple and ensure all-weather connectivity between Sonprayag and Kedarnath. "The ropeway project will be a boon to the pilgrims visiting Kedarnath as it would provide an

environment-friendly, comfortable and fast connectivity and reduce travel time in one direction from about eight to nine hours to about 36 minutes," an official release said. The minister said 23 Lakh pilgrims visited Kedarnath shrine last year and the number is expected to rise to 36 Lakhs, with the ropeway project. The Hemkund Sahib Ji proposed ropeway would provide convenience to pilgrims and tourists visiting the Valley of Flowers. It will ensure all-weather last mile connectivity between Govindghat and Hemkund Sahib Ji. This ropeway is also planned to be developed in public-private partnership and will be based on Monocable Detachable Gondola (MDG) from Govindghat to Ghangaria (10.55 km), seamlessly integrated with the most advanced Tricable Detachable Gondola (3S) technology from Ghangaria to Hemkund Sahib Ji (1.85 km) with the capacity to carry 1,100 passengers per hour per direction (PPHPD) and could ferry 11,000 passengers per day. Vaishnaw informed that 1.77 lakh people went to Hemkund Sahib Ji last year.

The ropeway is expected to increase the number of people visiting there by 10 times. Kedarnath is one of the 12 sacred Jyotirlingas situated at an elevation of 3,583 m (11968 ft) in the Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand. The temple is open for pilgrims for about six to seven months in a year from Akshaya Tritiya (April-May) to Diwali (October-November) and is visited by about 20 Lakh pilgrims annually during the season. Hemkund Sahib Ji is a highly revered pilgrimage site situated at an elevation of 15,000 ft in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. The Gurudwara established at the holy site is open for about 5 months in a year between May and September and is visited by about 1.5 to 2 lakh pilgrims annually. It is believed that Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the 10th Guru of Sikhs, meditated at the site. It is also famous as the meditation ground for Lord Rama's brother Lakshmana. The trek to Hemkund Sahib Ji also serves as the gateway to the famous Valley of Flowers, a national park recognised as the UNESCO World Heritage site, located in the pristine Garhwal Himalayas.

# 'Mangalsutra' jibe turning true: Kharge slams Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi over rise in gold loans and said his remarks during the Lok Sabha polls campaign about 'stealing of mangalsutras' have come true with women forced to mortgage their gold ornaments under his rule. Citing media reports, Kharge claimed that between 2019 and 2024, four crore women mortgaged their gold and took a loan of ₹4.7 Lakh Crore. In 2024, 38 per cent of the total loans taken by women are from gold loans, he said. In February 2025, RBI data showed that gold loans increased by a whopping 71.3 per cent in a year, the Congress chief said. "Narendra Modi ji, you had talked about 'stealing of mangalsutras'. That has now come true. In your rule, women have been forced to mortgage their gold ornaments. First you made women's 'stri-dhan' disappear by demonetisation, now due to inflation and falling household savings, they are forced to mortgage their



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge Pioneer photo

most valuable thing — their jewelry," Kharge said in his post in Hindi on X. During the Lok Sabha polls campaign last year, Modi had alleged that the Congress will take away 'mangalsutras' and redistribute the wealth of the people. Kharge alleged that the Modi government has worsened the condition of the economy so much that middle class families who buy two-wheelers are now unable to repay their loans. In view of rising loan defaults, two-wheeler financiers are cutting down on lending for the first time

since 2019, he claimed. He said 75 per cent of people buy two-wheelers on loan so that they can repay it slowly, but the financial crunch is so severe that as compared to last year, loans worth about ₹2 Lakh Crore are still outstanding till September 2024, which has increased by ₹40,000 Crore in a year. Two-wheeler sales have declined by six per cent in February 2025, Kharge added. "Recession, financial crunch and reduction in spending capacity — this is the essence of the economy you run," Kharge said, hitting out at the prime minister.

# 'Hindu awakening' on agenda of RSS top body meeting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An analysis of the prevailing scenario in the country, including the issue of "Hindu awakening", is on the agenda of a three-day meeting of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, the highest decision-making body of the RSS, that is scheduled to begin in Bengaluru from March 21. The meeting will also prepare a framework of various programmes and campaigns to be taken up this year and review the progress made on the work that was expected to be completed in the run-up to the centenary year of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the organisation said in a statement. The RSS will complete 100 years of its foundation on Vijayadashami (Dussehra) this year. In a statement, Akhil Bharatiya Prachar Pramukh of the RSS Sunil Ambekar said the meeting of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha will be held in Bengaluru from March 21 to March 23. The meeting will be held on the premises of the Janseva Vidya Kendra located at Channanahalli. Ambekar said the annual report of the RSS for 2024-25 will be discussed at the meeting. "Along with the critical analysis on it, reporting on special initiatives (of the Sangh) will also be done at the meeting," he said, adding, "In addition to the issue of Hindu awakening, an analysis of the current scenario of the country, including a discussion on the follow-up activities, is also included in the agenda of the baithak." Ambekar said the meeting will review the progress made on the work expected to be done in the run-up to the completion of 100 years of the RSS on Vijayadashami. "A framework of various programmes, events and campaigns will be prepared at the meeting," he said.

# India to be \$5 Trillion economy soon, says Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that the day is not far when India will turn a \$5 trillion economy as he urged all stakeholders to invest in people, economy, and innovation to create jobs and boost growth. Speaking in a post-Budget webinar on employment, Modi said the government has provided skill training to 3 crore youth since 2014 and decided to upgrade 1,000 ITIs and set up five centres of excellence. Referring to an IMF report of February 2025, Modi noted that between 2015 and 2025, India grew by 66 per cent, making the country a \$ 3.8 trillion economy. Observing that the country's growth surpassed that of several major economies, he said "the day is not far when



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses post-budget webinar on boosting job creation PTI

India will become a \$ 5 trillion economy." He also stressed the importance of making right investments in the right direction to continue expanding the economy. Modi underlined the critical

role of implementing budget announcements in achieving this vision and acknowledged the significant contributions of all stakeholders. He stated that capacity building and talent nurturing

act as the foundation stone for national development and in the next phase of growth, greater investment in these sectors is essential. "The vision of investment in people stands on three pillars - education, healthcare, and skill development," he said adding that today, India's education system is undergoing a transformation. He said this year's Budget serves as a blueprint for India's future, and that investments have been prioritized equally across infrastructure, industries, people, economy, and innovation. Modi highlighted the PM Internship Scheme that was launched to provide new opportunities and practical skills to youth. "We must ensure that businesses at every scale actively participate in this scheme. In this year's Budget, we announced 10,000

additional medical seats, with a target of adding 75,000 seats in the medical field over the next 5 years." Modi also talked about the government's decision to give infrastructure status to the tourism sector, saying that it will generate jobs for youth. He urged industry to invest in the healthcare sector and also talked about the potential of medical tourism to create jobs. Modi also emphasised the establishment of daycare cancer centres and the development of digital healthcare infrastructure to ensure quality healthcare reaches the last mile. Modi highlighted that the tourism sector has the potential to contribute up to 10 per cent to India's GDP and create employment opportunities for crores of youth. "50 destinations across the country will be developed with a focus on tourism," said

the Prime Minister adding that granting infrastructure status to hotels in these destinations will enhance ease of tourism and boost local employment. Highlighting the expansion of the Mudra Yojana to support homestays, Modi also stressed on initiatives like 'Heal in India' and 'Land of the Buddha' to attract global tourists. "Efforts are being made to establish India as a global tourism and wellness hub." "To cater to a larger population, planned urbanisation is essential. We have decided to allocate ₹1 lakh crore to the Urban Challenge Fund. The private sector, especially the real estate industry, must focus on planned urbanisation," he said. The government has given importance to skill development at par with the infrastructure sector, he added.

AI, he said could contribute lakhs of crores to the economy. "In this direction, we have allocated ₹500 Crore for AI-driven education and research in the budget." He also stated that India will set up National Large Language Model for development of AI capacity. "India has become the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world," said the Prime Minister, adding that several measures have been introduced in this budget to promote startups. He mentioned the approval of a ₹1 Lakh Crore corpus fund to boost research and innovation. This will increase investments in emerging sectors. Modi noted the provision of 10,000 research fellowships at IITs and IISc, which will foster research and provide opportunities for talented youth.

# Rahul vows to fight for railway porters' rights amid financial hardships

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Drawing attention to the financial difficulties faced by railway porters, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said they risked their lives to help people during the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station last month and yet their voice was not being heard. The former Congress president, who posted on his YouTube channel a video of his recent interaction with porters at the New Delhi railway station, asserted that he would fight for their rights. Gandhi also urged people to share suggestions on the 'Awaaz Bharat Ki' portal to improve crowd management and strengthen security. "We will listen to the voice



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during a meeting in New Delhi PTI

of India!" he said on X. The increasing number of stampedes at railway stations and other public places is a matter of great concern, Gandhi said, noting that many innocent people lose their lives or get injured in such incidents. "We need to think together about how to prevent such

tragedies," he said. In his post accompanying the video of his interaction with porters, Gandhi said, "A few days ago, I reached New Delhi Railway Station and met the porter brothers there again. During the interaction, they told me how everyone together made every possible effort

to save people's lives on the day of the stampede." "Whether it was trying to remove people from the crowd, ensuring that the injured reached the ambulance and administration, or taking out the bodies of the dead - using their physical abilities, handcars or spending money from their own pockets, they helped the passengers in every way," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said. Gandhi thanked them for saving many lives and helping in the relief work during the stampede at the station on February 15. At least 18 people were killed in the incident at the New Delhi Railway Station, which was witnessing a surge of passengers waiting to board trains for Prayagraj.

# Court discharges ex-Chhattisgarh CM Baghel in 2017 sleaze CD case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ RAIPUR

A special CBI court here has discharged senior Congress leader and former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel in a 2017 alleged sex CD case purportedly featuring a former BJP minister, citing lack of evidence, his lawyer said. Special Magistrate (CBI), Raipur, Bhupesh Kumar Basant considered Baghel's discharge application and granted him relief on Tuesday, noting there was no sufficient evidence to prove the allegations levelled against him in the chargesheet filed in the case, senior counsel Manish Datt told PTI. The court noted no case is

made out against the 63-year-old Congress leader, the counsel said, adding the order copy will be made available on Wednesday. Elated over the development, Baghel, who stepped down as CM after the Congress lost the 2023 assembly polls, took to X and posted "Satyamev Jayate" (truth alone triumphs). A discharge application is a request to end a criminal case before the trial begins. A court may allow such a plea if it finds lack of sufficient evidence to proceed against the accused. State Congress communication wing head Sushil Anand Shukla also hailed the CBI court's ruling.

# Engineer Rashid, seeks custody parole

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed Jammu and Kashmir JMP Engineer Rashid on Wednesday sought custody parole to attend the upcoming Parliament session, claiming he was not a security threat. Rashid's counsel made the submission before additional sessions judge Chander Jit Singh, who reserved the verdict for March 7 after hearing arguments on the plea. The plea seeking Rashid's interim bail or custody parole was filed by advocate Vikhyat Oberoi on February 27, following which the court sought the National Investigation Agency's (NIAs) response on March 3. The counsel previously argued that Rashid was seeking custody parole being a parliamentarian and needed to attend the upcoming session to fulfil his public duty. Custody parole entails a prisoner being escorted by armed police personnel to the place of visit. Oberoi said the Delhi High Court had granted custody parole for two days enabling Rashid to attend the parliamentary sessions. Referring to Rashid's submission of questions on the functioning of J&K departments in Parliament, the lawyer said, "I have put in questions for all those departments. And I am therefore requesting debates on all those questions. I completely abide by the ruling of the high court (that its order of custody parole will not be treated as a precedent)...I am only trying to argue that in the face of the evidence, I am not a security threat." He argued Rashid as a parliamentarian represented

45 per cent of Kashmir and so he could be allowed to represent his constituency. "I am only requesting that he (Rashid) needs to go to Parliament for the people. It is not my condition. It is not my contention that it is the fundamental right of my client to attend Parliament. It is my summation that it is a fundamental duty to attend it," the counsel said. The NIA counsel opposed the submission and said being a parliamentarian, did not entitle a person exceptions from the effect of detention. "Today, he is a person who is an MP (seeking custody parole on grounds of fulfilling his duty). Tomorrow, a doctor may be saying that I am accused of an offence, but I need to conduct surgery to save the lives of people and that my patients are waiting? Can he conduct surgery?... So any person may say that I have to perform my duty, I have to discharge my function..." the NIAs counsel argued. Sheikh Abdul Rashid, known as Engineer Rashid, defeated Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls in Baramulla. Rashid's regular bail application is currently pending before the court. The second part of Parliament's budget session would begin on March 10 and end on April 4. The judge on September 10 granted interim bail to Rashid to enable him to campaign for the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir. Rashid surrendered in Tihar Jail on October 27. He has been lodged in Tihar jail since 2019 after he was arrested by the NIA under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in a 2017 terror funding case.

# Delhi HC orders Centre, state to register marriages in three months

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday ordered the Centre and Delhi government to comply with the Supreme Court's directions over compulsory registration of marriages in three months. A bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said it was "pathetic and appalling" that the 2006 apex court order, asking all marriages to be compulsorily registered irrespective of faith, was not yet implemented by the authorities. "This is pathetic actually. It is appalling as to how you are not implementing the order of the Supreme Court," it added. The high court also issued notice to both governments on a petition seeking

direction to the Ministry of Home Affairs to prepare rules for a centralised database of marriage registration. The Supreme Court, in February 2006, ruled that all marriages, irrespective of their religion, be compulsorily registered and directed the Centre and all states to frame and notify rules for this within three months. Pursuant to the top court's directions, the Delhi government issued an order on April 21, 2014 containing certain provisions for compulsory registration of marriage. The order is known as "Delhi (Compulsory Registration of Marriage) order, 2014. However, various deficiencies and lacunae were pointed out in the rules by the petitioner, who said the state and the Central governments were informed about it.



Delhi High Court Pioneer photo

Petitioner Aakash Goel said in the absence of an appropriate legislation as desired by the Supreme Court in the 2006 judgment, the mechanism available for registration of marriages was not only inadequate and caused hardship to people seeking registration, but it

also did not fulfil the object of compulsory registration of marriages. "We call upon the ministry concerned of the Government of India and the Delhi Government to look into the matter and take appropriate steps which will be warranted in law and also

for ensuring the directions issued by the Supreme Court are complied with," the bench said. Granting three months' time, the bench asked for the decisions of the Centre and the state government in terms of its order to be filed before the next hearing on July 9. When the Delhi government counsel said it had framed rules in line with the apex court's directions, the bench said the rules were only executive in nature. "There has to be an enactment as per the directions of the Supreme Court... You have to respond to the needs of people and frame rules for smooth registration of marriage. That's the need of the hour. These are not the things which should come to the court," it added. The plea has sought a direction to the Ministry of

Home Affairs to prepare rules for a centralised database of marriage as "dis-aggregate state-wide databases" do not help achieve the objective of the Supreme Court judgment as a person can easily marry and register in Delhi, while being already married and registered in another state. It also sought directions to the Centre to maintain the centralised database and make it available in advance to citizens so that correct whereabouts of families were known while giving a go-ahead for a wedding. The petition also sought a direction for modifying certain clauses of the Delhi Compulsory Registration of Marriages Order, 2014 to allow online registration of marriages with the virtual presence of a married couple and witness before the authorities concerned.

# Libel case: Didi removes lawyer close to Abhishek

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In an apparently small but glaring incident that bears some faint indication of developing cracks in the relationship between Mamata Banerjee and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee, the Bengal Chief Minister has removed advocate Sanjoy Basu from the panel of her lawyers to defend a libel case filed against her by State Governor CV Ananda Bose. Now Mamata Banerjee's brief would be handled by senior Trinamool Congress lawyer and Serampore MP Kalyan Banerjee, sources said. Bengal Governor Doctor CV Ananda Bose had filed a defamation suit against Mamata on June 28, a day after the latter claimed that women complained to her that they were afraid to visit Raj Bhavan because of the activities happening there. This in the aftermath of a woman employee working in the Raj Bhavan had



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee during a TMC's workers meeting PTI

brought some accusations against some top notch person in there. Basu who is a close aide of Abhishek Banerjee and handles

his legal brief had reportedly been removed from many other legal matter of the State Government early this year. This after reports

did the rounds that a new political party had been formed in Bengal at his behest. Reports also said that "a close relative of the Chief Minister who was in touch with some BJP leaders was behind the new development." The reports were further buttressed by the conspicuous absence of junior Banerjee - who is also the party general secretary - from a host of party programmes. However Abhishek raised the issue himself early this month in a party general meeting and confirmed his allegiance for the Chief Minister and her aunt saying he would continue to swear by the name of Mamata Banerjee. "People are questioning my loyalty to the TMC, but let me tell in front of you all that I will never cow down. I will never give into any pressure. Even if they cut my head the wind pipe will cry 'Mamata Banerjee zindabad'. This is because like everyone I am also a soldier of Mamata

Banerjee," the TMC MP from Diamond Harbour said. The political grapevine has it that the junior Banerjee who is under pressure from the intelligence agencies post breaking of a number of scams including the teachers' recruitment scam was trying to find an avenue in the BJP so as to rid himself of the charges. A parallel group in the party says that the difference between the Chief Minister and her nephew is not related to the scams but to the ballooning ambition of Abhishek who wants to usurp power too soon a la Ajit Pawar. On whether the removal of Basu would mean much to the BJP State party leader Sajal Ghosh said, his party was "only concerned about the ouster of Mamata Banerjee," adding however that, "Kalyan Banerjee is a failure as a lawyer and his handling of the case will further make it bad" for the Chief Minister.

# Centre pays mere lip service to Tamil language: Stalin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Wednesday alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led union government paid mere lip service to Tamil language for the sake of votes and dubbed the ruling party at the Centre as Tamil's "enemy." Writing to party workers as part of his series on the theme of "all-time opposition to Hindi imposition," Stalin recalled DMK founder leader CN Annadurai's views on the issue. Decades ago, Anna had said that the party's objective is not to oppose Hindi, but to get equal recognition to Indian languages including Tamil. While the BJP claims that Prime Minister Narendra Modi held Tamil in high esteem and that the three-language formula is for the growth of languages of the states, the difference in allocation of funds for Tamil and Sanskrit would make it pretty clear that they are "enemies" of Tamil, Stalin alleged. As per the Union Education Ministry's data, during the period between 2014 and 2023, the union government allotted ₹2,435 crore to the Central Sanskrit University and the National Sanskrit University. During the same period, only ₹167 Crore was allotted to Central Institute of Classical Tamil. Fund allocation and expenditure has increased manifold for the promotion of Sanskrit and Hindi. "The union government, out-and-out, is functioning with a feeling of



Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin participates in all-party meeting to discuss proposed delimitation of LS seats PTI

linguistic hegemony and pays mere lip service to Tamil for the sake of votes," the chief minister alleged. The BJP-led Centre, which is betraying Tamil Nadu by not allotting funds due to the state, is also betraying by not allocating funds for Tamil language and it is trying to "destroy" Tamil and languages of other states through the "languages of dominance," Hindi and Sanskrit. Disapproving it, the DMK president said the consequences of imposing a language could be understood by perusing the history of world. "All Indian languages including Tamil listed in the 8th schedule of the Constitution are India's national languages," he said. However, if Hindi alone is claimed to be the national language, it is a

manifestation of dominance. Claiming that Sanskrit is India's root language is an "attempt to consign us to servitude." If Sanskrit is taken as the root language, it meant that all other languages originated only from it. "That is, they are trying to establish that all the languages in India had their roots in Sanskrit. It was linguist Robert Caldwell who had, 175 years ago, by way of his studies had made it known to the world that Dravidian languages including Tamil had unique characteristics," Stalin said. On March 4, Stalin wondered why the union government has not facilitated setting up of an institution to teach Tamil or other south Indian languages to people of states in north India.

# Case against Ansal group for fraud, conspiracy in UP

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh police have registered a case against real estate developer Ansal Group on charges of cheating, criminal breach of trust, conspiracy and organised crime. The FIR was lodged a day after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directed officials to take strict action against the company and ensure homebuyers' interests are protected. During a session in the state assembly, Adityanath criticised the opposition Samajwadi Party, alleging that its previous government had shielded developers like the Ansal Group. Even on Wednesday, he raised the issue in the state legislative council and said that the govern-

ment will take punitive action against the Ansal Group. The FIR was filed at the Gomti Nagar police station in Lucknow and names key people including Pranav Ansal, Sushil Ansal, Sunil Kumar Gupta, Francette Patricia Atkinson and Vinay Kumar Singh. They have been booked under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including criminal breach of trust, cheating, forgery, criminal conspiracy, and organised crime. In a separate financial blow to the company, the National Company Law Tribunal has admitted Ansal Properties and Infrastructure Limited into the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

# Lucknow court fines Rahul for non-appearance

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

A Lucknow Court on Wednesday imposed a fine of ₹200 on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for repeatedly failing to appear before it in connection with a case related to his remarks on freedom fighter Veer Savarkar. The Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate (ACJM) also issued a strict warning, directing Gandhi to appear before the court on April 14, 2025, failing which he could face legal consequences. The case originated from a complaint filed by Nripendra Pandey, who objected to a statement made by Rahul Gandhi during a press conference in Akola, Maharashtra, on December 17, 2022. Gandhi allegedly referred to Veer Savarkar as "a servant of

the British" and "a pension receiver." The complainant argued that these remarks were inflammatory and aimed at inciting enmity in society. He also claimed that pamphlets containing similar comments were distributed among journalists at the event. A demand was made to register a case against Gandhi under Sections 153(A) and 505 of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly promoting discord through his statements. During Wednesday's hearing, Gandhi's lawyer, Pranshu Agrawal, filed an application seeking an exemption from his personal appearance. He stated that Gandhi, as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, had a pre-scheduled meeting with a foreign dignitary on the same day and was preoccupied with official responsibilities. The lawyer

assured the court that Gandhi was not deliberately avoiding the hearing and respected the judicial process. The court, however, did not take Gandhi's absence lightly and imposed an ₹200 fine. It ordered his mandatory appearance on April 14, 2025, cautioning that failure to comply could result in the issuance of a non-bailable warrant. Apart from the Savarkar-related case, Rahul Gandhi is also facing another legal challenge stemming from a statement he made during an economic survey in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections. Pankaj Pathak, president of the All India Hindu Federation Mandal, filed a complaint in June 2024, alleging that Gandhi's comments regarding the distribution of wealth hurt religious sentiments.

# Ramdas Athawle invites Akash Anand to join party

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Republican Party of India (A) chief Ramdas Athawle has invited Akash Anand, the estranged nephew of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supreme Mayawati, to join his party after he was expelled from the BSP. "If he (Akash Anand) wants to take forward the mission of Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, he should join the Republican Party of India. If he joins the party, the Republican Party of India will get more strength in Uttar Pradesh," Athawle said. On Monday, BSP chief Mayawati expelled Akash Anand, stating that his response to being relieved of his duties was "selfish and arrogant." "The interest of the self-respect and self-esteem movement of the most revered Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar and fol-

lowing the tradition of discipline of the venerable Kanchiram, Akash, like his father-in-law, is expelled from the party in the interest of the party and the movement," Mayawati posted on X. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said, Anand's remarks after his removal from key posts reflected "a lack of political maturity." She accused him of being influenced by his father-in-law, Ashok Siddharth. "The lengthy response given by Akash is not a sign of remorse and political maturity but is mostly selfish and arrogant under the influence of his father-in-law, which I have been advising people in the party to avoid," she said. Mayawati further stated that Anand was expected to accept his removal from key positions in the BSP "maturely." "In the All-India meeting of BSP on Tuesday, Akash Anand

was relieved from all responsibilities, including the post of national coordinator, due to his continued influence by his father-in-law Ashok Siddharth, who was also expelled from the party. For this, he should have repented and shown maturity," she added. A day after being removed from all key positions, Anand said on Monday that he remained undeterred, drawing strength from the Bahujan movement's ideals. He emphasised that his struggle was not about a career but about the fight for the self-respect and self-esteem of marginalised communities. He asserted that he would continue to dedicate himself to the party and fight for the rights of society as a true worker of the Bahujan movement. He also called the decision an emotional one, acknowledging that "the test is difficult."

# Chandrababu reassures Telangana on Godavari water plan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has assured the people of Telangana that there is no cause for concern regarding his government's plan to divert Godavari river water from Polavaram to Banakacherla, as the initiative is aimed solely at utilising excess water that would otherwise flow into the sea. Addressing a party meeting to celebrate the Telegu Desam Party's (TDP) victory in two graduates MLC elections on Tuesday, the chief minister claimed a political party is "politicising" Andhra Pradesh's strategy to salvage water draining into the sea. "I am appealing again, when water draining into the sea is taken to a famine-hit region, nobody should feel bad. Everybody should think about it," Naidu said, adding that he was appealing to all the Telugu people. Noting that some people are questioning what right does

Andhra Pradesh have to divert water draining into the sea, Naidu wondered where the Telugu society is headed. Reminding that he never opposed Telangana's Kaleshwaram project, the CM called on the neighbouring state to build projects on the Godavari river to use its waters. Highlighting that the Godavari river is the only hope for the Telugu people, the TDP supreme noted that up to 1,000 TMC water is draining into the Bay of Bengal. Exhorting that interlinking rivers is his desire, including Ganga and Kaveri rivers, Naidu recalled that former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee also formed a task force for the purpose. "When I took up this matter with the prime minister (Narendra Modi), he said interlinking of rivers within states should be completed first, after which interlinking of rivers at the national level will become easy," Naidu said. Calling for positive thinking among political leaders, Naidu said Telangana can utilise water

resources wherever they are available so that the leftover water can flow down to Andhra Pradesh. Recalling the Vijayawada floods of 2024, he said rainfall in the upper reaches, especially in Telangana and Karnataka where projects could not be erected, had flown down to flood the city. "That's why the lower riparian states will always have authority. We are doing this (Polavaram to Banakacherla) for the betterment of Telugu people," he claimed. The Polavaram-Banakacherla link project aims to route 200 TMC floodwater from Godavari river at Polavaram to Banakacherla in Nandyal district through a link canal. Expected to cost over ₹80,000 Crore, the project will render the southern state drought-proof by providing drinking water to 80 lakh people and irrigating three lakh hectares, supplementing 9.14 lakh hectares of land. The project will also enable the supply of 20 TMC water to industries.

# Centre, Kerala government clash over pending ASHA workers' incentive funds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Centre and the Kerala government on Tuesday continued to dispute claims over the provision of funds for disbursing incentives to ASHA workers in the state. While state Finance Minister KN Balagopal accused the Centre of not providing funds on time, Union Minister George Kurian refuted the claim, stating that those who hear such allegations will start respecting Narendra Modi once they properly investigate the matter. Talking to reporters in Kollam, Balagopal said that the Centre had yet to release ₹100 Crore in pending payments. He urged the Centre to increase the honoraria for scheme workers, including Accredited Social Health Activist workers. Balagopal said that Kerala had been raising this matter during the pre-budget meetings convened by the Union Finance Minister for the past two years. "In Jaisalmer, I also reiterated our

demand that the rate of honoraria for Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and other scheme workers needs to be appropriately enhanced," the Kerala finance minister said. Earlier, the office of State Health Minister Veena George stated that the claim that the Centre had allocated the full amount due to Kerala for centrally-sponsored health schemes in the last financial year was incorrect. The Centre has thus not provided ₹636.88 Crore for the year 2023-24 under the pretext of co-branding, the Health Minister's office said in a statement. It further stated that the health minister had formally written to the Union Health Minister, the Union Health Secretary, the National Health Mission, and the State Mission, pointing out that ₹636.88 Crore was yet to be provided by the Centre for NHM in the financial year 2023-24. In its response on October 28, the Centre itself confirmed that the central share for Kerala in 2023-24 was yet to be disbursed, the statement claimed.

# Karnataka legislature recommends restructuring BBMP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

The joint select committee of the Karnataka legislature, tasked with reviewing the 'Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024', has recommended restructuring the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) by splitting it into a maximum of seven city corporations, in the Greater Bengaluru Area. It also provides for a constitution of a Greater Bengaluru Authority for coordination and supervision, and 30 months terms for the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor. The 13-member committee, headed by Congress MLA Rizwan Arshad, tabled the report in the Assembly on Wednesday. In July last year, the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill was referred to a joint select committee, which had recently submitted the report to Assembly Speaker UT Khader. According to the report, each city corporation should cover a population not less than 10 lakh, and the population density should be 5,000 inhabitants per square kilometre. The revenue generated from the area for the local administration in the year of the last preceding census should not be less than ₹300 Crore per annum, it said, adding that each corporation should have 50 per cent employment in non-agricultural activities. Tabling the report before the Legislative Assembly, Arshad

said the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike was established in 2008, population of Bengaluru then was 70-75 lakh, while now in 2025 it has reached 1.50 crore, and there are about 1 crore vehicles in Bengaluru. BBMP's area is about 786 sq km, for which the administration was run by one Mayor with a tenure of eleven months and a Commissioner, he said and added that BBMP is separate from parastatal agencies like -- Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTCL), Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM), Metro and others - and they are all functioning without any coordination. "There is centralisation of power in BBMP, there is no transparency, and there is corruption. There is a need for decentralisation of powers, if it doesn't happen it will lead to corruption and it won't be possible to provide good, transparent and effective administration. So, we have recommended restructuring of BBMP into various corporations. We have also made a recommendation regarding the tenure of the Mayor, for coordination at all levels between agencies," he added. As per the report, each city corporation would have a Mayor, a Commissioner, a Joint Commissioner, standing committees, and ward committees. Each city corporation in the Greater Bengaluru Area should

be suitably named with a common prefix 'Bengaluru', like -- "Bengaluru South City Corporation", "Bengaluru East City Corporation" and so on. The term of the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor is proposed to be 30 months, and a no-confidence motion can be moved only after six months from the commencement of their term, the report further said, while the city corporations shall have a term of five years duration. Noting that the Greater Bengaluru Area shall have civic authorities of the Greater Bengaluru Authority, the City Corporations and the Ward Committees, the report states that on the issuance of the final notification on this Act, the BBMP and such other local bodies notified shall cease to exist. It has also recommended for the government to issue a notification for establishment of the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) within 120 days after the commencement of this Act. The GBA would be headed by the chief minister as the ex-officio chairperson, while the minister in charge of development of Bengaluru would be the ex-officio vice-chairperson. The ministers in the state representing the legislature constituencies in the Greater Bengaluru Area would be ex-officio members. The Chief Commissioner of the Greater Bengaluru Area would be the secretary while mayors of the city corporations are members, the report said.

Commissioner of BDA, Chairman of BWSSB, MD of BMTCL, MD of BMRL, MD of Bescom, Deputy Commissioner of districts, the commissioner of police, Bengaluru, Superintendents of Police, CEO of Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority, the MD of Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited, the Chief Town Planner, the engineer-in-charge, the director of the Karnataka State Fire and Emergency Services would be members of the GBA. The commissioners of the city corporations in the Greater Bengaluru Area would be members of the GBA, while all MPs, and the MLAs and MLCs whose constituencies lie within the area, or who reside in the area of the GBA, would be members of the GBA. The government of Karnataka would appoint officials not below the rank of the principal secretary as the chief commissioner of the GBA, for a period of three years, subject to the pleasure of the government. As per the report, the chairperson of the GBA would convene meetings at least one meeting for every three months, and the authority would prepare the budget every year. The committee held consultations with officers from various departments, legal experts, stakeholders and the public. About 19 official meetings were held and at the 20th official meeting the report was submitted to the Speaker, Arshad said.

# SKM protest: Farmers stopped from heading to Chandigarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

Farmers associated with the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Wednesday claimed they were not being allowed to head towards Chandigarh for a planned 'dharna' in support of their various demands. In view of the dharna, barricades have been set at the Chandigarh-Mohali border points and security beefed up. The SKM, which is a conglomerate of more than 30 farmer bodies, has given a call for a week-long sit-in in Chandigarh starting March 5 in support of their various demands. The outfit said farmers, who left for Chandigarh in tractor-trolleys and other vehicles on Wednesday morning, were being stopped by the Punjab Police. In Moga, Krantikari Kisan Union (KKU) district Moga president Jatinder Singh said they were stopped at Ajitwal in Moga district by the Punjab Police when they were going to Chandigarh. Singh claimed some of them were "detained" by police. Farmers also raised slogans against the Bhagwant Mann government for not allowing them to go to Chandigarh. In Samrala also, farmers were stopped by police from moving to Chandigarh, they said. The Chandigarh administration has denied permission to farmers to hold their sit-in at



Members of Samyukta Kisan Morcha stage protest against Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann-led government in Amritsar PTI

Sector 34 in the city. On Tuesday, the Chandigarh Police had issued a traffic advisory, saying traffic movement on certain road stretches may be regulated on March 5 to ensure smooth vehicular flow and public safety. On Tuesday, Punjab Police "detained" several farmer leaders, including Balbir Singh Rajewal, Ruldu Singh Mansa, Gurmeet Singh Bhatial, Nachhatar Singh Jaiton, Veerpal Singh Dhillion, Bander Singh Golewal and Gurnam Bhikhi. SKM leader Joginder Singh Ugrahan on Tuesday had called upon farmer leaders to head towards Chandigarh. He had asked farmers to sit at a

vacant place if they are stopped by police on their way to Chandigarh, telling them not to block any road. Mann on Tuesday lashed out at several farmer bodies for resorting to protests every other day, turning Punjab into a "state of dharnas" and causing a huge loss to the state. Mann denounced farmer organisations after talks between the Punjab government and Samyukta Kisan Morcha leaders to discuss farmers' demands broke down midway on Monday. The SKM, which had led the 2020 agitation against the now-repealed three farm laws, is demanding the withdrawal of the Centre's draft of the National Policy

Framework on Agricultural Marketing, a legal guarantee to minimum support price as per the Swaminathan Commission report, implementing the state's agricultural policy, purchase of six crops, including basmati, maize, moong, potato at minimum support price by the state government. They are also demanding a law for debt settlement, ownership rights of land tillers ensuring canal water to every field, payment of sugarcane arrears, stopping "forcible" acquisition of land for the Bharatmala projects and jobs and compensation for kin of farmers who lost lives during the farmers' stir in 2020-21.



## Beginning of a trade war

What began as a threat by Trump is now a full blown trade war as Canada, China and Mexico retaliate the US tariffs

The trade war initiated by President Trump against China, Canada, and Mexico has set off a chain reaction of retaliatory measures, creating uncertainty in global markets and posing risks to economic stability. While the administration aims to address specific national concerns through these tariffs, the broader implications suggest potential harm to both the US and global economies. As the situation evolves, careful consideration of the long-term consequences is essential to mitigate adverse effects on world trade. As promised by him in his campaign, President Donald Trump launched a bold series of tariffs aimed at imports from China, Canada, and Mexico, a move that significantly escalated global trade tensions and set off a swift chain reaction of retaliatory measures. The president signed executive orders that imposed a 25% tariff on all goods from Mexico and Canada, and a 10% tariff on Chinese imports. The administration argued that these measures were necessary to tackle issues related to illegal immigration and drug trafficking to protect American industries. In an effort to minimize any disruptive effects, an additional 10% tariff was applied to Canadian energy exports, including electricity, natural gas, and oil.



The response from the targeted countries was swift and forceful. Beijing retaliated by announcing tariffs of up to 15% on key U.S. agricultural products such as chicken, pork, soy, and beef, while also expanding restrictions on U.S. businesses. In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau countered with 25% tariffs on \$155 billion worth of American goods. Similarly, Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum imposed retaliatory tariffs against the United States, criticizing the unilateral decision and warning of its adverse effects on both national and foreign companies operating in Mexico. Analysts have warned that the tariffs could significantly hinder economic growth, with projections suggesting a contraction of 2.8% in U.S. GDP. The increased tariffs were also expected to drive up consumer prices, adding to existing inflationary pressures and potentially prolonging periods of high interest rates. Global markets reacted negatively, with major U.S. stock indexes and shares in the automotive sector experiencing notable declines. Industries reliant on international supply chains, particularly the automotive sector, braced for production delays and increased costs as a result of these disruptions. The Trump administration maintained that these tariffs were a necessary tool to pressure foreign nations into addressing issues like drug trafficking and to incentivize domestic production. But the reality is different. The tariffs could ultimately have a net negative effect on the U.S. economy by driving up prices, reducing output, and dampening employment growth. In the unfolding saga of international trade, while the US administration's objective remains focused on addressing pressing national concerns, the broader consequences of this trade war hint at potential long-term harm for both the U.S. and the global economy.

# Balancing growth and conservation

Large-scale dredging and resource extraction projects at Kerala's Quilon Fish Bank have sparked concerns over marine biodiversity loss and ecological stability

India's ambitious Blue Economy vision is reshaping the way the country engages with its vast marine resources. At the heart of this transformation is Kerala, with the Quilon Fish Bank emerging as a crucial player in sustainable fisheries. However, recent concerns over large-scale dredging, resource extraction, and the long-term impact on marine biodiversity have raised important questions about balancing economic growth with ecological stability.

The Quilon Fish Bank, known for its rich biodiversity and high productivity, is among India's most significant fishing grounds. Spread across Kollam and Alappuzha districts, this region is a vital breeding ground for numerous fish species and shrimp. Kerala's fisherfolk have long depended on these waters for their livelihood, making sustainable fisheries management crucial for the state's economy and food security.

However, recent developments, such as the planned dredging of 242 square kilometres of the seabed in Kollam, have sparked widespread concern. Reports indicate that India's Geological Survey has identified 7.45 billion tonnes of sand in Kerala's coastal and offshore areas. While the government sees this as an opportunity for economic development, local communities fear it may lead to habitat destruction, loss of fish stocks, and increased coastal erosion. The controversial dredging project is part of a larger Blue Economy initiative aimed at tapping into the ocean's resources for economic growth.

While this approach has potential, questions remain about its long-term sustainability and impact on Kerala's delicate marine ecosystem. The Blue Economy concept emphasizes responsible and sustainable use of marine resources to drive economic progress. India, with its vast coastline and rich maritime heritage, has identified the Blue Economy as a critical driver of growth in the 21st century. The government's policy framework seeks to integrate economic growth with environmental conservation.

While large-scale resource extraction, such as sand mining and deep-sea fishing, forms part of this vision, efforts are also being made to minimize ecological disruption. Scientific research, eco-friendly technologies, and strict regulations are being implemented to ensure sustainability.

One of the key objectives of India's Blue Economy plan is to modernize the fisheries



sector. Investments in advanced fishing infrastructure, cold storage facilities, and alternative livelihood programs, such as seaweed farming and mariculture, are providing fishermen with new income opportunities. These initiatives aim to reduce dependence on overfished species and promote a more balanced marine ecosystem. Despite the promising aspects of the Blue Economy, concerns remain about its impact on marine biodiversity.

ing not just marine species but also the livelihoods of thousands of fishing families. Experts warn that Kerala's geographical location-between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats-makes it particularly vulnerable to environmental degradation.

To address these concerns, the government has been expanding Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to safeguard critical habitats. These conservation zones play a vital role

India refine its own Blue Economy strategy. Kerala's government has also taken steps to enhance coastal resilience. Large-scale coastal protection projects, such as artificial reefs and mangrove restoration, are being undertaken to mitigate the impact of erosion and habitat loss. However, these efforts need stronger support from the central government to ensure long-term effectiveness. The future of the Quilon Fish Bank and Kerala's fisheries sector hinges on finding a middle ground between economic growth and environmental sustainability. While resource extraction and development projects are necessary for progress, they must be undertaken with strict environmental safeguards.

A multi-stakeholder approach involving the government, local fishing communities, environmentalists, and global experts is essential. Policymakers must prioritize scientific research and ecological impact assessments before approving large-scale marine projects. Empowering local communities with alternative livelihood options, enhancing conservation efforts, and enforcing stricter regulations on resource extraction can help ensure a sustainable future for Kerala's fisheries. India's Blue Economy vision holds immense promise, but its success will ultimately depend on how well it balances development with ecological responsibility.

(The writer is associate professor at Centre For South Asian Studies; views are personal)

THE QUILON FISH BANK IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THIS DILEMMA. DREDGING AND SAND MINING, WHILE ECONOMICALLY LUCRATIVE, HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO DISRUPT FISH BREEDING CYCLES, ALTER OCEAN CURRENTS, AND INCREASE VULNERABILITY TO COASTAL EROSION

The Quilon Fish Bank is a prime example of this dilemma. Dredging and sand mining, while economically lucrative, have the potential to disrupt fish breeding cycles, alter ocean currents, and increase vulnerability to coastal erosion. The fragile balance of Kerala's coastal ecosystem is already under stress due to climate change and unregulated fishing practices.

Further extraction of marine resources could push it to a tipping point, endangering not just marine species but also the livelihoods of thousands of fishing families.

Countries like Norway, Japan, and Australia have successfully implemented sustainable fisheries policies that balance economic interests with conservation. Learning from these models can help

in replenishing fish stocks and maintaining biodiversity. Additionally, advanced monitoring systems are being introduced to track fish migration patterns and regulate fishing activities, ensuring long-term marine health.

Learning from these models can help

## PICTALK



A squirrel perches on a branch of red-silk cotton tree while feeding on flowers in New Delhi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

## When yesterday's children return as tomorrow's hope

### SECOND Opinion



ASHA IYER KUMAR

Time flies. A whole lifetime can sometimes feel like a fleeting frame in the vast reel of existence. Few things make me more aware of this than watching children grow. I have no children of my own to mark the passing years with each birthday they celebrate, but as a mentor and educator, I have been surrounded by young minds in various stages of becoming. I have watched them transition from wide-eyed learners to self-assured adults, carving out their place in the world. Yesterday, one of my earliest students visited me with his fiancée and parents, carrying wedding invitations, gifts, and a bouquet of memories from a time when he was just a six-year-old in shorts and tees. His visit felt like the culmination of a week steeped in nostalgia—a week in which I found myself thinking of all my past students, reaching out to some to check on their progress and well-being.

I was astonished at how they had grown—some still scaling academic heights with degrees and doctorates, others, like the one who visited me, embracing both career and companionship, settling into the rhythms of love and domestication. Not all seem set to become super achievers. Some were slow starters who gained momentum in the later years, some who were primed to blaze the trail, falling short in the end game. As I sat across from my former student, now a confident young professional with clear eyes and measured words, I found

The rise in youth crime in Kerala is a stark reminder of the challenges this generation faces. Where did we go wrong, and how can we build resilience alongside success?

myself reflecting on the delicate threads that connect our journeys to the broader tapestry of societal evolution.

They carry with them innovative solutions to problems we have long considered intractable. They approach challenges with a fluidity and adaptability that my generation often struggles to comprehend. Their apparent detachment from traditional structures is not apathy, but rather a reconfiguration of priorities, a reshaping of engagement that might prove transformative for our world. Yet this hopeful vision is not with-



out its shadows. The recent surge in youth-involved drug cases and violent crimes in Kerala sends tremors through our collective conscience. Young people, barely past adolescence, find themselves entangled in webs of addiction, exploitation, and criminality that threaten to define their entire existence. The

juxtaposition is jarring—young minds full of promise alongside peers whose potential is squandered in the pursuit of momentary escape or misguided power. This stark contrast forces us to confront uncomfortable questions about the environments we create, the values we embody, and the support systems we provide for our youth. Where exactly have we faltered? Perhaps in our haste to prepare children for success, we have neglected to equip them for struggle.

In our eagerness to protect them from hardship, we may have inadvertently shielded them from the very experiences that build resilience. In our focus on academic achievement, we might have overlooked the cultivation of emotional intelligence and moral courage. It's hard to put a finger on the fault lines that have caused the fractures. In the face of these complex challenges, I find solace in the knowledge that those who have passed through my classroom have largely become contributors to society rather than detractors from it. This is not entirely to my credit. Countless factors shape a person's trajectory, but I take quiet pride in having played some role in their formation. To have contributed, even modestly, to the development of honest, thoughtful, and capable individuals is perhaps the greatest measure of success in a mentor's life. Our purpose in this world is not measured by personal achievements or accolades, but by the lives we touch, the potential we help nurture, and the humanity we help foster.

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

## Letters to the Editor

### Textile industry needs support

Madam — Apropos of the article 'Export Potentials of Punjab ...' (March 5), presents an interesting reading. But the trend in the country remains different. Only slogans galore and solutions are nil. The second largest provider of employment is the cotton industry in India. The direct employment it provides is around 40 million. Besides this, there are micro units and allied feeding industries providing employment to many more millions. The cotton business has been suffering for years due to various internal as well as external factors. In the same way, the spinning mills also feel suffocating due to various factors. Declining exports, unviable cotton prices, growing costs of manufacturing, and a number of such factors are quoted to be disturbing the functioning of mills. It is a pity that a good number of mills are closing their operations, throwing millions of workers out of their jobs, besides their due negative impacts on export earnings.

The industry, with debt-funded capex, finds it too difficult to manage the show anymore. Actually, in most of the mills, the number of permanent workers availing themselves of employee-related benefits is too low, and the vast section of the workforce is made up of contract, outsourced, casual, contingent, and barrack segments, who are paid too little and do not avail themselves of any benefits meant for permanent workers. In spite of such huge savings from the labour component, the mills are closing down due to various reasons that the governments

can alone resolve. For example, the cost of power is felt to be unviable. Export subsidies need to be provided. In the absence of required intervention from the state or the Union governments, a good number of mills are already closed, and many are nearing closure. It is said even banks are not inclined to advance these industries anymore. It is time to attend to this segment as a priority, as slogans are not a solution.

A G RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

### Lasting peace in Manipur

Madam— Apropos of the editorial 'A fresh start or fleeting relief?' (March 4), it is very apparent that the Union Government's efforts and monitoring of Manipur ethnic violence for quite a long time are bearing fruit and steadily succeeding for normalcy. Unless the roots of the ethnic violence and secessionist underground activities are identified and addressed, the violence may erupt again. Drug trafficking, opium cultivation, missionaries' separatist activities, and foreign intervention from across the border must be handled iron-handedly.

The arms and ammunition snatched by warring outfits from the police and paramilitary forces should be recovered, and no mercy should be shown to those who attacked police and armed forces. The Parliament should approve the extension of the President's rule, and rather, Manipur should be directly ruled by the Centre as a Union Territory until complete normalcy is restored. The neighbouring states of Manipur should not feel the heat and face the consequences

of ethnic violence in Manipur. The opposition parties should work in unison with the Union Government in resolving Manipur violence and restoring peace.

VISHAL MAYUR | TUMAKURU

### Supreme Court warns influencers

Madam — The Supreme Court's call for regulating digital content to uphold morality while protecting free speech is crucial. The rise of social media influencers like Ranveer Allahbadia has raised serious concerns about the unchecked spread of vulgarity under the guise of free expression. His content, deemed obscene by many, is a clear example of why stricter guidelines are necessary. While free speech is a fundamental right, it does not give anyone a license to propagate content that corrupts young minds and disrespects societal values.

The court's decision to allow Allahbadia to resume his show was not well received. Although it imposed moral restrictions on incoming content, individuals engaging in vulgarity should be banned for at least a year. This would make them aware of the mistakes they have made in reality shows, ensuring that they feel the consequences of their actions. Such punishment should serve as a lesson for future generations to refrain from committing similar acts. The influence of such YouTubers extends to millions, and their impact on impressionable audiences cannot be ignored. The government must implement robust regulations to ensure that digital platforms maintain ethical standards.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

## INDIA BEATS AUSTRALIA



The other back-to-back victory of Team India in the ICC Champions Trophy semifinals against Australia has filled Indians with extreme aspiration of becoming champions. We are just a step away from the dream of becoming champions. The last time Team India lifted the Champions trophy was in 2013. Despite Australia giving a challenging chaser score of 264 runs to India, the partnership by the batting order, bowling, and fielding has made India win by four wickets. Now that India has made a glittering entry to the finals of the ICC Champions Trophy for the third time, let us all make figures crossed for the victory of

India in the finals as well. Now that the Indian cricket team has done their hat trick of three successive entries in the finals, let's pray that India will lift the trophy by naming the third title to her name as Champions.

It's time for all eyes to be on Dubai International Stadium for the thrilling final match. We really wish to see Rohit Sharma's squad turn champions. Cricket fever will be in full swing on the upcoming Sunday to thrill the whole world of cricket lovers. We are hopeful for India to make the podium finishes with the trophy in hand and joy in the eyes.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR



## FIRST COLUMN

AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI



### Understanding God and the Guru

A true guru recognises his limitations, serving only as a guide who connects disciples to the divine



We must understand the distinction between these fundamental entities in our lives. First, let me enumerate some commonly known qualities of God. He is omnipotent. This word is defined as having unlimited power. Only God fits this description. Is He not the Creator of innumerable galaxies? Similarly, God is omniscient. This word is defined as knowing everything. Who else except God fits this description? How much can a mere mortal know?

Albert Einstein famously said, "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know." Then, God is omnipresent too. This word is defined as being present everywhere at the same time. And God is one and we are many. Lord Krishna states, "An eternal soul is My part only." (The Bhagavad-Geeta 15.7) Let us see how a genuine guru fares in these characteristics. He knows that whatever he has learnt in terms of spiritual knowledge, oratory skills, etc., is due to God's empowerment. God is much pleased by preaching amongst devotees. A genuine guru realizes that the source of his knowledge is God only. As regards omnipresence, a genuine guru humbly accepts that he is severely limited in being present with his disciples. Additionally, a genuine guru never claims any similarity with God except being part of God. Because God is completely different from us.

A genuine guru knows this fact more than others, who are not so knowledgeable. Being an incarnation of God never crosses his mind, because he knows that God incarnates for specific purposes. A guru's role is extremely limited. It is just to help get his disciples connected with God. And he strictly avoids attracting them to himself personally. Adi Shankaracharya is the role model for him, who preached "bhaja govindam." Now I will take up the famous verse, which is, "gurur brahma, gurur vishnu, gurur devo maheshvara, gurur sakshat parambrahma tasmai shri gururve namah."

Can any mere mortal claim to be Brahma or Vishnu or Mahadeva, never mind all three of them? It is ludicrous to even imagine. These are manifestations of God, not some ordinary entities; they are eternal, whereas we are subject to repeated birth and death till liberated. So what is the meaning of this verse? It is simply that whatever a guru speaks has sanction from God; he is not deviating from His instructions. He is simply conveying the essence of His teachings.

That is how he represents God. A genuine guru ensures that he protects his disciples from any harm by his inappropriate actions. He does not promise anything more than helping them to establish a good connection with God. He tries to become a role model for taking shelter from God because that is how all can benefit. He knows that he cannot give anything more.

He is aware of his severe limitations in this regard. He guides his disciples to get connected to God such that they can get what all God can give. (9.25) The conclusion is to seek help from a genuine guru, who can help in progressing in our eternal journey. And we should never get side-tracked by hopes of easy gains, because there are none. We have to deserve all that we hope to get including liberation by our efforts, not someone else's.

A genuine guru knows this fact and never leaves any doubt in the minds of those who trust him. He thus gets respect from his disciples, which he richly deserves. Additionally, some disciples may serve him personally and some may donate so that the guru can maintain himself.

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

## A model of stability from China

While Western democracies struggle with internal gridlock, economic and stagnation, China's governance model continues to chart a course of long-term strategic vision



The Financial Times recently published an article on the question of who will succeed Xi Jinping. But perhaps the real question is not one of succession but of continuity—of how a governance model rooted in long-term vision, pragmatic adaptability, and national rejuvenation sustains itself beyond the tenure of any single leader. Unlike Western portrayals, often laden with exaggerated spectres from 'debt traps' to 'authoritarianism,' there are profound lessons to be drawn from China's trajectory—especially as Western democracies now find themselves gasping for air in the suffocating embrace of their contradictions. "Democracy is a failed joke," Ai Weiwei, the Chinese contemporary artist, remarked in a recent interview with The Independent—and perhaps never has this assertion been more starkly evident than in the shambolic decline of the liberal order. Governance, once regarded as the solemn responsibility of those entrusted with the future of their nations, has in the West deteriorated into little more than a revolving spectacle of populist theatre, corporate capture, and institutional paralysis. It is within this continuum that China now prepares to convene its most pivotal political gathering of the year—the Two Sessions.

The third session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) and the third session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), scheduled to commence on 4 and 5 March respectively, are not mere ritualistic formalities but the very engine of governance in a system defined by strategic foresight rather than short-term electoral expedience. The Western world, entrapped in the myopia of its dysfunction, looks upon this grand assembly with bewilderment, unable to comprehend a system where efficiency supersedes obstruction and where governance is an instrument of civilisation rather than a battleground of perpetual paralysis.

As Beijing convenes these pivotal sessions, it does so with a purpose that far surpasses the partisan gridlock that has crippled Washington under Trump and reduced Brussels, under Ursula von der Leyen's leadership, to a stage of waning relevance. History does not bestow hegemony upon the indolent. It is earned through foresight, discipline, and a genuine commitment to civilisation's progress. The Western model, long heralded as the apex of governance, is now fraying



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

at the seams, consumed by internal strife, economic stagnation, and an ever-widening gulf between the governed and their rulers. Meanwhile, the Chinese model, grounded in the philosophical profundity of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, marches forward with unparalleled

resolve. "The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the only correct path for building a modern socialist country," Xi Jinping declared in his report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2017. What have the last few decades illuminated since China's opening up? "Reform and opening up is the key

definitive proclamation for a new global paradigm—one where dialogue supplants discord and where stability is not held hostage to the whims of declining empires. The very existence of Western diplomacy has been predicated upon coercion, economic subjugation, and military adventurism. China, by contrast, has demonstrated that genuine global leadership lies not in the proliferation of conflict, but in its resolution.

This year's Two Sessions will reaffirm Beijing's role as an indispensable mediator of international crises, bringing adversaries to the negotiating table in a manner that the West, mired in its moral hypocrisy, has repeatedly failed to achieve. Consider the diplomatic masterstroke that saw China facilitate a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia—two historical adversaries long ensnared in the machinations of Western interventionism. This ethos extends to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, where China,

to the Western penchant for war profiteering. While NATO expands its influence under the guise of security, China constructs bridges of diplomacy, demonstrating that true global leadership lies not in fuelling divisions but in fostering dialogue. But China's vision does not stop at terrestrial affairs.

This year's Two Sessions will be held at the next frontier of human progress—space—becomes a new high-tech battlefield. While Western nations hoard technological advancements for geopolitical leverage, China has advanced an inclusive vision of cosmic exploration. The construction of the Tiangong space station, the pioneering lunar projects, and the Mars exploration programme are not mere scientific endeavours; they are emblematic of a civilisation that aspires not merely for national greatness but for the collective progress of humanity.

The essence of the Two Sessions lies in the articulation of a governing philosophy rooted in long-term vision, adaptability, and the pursuit of collective progress. It is not governance dictated by ephemeral political cycles but by a civilisation's deeper consciousness—one that understands its historical responsibility not only to itself but to the broader trajectory of human development. In an era where artificial intelligence and artificial general intelligence are reshaping economies, governance, and even social structures, China does not see these advancements as instruments of control or geopolitical leverage but as elements of a broader mission: ensuring that technological evolution remains a force for human cohesion rather than fragmentation. What China has proven is that reform is not an event; it is the flow of history recognising its potential. Simultaneously, the shifting currents of global trade, exacerbated by protectionist measures and economic fragmentation, have reinforced the necessity of an alternative economic logic—one not shackled to the fluctuations of political expediency but rooted in the principle of enduring equilibrium. True strength is not found in dominance, but in resilience—the ability to absorb, adapt, and outlast. This defines China's approach to trade tensions: rather than engaging in tit-for-tat economic skirmishes, the focus is on structural reinforcement—building self-sufficiency in critical sectors while ensuring that economic interdependence remains a mechanism of stability rather than vulnerability.

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

WHILE WESTERN ECONOMIES DROWN IN INFLATIONARY QUAGMIRES AND INSTITUTIONAL CRISES, CHINA HAS CHARTED A PATH OF ECONOMIC REJUVENATION THROUGH INDUSTRIAL UPGRADING, AND THE INDOMITABLE PURSUIT OF TECHNOLOGICAL SELF-RELIANCE

choice that determines the fate of contemporary China," Deng Xiaoping once asserted. This ethos continues to guide China, as the nation refines its developmental trajectory with an adaptability that the West, bound by ideological rigidity, can scarcely fathom. China is not merely asserting its presence but reshaping the very contours of the global order. The Two Sessions have highlighted the profundity of China's economic strategy—one that is not predicated on the ephemeral illusions of speculative capitalism but on tangible infrastructural and technological advancement. While Western economies drown in inflationary quagmires and institutional crises, China has charted a path of economic rejuvenation through high-quality development, industrial upgrading, and the indomitable pursuit of technological self-reliance.

Yet the significance of the Two Sessions transcends economic imperatives. It is also a

in defiance of Western inertia, has actively pursued dialogue among Palestinian factions. The hypocrisy of the liberal order is laid bare when the so-called torchbearers of democracy selectively disregard the suffering of those who do not fit within their geopolitical calculus.

Beijing, undeterred by such duplicity, has asserted itself as an honest broker of peace, proving that a multipolar world is not an abstraction but an unfolding reality. Even in the maelstrom of the Ukraine conflict, where Western powers have inflamed tensions rather than defused them, China's peace proposal has emerged as the only substantive roadmap towards de-escalation. President Xi Jinping has consistently emphasised that "confrontation, sanctions, and pressure will not solve the problem... what is needed is a mindset of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security," resonating ever more powerfully in contrast

## Healthcare divide: How tier-II and III cities are transforming medical access

Investments in advanced medical technology and government initiatives like Ayushman Bharat are making healthcare more accessible in tier II and III cities

Healthcare facilities in tier-II and III cities have long struggled with the disparity between affordability and accessibility of quality healthcare services. These cities often lack well-equipped medical centres, forcing patients to travel to nearby metropolitan areas for advanced treatment. The shortage of trained medical professionals further exacerbates the problem.

The doctor-to-patient ratio in these cities remains significantly below the WHO-recommended standard of 1:1000, often reaching alarming ratios such as 1:25,000. The Accessibility Gap One of the major factors behind this situation is the concentration of healthcare resources in metropolitan areas. Government hospitals in smaller cities often grapple with overcrowding, long waiting lines, and outdated infrastructure. Meanwhile, private hospitals that offer advanced treatments are often unaffordable for the majority of the population. This leaves patients with limited options, pushing them to seek care in distant metro cities.

However, in recent years, several hospitals in tier-II cities have made significant strides in bridging this gap. The emergence of well-equipped hospitals outside major metropolitan areas is proving to be a game-changer for patients who previously had to travel long distances for treatment. Health Institutions like Subharti Hospital in Meerut exemplify how tier-II cities are evolving to provide comprehensive and affordable healthcare not only under



KRISHNAMURTY

the Ayushman Bharat Mission but also for uninsured patients, reducing dependence on metropolitan hospitals.

### Ayushman Bharat and Affordability

One of the biggest challenges in tier-II and III cities is making advanced healthcare both available and affordable. Many private hospitals offer high-end treatment facilities, but their pricing structures make them inaccessible to a significant portion of the population.

To address this issue, some hospitals are designing cost-effective treatment models that prioritize patient affordability without compromising on quality. Additionally, government schemes and insurance programs such as Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY need to be further expanded and better implemented in these regions. Many eligible patients are unaware of their entitlements under schemes like PMJAY, leading to underutilization of available resources. Increased awareness and streamlined implementation of such initiatives can make a significant difference in ensuring financial accessibility to quality healthcare.

**Advancements in Medical Technology** Traditionally, hospitals in non-metro areas have



been perceived as lacking advanced infrastructure and specialized treatment options. However, this perception is gradually changing.

Many healthcare institutions such as Subharti Hospital in Meerut are now investing in cutting-edge medical technology, including advanced imaging facilities such as digital PET scans, high-resolution MRI and CT scans, and modern oncology treatment options like chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

The availability of these services locally is significantly reducing the burden on patients who would otherwise have to commute to larger cities.

A breakthrough in Meerut is the introduction of comprehensive treatment centres, particularly in fields like oncology. Cancer patients, for example, often face logistical and financial challenges when forced to visit different hospitals for diagnosis, surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

The integration of these services under one roof in tier-II cities is improving patient outcomes and reducing treatment delays. Subharti Hospital, for instance, has emerged as a reliable healthcare provider in Western Uttar Pradesh, offering a full spectrum of oncology services in a single location, saving patients valuable time and resources.

### The Road Ahead

Ensuring quality healthcare in tier-II and III cities requires a multi-pronged approach that includes expanding medical infrastructure, ensuring equitable resource distribution, increasing investment in medical education to address the shortage of trained professionals, and encouraging partnerships to enhance healthcare accessibility. As healthcare in India evolves, tier-II and III cities are poised to play a crucial role in expanding medical access beyond metropolitan areas.

Continuous efforts are needed to overcome existing challenges and create a healthcare system that is truly inclusive and accessible to all. With a focused approach towards affordability, accessibility, and technological advancements, the future of healthcare in non-metro regions holds immense potential. By addressing these challenges head-on, tier-II and III cities can become the next frontier in India's healthcare transformation.

(The writer is the Deputy Medical Superintendent of Subharti Hospital, Meerut. Views expressed are personal)

# Ukraine ready to come to negotiating table: Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW YORK/WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said he has received "strong signals" from Russia that it is ready for peace and that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has written to him saying his country is ready to come to the negotiating table and also sign an agreement on minerals and security.

Trump made these remarks Tuesday night in an address to the Joint Session of Congress, the first of his second term in the White House.

"I'm also working tirelessly to end the savage conflict in Ukraine. Millions of Ukrainians and Russians have been needlessly killed or wounded in this horrific and brutal conflict with no end in sight," Trump said.



President Donald Trump addresses a joint session of Congress at the Capitol in Washington on Tuesday. AP/PTI

He told Congress that on Tuesday, he received an "important letter" from Zelenskyy, in which he said that "Ukraine is ready to come to the negotiating table as soon as possible to bring lasting peace closer. Nobody wants peace more than the Ukrainians," Zelenskyy wrote in the letter, Trump said.

Trump said that Zelenskyy went on to write in the letter that his team and him "stand ready to work under President Trump's strong leadership to get a peace that lasts. We do really value how much America has done to help Ukraine, maintain its sovereignty and independence. Regarding the agreement on minerals and security, Ukraine is ready to sign it at any time that is convenient for you."

Trump said he appreciates the letter and added that "simultaneously we've had serious discussions with Russia and I've received strong signals that they are ready for peace."

Wouldn't that be beautiful? Wouldn't that be beautiful?" he said amid applause.

"... It's time to stop this madness. It's time to halt the killing. It's time to end the senseless war. If you want to end wars, you have to talk to both sides," Trump said. In a post on X, hours before Trump's address to Congress, Zelenskyy said Ukraine is "ready to work fast to end the war, and the first stages could be the release of prisoners and truce in the sky — ban on missiles, long-ranged drones, bombs on energy and other civilian infrastructure — and truce in the sea immediately, if Russia will do the same. Then we want to move very fast through all next stages and to work with the US to agree a strong final deal."

Zelenskyy said that Ukraine really does value how much America has done to help Ukraine maintain its sovereignty and independence. "And we remember the

moment when things changed when President Trump provided Ukraine with Javelins. We are grateful for this."

In the post, Zelenskyy also referred to the disastrous meeting between him and Trump in the Oval Office last week and said "Our meeting in Washington, at the White House on Friday, did not go the way it was supposed to be. It is regrettable that it happened this way. It is time to make things right. We would like future cooperation and communication to be constructive."

Trump said that the United States has sent hundreds of billions of dollars to support Ukraine's defence with no security, with no anything and asked lawmakers if they want to keep it going for another five years.

Trump said that more than 2,000 people are being killed every single week in the conflict that is now in its third year.

"They are Russian young people, they're Ukrainian young people. They're not Americans, but I want it to stop," Trump said. Trump added that meanwhile, Europe has sadly spent more money buying Russian oil and gas than they've spent on defending Ukraine, by far.

"Think of that. They've spent more buying Russian oil and gas than they have defending. We've spent perhaps USD 350 billion, like taking candy from a baby. That's what happened. And they've spent USD 100 billion. What a difference that is. And we have an ocean separating us, and they don't. But we're getting along very well with them and lots of good things are happening," he said.

"Biden has authorised more money in this fight than Europe has spent by billions and billions of dollars. It's hard to believe that they wouldn't have stopped it and said at some point. Come on, let's equalise. You've got to be equal to us."

That didn't happen," he said. A day before Zelenskyy wrote to Trump about Ukraine being ready to come to the negotiating table, the US President had temporarily suspended, with immediate effect, the delivery of all American military aid to Ukraine.

A report in The New York Times had quoted a senior administration official as saying that Trump had temporarily suspended the delivery of all US military aid to Ukraine and that the order takes effect immediately, affecting "more than USD 1 billion in arms and ammunition in the pipeline and on order."

This setback for Ukraine had come just days after Trump and Vice President JD Vance had a heated verbal exchange in the Oval Office with Zelenskyy, who was visiting the White House last Friday, and the two countries were all set to sign a rare mineral deal. But talks between Trump and Zelenskyy unravelled in a stunning exchange that played out in front of the global media.

Vance told the Ukrainian leader, "I think it's disrespectful for you to come to the Oval Office to try to litigate this in front of the American media... you should be thanking the president for trying to bring you into this conference."

As the conversation grew heated, Trump said to Zelenskyy "You're gambling with the lives of millions of people. You're gambling with World War Three. You're gambling with World War Three, and what you're doing is very disrespectful to the country, this country that's backed you far more than a lot of people say they should." Trump and Vance also criticised Zelenskyy for not being grateful enough for the support that the US had given so far to Ukraine in its war with Russia.

# Island is ours, says Greenland PM in defiance of message from Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NUUK (GREENLAND)

Greenland's prime minister declared on Wednesday that "Greenland is ours" and cannot be taken or bought in defiance of a message from US President Donald Trump, who said his administration supported the Arctic island's right of self-determination — but added that the United States will acquire the territory "one way or another."

Greenlandic Prime Minister Múte Bourup Egede said the island's citizens are not American nor Danish because they are Greenlandic. The United States needs to understand that, he wrote in a post in Greenlandic and Danish on Facebook Wednesday.

The future of Greenland will be decided by its people, he wrote.

His post came hours after Trump made a direct appeal to Greenlanders in a speech to Congress on Tuesday, a week before islanders head to the polls for parliamentary elections.

"We strongly support your right to determine your own future, and if you choose, we welcome you into the United States of America," Trump said. "We will keep you safe. We will make you rich. And together we will take Greenland to heights like you have never thought possible before," he added.

But Trump also said his administration was "working with everybody involved to try to get it," referring to his wishes to acquire Greenland

from Denmark, a longtime US ally.

"We need it really for international world security. And I think we're going to get it. One way or the other, we're going to get it," Trump said. Many in Greenland, a vast and mineral-rich island that is a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark, are worried and offended by Trump's threats to seize control of homeland.

Asked about Trump's comments, Denmark's foreign minister said Wednesday he did not think Greenlanders wanted to separate from Denmark in order to instead become "an integrated part of America."

Lars Lokke Rasmussen sought to strike an optimistic tone, saying he believed that Trump's reference to respecting Greenlanders' right to self-determination was "the most important part of that speech."

"I'm very optimistic about what will be a Greenlandic decision about this. They want to loosen their ties to Denmark, we're working on that, to have a more equal relationship," the minister said during a trip to Finland.

Lokke added that it was important that next week's parliamentary elections are free and fair "without any kind of international intervention". Greenlanders will head to the polls Tuesday. Trump's recent comments about taking over the island have ignited unprecedented interest in full independence from Denmark, which has become a key issue during campaign season.

# Gaza ceasefire deal looks doomed

THE CONVERSATION ■ DUBLIN

When Israel signed a ceasefire deal with Hamas in Gaza on January 15, the agreement was structured in three phases.

Phase one, a six-week period in which Hamas would release hostages in return for Israel releasing Palestinians detained in its jails, ended on March 1. The shaky deal has held for the full six weeks — just. At one point Hamas threatened to halt the exchange of hostages when it said Israel was breaching the terms of the deal.

The Netanyahu government responded — with US backing — by threatening to end the ceasefire in mid-February, saying that Hamas was not living up to its side of the deal.

The hostage releases have continued, although Israelis have been shocked and angered at the condition of some of the hostages after 17 months in captivity. Hamas has also taken advantage of the world's gaze

during hostage releases to stage large parades of its fully armed fighters. On March 1, as stage one of the deal was due to end, Benjamin Netanyahu ordered a full blockade of humanitarian aid entering Gaza. Middle East expert, Scott Lucas, answered our questions as to what is happening and how this situation may play out.

**Why has Israel decided to block humanitarian aid to Gaza?** The Netanyahu government's blocking of humanitarian aid to Gaza's population is part of a scheme to avoid a phase two of the ceasefire, while putting pressure on Hamas to extend phase one. That would allow the Israeli government to pursue the return of the remaining 59 hostages, alive or dead, held by Hamas while avoiding the requirements of phase two — notably the withdrawal of the Israeli military from Gaza and the restoration of a Palestinian government in Gaza.

Of course, those who will pay

the cost are more than 2.2 million Gazans, around 90 per cent of whom have been displaced amid 17 months of mass killing. But Israel's leaders are counting on that causing little concern, or at least significant action, by the international community.

**Wasn't the ceasefire deal dictated by a timetable?** Phase one of the agreement only stipulated that discussions for a phase two to begin within 14 days of implementation, which would have been about the start of February.

But the Netanyahu government reportedly sent messages to Qatar without the authority to discuss phase two, only to ensure that hostage releases continued.

The limit of its cooperation has been sending representatives to Egypt and conferring with Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, with current discussions suggesting little prospect of agreeing phase two.

# Demonstrators across 50 states unify a disparate opposition to Trump, his agenda

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ ATLANTA

As Donald Trump prepared Tuesday to address a joint session of Congress, protest groups gathered at parks, statehouses and other public grounds across the country to assail his presidency as dangerous and un-American.

The rallies and marches — set in motion by the fledgling 50501 Movement, a volunteer-driven group organised in the weeks after Trump's inauguration — mark the latest attempt at national resistance to the hardened support of Trump's "Make America Great Again" base and the success it has had in reshaping the Republican Party in the president's populist image.

Yet some early scenes Tuesday vividly demonstrated the difficulty Democrats, progressives and everyday citizens face in marshalling a tangible response to Trump and the swift, sweeping actions of his second administration. Protesters have so many things to push back against — from tariffs to Trump's reset on the war in Ukraine to the aggressive and sometimes legally dubious actions of the Department of Government Efficiency and its leader, billionaire Elon Musk, that it's hard to know what to focus on.

"There are so many things to fight, but I hope by being here we are starting some conversations," said Sara Grummer-Strawn, who held a sign declaring "So Much Wrong, So Little

Space," followed by a small-print litany of topics from Ukraine and tariffs to potential education cuts to the denial of climate and vaccine science.

Around her in Atlanta were hundreds of people marching and chanting about a range of Trump initiatives. There were Palestinian flags and Ukrainian flags, along with signs bemoaning Trump ending military aid to Ukraine as it fights off the invading Russian troops of Vladimir Putin.

Trump was called a fascist, a "Russian asset," "Putin's Puppet" and "Wannabe King," among other, more profane monikers. One signed implored "Punch Nazis," reflecting an increasingly common effort to compare Trump's presidency to Nazi Germany. Musk was a frequent

target of mockery and ire. But there were also appeals for transgender rights, abortion rights and diversity. One understated sign appealed simply, "Save Our Parks." Events were scheduled throughout the day in all 50 states, including later gatherings on the West Coast and in Hawaii.

In Austin, Texas, those gathered at the statehouse leaned in to support Ukraine. Pops of yellow — a nod to the colors of Ukraine's national flag — dotted the crowd as protesters affixed sunflowers to their hair, hats and clothing. The Texas crowd, which numbered in the hundreds, eventually made its way through downtown, chanting, "Hey hey, ho ho, Donald Trump has got to go."

"I think protests can be impact-

ful," said Carol Goodwin, an Austin resident active in the local advocacy scene. "I think these smaller protests are valuable for the people who come to express their frustrations, and I think this movement will grow over time."

For some participants, Tuesday recalled 50501's first day of national action on February 5 — or the many women's marches in 2017, at the outset of Trump's first term. But for many others, it was a new step in their engagement.

Goodwin said she was compelled to come out after the Oval Office exchange between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week. She also cited Trump's tariffs against Canada and Mexico.

# French PM flays US for pause in aid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ PARIS

France's prime minister decried the US pause on providing military aid to Ukraine as "unbearable" on Tuesday, describing it as tantamount to abandoning Ukrainians and allowing for a possible victory by Russia.

"The word suspension' fools no one," Prime Minister François Bayrou said, addressing French senators and mounting what was his second sharp criticism of the administration of US President Donald Trump in as many days. "The suspension in war of assistance to an aggressed country signifies that the aggressed country is being abandoned and that one accepts — or hopes — that its aggressor wins," he said. "It's obviously unbearable," Bayrou said. The French premier, a close ally of President Emmanuel Macron, also argued against strong pressure that the White House is exerting on Ukraine to quickly negotiate an end to the fighting. Bayrou said that Ukraine needs to keep fighting for its very survival.

# Pak mourns death of 18 in suicide bombings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ PESHAWAR

A city in northwestern Pakistan held funeral prayers and observed a day of mourning on Wednesday, after a twin suicide bombing targeted a military base there the evening before and killed 18 people, including five soldiers.

A militant group linked with the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the bombing in Bannu on Tuesday evening, which also left 42 wounded, some of them critically. It was the latest in a spate of violence, including suicide bombings, that has hit the country in recent days.

The attack unfolded with two suicide bombers first blowing themselves up to breach the wall surrounding the base. Most of the local residents were breaking their daylong fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan or praying at a nearby mosque. The powerful blasts tore through walls and ripped off roofs and also severely damaged the mosque. After the explosions, other attackers stormed the compound and set off a firefight with

the troops.

A statement from the army's media department on Wednesday said five soldiers and 16 militants were killed. It said the suicide bombers "rammed two explosive-laden vehicles into the perimeter wall" at the base.

Gunshots could still be heard early Wednesday as security forces combed through the area, looking to clear it of any militants involved in the attack. At the scene of the bombings, a mechanical digger was clearing away rubble where homes used to stand, and debris-covered prayer mats lay crumpled on the mosque floor.

A day of mourning was being observed, said Bannu community elder Alam Khan, and joint funeral prayers were held later in the day for the victims at a sports complex in the area. "All education institutions are closed," Khan said. "Most shops are also shut. Rescue workers have completed their operation by recovering the bodies of three deceased worshippers who were trapped under the collapsed roof of the mosque."

# Kremlin says Ukrainian law bans Zelenskyy from talks with Putin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ MOSCOW

A Ukrainian decree from 2022 ruling out negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin raises the question of who could sit at the table in potential peace talks aimed at ending their three-year war, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy "is still legally prohibited from negotiating with the Russian side," Peskov noted during his daily conference call with reporters. He said it was "positive" that Zelenskyy expressed readiness

Tuesday to negotiate peace with Russia as soon as possible. "But the details have not changed yet," Peskov added, apparently referring to the Ukrainian decree.

Neither Ukrainian nor Western officials have recently mentioned the September 2022 presidential decree, signed seven months after Russia's cross-border invasion, in the context of US President Donald Trump's efforts to stop the fighting.

The Trump administration on Monday suspended its crucial military aid to Ukraine as the United States sought to pressure Zelenskyy into negotiating

an end to the war. It wasn't immediately clear whether the support would resume after Zelenskyy's seeming effort to placate Trump.

Ukrainian forces are toiling to slow advances by the bigger Russian army along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, especially in the eastern Donetsk region. The Russian onslaught, which has been costly for its troops, hasn't yet brought a strategically significant breakthrough for the Kremlin. The war of attrition has killed tens of thousands of soldiers and more than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians.

Zelenskyy, French President

Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer could travel together to Washington, the French government spokesperson said Wednesday.

"It is envisaged that President Macron could eventually travel again to Washington with President Zelenskyy and his British counterpart," spokesperson Sophie Primas told reporters. She did not elaborate.

Macron was due to give a televised address to the nation later Wednesday about what he called the "great uncertainty" in global affairs.

The three leaders travelled sep-

arately to Washington last week for meetings with Trump.

In the early months of the war, Zelenskyy repeatedly called for a personal meeting with Putin but was rebuffed. After the Kremlin's decision in September 2022 to illegally annex four regions of Ukraine — Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia — Zelenskyy enacted a decree declaring that holding negotiations with Putin had become impossible.

The decree enacted a decision by Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council to bolster Ukrainian defences and seek more weapons from the country's Western allies.

# AI pioneers who channeled 'hedonistic' machines awarded

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ WASHINGTON

Teaching machines in the way that animal trainers mold the behaviour of dogs or horses has been an important method for developing artificial intelligence and one that was recognised Wednesday with the top computer science award.

Two pioneers in the field of reinforcement learning, Andrew Barto and Richard Sutton, are the winners of this year's A M Turing Award, the tech world's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

Research that Barto, 76, and Sutton, 67, began in the late 1970s paved the way for some of the past decade's AI breakthroughs. At the heart of their work was channeling so-called "hedonistic" machines that could continuously adapt their behaviour in response to positive signals.

Reinforcement learning is what led a Google computer programme to beat the world's best human players of the ancient Chinese board game Go in 2016 and 2017. It's also been a key technique in improving popular AI tools like ChatGPT, optimising financial trading and helping a robotic hand solve a Rubik's Cube. But Barto said the field was "not fashionable" when he and his doctoral student, Sutton, began crafting their theories and algorithms

at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. "We were kind of in the wilderness," Barto said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Which is why it's so gratifying to receive this award, to see this becoming more recognised as something relevant and interesting. In the early days, it was not."

Google sponsors the annual USD 1 million prize, which was announced Wednesday by the Association for Computing Machinery.

Barto, now retired from the University of Massachusetts, and Sutton, a longtime professor at Canada's University of Alberta, aren't the first AI pioneers to win the award named after British mathematician, codebreaker and early AI thinker Alan Turing. But their research has directly sought to answer Turing's 1947 call for a machine that "can learn from experience" — which Sutton describes as "arguably the essential idea of reinforcement learning."

In particular, they borrowed from ideas in psychology and neuroscience about the way that pleasure-seeking neurons respond to rewards or punishment. In one landmark paper published in the early 1980s, Barto and Sutton set their new approach on a specific task in a simulated world: balance a pole on a moving cart to keep it from falling. The two computer scientists later co-authored a widely used text-



book on reinforcement learning.

"The tools they developed remain a central pillar of the AI boom and have rendered major advances, attracted legions of young researchers, and driven billions of dollars in investments," said Google's chief scientist Jeff Dean in a written statement.

In a joint interview with the AP, Barto and Sutton didn't always agree on how to evaluate the risks of AI agents that are constantly

seeking to improve themselves. They also distinguished their work from the branch of generative AI technology that is currently in fashion — the large language models behind chatbots made by OpenAI, Google and other tech giants that mimic human writing and other media. "The big choice is, do you try to learn from people's data, or do you try to learn from an (AI) agent's own life and its own experience?" Sutton said.

Sutton has dismissed what he describes as overblown concerns about AI's threat to humanity, while Barto disagreed and said "You have to be cognizant of potential unexpected consequences."

Barto, retired for 14 years, describes himself as a Luddite, while Sutton is embracing a future he expects to have beings of greater intelligence than current humans — an idea sometimes known as post-humanism.

"People are machines. They're amazing, wonderful machines," but they are not the "end product" and could work better, Sutton said.

"It's intrinsically a part of the AI enterprise," Sutton said. "We're trying to understand ourselves and, of course, to make things that can work even better. Maybe to become such things."

# NASA's two stuck astronauts closing in on their return

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ CAPE CANAVERAL

NASA's two stuck astronauts are just a few weeks away from finally returning to Earth after nine months in space.

Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams have to wait until their replacements arrive at the International Space Station next week before they can check out later this month.

They'll be joined on their SpaceX ride home by two astronauts who launched by themselves in September alongside two empty seats.

During a news conference Tuesday, Wilmore said that while politics is part of life, it did not play into his and Williams' return, moved up a couple weeks thanks to a change in SpaceX capsules. President Donald Trump and SpaceX's Elon Musk said at the end of January that they wanted

to accelerate the astronauts' return, blaming the previous administration.

But Williams, in response to a question, did take issue with Musk's recent call to dump the space station in two years, rather than waiting until NASA's projected deorbit in 2031. She noted all the scientific research being performed at the orbiting lab.

"This place is ticking. It's just really amazing, so I would say we're actually in our prime right now," said Williams, a three-time space station resident. "I would think that right now is probably not the right time to say quit, call it quits." Williams said she can't wait to be reunited with her Labrador retrievers. The hardest part about the unexpected extended stay, she added, was the wait by their families back home.



ISIS-K terrorist charged for role in 2021 Kabul airport bombing, Trump thanks Pak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW YORK/WASHINGTON

An ISIS-K terrorist has been charged with conspiring to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organisation resulting in death and faces life in prison for his role in the 2021 Kabul airport bombing, with President Donald Trump thanking Pakistan for help in his arrest.

apprehended and is being brought to the country to face justice. Trump did not name Sharifullah and thanked the Pakistan government for "helping arrest this monster".

"He admitted to supporting and conducting activities on behalf of ISIS-K in support of multiple lethal attacks, including the attack on Embassy Guards in Kabul, Afghanistan on June 20, 2016 and the attack at the Crocus City Hall, a popular concert venue complex near Moscow, Russia on March 22, 2024 that killed approximately 130 people and injured numerous others.

FBI, DOJ Hq among 44 federal buildings listed for potential sale

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW YORK

The Trump administration on Tuesday published a list of more than 400 federal properties it says it could close or sell, including the FBI headquarters and the main Department of Justice building, after deeming them "not core to government operations."

building, where President Donald Trump once ran a hotel, and the American Red Cross headquarters. The headquarters of the Department of Labor and the Department of Housing and Urban Development are listed as well.

dollars are no longer spent on vacant or underutilised federal space," it said, and "helps eliminate costly maintenance and allows us to reinvest in high-quality work environments that support agency missions."

chopping block house agencies that Trump has long criticized and targeted, notably the FBI and Justice Department. The FBI and HUD headquarters are also prime examples of the brutalist architectural style that Trump has tried for years to eliminate, preferring traditional, neo-classical architecture instead.

according to the employee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. Musk's Department of Government Efficiency has listed scores of cancelled office leases on DOGE's official website, raising questions around the country about what will happen to services provided from those offices.

Suspect in German car-ramping case gives no info on motive

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MANNHEIM (GERMANY)

The suspect in a car-ramping in the German city of Mannheim that killed two people gave no information about his motive Tuesday as he appeared before a judge who ordered him held pending a possible indictment, investigators said.

information in his appearance before a judge, "so that his motive for the act is still unclear." A search of his apartment in nearby Ludwigshafen also turned up no clues as to a motive.

years ago and was convicted for drunken driving. He had also been investigated for a hate speech offense on Facebook in 2018, for which he was fined, prosecutors said without giving further details.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Smt. Neela Devi W/o Sh. Vijay Kumar is the owner of Plot of area measuring 70 Sq. Yds., Out of Khet no. 1199m, & 120m, & 121m, & 122m, Situated at Village Shalpur, Govardhan Khadar Pargana Dabri Tehsil & Distt Gautam Budh Nagar, by virtue of Sale Deed dated 9/11/2023, Reg. No. 22108, executed by Sh. Subhash Chand, same to be finance by SMFG India Credit Company Limited (Formerly Fullerton India Credit Company Limited).

PUBLIC NOTICE: I, Sharun Deep S/o Sh. Ragbir Singh R/o E-156, Naraina Vihar, Delhi-110028, Owner Of Plot No. 156, Block-E, Naraina Vihar, New Delhi-110028, vide DDA File No. F9/201/194-195, the original document, being Deed of Possession Letter, Possession Slip, D Form And Occupancy Certificate of the above said property have been lost or misplaced by us and not traceable despite of my best efforts.

PUBLIC NOTICE: This is to inform to all concern that Smt. Lata Gupta alias Pushpa Lata Gupta alias Pushpata Gupta W/o Late Shri Jagdish Prasad Gupta alias Sh. J.P. Gupta R/o B-2/11, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi-110029 who is the original allottee/owner of Residential Plot No. A-04, Sector-56, Noida (U.P.) and who expired on 28/02/2025.

NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER: No. SSA-19016/4/2024-Media-SSA/ Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites tender through e-tendering process for supply of School Band Uniform from authorized dealer or manufacturer of uniforms/garments.

Wreckage of fighter jet, bodies of pilots found in Philippines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA Manila

Philippine military officials said on Tuesday that rescuers have found the wreckage of a missing fighter jet and the bodies of its two pilots in a mountainous region of a southern province where they were deployed to fight communist rebels.

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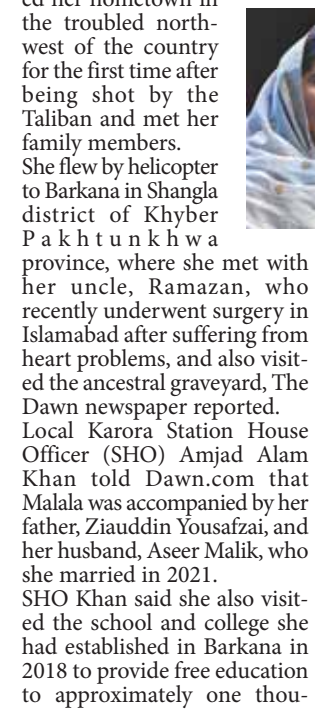
Malala visits hometown for first time after being shot

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's first Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai on Wednesday visited her hometown in the troubled north-west of the country for the first time after being shot by the Taliban and met her family members.

sand girls in the district, which previously had no functional government college for girls. "Malala met students, inspected classes and spoke to students while urging them to study and make their future brighter," the SHO said, adding that the Malala Fund would ensure a high standard of education at the college free of charge.

Malala also visited the home of her maternal family. Also present was education activist Shahzad Roy, who runs the Shingla Girls School and College under Zindagi Trust. He briefed her about the facilities provided by the college.



Local Karora Station House Officer (SHO) Amjad Alam Khan told Dawn.com that Malala was accompanied by her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, and her husband, Aseer Malik, who she married in 2021. SHO Khan said she also visited the school and college she had established in Barkana in 2018 to provide free education to approximately one thou-

sand girls in the district, which previously had no functional government college for girls. "Malala met students, inspected classes and spoke to students while urging them to study and make their future brighter," the SHO said, adding that the Malala Fund would ensure a high standard of education at the college free of charge.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS: CHANGE OF NAME: I, SANJAY JAIN S/o Shripal Chand Jain R/o V-500/36B, Street No.-18, Vijay Park, Maujpur Delhi-110053 have changed my name to SANJAY KUMAR JAIN for all future purposes.

LOST & FOUND: I, Kavita Sisodiya, W/o Shri Bharat Singh, R/O. House Number B-3, Ramgarh, Azadpur, Delhi -110033. I, have changed my name to Kavita for all purposes.

LOST & FOUND: I, Sanjay Vasant Kharde S/o Sh. Vasant Ganpat Rao Kharde has lost original Allotment Letter, Possession Letter and Mutual Exchange Letter dt. 13.06.1991 of Flat No.105, Tower No.12, Supreme CGHS Ltd. (Supreme Enclave), Plot No.14, Mayur Vihar Phase-I, Delhi, finder please contact: 9811130598

LOST & FOUND: I, Iqbal Khan s/o Nawab Husain 1012, Gali Rajan, Farash Khana, Delhi-110006, I, have lost my partition Deed vide reg. No 4086, book No 1, Vol No. 11095, Pages 137 to 148, LR No: 2638703/2025, Mobile No. 9212373248.

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PUBLIC NOTICE: This is to inform to all concern that Smt. Lata Gupta alias Pushpa Lata Gupta alias Pushpata Gupta W/o Late Shri Jagdish Prasad Gupta alias Sh. J.P. Gupta R/o B-2/11, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi-110029 who is the original allottee/owner of Residential Plot No. A-04, Sector-56, Noida (U.P.) and who expired on 28/02/2025.

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HIMALAYA FOOD INTERNATIONAL LIMITED (Formerly Known as Himalaya International Limited) Regd. Office: 118, 1st Floor, 12 Gagandep Building, Rajendra Place, New Delhi-110008. Tel. +91 11 45108609, Fax: +91 1704 225178. E-mail id: cs@himalayainternational.com | website: www.himalayainternational.com

NOTICE OF POSTAL BALLOT: NOTICE is hereby given to the members of Himalaya Food International Limited (the "Company") pursuant to the provisions of Sections 108, 110 and other applicable provisions, if any, of the Companies Act, 2013 (the "Act"), including any statutory modification(s), clarification(s) or re-enactment(s) thereof for the time being in force, read with Rules 20 and 22 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 (the "Management Rules") as amended, Secretarial Standard-2 on General Meetings (the "SS-2"), Regulation 44 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 (the "SEBI Listing Regulations") read with General Circular no. 14/2020 dated April 8, 2020 and 17/2020 dated April 13, 2020, 22/2020 dated June 15, 2020, 33/2020 dated September 28, 2020, 39/2020 dated December 31, 2020 read with other relevant circulars, including General Circular No. 10/2021 dated June 23, 2021, General Circular no.20/2021 dated December 8, 2021 and General Circular no.3/2022 dated May 5, 2022 and General Circular No. 11/2022 dated December 28, 2022 issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic (hereinafter collectively referred to as "MCA Circulars") and other applicable laws, rules, circulars, regulations and notifications issued thereunder (including any statutory modification or re-enactment thereof, for the time being in force), the Company has dispatched the Postal Ballot notice on March 04, 2025 through electronic mode (e-mail) only to those shareholders whose names are recorded in the Register of members and/or Register of beneficial owners maintained by the Depositories as on February 28, 2025 for seeking approval of the shareholders of the Company by way of Postal Ballot through electronic means ("e-voting") only, to pass the following resolutions as special resolutions:

Table with 2 columns: S.No., Resolution. 1. Appointment of Mr. Bhushan Kumar Garg (DIN: 02393899) as an Independent Director of the Company

Members are informed that: (a) In compliance with the applicable provisions of the Act & MCA Circulars, the Company has sent notice along with procedure & instructions for e-voting through electronic mode only, to those members whose names appear in the Register of Members or Register of Beneficial Owners maintained by the Depositories as on Friday, February 28, 2025 ("cut-off date") and voting rights of the members are reckoned as on that day. Accordingly, physical copy of the Postal Ballot Notice along with Postal Ballot Forms and pre-paid business envelope is not being dispatched to the shareholders for this Postal Ballot exercise. Members are requested to refer e-voting instructions outlined in the notice to cast their vote on the resolutions proposed for their approval. Members are requested to give their assent/dissent to the proposed resolutions through e-voting facility only.

# Cabinet approves changes to LHDC to include generic veterinary medicines

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved changes to the ₹3,880 Crore Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme (LHDC) to include the distribution of high-quality and affordable generic veterinary medicines to farmers. The total budget provided for the Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme (LHDCP) was ₹3,880 Crore for 2024-25 and 2025-26. A decision related to livestock health has been taken in the Cabinet. High-quality medicines will be provided under the Pashu Aushadhi component of the scheme, I and B Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said after the Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav briefs on union cabinet decisions PTI

Pashu Aushadhi is the new component added to the LHDCP scheme, an official statement said. The minister said Pashu Aushadhi would be similar to Jan Aushadhi Yojana. The generic veterinary medicines will be distributed through

PM Kisan Samridhi Kendras and Cooperatives. Vaishnav said traditional knowledge of veterinary medicines will also be revived and documented as part of the scheme. The Cabinet approved a provision of ₹75 Crore from

the total budget allocation for supplying good quality and affordable generic veterinary medicine and an incentive for sale of medicines under Pashu Aushadhi component. The scheme has three components — National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP), Livestock Health and Disease Control (LH and DC) and Pashu Aushadhi. Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme focuses on the prevention of diseases like Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Brucellosis, Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF), Lumpy Skin Disease, etc, through immunisation. The scheme also supports door-step delivery of livestock health care and improving the availability of generic veterinary medicine. The minister stated that nine

states are ready to be declared as FMD-free zones. These states include: Punjab, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat and Maharashtra. India is the world's largest milk producer. Being FMD-free and having a systematic and well-documented vaccination programme will help in the export of milk and milk products in a significant way and improve farmers' income, he added. The LHDCP will help in the prevention and control of livestock diseases through vaccination, surveillance and upgradation of healthcare facilities. Also, the scheme will improve productivity, generate employment, encourage entrepreneurship in rural areas and prevent economic losses of farmers due to disease burden.

# Ad break: Pepsi pokes Coke with 'anytime' over 'half time'

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■**  
NEW DELHI

The never-ending hilarious ad war between beverage majors Coca-Cola and PepsiCo has taken off this season with PepsiCo's 'anytime' jibe at its bigger rival Coca-Cola's 'half time' campaign. Replying to arch rival Coca-Cola's 'half time' campaign for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, PepsiCo came out with a full-page newspaper advertisement flipping the script with 'anytime' campaign with a direct hit on the cola major trying to grab the consumers' eyeball. In its 'half time' campaign rolled out a month back across TV and digital platforms, the market leader sought to promote the idea of refreshing during pause times with a chilled soft drink. However, PepsiCo with its witty 'anytime' tag line kicked off the summer campaign with a message that why wait for a

particular moment when every moment is better with a Pepsi in hand. Pepsi in its latest ad has listed life's best moments - first time, thirst time, day time, play time, class time, pass time, crunch time, lunch time, chill time, one more time, dinner time, winner time, down time, town time, we time, me time - to enjoy the drink. It has fondly brought back the days of humour and cheekiness in creative marketing. This also attracted comments on the social media platforms, where people fondly remembered the 1996 ad war, when Pepsi had launched its ad campaign titled 'Nothing Official About It'. PepsiCo had lost the official beverage sponsorship rights to Coca-Cola in the 1996 Cricket World Cup, which was jointly hosted by India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Following that, PepsiCo came with the famous 'nothing official about it' campaign

starring cricket icons Sachin Tendulkar, Vinod Kambli, and Mohammed Azharuddin. "For those who remember, 'Nothing Official About It' wasn't just a campaign - it was a cultural moment. A take from the brand that turned into an obsession amongst the audience, proving that sometimes, not trying too hard is exactly the winning move. And now, decades later, Pepsi seems to be channelling that same effortless confidence," said PepsiCo in a statement. When asked, Rediffusion Chairman Sandeep Goyal said: "Now they joust but they don't go for knock-outs." "Colas were once the most exciting and engaging category in FMCG. Over the years, many more categories have grabbed consumer attention and have got consumers engaged and involved. So colas are not centre stage any longer to the same extent as maybe half a century ago," he said.

# BSES launches drone pilot training for Army veterans



Pioneer Photo

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

In a landmark initiative reflecting its unwavering commitment to the welfare of India's armed forces personnel, BSES, in collaboration with the Army Welfare Placement Office (AWPO) has launched a transformative drone pilot training and placement program. This pioneering initiative is designed to empower ex-servicemen, those retiring within six months and Veer Naaris with cutting-edge skills, opening doors to rewarding careers in the rapidly expanding drone sector.

Recognising the immense potential of this high-growth industry and the unique challenges faced by veterans transitioning to civilian life, this program aims to bridge the gap between military service and civilian employment through comprehensive, industry-specific training and robust placement support. The drone pilot training and placement program is a forward-looking initiative designed to equip 250 veterans and 50 Veer Naaris over a three-year period with specialised drone operation skills. This program opens pathways to careers in agriculture, infrastructure

development, security, logistics, and more within the burgeoning drone industry. Being conducted in small, focused batches of around 20 participants, the program offers an intensive 14-day curriculum covering both theoretical knowledge and hands-on practical experience. Trainees will gain expertise in flight operations, payload management, data analysis, and regulatory compliance, using advanced drone models such as White Hawk, Spidex, Nakshay, and Bhiman. Certified instructors from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) will deliver the training, culminating in the awarding of the mandatory Remote Pilot Certificate (RPC) for commercial drone operations in India. Moreover, entrepreneurship support is embedded within the program, offering specialized sessions on setting up drone-based businesses, regulatory compliance, and business development. Participants will benefit from offline internships, enhancing real-world readiness, with job opportunities. The initiative is being coordinated by NGO partner 'Sahayog care for You'.

# IACC hosts conference on women empowerment

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) successfully hosted a thought-provoking conference on Women Empowerment in New Delhi under the theme "Celebrating Womanhood: Empower, Educate, Elevate." The event brought together distinguished leaders and advocates, emphasising the necessity of empowering women to drive societal progress. While speaking at the conference Mridula Pradhan, Chairperson of Vikas Foundation Trust, emphasised the dignity and respect of women, quoting a Sanskrit shloka: "Where women are respected, divine blessings follow." She advocated for true gender equality, urging that the slogan 'Beti-Beta Ek Saman' must be implemented in all spheres of life. Pradhan also stressed the importance of protecting women's rights, particularly reproductive rights. Former Union Minister Smriti Irani addressed the gathering, highlighting the strength of Indian women in overcoming challenges, particularly during the pandemic. She noted that the Narendra Modi



Pioneer Photo

government has taken significant steps toward financial inclusion for women by providing bank accounts and loans, which women have successfully leveraged, leading to low non-performing assets. However, she pointed out that "the digital world remains biased against women, and addressing this challenge is crucial." Dr Mallika Nadda, Chairperson of Special Olympics Bharat, reaffirmed that "Women's rights are non-negotiable, and their dignity must be protected at all costs." She emphasised the additional challenges faced by physically

challenged women and called for prioritising their inclusion and support. Dr Upasana Arora, Conference Chair, Executive Council Member of IACC, and Managing Director of Yashoda Super Specialty Hospitals, underscored the pivotal role of women in societal transformation. She stated, "Empowerment of women is essential for social upliftment. Women who are empowered must extend support to those who are not, creating opportunities for excellence. When women are empowered, society as a whole is empowered." Dr Atul Chauhan, Regional

President of IACC and Chancellor of Amity University, in his inaugural address, called upon all attendees to actively participate in the mission of women's empowerment, echoing the sentiment that "Women have to be empowered to dream." Dr Lalit Bhasin, Past National President of IACC, provided a compelling perspective, asserting that Indian women have always been powerful. "When we say 'empower women,' we imply that someone else has to do it. However, Indian women have historically shaped societies with their resilience and determination," he remarked. The conference culminated in an awards ceremony celebrating exceptional women leaders who have made remarkable contributions across various sectors: The 'Women Leader of the Year' award was bagged by Dr Amit Chauhan, chairperson, Amity Group of Schools, while the 'Excellence in Educational Leadership' award was given to Charu Modi, director, Godfrey Phillips India Limited. The 'Leadership in Gender Equality and Advocacy' award was given to Nina Gupta, managing partner, Bhasin and Co Advocates.

# Centre imposes import curbs on platinum alloy

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■**  
NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday imposed import curbs on platinum alloy with less than 99 per cent purity to curb illicit imports of this precious metal blended with significant amounts of gold. Importers of such platinum alloys are now required to obtain import authorisation from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) for the inbound shipments. The decision follows cases where this alloy blended with significant amounts of gold was imported to exploit the tariff differential between gold and platinum. "Import policy of platinum is revised from free to restricted except for platinum alloy of 99 per cent or more purity by weight of platinum," the DGFT said in a notification. To ensure a smooth supply of platinum for jewellery manufacturing and industrial use, the government allows the unrestricted import of platinum alloy with 99 per cent or higher purity of platinum.

# CAG K Sanjay Murthy meets 16th Finance Commission in Bhopal

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), K Sanjay Murthy, met with the 16th Finance Commission chaired by Dr Arvind Panagariya on Wednesday in Bhopal. According to a release issued by the CAG, the high-level consultation formed a critical part of the Commission's ongoing assessment of the financial landscape of the Centre and states. The deliberations mainly focused on three key areas: Union and State Finances, Local Bodies, and Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs), among others. The Union, the states, local bodies and the PSEs are under the audit of the CAG. In addition, the CAG also maintains the accounts of the states. The CAG shared various audit findings for Union and states in various sectors, the fiscal challenges and stress points, including the gap between expenditure and non-debt receipts for the Union and states combined. The key areas of concern include a decline in the state own tax revenue (SOTR) buoyancy of the States and varying levels of SOTR and non-tax revenue of the States, which underscore the need for more robust revenue collection mechanisms. The CAG drew attention to the need for regular reporting of the Off Budget Borrowings, meeting the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) targets and the taking into account post audit liabilities computed by the CAG in his reports. This could be a crucial source of information for Finance Commission while examining the extent of fiscal consolidation for the Union

and the States. "The CAG's presentation drew attention to untapped revenue sources. Notably, areas such as stamp duty, registration fees, and state excise collections have been identified as having substantial potential for enhanced fiscal performance. Recommendations in this regard include regular updates to market value guidelines, improved classification of property types, and the adoption of modern technology-such as sensor-based systems and QR codes-to minimise revenue leakages and improve data accuracy," according to the release. In the realm of Goods and Services Tax (GST) administration, the CAG has also proposed several reforms aimed at widening the tax base and enhancing transparency. Suggested measures include the integration of unregistered goods and service providers into the GST framework via automated data collection and real-time information systems, along with improvised taxpayer verification processes. These initiatives are expected to not only streamline the tax collection process but also ensure more accurate apportionment of inter-state tax flows. The CAG gave a strong emphasis on the need to standardise accounting practices at all tiers of the government for transparent and ready availability of comparable fiscal information. The presentation called for the harmonisation of object heads of expenditure and adoption of a uniform six-tier classification system by state governments without deviations. It was also highlighted that, as an immediate measure, harmonisation of local bodies accounts with Central and state accounts may be attempted in top 100 cities. Such steps would facilitate the seamless

consolidation of fiscal data and strengthen transparency in public financial management, thereby empowering policymakers with clearer insights into both revenue and expenditure. An important highlight of the discussion was the endorsement of good practices, like that involving the establishment of a budget stabilisation Fund by jurisdictions with surplus revenues. "A key component of the meeting is centered on the financial management of local bodies. The CAG shared insights from performance audits across numerous urban local bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions, pointing out issues such as incomplete devolution of functions, heavy dependence on Central and State grants, and low levels of own-source revenue," it said. "In this regard, recommendations included integrating local body use of Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS) for onboarding the payment or fund transfer made by the states to the urban local bodies (ULB) and the rural local bodies (RLB) and streamlining accounting practices to ensure consistent and transparent financial reporting at the grassroots level. Need for development of specifically suited system for the processing of the transactions of the ULBs or RLBs and their accounts was suggested, which can be incentivised by the FC," it added. Additionally, the presentation addressed the lack of oversight of State Public Sector Enterprises in submission of their Annual Accounts, urging corrective measures to address persistent losses and inefficiencies, and recommending a close monitoring of disinvestment strategies.

# IRFC expands funding beyond Indian Railways



IRFC board of directors unveil Navratna status with CMD and CEO Manoj Kumar Dubey in center Pioneer Photo

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC), which earned Navratna status from the government, on Wednesday said that with this recognition, it can go beyond its present funding activities to the needs of the Indian railways to all other companies operating in the whole rail eco-system. Interacting with the media persons to update the future plans after being awarded the Navratna status, IRFC CMD and CEO Manoj Kumar Dubey said the company, which was funding to the Indian Railways, has now got wider legroom to finance all other companies and activities which come under the rail logistics eco-system. On March 3, 2025, the government approved the

upgradation of IRCTC and IRFC to Navratna Central Public Sector Enterprises. Dubey said that his company will have several edges as compared to his competitors when it comes to bidding for railway-linked projects because the IRFC maintains very low expenses, has access to cheap raw material (loan) and it wants a margin of over 40 paise, a margin it gets from the Railways currently. He informed that the firm has funded ₹5 Lakh Crore to the Indian Railways till date, however, the Railways hasn't taken any loan from it for the past two years. "As and when the railways require money, it has to come to us and that business is always assured to us. Apart from that, what we have embarked upon is anything back and forth linkage with the railways we wish to fund," Dubey said. "We have found that in our gamut of systems others are funding with a big margin of

200 and 250 basis points. Think over a scenario that I am funding with anything between 40 bips to 150 bips and the kind of yield it will give to my bottomline," he added. Dubey banked upon the company's zero NPA status. "Out of all the three government financial institutions — the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC), Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and IRFC - that can issue 54EC bonds (capital gain bonds), our nil NPA status makes us safest among all," he said. A statement from the company said that it has already secured funding for 20 BOBR (Bogie Open Bottom Rapid discharge railway wagon) rakes for NTPC worth ₹700 Crore and was recently declared the lowest bidder to finance a Rs 3190 Crore loan for PatratuVidyt Utpadan Nigam Limited (PVUNL), a subsidiary of NTPC. "Additionally, NTPC

Renewable Energy Limited (NTPC REL), a wholly owned subsidiary of NTPC Green Energy Limited (NTPC GEL), has accepted IRFC's bid for ₹7600 Crore for a Rupee Term Loan (RTL) against its Request for Proposal," the press note said. "IRFC is also actively exploring opportunities to fund rolling stock requirements for Indian Railways customers, container train operators, renewable energy needs of Indian Railways, Metro Rail Projects, port rail connectivity and PPP projects sanctioned by Indian Railways," it added. Dubey said that IRFC has played a key role in funding nearly 80 per cent of Indian Railways locos, coaches and wagons, including the Vande Bharat Express trains. At present, nearly 86 per cent of the company is owned by the Ministry of Railways and nearly 13 per cent by all diverse shareholders in the country as well as overseas, he added.

of where the data lives," said Arvind Nithrakashyap, chief technology officer and co-founder of Rubrik. "We are seamlessly integrating new technologies across the world's major cloud platforms, SaaS offerings, and on-premises so our customers can better detect compromised data, enhance the speed of identifying affected data, and accelerate the discovery of clean entry points," he added. "The timing is critical, as leading Indian enterprises accelerate their cloud adoption, they also see cyber-risk and realise the urgent need for cyber-resilience," said Ashish Gupta, managing director India and head of engineering, Rubrik India.

# Brewers association allege excise rules not uniform in Karnataka

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Pointing towards increasing amount of arbitrariness in beer regulations in Karnataka, the Brewers Association of India (BAI) has said the State Government while dealing with the applications of rounding off of the declared price (DP) was favouring some companies. The Karnataka government introduced the concept of rounding off of the DP (declared price) to nearest Rs 5 was introduced, while the application of one beer supplier, viz, M/s Som Breweries and Distilleries which applied with an upward price revision got approved without due documentary substantiation,

the plea of BAI members were put on hold, the BAI, the apex body of the beer industry, which represents India's largest beer makers such as the AB InBev, Carlsberg, and United Breweries (a Heineken company), said in its representation to the State government. "As a result, our member companies, which are the biggest investors and contributors to government revenues in the state, feel greatly aggrieved and discriminated against," said that letter and demanded the State government to ensure level playing field for all beer suppliers in Karnataka. BAI has demanded that applications of its members should also be

cleared with respect to rounding off in the DP where there is no consequent change in the MRP. Highlighting the biasness in implementation of excise rules, the BAI has stated that "this is against the ethos of fair competition and will do more harm than good in the long run for the industry, the government revenues, the consumers, local economy and investment in the state". According to BAI Director General Vinod Giri, "in recent times we have been witnessing increasing amount of arbitrariness in beer regulation in the state which is threatening the industry growth as is evident from the recent trends in beer sales in the state."

# Rubrik unveils new capabilities to enhance cyber resilience

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

In its ongoing commitment to deliver comprehensive cyber resiliency, Rubrik on Wednesday announced significant innovations designed to enhance protection for cloud, SaaS, and on-premises environments. The innovations aim to provide customers with even more ability to anticipate breaches, detect potential threats, and recover with speed and efficiency no matter where their data lives. "Cyber criminals will not stop innovating, and neither will we. Our utmost priority is the security, safety, and appropriate accessibility of our customer's data, regardless

# Real Madrid defeats Atletico 2-1 in Champions League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ MADRID

A superb goal from Brahim Diaz helped Real Madrid maintain its dominance of the Madrid derby in Europe's biggest stage with a 2-1 victory over bitter rival Atletico in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Tuesday. Atletico has been beaten by the record 15-time European champion in both Champions League final matchups and has won only three of 11 meetings with their city rivals in UEFA competitions. Also Tuesday, Arsenal made a massive step toward a quarterfinal spot with a 7-1 win at PSV Eindhoven. It was the biggest victory in an away match in the knockout stage of the Champions League, UEFA said.



— in the 2015 quarterfinals and 2017 semifinals. Playing at home at Santiago Bernabeu stadium, Real Madrid took the lead on its first chance through a great goal from Rodrygo. After being picked up down the flank, he cut inside the box, was too fast for defenders and beautifully curled the ball into the back of the net. "It stemmed from a nice ball from Fede Valverde," Rodrygo said. "He absolutely read my movement and put the ball in behind the man covering me. I made a little dribble inside and then smashed it off my left."

Atletico patiently waited for an opportunity. It came in the 32nd minute and Julian Alvarez seized it with a spectacular strike. The forward collected the ball down the left, cut inside the box and curled the ball past Thibaut Courtois for his seventh goal in the tournament this season. "I leave with the feeling that we competed well," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said. "We could have done more in terms of the goals we conceded. We must continue with this rhythm for the second leg, which will be tough and difficult, and in which we will have the support of our fans." Gunners romp to emphatic win

Arsenal, which returned to the Champions League after a six-year absence last season, got off a shaky start and Jurrien Timber scored against the run of the play with a header at the far post, just after PSV hit the woodwork. The London team never looked back after that and led 3-0 at the half-hour mark. Seventeen-year-old Ethan Nwaneri doubled the lead in the 21st after his teammates combined well in the area to set him up. Mikel Merino then made the most of the confusion in the box to make it 3-0 after PSV repeatedly failed to clear the ball.

A silly foul from Thomas Partey on Luuk de Jong in the box gave PSV some hope before halftime and Noa Lang converted. But PSV crumbled once back from the locker room. Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard scored twice, with Leandro Trossard and Riccardo Calafiori adding more luster to the win.

**Dortmund held**  
Last season's runner-up Borussia Dortmund is evenly matched with Lille ahead of the second leg after Hakon Arnar Haraldsson's goal salvaged a 1-1 draw for the French team.

**Aston Villa wins away**  
Aston Villa shook off its poor away form, and it was largely due to an own goal from a rival player. A turning point came in the 82nd minute when Club Brugge defender Brandon Mechele beat his own goalkeeper with the teams tied 1-1. Mechele slid to stop a cross from Morgan Rogers, only to deflect into the back of the net.

Before that, the Belgian side had looked solid, enjoyed most of the possession and created the best chances in the second half. Looking demoralized, the hosts then conceded a late penalty that was converted by substitute Marco Asensio.



# WPL: UP Warriorz to face Mumbai Indians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LUCKNOW

Time is running out for UP Warriorz, who face a must-win situation against Mumbai Indians in their Women's Premier League match here on Thursday. With their playoff hopes hanging by a thread, the Warriorz must bounce back from back-to-back defeats to stay in contention. It was a disappointing homecoming for the Warriorz, who were comprehensively beaten by Gujarat Giants at the Ekana Stadium in their previous fixture. The 81-run defeat not only pushed them to the bottom of the points table but also dented their net run rate. Now, with just a couple of games left, they must avoid a third consecutive defeat that could all but end their campaign.

The first-ever WPL match in Lucknow saw Beth Mooney producing a batting masterclass, guiding Gujarat Giants to 186/5, the third-highest total this season. On a pitch that played true and offered value for shots, the Warriorz's batting unit however failed miserably, raising serious concerns about their approach and execution. UP Warriorz have been struggling to settle on a stable batting order. Their latest experiment — pushing Georgia Vull to No. 3 — backfired, as they collapsed to 48/6 inside 10 overs, with only one batter from the top six reaching double digits. Despite the collective failure, Chinelle Henry stood tall yet again. The West Indian all-rounder's aggressive 14-ball 28 helped UPW limp past 100 before they were bowled out for 105. Henry, who has been their standout batter this season, has amassed 138 runs at an average of 34.50 and a staggering strike rate of 209-plus, highlighting her ability to score quickly even in difficult situations. Given the ongoing struggles at the top, UP Warriorz might consider restoring Vull to her preferred opening role — a position where she flourished in the Women's Big Bash League. Grace Harris, who has shown glimpses of form, will be crucial in the middle order. The Aussie's experience and power-hitting could provide the much-needed balance, especially in crunch moments. Additionally, skipper Deepti Sharma, who has been quiet with the bat since her 39-run knock against Gujarat, will need to step up and deliver a captain's innings. Unlike their struggling opponents, Mumbai Indians find themselves in a relatively better position. Placed third on the table with six points, they remain in contention to top the standings and secure a direct spot in the final. In the WPL format, the top-placed team qualifies directly for the final, while the second and third-placed teams battle in an Eliminator to determine the other finalist. With three matches remaining for them, the inaugural edition champions in 2023, MI, have a realistic chance of leapfrogging to the top, but they cannot afford another slipup, having lost to table-toppers Delhi Capitals in their previous outing, where their batting failed to click to be restricted to a modest 123/9. India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur looked promising but failed to convert her start, falling for 22 off 16 balls, while Nat Sciver-Brunt struggled for fluency, managing just 18 off 22 balls. The English all-rounder, however, remains a key figure in MI's campaign, having already scored 272 runs from five matches, including three fifties, at a strike rate of 147-plus. Incidentally, Sciver-Brunt had hammered an unbeaten 75 against UP Warriorz in the first leg, and her ability to anchor the innings while accelerating at will will make her a major threat once again.



# A Sharath announces retirement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ CHENNAI

Indian table tennis legend A Sharath Kamal will hang up his racket and the iconic bandana later this month, having stayed at the top of his game for more than 22 years and resisting the temptation of lasting another Olympic cycle at the ripe old age of 42. In his own words, life has come full circle for one of India's finest athletes who will say goodbye to professional table tennis in front of his friends and family in Chennai, where the WTT (World Table Tennis) Star Contender and his swansong will be staged from March 25 to 30. Sharath's contribution to the game goes beyond the staggering numbers, including seven gold medals at the Commonwealth Games, two path-breaking bronze medals at the Asian Games and five appearances at the Summer Olympics. Paris last year was easily the highlight for him as an Olympian, having received the honour of carrying India's flag at the opening ceremony. The results did not go his way in the French capital but considering his fitness and ranking (he remains India's highest ranked player at no. 42), Sharath decided to carry on for another season and take it from there. Another Commonwealth Games and Asian Games are on the horizon but Sharath has had enough. "Not saying I am letting it go completely, but this is certainly the end for us on the big tables, in front of the big crowds. Time to give my bandana and racket some rest," he said. "Grateful beyond words for all the joy, for all the love, for all the pain, for all the lessons, and for all the people this sport has given me." For the better of the past two decades, Sharath inspired the younger generation to take up the sport before Manika Batra emerged to share that responsibility. Sharath not only lifted the profile of the sport, he announced the arrival of Indian table tennis on the global stage and made his presence felt against the all-conquering Chinese and other Asian giants including Japan and South Korea. His booming forehand made his opponents nervous and over time, he continued to evolve and developed an equally lethal backhand. Kamlesh Mehta, an Arjuna awardee and another fine player to have come out of India, listed out the reason for Sharath's longevity in the game. "The game has changed so much in the last 20 years. When he started, he was not doing the backhand banana flick. He had to learn that banana flick and strengthen his backhand. "He was able to make those changes, learn new things and put it in his game. That's the

reason he could sustain himself for so long," Mehta told PTI. As any elite athlete, Sharath had his share of ups and downs. The hip and hamstring injury he suffered during the 2015 World Championships was a major setback in his career. "Many people had written him off after that injury but he came back stronger," recalled Mehta. Some of Indian table tennis' best results coincided with the twilight of Sharath's career. With Sharath now having the support of a formidable bench strength, India were able to stun Japan for a bronze medal at the 2018 Asian Games. Fellow Chennai resident G Sathiyani was the architect of that famous win. Another unthinkable happened when he and Manika teamed up to land a historic mixed doubles bronze in Jakarta. Even Sharath did not see it coming on the highly competitive continental stage. There was no stopping him as he entered his 40s, bullish about his returns at what was going to be his final appearance at the Commonwealth Games. Ahead of the 2022 edition in Birmingham, he had to work doubly hard to maintain his fitness as his battered and bruised body was not responding to the zeal of a teenager. With an unprecedented three gold medals, he surpassed his own expectations.

Union Sports Minister Manuskh Mandaviya on Wednesday expressed the confidence that India would surpass its highest-ever gold-medal tally when the country's athletes compete in the Special Olympics World Winter Games, scheduled in Turin, Italy from March 7 till 17. India is sending a strong 49-member contingent including 30 special athletes for the Winter Games, which were last held in 2017 in Austria where the country won 73 medals, including 37 gold. The athletes will compete in six disciplines comprising alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, floorball, short speed skating, snow boarding and snow shoeing. "I am seeing tremendous enthusiasm among these athletes. During the last edition of the Special Olympics World Winter Games, India won 37 gold medals, and this time I am confident we will perform even better," said Mandaviya during a sendoff function held at the Dhyana Chand National Stadium. "I really salute the parents of these athletes and Special Olympics Bharat, who have helped them reach this level. These athletes are very special to us, because what they are doing not everyone can do," the minister added. "You are an inspiration for the whole country." The Sports Authority of India (SAI) provided 11 national coaching camps for these

# India to perform better in Special Olympics World Winter Games, says Mandaviya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

Union Sports Minister Manuskh Mandaviya on Wednesday expressed the confidence that India would surpass its highest-ever gold-medal tally when the country's athletes compete in the Special Olympics World Winter Games, scheduled in Turin, Italy from March 7 till 17. India is sending a strong 49-member contingent including 30 special athletes for the Winter Games, which were last held in 2017 in Austria where the country won 73 medals, including 37 gold. The athletes will compete in six disciplines comprising alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, floorball, short speed skating, snow boarding and snow shoeing. "I am seeing tremendous enthusiasm among these athletes. During the last edition of the Special Olympics World Winter Games, India won 37 gold medals, and this time I am confident we will perform even better," said Mandaviya during a sendoff function held at the Dhyana Chand National Stadium. "I really salute the parents of these athletes and Special Olympics Bharat, who have helped them reach this level. These athletes are very special to us, because what they are doing not everyone can do," the minister added. "You are an inspiration for the whole country." The Sports Authority of India (SAI) provided 11 national coaching camps for these



athletes in various Indian cities including Chandigarh, Narkanda, New Delhi, Gwalior, Noida and Gurgaon to help them prepare well. Additionally, SAI provided equipment support for training and competition. The ministry has also sanctioned money towards airfare, boarding and lodging for the participation of contingent in Games. Mallika Nadda, the president of Special Olympics Bharat, commended the ministry for increasing the prize money for athletes winning medals in Special Olympics World Games.

born Ngamba thought she was about to be deported from Britain. Now she's set to make her professional debut at Royal Albert Hall. She's facing veteran Kirstie Bavington in a super welterweight bout in London as part of an all-female card headlined by the Jonas vs. Price welterweight world title unification fight. "I can see it, that dream of me having a belt and being the world champion," Ngamba told The Associated Press, "but at the same time you have to be in the present and you have to make sure you get the job done." The 26-year-old Ngamba tries not to think ahead too much. That's because she knows circumstances can change so quickly. Ngamba had arrived in Britain

# Cindy Ngamba set for a pro debut on all-female fight card

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LONDON

Something stood out to Cindy Ngamba as she glanced around when Friday's all-female boxing event was first announced. So many world championship belts. Ngamba wants one of her own. "I saw Natasha Jonas and Lauren Price and Caroline Dubois with their belts, and I remember saying Oh, that looks nice, I would love to have one of them," she said. Achieving goals is kind of Ngamba's thing. At the Paris Games, she became the first athlete competing as a refugee to earn a medal when she took bronze in the middleweight category. A decade ago the Cameroon—

could have arrested me at any moment," she said. "I visualized that they could arrest me in the street or in my house, in school or with my friends. I never knew it was going to be at an immigration center where I usually (went) every weekend." Worried she would be deported, she thought to herself: "I have no one in Cameroon, no family in Cameroon. Who is going to take care of me?" She was held overnight at a detention facility in London before being released. Ngamba, who came out as gay when she was 18, eventually won her case and was given refugee status. Same-sex relations in Cameroon can result in prison sentences of five years in the country.



at age 11 — her father and siblings live here, too — in Bolton, just north of Manchester, and set about learning English and trying to fit in. She picked up boxing at age 15, and it became an escape from the stress of worrying about her residency status. She described being arrested as

decline in his 40s. He was named the NBA's Western onference player of the month earlier Tuesday after he averaged 29.3 points, 10.5 rebounds, 6.9 assists and 1.2 steals in February while playing more than 35 minutes per game for the Lakers, who went 9-2 to surge into second place in the West. With their victory over the Pelicans, the Lakers improved to 11-2 since acquiring Doncic. James has played in 1,548 regular-season games, trailing only Robert Parish (1,611) and Abdul-Jabbar (1,560). If he stays healthy and elects to return for a record 23rd season, he will likely surpass Parish next winter. James has also played in 287 postseason games, the most in NBA history. He became the league's career playoff scoring leader on May 25, 2017, when he

# LeBron James becomes first to score 50,000 combined points in NBA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LOS ANGELES

LeBron James is well on his way to rewriting every previous definition of basketball longevity, and the 40-year-old star is now racking up numbers the NBA has never seen before. James became the first player to score 50,000 combined points in the regular season and postseason on Tuesday night, surpassing the mark with a 3-pointer early in the first quarter of the Los Angeles Lakers' 136-115 win over New Orleans. James finished with 34 points against the Pelicans after toppling another milestone in his unprecedented career. "I mean, that's a lot of points," James said afterward, rubbing his beard in wonder. "Obviously, the first thing that comes to mind is

where I'm from. Picking up the game when I was a little kid and having a love for the sport, and hoping that someday I'd be able to play at the highest level. I've been able to do that and really enjoy my career. So it's definitely an honor. It's pretty cool to see that." James already is the top scorer in NBA history in both the regular season and the playoffs. Maintaining a spectacular level of play midway through his record-tying 22nd season, he is pulling away from the other greats of the game: Lakers great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who played 20 seasons, is a now-distant second with 44,149 combined points. James got his milestone 3-pointer off an assist by Luka Doncic, a trivia tidbit that pleased both superstars. Doncic's arrival in



last month's seismic trade with the Dallas Mavericks has invigorated both James and the Lakers, who look like

championship contenders with a seven-game winning streak and 17 victories in their last 20 games.

"It's amazing, watching him do this stuff at this age," said Doncic, who had 30 points, 15 assists and eight rebounds against New Orleans. "It's just unbelievable, that 50K points. I can't even explain how insane that is. He might get to 70K. You never know." The Lakers recognized the milestone at the next timeout, with public address announcer Lawrence Tanter saying: "Ladies and gentlemen, we all have just witnessed history." James acknowledged the standing ovation with several waves from the bench. James is tied with Vince Carter for the most seasons played in NBA history. But while nearly every other NBA player who lasted to his late 30s finished at a fraction of his peak powers, James' game shows no signs of

surpassed Michael Jordan's total of 5,987 during the Cleveland Cavaliers' Eastern Conference finals game at Boston. James then became the top scorer in regular-season history on Feb. 7, 2023, when he topped Abdul-Jabbar's record of 38,387 points during the Lakers' game against Oklahoma City. James' prolific scoring is due in large part to his metronomic consistency. With his performance against the Pelicans, he has scored at least 10 points in 1,278 consecutive games since Jan. 6, 2007 — by far the longest such streak in NBA history. James' player of the month award for February was his 41st, extending his own league record. He is also the oldest player to win the award, surpassing a 37-year-old Karl Malone in November 2000.

# Smith announces retirement from ODI cricket

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DUBAI

Australia's stand-in skipper Steve Smith on Wednesday announced his retirement from ODI cricket following his team's four-wicket loss to India in the Champions Trophy (CT) semifinal here but the star batter will continue to play Tests and T20 Internationals. The 35-year-old, who was leading the world champion side in the absence of an injured Pat Cummins, informed his teammates after the match that he would be stepping away from the 50-over format with immediate effect.



Reflecting on his decision, Smith said it was the right time to step aside as Australia builds itself for the 2027 ODI World Cup. "It has been a great ride, and I have loved every minute of it," Smith said. "There have been so many amazing times and wonderful memories. Winning two World Cups was a great highlight along with the many fantastic team-mates who shared the journey," he added

in a media release shared by Cricket Australia. A key member of Australia's victorious 2015 and 2023 ICC World Cup-winning teams, Smith was named Australia's men's ODI Player of the Year in 2015 and 2021 and earned a place in the ICC men's ODI Team of the Year in 2015. He took over the ODI captaincy in 2015 and, fittingly, led the side one last time in his final match. "Now is a great opportunity

for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup so it feels like the right time to make way," he added. The veteran of 170 ODIs said Test cricket remains a priority and he is looking forward to the World Test Championship Final in June. "I feel I still have a lot to contribute on that stage," he said. "Now is a great opportunity for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup, so it

chipped in with 28 wickets at 34.67.

Tributes pour in from CA. Tributes poured in for the star with CA chief executive Todd Greenberg and chairman of selectors George Bailey hailing Smith's immense contribution to Australian cricket. "Congratulations to Steve on an amazing One Day International career during which he has made a vast contribution to Australia's performances in the 50-over format," stated Greenberg. "Right up until his final ODI innings Steve exhibited an incredible ability to accumulate runs in all conditions and his astute leadership has been crucial in the team's ongoing success including the 2015 and 2023 ICC World Cup victories. "We're fortunate Steve still has much to offer in the Test and T20 arenas and I look forward to witnessing the next stage of one of cricket's great careers," Greenberg added. Bailey echoed the sentiment. "We fully understand and support Steve's decision to retire from One Day International cricket.

# We still have not played perfect game: Gambhir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DUBAI

Not the one to be easily pleased, India head coach Gautam Gambhir said his team is still searching for that "perfect game" despite entering the Champions Trophy (CT) final with an all-win record and he is hopeful that it would come in the summit clash on Sunday. India trounced Australia by four wickets in the final Tuesday, with senior batter Virat Kohli making a well-paced 84. "See, in international sport, you want to keep improving. You don't say that you've ticked all the boxes. We still haven't played a perfect game. I will never be satisfied with the performances," Gambhir said in the post-match press conference. Gambhir hoped that India can produce that "perfect game" in the Champions Trophy title clash on March 9. "We still have one more game to go. Hopefully, we can play a perfect game. We want to keep



improving, we want to be ruthless on the cricket field but absolutely humble off the field as well," he added. India have taken some bold calls such as playing four spinners, promoting Axar Patel to No.5 and pushing down KL Rahul to No. 6 to suit the team's needs. It may look illogical from outside but for Gambhir they were minor pieces in the grand plans of keeping the players "out of the comfort zone" to extract the best out of them.

"I think cricket is all about being out of your comfort zone, and that is how you grow. If everyone is in their comfort zone, then there is stagnation. So, I believe, and you've seen the results. I know you guys will keep going back to 3-1 in Australia. "But everyone in the dressing room is staying out of the comfort zone be it the coaching staff, be it the players and hopefully we continue to do what is important for Indian cricket," he said.



# Praggnanandhaa draws with Shankland in Prague Masters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ PRAGUE

Grandmasters Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh Chithambaram continued to remain in joint lead after drawing their sixth-round games in the Prague Masters Chess tournament here. Praggnanandhaa was held to a draw by Sam Shankland of the United States, while Aravindh split the point with Quang Leim Le of Vietnam to be on four points out of a possible six, on a day when all the games were drawn for the first time in the tournament. Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh continued to be followed by top seed Wei Yi of China, Anish Giri of Holland, Vincent Keymer of Germany and Quang Leim, all of whom are on three points apiece. Another half-point behind are the Czech duo of Nguyen Thai Dai Van and David Navara, Gurel Ediz of Turkey and Shankland. With three more rounds to come, Praggnanandhaa holds the edge over Aravindh as he is set to play the next two games with white pieces. Aravindh, on the other hand, has only one game with white left. The seventh round will be crucial for Praggnanandhaa as he takes on Wei Yi, while Aravindh will meet Anish, who has drawn all his games so far. Praggnanandhaa was under pressure for some time in the middle game against his American opponent, who played white. The opening featured a regular Italian game and Shankland threw

open the position with a knight sacrifice on the king side. Soon after, Praggnanandhaa had to part with one of his rooks for a minor piece, and what resulted was a very complex position. Navigating between better and equal thereon, the Indian allowed Shankland to go for a forced repetition and the game was drawn after 43 moves. Playing white, Aravindh faced the Queen's gambit declined - one of the most classical setup for decades now - and had his forces around the centre right from the word go. However, as the game progressed, Quang Leim remained impregnable, and by the 19th move itself the players had exchanged as many as three minor pieces and two pawns. The pawn structure took a small turn when Aravindh decided to part with his last bishop for a knight but black had nothing to worry about. The players soon arrived at a rook-and-pawns endgame where the draw was a just result after 32 moves. In the Challengers section, the fortunes of Divya Deshmukh did not change as she suffered another defeat and was pushed to the sole last spot among 10 players. Vclav Finel defeated Divya in a rook-and-minor-piece endgame leaving the Indian on 1.5 points. Jonas Buhl Bjerre of Denmark regained the joint lead by beating Marc'Andria Maurizzi of France. The Dane shares the top spot with Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan.

# Sreesanth backs India to win Champions Trophy final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DUBAI

Team India simply looks unstoppable, exuding confidence, energy and dominance and World Cup-winning former India pacer Sreesanth feels no side can stand in their way in the Champions Trophy final on Sunday. The Rohit Sharma-led side trounced reigning world champions Australia by four wickets in the first semifinal here on Tuesday to make it four wins out of four in the ICC showpiece. They now await the winners of New Zealand and South Africa for the Sunday's summit clash. "Doesn't matter who the opponents are in the final - India are going to win," the 2007 T20 World Cup and 2011 ODI World Cup winner told PTI Video. "There is so much positive energy. They are playing some wonderful cricket. The way



Virat Kohli anchoring the chase, the way Shreyas Iyer has stepped up - let's just keep our fingers crossed." Sreesanth also emphasised the importance of staying grounded. "Let's be humble in our process. That's what Mahi bhai (MS Dhoni) used to say - one of the best captains I've played with. "Even Sourav Ganguly used to say the same. Dada always used to say, let's be humble and trust the process. That's exactly what the Indian team

is doing... Gautam (Gambhir) bhai is doing a great job," he observed. Mohammad Shami, returning after a 14-month injury layoff, has once again emerged as India's leading wicket-taker in a world tournament, claiming eight wickets. He shares the top spot with New Zealand's Matt Henry, both having taken eight wickets. Shami was the highest wicket-taker in the 2023 World Cup, with 24 wickets, where India finished as runners-up to Australia. That tournament

marked his last appearance before the injury layoff. "Shami 'one of the biggest fighters. I remember seeing him bowl at the nets. I used to tell him, 'Shami, you will go a long way', and I like it a lot because of the way he has upgraded himself. "Playing for the country, forgetting the past, looking ahead, even after coming back from injury and doing well, getting the wicket in the first over..." Sreesanth also believes India's domination in world cricket has well and truly arrived. "Absolutely, there's no doubt that India will dominate world cricket for years to come. The talent pipeline is incredible - from domestic cricket to Under-19 tournaments to women's cricket, the system is flourishing. We have to thank the BCCI and Jay Shah for building such a strong foundation. The support system, the sponsorships, the structure - India are well ahead of the rest of the world."



# Trying to get my rhythm, says Shami

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DUBAI

Mohammed Shami conceded that operating as India's lone front-line pacer after coming back from a lengthy injury layoff has been a heavy "responsibility" but said he is trying to regain his "rhythm" to suit the team's needs in the ongoing Champions Trophy (CT). Throughout the ICC showpiece here, Shami has shared the new ball duties with either Harshit Rana or Hardik Pandya because of the injury-forced absence of Jasprit Bumrah. Rana is still learning the ropes, while Pandya is an all-rounder and delivering 10 overs in an ODI is not precisely his territory. Shami has so far picked eight wickets in the tournament. "I am trying to get my rhythm back and contribute more for the team. It is a responsibility when there are no two proper fast bowlers and I have to shoulder more responsibility," Shami said in a mixed zone interaction after India's semifinal victory over Australia here on Tuesday night. Shami said his workload is heavier without Bumrah steaming in at the other end but he is trying to give more than a 100 per cent to the role. "There is a load when you are the one main fast bowler and lead from the front. "I have become used to this load and am trying my best to make it easy for others and

give more than 100 per cent," he said. Shami was sidelined for over a year with an ankle injury that he picked during the 2023 ODI World Cup. The veteran said he is now ready to shoulder the responsibility of bowling long spells. "The trust debate ends when you get selected in the team. I don't think that one should worry about his fitness too much. We just need to put in the effort and see how your body takes it. After all, we are labourers. "I am now ready to bowl long spells. Short spells are anyways easy - 6 balls or 12 balls - and in limited-overs cricket it doesn't matter whether it's 10 or six overs," he noted. The 34-year-old has bowled his full quota of 10 overs against Bangladesh and Australia, while he bowled just eight and four overs against Pakistan and New Zealand respectively in the earlier matches, primarily because spinners bowled nearly 35 overs in those games. Being at one venue helped me Shami said it is an advantage for him that all of India's Champions Trophy matches are being played in Dubai. "It has definitely helped us because we know the conditions and the behaviour of the pitch. It is a plus point that you are playing all the matches at one venue. "The main thing is to gauge the conditions and know how the pitch behaves because you are playing at one venue and you can get to know it well," he said.

# Playing fearless cricket while remaining calm has worked for me: Rahane

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ MUMBAI

Kolkata Knight Riders captain Ajinkya Rahane has credited his success in the Indian Premier League and domestic T20s to playing "fearless cricket" while remaining calm. The 36-year-old topped the batting charts in the previous edition of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy with 469 runs, including five half-centuries, at a strike rate of 164.56. His aggressive approach also paid off in the IPL where he was the batting mainstay for Chennai Super Kings in the last two editions. "It was always about being an anchor and the others would play around me. (But the) last 2-3 years, it's always about playing with freedom, fearless cricket and go out and back my game," Rahane, the brand

ambassador of Skillhub Online Games Federation, said here on Tuesday. "I am trying to do that (play fearless cricket) but it's (also) about following my processes and routines and staying loyal and truthful to the game." Rahane, who led Mumbai into the Ranji Trophy semifinal and scored 467 runs, said he would carry the confidence from domestic cricket into the upcoming edition of the IPL. "For me, personally, batting-wise I am doing really well. Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy was really good for me, I had a really good domestic season. So, I am really confident about myself," he said. "It is just about staying in the moment, staying calm and keep backing myself, not to think too much ahead and not to think about the past. It's always about improving and enjoying my game," he added.



Rahane felt that India's victory in the Champions Trophy semifinal in Dubai on Tuesday could also be attributed to the side not dwelling into the past

record against Australia in the knockouts of ICC tournaments. Before Rohit Sharma's side won the match by four

wickets, India had never beaten Australia in the knockouts since the quarterfinal of the 2011 World Cup in India. India had lost to Australia in the 2015 Cricket World Cup semifinal, the 2023 World Cup final and the 2023 World Test Championship final. "Very happy that India has won the semifinal against Australia and have entered the final. I want to congratulate the team and I am sure they will do well in the final," Rahane said. "What happened in the past is gone, the team must be thinking about the present and their aim was to beat Australia... To beat them in the semifinal. "Obviously, what has happened in the past keeps playing on the mind but as a cricketer, your mind is always in the moment, in the present,

to do well in that game to win the match," Rahane said. Rahane, who has been appointed KKR captain ahead of the upcoming IPL season, said he would like the defending IPL champions to keep it simple. "Our team is really good, everyone is playing really well. We had a camp in Mumbai, all the domestic players were here but international players are also playing which is really good," he said. "We won the championship last year but again this year it is about starting from the scratch, starting from zero. T20 is a funny format and IPL is a challenging tournament. "I am happy and humbled to be captain of the KKR team. We would like to keep it simple, take one game at a time and stay in the moment and enjoy the format," Rahane added.

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER,  
BALANGIR (R&B) DIVISION: BALANGIR  
e-Procurement Notice  
BID IDENTIFICATION No: BGR R&B/ 2/ 2024-25  
No. 990 // Dtd. 28.02.25

1. The Superintending Engineer, Balangir (R&B) Division, Balangir on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate Composite bid in Double cover system in ONLINE MODE for the construction of works detailed in the table below from B Class Contractors registered with the State Governments and contractors of equivalent Grade/ Class registered with Central Government/ MES/ Railways for execution of Road /Building /Bridge works. The proof of registration from the appropriate authority shall be enclosed along with the bid.

2. Nature of Work : Building work  
3. No. of tender : Building work: 01 Nos.  
4. Tender Cost : Rs.10, 000/-  
5. Class of Contractor : "B" Class (Registered with CDMS)  
6. Date & Time of sale & Receipt of Bids : From Dt.06.03.25, 10.00 A.M. to Dt.20.03.25 up to 05.00 P.M.  
7. Date of opening Bid : Dt.21.03.25 at 11.00 A.M.  
8. The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website: <http://tendersorissa.gov.in>. All future corrigendums will be available on ONLINE MODE only.

OPR-34281100172425  
Superintending Engineer  
Balangir (R&B) Division