

CHAMPIONS BRING THE TROPHY HOME! JAI HO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai
 India sealed an unprecedented third Champions Trophy triumph with an unblemished record as Rohit Sharma combined his inherent freedom with steely resolve to inspire his side to a four-wicket win in a closely-fought final against New Zealand, here on Sunday.
 India won the trophy without losing a match, reflecting their dominance in the tournament which they won back in 2002 and 2013.
 No other team has won the event thrice. Well-timed fifties by Daryl Mitchell (63) and Michael Bracewell (53) steered the Kiwis to 251 for seven after Indian spinners led by Kuldeep Yadav applied the squeeze for a large part of their innings.
 Indian batters needed to capitalise on that fine effort of the bowlers, and Rohit, who many believe was featuring in his last ODI match for India, led from the front, slipping into his tur-



bocharged version almost immediately. The chase of 252 grew tight in the business end while the Blackcaps spinners were operating on a sluggish pitch, but skipper Rohit's ebullient 83-ball 76 had already given them the cushion to overhaul the target in 49 overs.
 KL Rahul with his 34 not out, there was no dramatic twist to the tale, leading the side past the finish line after India lost well-settled batters.
 Pacer Nathan Smith, who replaced injured Matt Henry in the line-up, felt the heat as the 37-year-old Rohit hammered him for two sixes and as many fours in the beginning of the chase.
 At the other end Shubman Gill (31), who helped Rohit to raise 105 runs for the opening wicket, was more subdued and the lone spark in his innings was a maximum off spinner Rachin Ravindra.



WINS THROUGH DECADES		
Year	Winner	Margin of wins
1998	South Africa	South Africa won by 4 wickets
2000	New Zealand	New Zealand won by 4 wickets
2002	Sri Lanka and India	India and Sri Lanka declared co-champions
2004	West Indies	West Indies won by 2 wickets
2006	Australia	Australia won by 8 wickets
2009	Australia	Australia won by 6 wickets
2013	India	India won by 5 runs
2017	Pakistan	Pakistan won by 180 runs
2025	India	India won by 4 wickets

India, what is wrong with these men?

Macabre carnality in Hampi

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Bengaluru
 Hampi, a UNESCO world heritage site in Karnataka, is in the news for wrong reasons as two women including an Israeli tourist, were raped at knifepoint by a group of local persons who robbed their mobile phones and Rs 9,500 cash late Thursday night.
 An Orissa youth Bipash, who was with the victims at the time of attack, was bashed up by the group and thrown into Tungabhadra Canal. His body was recovered on Friday morning while two friends of the victims jumped into the canal and swam to safety. One of the victim was a US citizen while the other person was from Nashik in Maharashtra.
 The Israeli lady and her female companion, who was the former's host, went to the scenic Koppal for stargazing around Thursday midnight, when the attack happened. The police, according to Ram Arasiddi, the Superintendent of Police, Koppal told media persons that two of the attackers have been arrested and a search was

on to trace the third person. The arrested duo has been identified by the victims and their associates. Both the women are undergoing treatment at a government run hospital in Koppal.
 Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar took to social media and condemned the incident. Siddaramaiah described the attack on women as a most heinous act. The police are yet to catch hold of the third attacker even at the time of going to Press on Sunday evening. Police said the names of arrested persons were Handi Malla (22) and Chetan Sai (21).
 What has upset the local population is the timing of the incident as this is considered as a tourist season in Hampi which draws a lot of tourists from India and abroad. "This is likely to cause a rethinking on the part of travelers who had selected Hampi, which is hardly 25 km away from the spot," said M R Hari, CEO, Invis Muti Media, tourism management and consultancy services.

Perverse depravity in Pune

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Pune
 A man arrested for alighting from a BMW and urinating at a traffic junction in Pune was on Sunday remanded in police custody till March 10 along with his co-passenger. A video of the act, which took place on Saturday morning in Shastrinagar in Yerawada area, had gone viral on social media, prompting police to book Gaurav Ahuja (25) and Bhagyes Oswal (22) for public nuisance, rash and negligent driving, causing danger on public roads and other offences under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Motor Vehicles Act.
 While Oswal was arrested from his residence on Saturday, Ahuja, who was driving the car, was detained hours later from Karad in neighbouring Satara district and was placed under arrest in the early hours of Sunday, a

police official said.
 In the clip that went viral on social media platforms, Oswal can be seen occupying the front seat of the luxury car, while Ahuja is urinating at a traffic junction before taking to the wheel and speeding off after making an obscene gesture at a person videoing the incident.
 Ahuja and Oswal were produced in the sessions court here, with the public prosecutor seeking seven-day police remand to allow a probe into whether the two had consumed any narcotic substance. The duo's lawyer opposed the remand plea claiming police was working under political and media pressure and had invoked BNS sections that did not apply to the case. After hearings arguments from both sides, the court remanded Ahuja and Oswal in police remand till March 10.

Sick obscenity booked in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna
 Bihar Police has ordered a statewide crackdown on the public playing of double-meaning Bhojpuri songs, calling it a "burning social problem" that endangers women's security and has a "perverse effect" on children's minds. The move comes as authorities aim to curb the growing influence of vulgar songs in public spaces, warning of strict action against violators.
 A circular issued by the state Police Headquarters directs all Inspector Generals (IGs), Deputy Inspector Generals (DIGs), and railway police to take action against those playing such songs in public spaces. "A special drive must be carried out across the state to identify those who indulge in such activities and promote vulgar and double-meaning Bhojpuri songs," the circular stated. The move comes swiftly after renowned actress Neetu Chandra took a strong stance against vulgarity in music by filing a PIL in the Patna High Court. Her petition specifically targets singer Yo Yo Honey Singh's latest song, Maniac, citing its objectionable content. Neetu who authored an article for The Pioneer on the

issue on occasion of Women's Day, also urged the court to impose a ban on Bhojpuri songs that promote misogyny, arguing that their lyrics often objectify and demean women. In this regards she also met top Bihar police officials including DGP Vinay Kumar on Sunday.
 The letter highlights concerns about the impact of these songs on society. "It becomes embarrassing for women when they hear such vulgar and double-meaning Bhojpuri songs at public places, functions, buses, trucks, and auto-rickshaws," it read.
 The directive also stressed that such songs create an unsafe atmosphere. "Sometimes they feel insecure also when such songs are played. Strict action should be taken against those who are caught violating the directive in this regard," the circular added.
 People caught playing such songs in public spaces will face legal action under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The issue has been a subject of concern in the Bihar Assembly as well. Responding to the demand, the state government had assured that "strict action would be taken against those who promote obscene and double-meaning Bhojpuri songs."

In State

Day temp to reach 40 deg in 5 days

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
 The day temperature across Odisha is likely to rise gradually by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius over the next four to five days, according to a forecast by the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here.
 Besides, the minimum temperature in the State is likely to increase by 2 to 4 degrees during the same period.
 The maximum temperature in Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Subarnapur, Boudh and Balangir districts is expected to rise to 40 or above over the next five days.
 For the next 24 hours, Bhubaneswar and its

neighbouring areas would experience mainly clear skies. The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to be around 35 degrees and 21 degrees, respectively.
 The highest temperature recorded in the State was 38 degrees in Boudh, while Phulbani registered the lowest minimum temperature at 13 degrees. Bhubaneswar recorded a temperature of 35.4 degrees.
 The Special Relief Commissioner's Office has issued an advisory, urging the public to take precautionary measures against the hot weather, especially when stepping outdoors between 11 am and 3:30 pm.

CM opens projects worth Rs 42 cr in Keonjhar

Announces Rs 7 crore aid for Anandpur College

PNS ■ KEONJHAR
 Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday inaugurated 16 projects worth Rs 42 crore and laid foundation for several more development projects worth Rs 118 crore in Anandapur of Keonjhar district.
 Attending the 61st annual festival at the Anandapur College, Majhi announced a financial package of Rs 7 crore for upgrading the college's infrastructure. This includes building a multi-purpose hall, a seminar hall and improving the sports ground.
 He instructed officials to take steps to make Anandapur College an autonomous institution. In addition, Majhi announced Rs 2 crore for upgrading the Anandapur Sub-Divisional Hospital and Rs 20 crore



for completing the construction of the stadium in Anandapur.
 Majhi also praised the college's educational environment and said it has produced many talented students. "I am proud to have studied at such an institution," he said, recalling his own student days.
 "Student life is a struggle, but it will lead to success. Trust your hard

work and the blessings of your teachers," he told the students.
 "While education is not a problem anymore, the real challenge is ensuring quality education. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to provide quality education, create a good learning environment and equip students with skills to contribute to India's growth," he

said.
 Majhi also emphasised his government's commitment to education, saying that Rs 41,273 crore has been allocated for education in the upcoming Budget, making it one of the highest allocations in the country. Of this, Rs 3,655 crore would be dedicated to higher education, he said.

In BBSR STF nabs 10 Bangladeshi infiltrators

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
 The Special Task Force (STF) of the Odisha Crime Branch arrested as many as 10 Bangladeshi infiltrators at the Bhubaneswar railway station on Sunday.
 The STF officials arrested the Bangladeshi nationals, six men, three women and a minor boy, during a raid at the railway station.
 The Bangladeshi nationals had entered India without any valid documents and they have been residing at the Bhubaneswar railway station for last few days.
 The STF officials have seized seven mobile phones, Bangladeshi currencies and other items from the intruders.
 The Bangladeshis had illegally crossed the Indo-Bangladesh border near the Dhubri area in Assam, STF sources said.

Opp decries Jayanarayan's 'merger mistake' remark

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
 A political storm has erupted in Odisha following BJP leader and Sambalpur MLA Jayanarayan Mishra's controversial statement, "Merging with Odisha was our mistake".
 Mishra had made the statement while addressing a gathering during disbursement of the Subhadra Yojana money for women on Saturday in Sambalpur.
 His statement has not gone well, particularly with the opposition parties BJD and Congress, whose leaders have stepped up attacks on the BJP and the Odisha Government.
 Condemning Mishra's statement, the Congress questioned the BJP's stance on Odisha's sovereignty.
 Congress Legislature Party Leader Rama Chandra Kadam criticised the BJP, stating, "The party that came to power by



speaking of regional identity is now questioning the very existence of the State. Does the BJP not want Odisha's sovereignty to remain intact?"
 "The BJP came to power with raking up the Odia Asmita and it seems that the double-engine government wants to divide the State. But it will never happen," he said.
 The BJD has also joined the criticism, expressing deep disappointment over Mishra's statements. BJD leader Pratap Deb termed the statement "unfortunate", emphasising that

Odisha witnesses big surge in forest fires

2,586 fire points detected in a week

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR
 Odisha is grappling with an alarming rise in forest fires as summer progresses. According to the Forest Survey of India (FSI), 2,586 fire points have been recorded across the State in the past seven days.
 The affected districts include Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Koraput, Nuapada, Kalahandi, Bargarh, Balangir, Rayagada, Kandhamal, Sundargarh, Boudh, Subarnapur, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Gajapati, Ganjam, Deogarh, Angul, Cuttack, Nayagarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Dhenkanal and Jajpur.
 Persistent fires have hampered containment efforts, en-



dangerous vast forest areas and disrupting the ecological balance. Between February 25 and March 4, as many as 1,172 fire points were detected, marking a sharp increase within a short span.
 Forest fire incidents are identified when satellite sensors MODIS or SNPP-VIIRS detect hotspots in forested re-

gions. Rising temperatures and dry weather have intensified the risk with 46 per cent of 1,956 fire points in 2025 reported in a single week of February. The Koraput circle alone witnessed 11 large fires by mid-February, worsened by early leaf shedding in southern Odisha's forests.
 Around 28 per cent of the

State's forests, spanning 57,066 square kilometers, are classified as highly fire-prone, particularly dry deciduous areas. Koraput remains the most vulnerable due to its tropical forests and human settlement patterns.
 Human activities such as slash-and-burn agriculture and Mahua flower collection,

where dry leaves are burned, are key contributors to forest fires. Land clearing for cultivation, especially in Keonjhar's tribal regions, has further aggravated the crisis. Notably, over 1,100 fire points in 2025 originated outside protected forests, underscoring the urgent need for preventive measures.

In city ATM looter hurt in encounter with police

Was wanted in multiple cases
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A notorious inter-State criminal, Deepak Kumar was injured in an encounter with the Commissionerate police on Saturday night in the Badagada area in the capital city.

Deepak, who hails from Bihar, had been targeting ATMs across Odisha.

As per reports, the encounter took place when Deepak was attempting to loot an ATM kiosk at Badagada. Upon spotting the police, he opened fire, following which cops retaliated in self-defence. In the exchange of fire,



Deepak sustained a bullet injury to his leg and was shifted to the Capital Hospital.

Deepak has multiple cases registered against him in various police stations. His modus operandi involved using adhesive inside ATM cash dispens-

ers. When customers attempted to withdraw money, the notes would get stuck due to the adhesive. Assuming a malfunction, the customers would leave, allowing Deepak and his gang to retrieve the stuck cash later.

The police have identified two more associates of Deepak, but they managed to escape. The gang was also on the most-wanted list of Ranchi police. A hunt has been launched to nab the absconding criminals.

Hotel 'serving' beef as mutton in Satyabadi Section 163 clamped within 1-km radius of eatery

PNS ■ PURI

A day after sealing a roadside eatery named 'Jaya Hotel' in Satyabadi over allegations that it was serving beef to customers under the guise of mutton, Puri district administration officials on Sunday imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS).

The district authorities took swift action against Jaya Hotel after a video surfaced online, reportedly showing beef being served at the eatery. The viral video stirred significant unrest amongst the local residents, compelling the authorities to impose Section



163 of BNSS within a one-kilometer radius of the hotel.

The administration's intervention highlights the delicate nature of such allegations as the matter is a potentially contentious issue.

The authorities have committed to conducting a thorough investigation into the incident. They have appealed to the public to stay calm. Adequate steps are also being undertaken to maintain law and order in the area.

No comments could be obtained from the concerned hotel staffs or the investigating officials in this connection.

Mohana records highest school closures in State

302 schools shut in 5 years
RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

Mohana in Gajapati district has recorded the highest number of school closures in Odisha with 302 schools shutting down in the last five years, making it the most affected region in the State. The issue was raised in the Odisha Assembly on March 7 when Cuttack MLA Sofia Firdous questioned the government on the total number of school closures across the State and the steps being taken to reopen them.

In response, School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond revealed that 5,632 schools have been closed and merged across Odisha over the last five years with Mohana bearing the brunt of these closures. He further stated that since June 2024, not a single closed school has been reopened. He added that any grievances regarding school closures would be reviewed by the District Grievance Redressal Committee, which would forward its recommendations to the committee for further consideration.

Gajapati district, particularly the Mohana constituency, falls entirely under the Fifth Scheduled Area, making education a crucial lifeline for the region's socioeconomic development. The majority of the population comprises Soura Tribes, Kondh Tribes and Minority communities, for whom education remains the only pathway to upliftment and integration into the mainstream society. These communities heavily depend on mother-tongue-based education at the preliminary level, and the closure of schools has significantly disrupted early childhood learning.

Educationalists and local leaders have raised alarm over the mass school closures, warning that the lack of access to education will increase dropout rates, deepen socioeconomic disparities and isolate these vulnerable communities further. With many students now forced to travel long distances, activists have called for immediate government intervention to strengthen rural education, improve infrastructure and implement policies that prevent further closures and ensure the reopening of schools in critical areas.

KIIT, KISS, KIMS celebrate Women's Day



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

KIIT, KISS and KIMS came together to celebrate the International Women's Day on Saturday.

Founder of KIIT and KISS Dr. Achyuta Samanta expressed his deep appreciation for the contributions of women, emphasising that the growth of KIIT has been driven by the respect and opportunities it provides to women. "What we preach, we practise. We have been promoting women's empowerment since the inception of KIIT," he said. He further noted that women have risen to occupy key leadership positions within KIIT, making it a model institution for

inclusivity and equal opportunity. More than 50 per cent staffs at KIIT and KISS are women, and the ratio is the same among the students as well.

Women employees expressed their sentiments about their deep connection with KIIT and the sense of security and opportunity it provides. They highlighted how the institution has created a nurturing environment where both personal and professional aspirations can flourish.

Adding to the celebrations, the Centre for Women's Studies at KISS observed the day with the theme "Empowering Young Women through Sports: Towards Building a Healthy Nation".

Child theft bid from Baripada Med College foiled

Woman arrested by police
PNS ■ BARIAPADA

Vigilant attendants foiled a child abduction attempt at the Baripada Medical College Hospital of Mayurbhanj district on Saturday.

The accused, a woman from the Rasgobindpur area, was caught red-handed while attempting to steal two newborns from the hospital's Women and Child Ward.

The suspicious behaviour



of the woman prompted the attendants to detain her when she tried to flee the scene after being confronted. The woman was later handed over to police.

Following the incident, the Town police took the woman into custody for further investigation. Preliminary probe suggested that she might be part of a larger child-trafficking network. Authorities are now probing whether she acted alone or had accomplices involved in the crime.

The police are also reviewing CCTV footages from the hospital premises to gather more evidence. Officials have assured that a thorough investigation is underway to prevent such incidents in future and ensure the safety of newborns at the medical.

The incident has raised serious concerns about the hospital security and the safety of newborns. Following the event, the hospital administration has been urged to enhance security measures, including stricter visitor screening and increased surveillance, to prevent similar occurrences.

Authorities have also advised parents to remain cautious and report any suspicious activity to the hospital staffs immediately.

Red Cross award ceremony held at Raj Bhavan

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A State-level Youth Red Cross and Junior Red Cross Award Giving Ceremony was organised at the Raj Bhavan here.

Chief guest Governor and President of Indian Red Cross Society, Odisha State Branch Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati said, "Join the change and start the change from yourself."

He said that for the better cause of society, all should join as volunteers of Red Cross.

The Governor's Principal Secretary NBS Rajput was the guest of honour. Honorary Secretary, Indian Red Cross Society, Odisha State Branch Ganesh Chandra Patra delivered the welcome address.

From the YRC wing, eight



best colleges, 26 youth Red Cross counsellors, 44 YRC volunteers; and from JRC wing, nine best junior Red Cross counsellors, six best JRC volunteers, six best schools and three best districts of the State were

awarded for their exemplary social services for the years 2019-20 to 2023-24.

Staff members of YRC and JRC wing Surendra Nath Samal, Gyanda Prasad Sahoo, Pratap Jena and Rama Rani Senapati were also felicitated.

Foroptors were distributed to 10 schools for early detection of eye problems of children. About 500 volunteers and counsellors from various schools and colleges of the State, district officers and life members were present on the occasion.

CONTEMPORARIES

Delimitation and democratic rectitude

Central Government's pursuit of electoral equitability



S JYOTIRANJANA

In the intricate tapestry of Indian democracy, the principle of equitable representation stands as a cornerstone, ensuring that the voice of every citizen resonates with equal potency in the legislative corridors. The forthcoming delimitation exercise, a Constitutional mandate, seeks to recalibrate the distribution of parliamentary seats in alignment with contemporary demographic realities. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Central Government, under the stewardship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is poised to undertake this exercise with a steadfast commitment to preserving the federal equilibrium and democratic integrity of the nation.

Historical context: The genesis of the delimitation discourse

The discourse on delimitation is deeply rooted in the demographic transformations that have un-

folded over the decades. The last comprehensive delimitation was effectuated in 1976, subsequent to which a constitutional embargo was imposed, initially until 2000 and subsequently extended to 2026. This moratorium was instituted to incentivise States to implement effective population control measures without the apprehension of diminished parliamentary representation. However, this prolonged hiatus has precipitated significant disparities in representa-

tion, necessitating a recalibration to reflect the current demographic landscape.

The origins of this predicament can be traced to a quintessentially Congressian penchant for political expediency. The 1976 decision to freeze the reallocation of Lok Sabha seats was not an exercise in statesmanship but a short-term political salve designed to prevent dissent from states that had effectively controlled their population. The freeze, that was again extended in 2001, has resulted in a spectacular demographic distortion, i.e., where some MPs represent over 25 lakh constituents, while others, in the electorally privileged South, preside over a much smaller electorate.

This electoral atavism is no longer tenable. India's democracy cannot be held hostage to a policy relic of the Emergency era, a time when the Congress government trampled upon constitutional propriety with impunity. The BJP's and the Central Government's position is unequivocal, i.e., representation must reflect demographic reality, not a political arrangement

fossilised in the amber of antiquated policy.

The BJP's stance: Ensuring equitable representation

The BJP has consistently advocated for a delimitation process that upholds the principles of equitable representation while safeguarding the interests of all States, irrespective of their demographic trajectories. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, while addressing the concerns those emanated from southern states, unequivocally assured that no State would witness a reduction in its parliamentary representation due to the delimitation exercise. He emphasised that the Modi administration is committed to ensuring that southern States receive a fair share of representation, dispelling apprehensions of any diminution in their legislative voice.

Addressing concerns: The North-South dichotomy

The apprehensions have been articulated, particularly by leaders from southern States, regarding a potential diminution in their parliamentary representation post

delimitation. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin convened an all-party meeting to deliberate on the perceived ramifications of the delimitation exercise, referring to it as a "sword hanging over southern States." However, the BJP has dismissed these concerns as unfounded, with Tamil Nadu BJP president K Annamalai characterising them as "imaginary fears" and reiterating the party's commitment to equitable representation.

Constitutional mandate and federal integrity

Article 81(2)(a) of the Indian Constitution mandates that parliamentary representation must reflect population proportions. The Opposition's attempts to portray delimitation as a BJP-driven conspiracy conveniently ignore the fact that this exercise is a constitutional necessity, not a partisan choice. The fact that previous Congress-led governments continued to extend the freeze, despite acknowledging its flaws, speaks volumes about their institutional pusillanimity. The Central Government's adher-

ence to this mandate underscores its commitment to upholding the Constitutional framework and ensuring that the democratic process remains robust and representative. And by aligning parliamentary representation with contemporary demographic realities, it aims to fortify the legitimacy of the legislative process and enhance the efficacy of governance.

Reaffirming commitment: The path forward

The BJP-led Central Government's approach to delimitation is anchored in the principles of transparency, inclusivity and Constitutional propriety. The party acknowledges the diverse demographic patterns across states and is committed to a deliberative process that accommodates these variations while ensuring that the fundamental tenet of equitable representation is upheld. Thus, by engaging in constructive dialogue with all stakeholders and addressing concerns through factual clarifications, the BJP and Central Government seek to navi-

gate the delimitation exercise in a manner that reinforces the unity and integrity of the nation.

The impending delimitation exercise presents an opportunity to recalibrate the democratic framework to reflect the evolving demographic landscape of India. The Central Government's commitment to conducting this exercise with fairness and constitutional fidelity underscores its dedication to strengthening the democratic ethos of the nation. And by ensuring that every citizen's voice is accorded equal weight in the legislative process, the Central Government reaffirms its resolve to uphold the principles of justice, equity, and federal harmony that constitute the bedrock of Indian democracy.

(The writer is an advocate and Central Government Counsel for Orissa High Court, Consulting Editor/Legal Affairs and Public Policy, The Pioneer and a Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law and Media Studies, School of Mass Communication, KIIT University. Views are personal)

Nature lovers excited Ekakula Nasi beach woos Olive Ridley's in droves after 33 yrs!

RAJESH BEHERA
KENDRAPADA

Olive Ridley Sea turtles have congregated in lakhs at the Ekakula Nasi for mass nesting after a gap of 33 years, and laid eggs at the beach, bringing excitement among nature lovers.

For the last time, the sea turtles laid eggs at Ekakula Nasi within Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in 1992-93 turtle season, stated ACF in-charge of Gahirmatha, Manas Kumar Das.

According to the ACF, 1,69,348 female Olive Ridley sea turtles laid eggs in Ekakula Nasi in last 48 hours. In the



ongoing turtle season, a total 4.34 lakh endangered female Olive Ridley sea turtles laid eggs at Nasi-2 and Ekakula Nasi beaches of Gahirmatha within last three days (from March 5 to 7). The Ekakula Nasi is 8 km long, but the turtles laid eggs in 3 km out of

8 km long beach. It is expected this time a record a number of turtles would come for laying eggs at Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary following the mass nesting scenario.

Earlier a record was created in 2023, when an estimated 5,12,175 sea turtles came ashore Nasi-2 for mass nesting. "The Forest department was worried thinking that the endangered marine turtles might skip mass nesting at Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary in coming years due to shrinking and erosion of the same beach where they earlier laid eggs and later skipped. Conducive environment and beach condition play an important role for turtle to lay eggs on the same beach too," stated ACF Das.

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In Kendrapada Youth thrashed for ruckus outside girl's house

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

Youth was thrashed by locals and handed over to police on Saturday after he created a ruckus before the house of a girl under the Rajnagar police station area in Kendrapada district.

Later, the accused identified as Nihar Swain, a resident of Bagapatia Resettlement Colony, was arrested and forwarded to court by police, said Rajnagar police station IIC Naresh Sahoo.

On March 5, Nihar had proposed to the girl when she was standing near her house. But when she spurned his advances, he allegedly abused her and even tried to attack her family members. Following this, the girl's family members lodged a complaint at the Rajnagar police station.

But again on Saturday, he



came near the girl house and began abusing her in filthy language.

Infrate over this, locals overpowered the youth and tied him to a pole and gave a good thrashing before handing him over to the police.

The court has rejected the bail plea of Nihar and sent him to judicial custody.

Women's Day Youth Conclave held at RD Women's University

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A Youth Conclave hosted at the Rama Devi Women's University (RDWU) here on the International Women's Day witnessed a pledge to accelerate action for women's equality.

The event, attended by over 1,000 delegates including 800 plus girl of the university, promoted women in entrepreneurship and emphasised on the mental health of women while ensuring equal opportunity for every woman and girl for an equal world.

The logo of 'WE', an initiative promoting entrepreneurship and innovation, was unveiled at the event. The initiative is going to have a series of awareness programmes for young girls at various places in Odisha, the organisers in-



formed.

Prof Chandni Charan Rath, Vice-Chancellor-in-Charge, RDWU stated, "As per Indian scriptures, it is said that the gods reside where women are worshipped. So, when women are empowered, the future of any country will be brighter." He highlighted the crucial role of women in shaping families,

Inspiring journey of Odisha scientist Elina Mishra

Receives pat from PM Modi

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Bhubaneswar-born nuclear scientist Elina Mishra at Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Mumbai featured in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media properties on the International Women's Day and shared her journey.

Modi handed over his social media accounts to six inspiring women. Elina was among the six lucky women and encouraged young women to explore careers in science and technology through the PM's social me-



dia handle.

She took over the PM's social media handle and shared, "I come from a family with a strong academic background; and, thus, they created a ripe environment to learn science. My interest and inquisitiveness for science developed due to my father, whom I have seen relentlessly working towards his research."

She continued, "I was fortunate enough to be associated

with a group working in the field of electromagnetism, accelerator physics and technology. I was associated with the development of magnetic and RF (Radio Frequency) characterisation of Drift Tube Linac cavities for Low Energy High Intensity Proton Accelerator (LEHIPA). It was indeed a very proud and satisfying moment when a 20 MeV proton beam was successfully accelerated."

"Under Indian Institutes Fermilab Collaboration (IIFC), we have indigenously designed and developed several focusing quadrupole magnets and beam steering dipole corrector magnets for 800 MeV Proton Improvement

Plan (PIP-II) project of Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Chicago. BARC designed and developed magnets are now a part of PIP-II beamline," she wrote.

"Owing to the fact that at remote and rural locations, primary health care diagnosis and imaging facilities are sparse in number, a novel solution has been devised for a low-cost, compact, portable, cryo-free, lightweight system which can be easily transported to remote areas. Towards this, we have designed and developed a Halbach-based permanent magnet dipole with an in-built magnetic field gradient for medical applications," she added.

Deputy CM praises SBI's CSR drive



On Women's Day

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

On the occasion of the International Women's Day 2025, the State Bank of India Bhubaneswar Circle organized various CSR activities across Odisha.

In an event organised at SBI LHO Bhubaneswar, Deputy Chief Minister Pradipta Kumar Patra graced the occasion and distributed 200 sewing machines for Women SHGs and other Start-Up Lady Entrepreneurs as well as 81 numbers of sanitary pad incinerators for girls of high schools and ladies hostels across Odisha.

Chief General Manager

Dinesh Pruthi, General Manager Ponnambalam M, General Manager Kaushal Kishor Singh, Deputy General Managers and more than 100 staff members of SBI LHO Bhubaneswar were present.

Deputy Chief Minister Patra lauded the efforts of SBI's various initiatives for the upliftment of weaker section and girl students under CSR programs. She also praised SBI for smooth transfer of funds directly to the accounts of beneficiaries under Subhadra scheme and maximum disbursement of loans under Mission Shakti for which Odisha State has ranked 2nd position across India.

Senior citizens embark on spiritual journey 'Sustainable Science and Technology' conf held

Ayodhya-Varanasi Pilgrimage Train leaves B'pur

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Ayodhya-Varanasi Senior Citizen Pilgrimage Train, under the State Government's Senior Citizen Pilgrimage Scheme, was ceremoniously flagged off by Deputy Chief Minister Pradipta Kumar Patra at the Brahmapur railway station on Saturday. This marked the sixth pilgrimage train of the financial year 2024-25, benefiting 775 senior citizens from various districts.

Launched in 2016 by the State Tourism Department, the scheme has enabled economically-disadvantaged and Below Poverty Line (BPL) senior citizens to fulfill their spiritual aspirations. Citizens aged 60 to 75, irrespective of caste or religion, are selected based on financial criteria, re-



quiring valid proof such as an Antyodaya Card, Widow Allowance Card, or Food Security Ration Card.

So far, 33,588 senior citizens have embarked on spiritual journeys to revered destinations such as Madurai, Rameswaram, Prayagraj, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Ajmer, Pushkar, Tirupati Balaji, Vellore, Srikalahasti, Shirdi, Nashik, Dwarka, Kolkata Kali Temple, Kamakhya, Agra, Mathura and Vrindavan.

This year, the scheme aims to facilitate 8,000 pilgrims in

10 phases, covering destinations including Ayodhya, Varanasi, Shirdi, Nashik, Kolkata Kali Temple and Kamakhya.

Pilgrims are selected by respective District Magistrates based on district-wise quotas. In case of excess applications, a lottery system is used, with a 20% waiting list prepared for replacements.

The State Government, in collaboration with IRCTC, has made elaborate arrangements for the pilgrims, including free transportation from their villages to the designated

railway station and back, along with accommodation, meals and local transportation at the pilgrimage sites. Additionally, tour guides, travel insurance and medical assistance are provided.

In this phase, 438 pilgrims from Ganjam, 72 from Gajapati, 91 from Kandhamal, 119 from Nayagarh and 55 from Boudh, totalling 775, are embarking on the journey, accompanied by 24 escort officers. Family members of the pilgrims gathered at the railway station to wish them a successful journey.

At CSIR-IMMT

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A two-day National Conference on "Sustainable Science and Technology for Viksit Bharat" began at the CSIR-Institute of Minerals & Materials Technology (IMMT) here as part of the institute's Diamond Jubilee Celebration. The conference was inaugurated by MPs Dr Rabindra Narayan Behera and Bibhu Prasad Tarai.

Director, CSIR-IMMT Dr Ramanuj Naryan delivered the welcome address and Chief Scientist Dr LD Besra spoke about the conference. Dr Santosh Kumar Behera, convener of SSTV 2025, offered the vote of thanks in the inaugural session.

Inaugurating the event MP Behera said industries must innovate responsibly, ensuring that development and environmental conservation go



hand in hand for a truly Viksit Bharat.

On first day, the research works of students of different academic and R&D organizations were presented in a well-organized poster exhibition where scholars explained their works to the visitors one-to-one. Posters were also evaluated for best poster awards.

MP Dr Tarai said, "To achieve sustainable development, every citizen must contribute to innovation and research. By popularizing science

and technology, we can make India a global leader. Together, we will build a stronger, more prosperous nation and fulfill the dream of Viksit Bharat."

A 4M theme panel discussion was coordinated by Dr Ramanuj Narayan. In addition to this, the 4M Vigyan Rath which was sent to visit different parts of Eastern-India to popularize science with special emphasis to 4M research areas was received with a grand welcome by all the participants, on its return back to the campus. Prof Bidyadhar Subudhi,

Director, NIT Warangal delivered the first Plenary Talk on "Photovoltaic System and its Integration with Smart Grid".

A cultural programme was organized for participants in the first day evening. On second day a popular talk by Dr Sudhanshu Mani, the creator of Vande Bharat Express Train, is planned.

The event has brought together leading scientists, academicians, technologists, policymakers and thought leaders from esteemed institutions.

SUBHADRA: Booster dose to transformative women-led dev

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Women make up half of our society, and no true development can happen without them. Any responsible government must recognize this. For us, it was only natural to not just acknowledge this but to make it a key part of our development vision, when voted to power. We made it a part of the manifesto and it is fair to say that the people of the State embraced our vision - we were voted to power ending the 24-year-old rule of BJD in the State.

As soon as the new government was formed, not a single day was wasted and in its first meeting dated 17th June 2024, the Cabinet decided to roll out SUBHADRA - the largest women empowerment initiative in the history of Odisha. Being the Minister-in-

Charge of the Department of Women and Child Development, which was mandated to roll out the scheme, it was incumbent on the entire team of the Department to develop the scheme with all its details like detailed guidelines, SOP, financial budgeting, execution plans etc.

In formulating the guidelines, several women empowerment schemes of the country as well as different countries of the world were studied in great detail. We held thorough discussions at the beginning to define the basic contours of the scheme and became clear that unless we listened to the target group's needs, the scheme would remain another official government document having no connect with the ground.

To this effect, stakeholder consultations were organised in 10 districts of

the State soliciting the opinions of the women themselves regarding their needs and expectations from the Government. I take this opportunity to thank all those women who helped shape the core vision of the scheme - the target age group and the idea of transferring the scheme benefit directly to the beneficiaries in their single-holder bank accounts. These are the two central pillars around which the entire scheme literature has been formulated.

The suggested target age group was 21 to 60 under the scheme as it is the most economically productive age group since a majority of the women workforce belonged to this age group. Recognizing its importance, we made this the first pillar of the scheme. The second key suggestion was transferring the scheme benefits directly to the

beneficiaries in their single-holder bank accounts which made DBT the obvious choice for implementation. With these two central pillars in mind, the entire scheme was woven to maximise the inclusion of the needy and to exclude the well-off. The scheme's core structure was further refined through a series of deliberations starting from the Department to the State Cabinet.

With the basic framework in place, an estimation was carried out to arrive at the number of potential beneficiaries based on the available census data and the electoral database pertaining to the scheme age group. The estimated number of beneficiaries was slightly over one crore based on the rigorous exercise done by the Department and all stakeholders were directed to factor this

into their budget planning. A total of Rs 55,000 crore was allocated for the scheme, with Rs 11,000 crore earmarked for 2024-25, thus making it the single largest women empowerment scheme thus far in the history of Odisha.

The most vulnerable sections of the population have, for years, been covered under NFSA, with States often supplementing it through their own initiatives. Naturally, SUBHADRA prioritized identifying beneficiaries from this pool first. And in attestation of our vision, most of the scheme beneficiaries were identified from this. The scheme also extends benefits to those outside the NFSA/SFSS framework with detailed provisions ensuring their inclusion under SUBHADRA - truly a scheme designed to encompass all

Civil society members working in the field of women empowerment have been co-opted as members of different committees constituted under the SUBHADRA Guidelines to ensure that the voice of people is heard and reflected in the decision-making process for the inclusion of an applicant or otherwise.

The Odisha Computer Application Centre (OCAC) under the Electronics & Information Technology Department has been our partner in the IT Implementation part of SUBHADRA and played a crucial role in designing a robust portal to manage the entire 1 crore plus estimated women and has served the implementation of SUBHADRA magnificently. The registration process through CSKs/MSKs has been remarkable with over 60 lakh registrations completed

within the first few days of rolling out the scheme. The collective involvement of all stakeholders - Department Officials, District Administration, and other Departments - in reaching out to people and educating them on scheme guidelines through SUBHADRA Sachetana Rathas, SUBHADRA Swagat Padayatras and other awareness activities has shown the way to how a truly participative scheme is to be rolled out redefining the role of all stakeholders. With over 1.08 Crore registrations SUBHADRA is a testament to how rural populations can effectively use technology when it is made accessible in the correct manner.

The Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS) was selected as the preferred DBT platform and NPCI (National Payment Corporation of India) has played a crucial role

in ensuring seamless transactions despite the involvement of multiple stakeholders.

With disbursements made to over 98 lakh beneficiaries thereby ensuring their financial inclusion in a span of six months of our Government's formation, the scheme stands out as a resounding success in terms of implementation. As the first scheme in India to adopt the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) effectively for benefit disbursement directly into digital wallets and promoting digital financial transactions by incentivising digital transactions, SUBHADRA has set the benchmark for the entire country in realising the dream of Digital India Initiative of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Meanwhile the second instalment of the scheme was disbursed on March 8.

Sangam water fit for bathing: CPCB

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A new report by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) submitted to the National Green Tribunal has said that as per statistical analysis, the water quality during the recently concluded Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj was fit for bathing.

The CPCB report said the statistical analysis was necessitated because of "variability of data" in the samples collected from the same locations across different dates and on different locations on the same day, because of which these did not reflect the "overall river water quality throughout the river stretch".

The report dated February 28 and uploaded on the tribunal's website on March 7 said the board had conducted water monitoring twice a week from January 12 onwards, including on auspicious bathing days, at five locations on Ganga river and two locations on Yamuna river.

"There is a significant variability in the values on various parameters, viz pH, dissolved oxygen (DO), biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and fecal coliform count (FC) for the samples taken from the same location on different dates. The values of the afore-mentioned parameters also vary at different locations for the samples collected on the same day," the report said.

The DO or the amount of oxygen in water, BOD, which measures the amount of oxygen needed to break down organic



Sadhus take holy dip at Triveni Sangam during Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj

PTI

matter in water, and FC, a marker of sewage contamination, are key indicators of water quality.

The report said that an expert committee examined the issue of "variability in data" and said that "the data represents a snapshot of water quality at a specific location and time and may vary significantly depending upon factors such as upstream anthropogenic activities (human actions), rate of flow, depth of sampling, time of sampling, river current and mixing of currents, sampling location and such other

multiple factors". "As a result, these values reflect water quality parameters at the exact time and place from where these water samples were collected, and may not fully represent the overall characteristics of the river, therefore, not necessarily reflecting the overall river water quality throughout the river stretch," it said.

The report also said that because of the variability, a statistical analysis of water quality data of various monitoring locations for the key parameters was undertaken from January 12 to February 22 at

10 locations of "mass bathing" and that 20 rounds of monitoring were done.

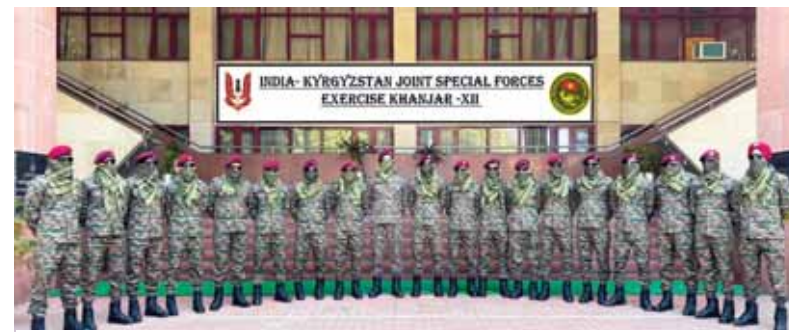
"It is submitted that as per the above-mentioned statistical analysis, the median value (central tendency of the data) of pH, DO, BOD and FC for the monitored stretches is within the respective criteria/permissible limits," the report noted.

According to the report, the median value for FC was 1,400 as compared to the permissible limit of 2,500 units per 100 ml, while the DO was 8.7 vis-a-vis the stipulated norm of being greater than 5 milligram per litre, and the BOD was 2.56 against the stipulated limit of less than or equal to 3 mg per litre.

On February 17, the CPCB had informed the tribunal through a report that various locations in Prayagraj during the Maha Kumbh were not conforming to the primary water quality for bathing with respect to the level of faecal coliform.

"The river water quality was not conforming to the primary water quality for bathing with respect to faecal coliform at all the monitored locations on various occasions.

"A large number of people bathe in the river at Prayagraj during the Maha Kumbh Mela, including on auspicious bathing days, which eventually leads to an increase in faecal concentration," the report had said. At present, the matter has been posted for hearing on April 7. Advocate Saurabh Tiwari appeared for the petitioner in the case.



India and Kyrgyzstan Army personnel during the exercise Khanjar-XII 2025

PTI

India-Kyrgyzstan special drill to start on March 10

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The 12th edition of the India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces Exercise Khanjar-XII is set to take place in Kyrgyzstan from March 10 to 23. Since its inception in 2011, the exercise has evolved into an annual training event, Defence Ministry said here on Sunday.

Giving details, officials said the alternating venues between India and Kyrgyzstan reflect the unique dimension of the thriving strategic relationship. The last edition of the same exercise was conducted in India in January 2024. The Indian contingent is represented by troops from the parachute regiment (special forces) and the Kyrgyzstan contingent is represented by Kyrgyz Scorpion Brigade. Aim of the exercise is to exchange experiences and best practices in counter terrorism and special forces operations in urban and mountainous high altitude terrain scenarios.

The exercise will also focus on developing advanced special forces skills of sniping, complex building intervention and mountain craft. Beyond rigorous training, the exercise will feature vibrant cultural exchanges, including celebration of the Kyrgyz festival Nowruz. This interaction will further cement the bond of friendship between the two nations.

The exercise will provide an opportunity for both sides to fortify defence ties while addressing common concerns of international terrorism and extremism. The exercise reaffirms the commitment of India and Kyrgyzstan to fostering peace stability, and security in the region.

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Rajnath Singh calls for increased R and D in aerospace medicine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday highlighted the growing need for expertise in aerospace medicine in view of the continuous increase in air and space traffic.

He made this assertion after visiting Institute of Aerospace Medicine (IAM) of the Indian Air Force (IAF) in Bengaluru.

He is the first defence minister to visit the institute, defence ministry said here. He was briefed about the unique role of IAM in pilot training, their medical evaluation and aeromedical research.

Rajnath Singh said "From the defence perspective, space has emerged as a major domain in warfare. We have taken a step forward in this direction and mastered the most-advanced technologies such as anti-satellite. India has also become the fastest growing aviation market in the world.

As we are touching new heights in space, we need to explore more possibilities in aerospace medicine. There is a need for increased R and D as research in any high-end complex technology provides benefits to many fields," he said.

The defence minister underscored the importance of aerospace medicine, terming it as critical for dealing with challenges such as micro-gravity, radiation, and isolation faced by a human being in space, while also addressing physical and mental changes.

"Whether it is an issue related to neurons, bone loss or mental problems, it is the responsibility of aerospace and space medicine to tackle these challenges. The field must prepare itself for bigger responsibilities in the future," he said.

The defence minister also said the aerospace sector is going to witness an unprecedented growth in the times to come and it will be pivotal in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047. "The sector is going to play a crucial role in deciding technological advancements, national security, and economic growth. In addition, it will be central in achieving milestones such as satellite launching, inter-planetary missions and commercial space services," he said. Rajnath Singh also inspected the Dynamic Flight Simulator and High Performance Human Centrifuge used for high-G training of fighter pilots and the Spatial Disorientation Simulator for training the pilots of the Armed Forces to avert the risk of spatial disorientation in flight.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind protest against Waqf Amendment Bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind on Sunday extended support to the protest called by All India Muslim Personal Law Board and other organisations against the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, claiming that Muslims are being forced to come out on the streets to reclaim their rights.

Jamiat chief Maulana Arshad Madani said in the working committee meeting of the organisation on February 12, 2025, it was decided that if the Bill is passed, all state units of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind will challenge this law in their respective state high courts.

Additionally, the Jamiat will also approach the Supreme Court with the confidence that justice will be served, as "courts remain the final recourse for us," he said.

Supporting the protest of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and other national organisations at Jantar

Mantar here on March 13, Madani said that Muslims are being forced to come out on the streets to reclaim their rights.

He said that for the past 12 years, Muslims have shown great patience and tolerance.

"However, now, when the concerns of Muslims regarding Waqf properties are being disregarded, and an unconstitutional law is being forcibly imposed, there remains no other option but to protest," Madani said in a statement.

He emphasised that peaceful protest for one's religious rights is the democratic right of every citizen in the country.

The Jamiat chief further stated that since the introduction of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, "we have been making every possible effort in a democratic manner to convince the government that Waqf is a purely religious matter".

"Waqf properties are donations made by our ancestors for the welfare

of the community, and therefore, we cannot tolerate any government interference in them," he said.

"Muslims cannot compromise on their rights, not just their existence. The current government wants to take away the rights granted to Muslims by the country's Constitution by bringing a new Waqf Amendment Act," he alleged.

"We are going to protest to reclaim the rights and powers granted to us by the Constitution. By bringing legislations like the Waqf Amendment Bill, there is an attempt to infringe upon these very constitutional rights," he alleged.

Maulana Madani said Jamiat has made efforts to make those parties in the government, which call themselves secular and in whose success Muslims have also played a part, that what is happening is very wrong.

"However, now even the central cab-

inet has approved it, which clearly means that these parties have openly supported this Bill," he said.

The Jamiat president claimed that this is a betrayal of the Muslims, and playing with the country's Constitution and laws.

"These parties value their own political interests more than the secular Constitution of the country and the Muslims. Therefore, the parties that claim secularism are equally responsible for what is happening in the country today," he said.

"By assisting openly in pushing the country toward destruction and ruin, their role is far more dangerous than that of the communal forces because they are acting like friends while stabbing people in the back," Madani said.

He appealed to people to join the demonstration in large numbers to not only make it successful but also to show their awareness and commitment to the community's cause.

PM Modi, Nadda visits VP Dhankhar at AIIMS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Health minister J P Nadda on Sunday visited AIIMS here to enquire about Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar.

He was admitted there early morning after complaining of uneasiness and chest pain. He is stable and under observation.

In a social media post, Modi said, "Went to AIIMS and inquired about the health of Vice President Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar Ji. I pray for his good health and speedy recovery".

Dhankhar (73) was taken to the hospital around 2 am.

He was admitted to the Critical Care Unit (CCU) under Dr Rajiv Narang, Head of Department of Cardiology at AIIMS, sources said.

Japanese woman falls to death from 14th floor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

In a shocking incident a Japanese woman was found dead after she fell from a balcony on the 14th floor of an upscale residential society in Gurugram, police said. The body was handed over to the family after an autopsy on Saturday and further investigation is under way, police said. In connection with the matter the police have informed the embassy for further proceedings.

According to the police, the victim Madoko Thamano (34) had come to Gurugram with her husband in September last year. She was living in a society here with her husband and two children. The deceased's husband works in a branch of a foreign bank operating in Gurugram. The incident occurred on Friday morning when the police received a call from society guards regarding a woman's body being found lying on the ground, a police officer privy to the matter said.

Following information a police team was immediately dispatched to the incident spot. "The reason behind the incident is yet to be known. We are investigating the matter from all possible angle. The matter is under investigation," said Inspector Sandeep Kumar, SHO of Sector 53 police station.

Congress pushes for simplified GST 2.0

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

With Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserting that the GST rates will come down further, the Congress on Sunday said any changes in the tax must be more comprehensive than a mere rate reduction and stressed the need for a radically simplified and less punitive GST 2.0.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said his party had envisaged a GST 2.0 a truly "Good and Simple Tax" in its manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, and it remains committed to that vision.

"The ball is now in the Union government's court- will they take this historic opportunity?" Ramesh asked in a statement. "The finance minister has declared that GST rates will be reduced soon.

The Indian National Congress reiterates that any changes in GST must be more comprehensive than a mere rate reduction," he said.

Reducing the tax on caramel popcorn, without fundamentally reforming a system that has three rates of tax for popcorn, is just window-dressing, the former Union minister added. The need of the hour is a radically simplified and less punitive GST 2.0, he said. "The first objective of GST 2.0 must be to simplify the tax slabs. The three-slab tax system for popcorn and the differential tax rates for cream buns and regular buns are only the



Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh

PIONEER PHOTO

tip of the iceberg," he said.

As the Narendra Modi government's former chief economic advisor, Arvind Subramanian, has acknowledged, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has up to 100 different rates, including cesses, the Congress leader pointed out. "This complexity increases the compliance burden on businesses and the government bureaucracy. The multiplicity of rates has facilitated alarming GST evasion of ₹2.01 Lakh Crore, almost double the ₹1.01 Lakh Crore reported in FY23," he claimed, adding that "18,000 fraudulent entities have been uncovered; many more are likely undetected".

The complexity of the current GST regime reflects a lack of seriousness on the government's part to enforce a truly "Good and Simple Tax", Ramesh said.

"Second, a key issue in recent months has been the slowdown in GST net collections due to high refunds. Data from December 2024 showed that net GST collections, after adjusting for refunds, slumped to 3.3 per cent growth partly due to the 45.3 per cent increase in refunds to taxpayers," he said.

While some part of this increase in refunds is certainly credible, a significant component of these refunds is likely fraudulent, he claimed. "The complexity of the GST system especially when combined with a software system that is ridden with loopholes has allowed for large-scale fraud," the Congress leader alleged. Input Tax Credit (ITC) fraud is particularly common, with more than ₹35,132 Crore worth of fraud identified, amidst a recovery rate of just 12 per cent, he noted.

Weak supply-chain tracking means that buyers can claim ITC without receiving supplies, often using false invoices or inflating turnover to secure fraudulent refunds, Ramesh said. "Minimal validation and the lack of physical checks during online registration also enables the creation of fake companies who seek refunds without actual operations.

Firms have also claimed refunds on exports that are ineligible for such benefits," he said. The inadequate enforcement mechanism for GST needs to be one of the key targets of any reforms, the Congress leader said.

Government yet to receive proposals from HCs to appoint ad-hoc judges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Over a month after the Supreme Court cleared the decks to appoint ad-hoc judges in high courts to deal with rising pendency of cases, the government is yet to receive proposals from respective HCs naming candidates.

Considering a backlog of over 1.8 lakh criminal cases, the Supreme Court on January 30 allowed the high courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength.

Article 224A of the Constitution allows the appointment of retired judges as ad-hoc judges in high courts to help deal with pendency.

Sources said the Union law ministry is yet to receive any recommendation from respective high court collegiums for appointing ad-hoc judges. As per the laid down procedure, the respective high court collegiums send recommendations or names of candidates to be appointed as HC judges to the Department of Justice in the law ministry.

The department then adds inputs and details on the candidates before forwarding the same to the Supreme Court Collegium.

The SC Collegium then takes a final call and recommends to the government to appoint the selected persons as judges.

The president signs the 'warrant of appointment' of the newly-appointed judge.

The procedure to appoint ad-hoc judges will be the same except that the president will not sign the warrant of appointment. But the assent of the president will be sought for appointing ad-hoc judges.

Except in one case, there is no precedence of appointing retired judges as ad-hoc HC judges, sources pointed out.

In a judgement on April 20, 2021 on the appointment of ad-hoc judges in the high courts, the top court had imposed certain conditions.

However, later a special Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant had relaxed certain conditions and kept some in abeyance.

Climate change to intensify, cooling effects may weaken: Scientists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Climate change is growing stronger and more robust and the cooling, counter effects of La Nina may not be effective in a warmer future, climate scientists said, assessing current heat trends seen in large parts of the country.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted an early summer this year, with above-normal temperatures and intense, long heat wave spells.

The country experienced its warmest February since 1901, with the fifth lowest rainfall since 2001, it said.

While human-caused climate change is increasingly driving a 'new normal' marked by a warmer winter and shorter spring, scientists also draw attention to the yearly changes in weather patterns, termed 'year-to-year variability'.

"For example, updates from the IMD this year suggest that it was an unusually dry winter," Arpita Mondal, associate professor at the Centre for Climate

Studies at IIT Bombay, said.

She explained that rain is a natural cooling process that helps bring temperatures down.

Raghu Murtugudde, an earth system scientist and professor at IIT Bombay, said, "I see a global wave of warm and cold temperature anomalies (deviations from expected patterns) during Dec-Feb that are related to the swings of jet streams."

Jet streams are strong winds blowing in the upper levels of the atmosphere and influence weather by shifting north and south.

Mondal said, "Our study finds that a northward shift in these winds during pre-monsoon is directly linked with heatwave character, such as its duration and temperature."

Further, El Nino and La Nina phases of the 'ENSO' natural climate driver also contribute to the overall trends, Vimal Mishra, chair professor of civil engineering at IIT Gandhinagar, said.

"So, under El Nino-like conditions, you

will see warm springs or hot temperatures just after winter, whereas if La Nina prevails, you will find more number of cool or cold days," Mishra said.

Much of the world's weather is significantly influenced by the 'El Nino-Southern Oscillation' (ENSO), involving changes in temperatures and atmospheric pressures in the Pacific Ocean.

An ENSO cycle oscillates between the 'El Nino' warm phase linked with warmer ocean temperatures and its counterpart 'La Nina', transitioning each time via a neutral phase. A cycle typically lasts between 2-7 years.

This week, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) notified that the "weak" La Nina that emerged in December 2024 "is likely to be short-lived".

The UN agency had predicted the La Nina a 60 per cent chance of emerging during July-September, following ENSO-neutral conditions that began in May 2024.

Further, temperatures during March 2024-February 2025 were 0.71 degrees Celsius above the 1990-2020 average, and 1.59 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service said this week.

Sea surface temperatures remained unusually high in many ocean basins and seas, it said.

Murtugudde said, "It's not really a La Nina at all. It has some cold waters in the tropical Pacific (Ocean), but in the critical eastern Pacific, some warm anomalies have persisted. And this only emerged at the end of the year, as opposed to peaking during December-February."

"The patterns are a bit unexpected, but likely related to the record warming of 2023 which is still continuing. We haven't really explained the level of warming yet," he added.

Studies have projected that in a warmer future, El Nino events are likely to become more common and intense, with every one in two of these being an

extreme one. The 2023-24 El Nino, one of the strongest five on record, is said to have fuelled rising temperatures and extreme weather events around the world in the period.

India experienced 536 heatwave days during summer 2024, the highest in 14 years, with the northwestern region seeing the warmest June since 1901, according to the IMD.

Mishra said, "The most robust, important signature is that of climate change. Therefore, even under ENSO-neutral conditions very much likely this year we cannot ignore harsh heatwaves, given that we have already started with quite warm temperatures in March."

In its update this week, the WMO has predicted a 60 per cent chance of ENSO-neutral conditions during March-May 2025.

Further, under climate change, "an El Nino will cause a lot of problems for us, but La Nina may not be able to provide comfort to us," Mishra added.

Mamata created Frankenstein's monster at JU: Adhikari

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Frankenstein's monster at the Jadavpur University (JU) is a creation of Mamata Banerjee, State Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari on Sunday said adding the former had manufactured the entanglement inside the JU campus in order to afford a lease of life to the Marxists and make them relevant in the State politics once again. This, in order to divide the anti-Trinamool Congress votes and impede BJP's ascendancy. Adhikari who led an impressive rally of saffron workers skirting the Jadavpur University campus said, "The Frankenstein's monster at Jadavpur has been manufactured by Mamata Banerjee. The entire drama is being directed by her to give the CPI(M) a fresh lease of life in Bengal Trinamool Congress has teamed up with the Left to make them relevant again in the State," in order to divide the Hindu votes and hinder BJP's emergence to power.

Adhikari organised the rally more than a week after a commotion broke out inside the JU campus where the Left wing students including the CPI(M) affiliated Students' Federation of India gheraoed State Education Minister Bratya Basu whose vehicle then allegedly forced its exit out of the campus grievously injuring a couple of students. Basu visited the University to attend a meeting of the Trinamool Congress-backed West Bengal College and University Professors' Association (WBCUPA). The students were demanding from the Minister a deadline for staging of students' body elections in the State. The elections to the students' unions have not been held for the past eight years. Adhikari who also demanded the arrest of Basu for the JU incident said, "This is a drama that has been jointly enacted by Salim and Hakim — (read CPI(M) State secretary Md Salim and senior TMC leader and Minister Firhad Hakim) — in order to divert the attention of the people from other more important issues and



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee

once again divide the Opposition vote, but we will expose them soon. Jadavpur has become a hub of anti-national elements who thrive by drugs and impose their hegemony inside the campus. We will organise a mass convention after March 15 and go out on an awareness campaign throughout the State where we will tell the people about this TMC-Left camaraderie. We will not leave them." Adhikari's colleague in the State Assembly Amarnath Shakha too attacked the Left from "perpetrating a goonda raj inside the Jadavpur campus. Mamata Banerjee's Government cannot take care of them. They are hand in gloves with them, leave them up to the BJP. It will take half-an-hour to restore order in JU. The CPI(M) and TMC are destroying the campus which was once a seat of nationalist learning." Curiously the TMC leadership too had issued similar threats against the JU students. While Bengal Minister Arup Biswas said that it would take one minute for his party

men to enter and subjugate JU, his party colleague and MP Sayani Ghosh said that it was because of the restraint being exercised by Mamata Banerjee that JU were perpetrating their illegal acts. "Mamata Banerjee is showing remarkable patience despite provocations by the Left-wing students. Due to the patience shown by the CM, police are not entering the campus despite the attack on the Minister." The Left however "invited" the TMC and BJP to enter JU forcibly and "see the consequence." CPI(M) leader Srijan Bhattacharya said that "repeatedly these leaders of BJP and TMC are issuing threats this means the students are on the democratic track let them enter the campus and then face the consequence in the people." Meanwhile much like what happened in the aftermath of the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital rape and murder case a section of the civil society on Sunday took out a long procession demanding justice for the students of JU.

Worker dies in factory collapse, rescues ongoing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ludhiana

One more worker died in the factory building collapse here, while the rescue operation was still on, as another worker was stated to be trapped under the debris, officials said on Sunday. The worker's body was brought out from under the debris on Sunday, taking the death toll in the incident to two, they said. On Saturday evening, a worker was killed after the building of a textile factory collapsed in the focal point area here. Two teams of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), along with police, fire brigade and the municipal corporation, were undertaking the rescue operation, the officials said. Sources said repair work was being taken up in the factory when a pillar gave way. An eyewitness on Saturday said a loud sound was heard before the building caved in. On Sunday, Deputy Commissioner Jitendra Jorwal said that two workers have died in the incident. The rescue operations are still going on to locate one worker who is stated to be



Rescue work underway after a multi-storey building of a textile factory collapsed in Ludhiana

trapped beneath the debris after the incident that occurred around 5 pm Saturday, the officials said. Due to the substantial amount of debris, rescue teams are removing it carefully using manual equipment, they said. Deputy Commissioner Jorwal said a magisterial probe has been ordered to

investigate the exact cause of the incident. An FIR has also been registered in connection with the incident. Compensation will be provided to the families of the deceased while the government will cover the medical expenses for the workers who were injured in the incident, the officials said.



Rescue operation underway to trace workers trapped inside SLBC tunnel in Nagarkurnool

Cadaver dogs deployed in SLBC tunnel rescue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nagarkurnool

Cadaver dogs will be deployed inside the partially collapsed Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel here on Sunday to search for human presence, as the rescue operation to save eight trapped persons entered its 16th day. The dogs joined the rescue efforts on March 7, when they were taken inside the tunnel. The canines, specially trained to detect human remains, would be taken into the tunnel on Sunday, a police official said. Rescue teams will dig beyond five feet at two points identified by Human Remains Detection Dogs (HRDDs), as workers may be trapped in the second layer of the dismantled tunnel boring machine (TBM), according to a senior official on Saturday. The Kerala police's Belgian Malinois breed dogs are capable of detecting

scent from a depth of up to 15 feet. The Telangana government has decided to deploy robots for the rescue operation from March 11 to ensure the safety of rescue personnel, as the challenging conditions inside the tunnel, including water and slush, pose significant risks. The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has submitted an initial report in which, among other things, it has cautioned that rescue operations should be carried out with extreme caution and care in the last 70 metres (at the accident site), the official said. As the fragments of the huge TBM got submerged under water, soil and stones inside the tunnel, they caused a hazard to the rescue team. The rescue operation has been going on amid challenging conditions, including muck and seepage of water. Eight persons — engineers and labourers — have been trapped in the SLBC project tunnel since February 22

Nitish Kumar issues appointment letters to new teachers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar handed over appointment letters to 51,389 newly recruited teachers on Sunday. These teachers were recruited by the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) through the third phase of the Teachers' Recruitment Examination (TRE-3). Speaking at the function, the CM said that apart from 2,68,548 teachers recruited in the three phases, 42,918 candidates have cleared the exam for headmasters

and they will get the appointment letters next month. "Further, 2,53,961 teachers, who were earlier appointed by Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies, also cleared competency test to get the government employee status," he said. "Now, the total number of government teachers in the state will be 5,65,427," he added. Kumar said his government is taking all measures to ensure the overall development of the education sector in the state. "The share of the state budget ear-

marked for education has reached 22 per cent, and it will be further increased. Right from the beginning, education, especially that for girls, has remained the top priority of the state government," he said. Leader of the opposition in the assembly Tejashwi Yadav said the process for the recruitment of these teachers started during the previous Mahagathabandhan government. Yadav was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an RJD protest to press for the implementation of 65 per cent reservation for backward communities in state government jobs.

Three injured in Mumbai gas pipeline fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Three persons suffered burn injuries after a leaking gas pipeline caught fire on a road in Mumbai's Andheri area early on Sunday, an official said. Two vehicles were also damaged in the incident, he said. The Mahanagar Gas Limited (MGL) in a statement later said the pipeline was damaged due to the "JCB impact during unauthorised, uncontrolled digging". The blaze erupted at 12.35 am in a heavily leaking supply pipeline of the MGL, passing through the middle of a road at Sher-E-Punjab society near a gurdwara at Takshila in Andheri (East) area, a fire official said earlier in the day. It was a "level-one" fire which was confined to two moving vehicles, he said. A two-wheeler rider, Arvindkumar Kaithal (21), suffered 30 to 40 per cent burns, another biker, Aman Harishankar Saroj (22), sustained 40 to 50 per cent burn injuries, and auto-rickshaw driver



Repair work underway after leaking of a gas pipeline in Mumbai

Suresh Kailas Gupta (52) suffered 20 per cent burns, he said. A water tanker, a fire engine and other assistance were rushed to the spot and the blaze was extinguished by 1.34 am, the official said. The three injured persons were taken to the Balasaheb Thackeray Trauma Care Centre in Jogeshwari for treatment. Kaithal and Saroj, however, took discharge against

medical advice, the official said. The MGL in its statement said the gas pipeline was damaged due to the JCB (earth-excavating machine) impact during unauthorised and uncontrolled digging last night, leading to the fire. The fire brigade and the MGL emergency team extinguished the blaze. The gas supply was stopped for repair work of the pipeline, it said.

ASHA workers combat TB stigma in UP with nationwide screening initiative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Ranjana Chaudhary, a 28-year-old ASHA worker in Uttar Pradesh's Siddharthnagar visits six to seven houses in Madhubeniya village every day with an aim to eradicate the stigma behind Tuberculosis and encourage villagers to get screened for the disease. "Social stigma is still a major impediment due to which people do not readily come forward for testing for the deadly contagious air-borne disease. "No no, why should I have TB?" she said irritatingly. Chaudhary and lakhs of ASHA workers in remote areas of the country face the daunting challenge of convincing people to attend tuberculosis screening camps and

are mobilising vulnerable people to such camps under the ongoing pan India 100-Day Intensified Campaign to Eliminate TB. Aimed at accelerating efforts towards eliminating Tuberculosis from the country, the government has been proactively screening and testing vulnerable populations such as diabetics, smokers, alcoholics, those who are malnourished, people living with HIV, individuals with a history of TB or COVID, the elderly and household contacts of TB patients. Since the launch of the 100-day campaign in December last year, the TB programme has notified over 6.1 Lakh TB patients across the country of which 4.3 Lakh patients were diagnosed from the 455 intervention districts. "Often we don't tell people that it is a TB screening camp and tell them to attend it saying a free health check-up camp is being held nearby. Even if detected for tuberculosis people generally prefer to keep it under wraps for fear of isolation and social stigma," Chaudhary said.

"By virtue of the fact that TB is a communicable disease, stigma is manifold. Especially if a woman is diagnosed with the disease, the family considers it as a curse and tries to hide it for fear of the girl remaining unmarried. Lots of families also try to keep it confidential thinking they would be ostracised from the community," said another ASHA worker Sunita. Dr Shailendra Bhatnagar said TB is a very peculiar disease. If you do not get the right treatment at the right time you may infect other family members of the family and neighbours. "If a TB-positive patient is not treated he or she can create 15 new patients in one year. Similarly further if this new lot of 15 new patients are not treated in the second year the figure becomes 225 and similarly the chain can go on and on," he explained. Dr Bhatnagar stressed that as soon as one gets any of the symptoms, he or she should get tested. If found positive, the entire family is examined.

Contact tracing, which became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, is a terminology that has been used in TB programmes for several years now, Dr Bhatnagar informed. It is being done with the intention that if one index patient gets Tuberculosis, his or her household members and the people they interact with on a routine basis in work areas or elsewhere are examined for signs of TB. The household contacts are 10-60 times more at risk of getting the disease. "Even if their close contacts test negative at that moment, they are put on preventive TB treatment," he said. "However, before initiating TB preventive treatment to contacts, it is mandatory to rule out active TB disease by a qualified doctor," Dr Bhatnagar said. The identity of TB patients is not revealed to the public, and in several cases, the Ni-kshay Poshan kit is being delivered to their doorstep, he added. To mitigate stigma, the national TB elim-

ination programme has adopted a multi-pronged approach. TB champions/TB Vijaetas - persons who have overcome the deadly disease are being engaged and made ambassadors of awareness, counselling, and patient support. They routinely support patients and their families by paying them house visits, guiding them through their treatment and nutrition requirements and helping them mitigate any stigma or misinformation about the disease. Along with them, Gram Pradhans are also being sensitised under the TB-Mukt Panchayat Abhiyaan, where they are briefed about the TB disease, how it is diagnosed, and patient entitlements. They are also encouraged to talk about TB during their Panchayat meetings, monitor progress indicators of the program and support TB patients as Ni-kshay Mitras. Since the launch of the campaign, around 12 Lakh Ni-kshay Shivirs (TB screening camps) have been held across the country and 11 Crore persons who are vul-

nerable to being affected by TB have been screened across the country. Such mass mobilisation has been possible through different levers the National TB Elimination Programme has tapped into to combat stigma around TB and encourage early testing and screening. Through the course of the campaign, over 27,000 elected representatives across different levels (union and state ministers, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, and Gram Pradhans), have been engaged to increase awareness, participate in Ni-kshay Shivirs and provide nutrition support to TB patients and their families through the Ni-kshay Mitra programme. As part of the campaign, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare sensitised over 250 parliamentarians during the winter session of parliament, and the Union Health Minister JP Nadda, chaired meetings with Chief Ministers or LGs and Health Ministers of implementation states, encouraging them to actively monitor and participate in campaign activities.

Editor's TAKE

A promise is a promise!

Delhi Government approves financial aid for women, seeking to set it apart from what has now come to be widely perceived as political freebies

The Delhi Government, powered by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, has approved the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, a scheme aimed at providing financial assistance of ₹2,500 per month to women from economically weaker sections. The initiative, a key promise made during the BJP's election campaign in Delhi, is expected to cost the exchequer ₹5,100 crore. The eligibility criteria for the scheme include an annual income cap of ₹2.5 lakh and an age range of 18 to 60 years.

The Delhi Chief Secretary, along with other officials, has finalised these conditions, ensuring that the financial aid reaches the most deserving beneficiaries. However, the announcement understandably will concretise over a period of time as no date for disbursement has been declared yet, despite earlier promises of payments beginning on March 8. Besides, it has also been pointed out that the eligibility criteria were not communicated to voters during the election campaign. In its layout, the Mahila Samridhi Yojana seeks to ward off any criticism of the so-called "freebie culture," which political parties across the spectrum accuse each other of.

Indeed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has often warned of excessive populist schemes could that burden State finances and harm long-term economic stability. He has advocated for welfare measures that promote self-reliance rather than direct cash benefits. It is hoped that the Delhi Government would acknowledge the Prime Minister's warning and ensure that welfare measures are not just a tool to secure electoral victories.

BJP national president JP Nadda himself launched the scheme, congratulating the Chief Minister for allocating the funds for its execution. Ms Rekha Gupta has a tight financial rope to walk on, considering she bemoaned the appalling fact of Delhi's empty coffers when she assumed office. Admittedly, Delhi has already allocated itself subsidies which are worth thousands of crores, a probe into which the Government must initiate post haste. The subsidies given by the Kejriwal Government in the past decade have increased manifold, inquiries into which ought to be the present Government's utmost priority. The highest subsidies have been allocated to the power, water and transport sectors. Delhi's power subsidies rose from ₹292 crore in 2014-15 to a shocking ₹3,600 crore by 2024-25. The free water provided by the Kejriwal Government was another big drain on the exchequer. The past decade has spawned an invincible Water Mafia culture in Kejriwal's erstwhile strongholds which merits an independent action. Water subsidies rose from ₹21 crore in 2014-15 to ₹500 crore projected for 2024-25. Free bus travel for women cost a whopping ₹115 crore in 2019-20. In 2014-15, the total subsidy doled out was ₹1,555 crore. This figure nearly doubled in 2015-16, soaring to ₹3,018 crore. While it remains to be seen how Ms Gupta delivers on her promise to fellow women citizens, what needs to be clearly factored in is the figure of ₹5100 crore and how best to manage the resources for it.

The approval of the Mahila Samridhi Yojana initiative is expected to strengthen the BJP's party's appeal among women voters, a crucial demographic in electoral politics. Therefore, the real success of the scheme will depend on its swift and transparent implementation. With opposition parties already raising concerns over delays and additional conditions, the Delhi Government must ensure that the scheme does not remain a mere electoral promise and delivers tangible benefits to the intended beneficiaries.

As the political landscape of Delhi continues to evolve, the implementation of welfare schemes such as this will play a pivotal role in shaping the public's perception of the ruling party. The question remains whether the BJP can balance its ideological opposition to freebies with the electoral necessity of welfare measures. Indeed, the politics is the art of possible.

Leaderspeak

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I urge the CM of Tamil Nadu to draw inspiration from other states that have taken steps to offer medical and engineering education in their native languages. It is my sincere wish that Tamil Nadu also introduce such courses in Tamil.

AMIT SHAH, MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

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Judiciary under malicious attack by influential groups

In a democracy, some criticism of the judiciary is inevitable. However, unless there is a measure of restraint, judicial institutions will be damaged and judicial integrity stand debilitated

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked, "Events crowd in upon us in such quick succession that we are apt to miss their true significance." This is particularly true of the unhealthy drift of recent events in the Supreme Court of India. The customary reverence formerly paid to judges of the Supreme Court is being systematically deflated. Pernicious attacks on the judiciary have become commonplace. Many are made by political parties and politicians. Some politicians who are distinguished members of the Supreme Court Bar, see enormous mileage in pursuing that course. But even beyond politicians, the attacks have been made with impunity by the media, academicians and limbs of the law. The recent spate of malicious attacks on our former most respected Harvard educated Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, particularly after he hung up his gloves on November 10, 2024, has shocked the conscience of all right thinking people who cherish and value democracy, the rule of law and the independence of the Judiciary. All I can say is that the vicious attack of calumny and vilification set in motion against Chief Justice Chandrachud in the print, visual, broadcast and internet media, and that too without any cogent basis or tangible evidence, by vested political interests and ventilated by unscrupulous lawyer politicians (who ostensibly owe their allegiance to the Supreme Court) is a most ignominious development that deserves to be condemned by one and all in the strongest possible language. It is indeed lamentable that such personal and political attacks, led by politicians, politician lawyers and lawyers, have gone too far, nay crossed the 'Lakshman Rekha'.

They have sometimes been devised to undermine the fundamental independence of judges of the highest judiciary, even to attempt to daunt judges or to sway the outcome of cases and to depreciate their irrepressible impartiality and integrity. The unconquerable power of democracy and the Rule of Law are being sought to be subverted and subjugated in a most sinister and malicious manner.

Behind the façade of the attacks on the judiciary, I see the evil hand of certain political parties (even invisibly supported by foreign forces inimical to India's interests) to dislodge the smooth functioning of the highest court of the land by means foul rather than fair. In a democratic society, some criticism of the judiciary is inevitable. This is especially so at a time when there is a grow-



ANOOP BOSE

ing understanding of the inescapable choices which are open to judges. Just as decisions of the other branches of the government attract criticism, important and controversial decisions of the courts will inescapably do the same.

Into this ambience has been impregnated the technology of the modern media of communications. Unless there is a measure of restraint, the judicial institutions will be damaged and judicial integrity debilitated. The following features of the recent attacks on the judiciary have been distinctly intemperate. The personal targeting of identified judges. The attempt to intimidate them or to deflect them from fidelity to their oath of office to decide each case strictly on its merits. The unrelenting character and partisan political aspect of the attacks. A censurable feature of the barrage which cannot pass unnoticed is how a woman judge, who was the first lady judge to have been honoured with a well-deserved elevation straight from the Bar to the Bench, was singled out for a studied attack by a senior lady member of the Bar in April, 2018 before her swearing in. In April, 2018, there was also an unholy attempt to impeach another former Chief Justice of India supported by seven disgruntled opposition parties. Targeting judges, identifiable because of their sex, race or other minority considerations, attacking them by over-simplified and inaccurate generalisations, caters to public prejudice.

Such conduct is unworthy of our country that indefatigably claims to uphold fundamental rights and the rule of law. In the face of the onslaught, and under fire, there are a few strategies available to the judiciary. It would be a reprehensible judicial response

to cave in to the pressure and to do exactly what the politicians, editorialists or other powerful interests desire. This would be a complete abdication of the judicial system. It, therefore, rests increasingly on the organised legal profession to defend the judiciary, to correct blatant misinformation and to remind politicians, the media and others of the precious heritage of judicial neutrality and independence which we have enjoyed so proudly. In India, independence and conscientiousness are cherished features of the judiciary. Institutional protection for those features must be sustained.

Political attempts to undermine them should be spurned. Leaders of the legal profession, irrespective of their personal political leanings, should speak up where judges are unjustly assailed by politicians and others for carrying out their independent role. The increasingly adversarial and belligerent nature of our public discourse should not become contagious to the erosion of the balanced relationship of the judiciary with other branches of the government.

Legislators, members of the Executive Government and the judiciary should realise that each branch has its distinct part to play, without which constitutional government would falter and fail. But a genuine desire to protect and preserve the rule of law and the dignity and majesty of the highest court of the world's largest working democracy. In this context, it would not be out of place to men-

tion that our first President Dr Rajendra Prasad, himself an outstanding lawyer, described this "noble edifice" as the 'Temple of Justice' on the occasion of the inauguration of the new Supreme Court building on August 4, 1958 in the august presence of Prime Minister Nehru, Vice President Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Chief Justice Sudhi Ranjan Das, his son-in-law Asoke Kumar Sen, the Union Law Minister and my senior and guru, Lok Sabha Speaker Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, and Attorney General Motilal Chimanlal Setalvad.

In conclusion, I am highly emboldened to commend to readers the stern message delivered by Justice Jashmed Burjor Pardiwala of the Supreme Court at the Second Justice HR Khanna Memorial Symposium on July 3, 2022, "Personal attack on judges for their judgements lead to a dangerous scenario where the judges have to think about what the media thinks, rather than what the law says.

This puts the rule of law on the burner, social and digital media are primarily resorted to expressing personalised opinions more against the judges, rather than a constructive critical appraisal of their judgments. This is what is harming the judicial institution and lowering its dignity. This is where digital and social media need to be regulated throughout the country to preserve the rule of law under our Constitution in India, which cannot be defined as a completely mature or defined democracy, social media is employed frequently to politicise purely legal and constitutional issues."

(The author is an internationally reputed senior lawyer practising in the Supreme Court of India and various High Courts and Tribunals in India. Views expressed are personal)

Whither the women of this country?

SECOND Opinion



PAYAL AGARWAL

Accelerate Accelerate action is a call for urgency, inclusion, and transformative change. It underscores that equality cannot wait and that all sectors of society must work together to hasten progress toward women's rights and empowerment. The responsibility for accelerating this change primarily lies with institutions, particularly the government. Effective policy changes and awareness campaigns that challenge deeply ingrained societal norms are crucial.

While the Government of India has placed women's education and empowerment at the forefront of its agenda — an effort worthy of commendation — the critical question remains: What about their security? According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a total of 4,32,256 cases of crimes against women were registered across India in 2022 — an alarming statistic that translates to nearly 51 FIRs being filed every hour. These cases include rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and dowry-related violence, marking a four per cent increase from the previous year. However, the NCRB also clarified that the rise in registered cases does not necessarily indicate an increase in crime but rather a greater willingness among victims to report incidents.

While urban areas have witnessed increased awareness

and reporting, rural regions still struggle with underreporting due to social stigma and a lack of support systems. A report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) revealed that 151 sitting MPs and MLAs have declared cases related to crimes against women in their election affidavits.

West Bengal has the highest number of lawmakers (25) facing such cases, with 16 sitting MPs and MLAs accused of rape. While the BJP leads in such cases, Congress and other parties are not far behind. These numbers are not just statistics—they represent silent battles fought daily by women at home, on the streets, in workplaces, and even within political corridors.

Protecting the dignity of women is the Government's duty, yet it is deeply ironic that political parties, both at the State and Central levels, sometimes shelter individuals accused of crimes against women for electoral gains. Whether it is Sheikh Shahjahan of TMC or Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of BJP, such instances raise serious concerns about political accountability.

The BJP Government claims significant progress in empowering women, yet the party itself has 134 sitting MPs and MLAs facing charges of crimes against women. Congress follows with 25, with AAP close behind. India ranked 128th out of 177 countries in the 2023 Women, Peace, and Security Index, which assesses women's status based on three dimensions: Inclusion (economic, social, and politi-

cal), Justice (formal and informal discrimination), and Security (individual, community and societal levels). This ranking reinforces the urgent need to accelerate action. In response to growing concerns, the Central Government has extended its flagship

women's security scheme until 2025-26 to curb crimes against women. However, ensuring women's safety requires a multi-pronged approach, including stringent laws, robust security measures, swift justice, timely redressal of complaints, and accessible institutional support for victims.

At its core, the persistence of gender-based violence is deeply rooted in India's complex social fabric, where patriarchal norms, economic disparities and cultural traditions intersect to perpetuate inequality. This systemic injustice not only denies women their right to live with freedom and dignity but also hinders societal progress. Meaningful change requires a shift in mindset-starting at home. As the saying goes, "Gender equality begins at home," and by fostering a culture of respect and equality, we can empower the next generation to build a fairer world. According to the World Economic Forum, at the current pace of progress, achieving full gender parity will take until 2158 — approximately five generations from now. The question we must ask ourselves is: Can we afford to wait that long, or will we take action now to accelerate change?

(The writer is a lecturer in Political science, Jawaharlal Nehru College, Kuanpal, Cuttack; views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

TRUMP IMPOSES RECIPROCAL TARIFF

The United States of America is all set for rolling out the reciprocal taxation policy for the world. And his particular taxing targets are China, Brazil and India, all the major BRICS countries, along with Canada, the EU and Mexico. Donald Trump claims their tariff rates are unfair for US products. Trump claims that India charges more than 100 per cent tariff rates, whereas South Korea charges four times higher tariffs on the USA. This is a clear indication of the fact that this time Trump 2.0 is actually trying to establish fair trade conditions, at least from the American domestic perspective. His wish to play fair on the tariff ground against those nations that have charged tremendously higher amounts of tariffs on America will become a costly affair for the respective targeted countries. Although Trump achieving this trade fairness is definitely a challenging task. As the nation will feel, it is challenging to adjust themselves to the new reciprocal tariff system. The opinion of Trump to achieve this trade fairness is welcoming, as every country has the right to bargain, compete and charge

the tariff for protecting their local businesses. But at the same time, the US must not forget that the world is still on the juggernaut of unfair competition, resource and income divide. Still, the developing countries stand nowhere in comparison to the trade figures of the developed nations. In such a trade paradox milieu, the idea of tariff fairness and equity seems a little vague. Trump must pave the way for fair trade opportunities before initiating the idea of tariff fairness and reciprocity. Trump must understand that no nation can grow unilaterally; we all need each other for our holistic development altogether. Trump must understand that America is a hegemonic state, and it holds its accountability for setting a balanced world order. It just can't do tit for tat with the world, calling it fairness. At the same time, Trump must stop taking help from Elon Musk, a smart capitalist. Since the administration of America is not like the running of a company, where risk-bearing is conditioned for profit only. Sometimes, our loss is the genuine profit of others, and we have to do so to pave the way for an equivalent and just society.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Unique ID for voters

Madam — India's democracy is set to create a new milestone in its journey toward becoming more robust and transparent. Under the initiative of the Election Commission, nearly one billion voters in the country will now be assigned a unique identity, making the electoral process more transparent, secure and error-free. This step will not only simplify voting but also eliminate issues like fraudulent voting and duplicate voter names. In today's digital era, it was essential to make voter identification more effective. By adopting a digital system, the Election Commission is ensuring that duplicate names are removed from voter lists and each voter is assigned a distinct identity, thereby strengthening the democratic framework. This initiative will enhance voter credibility, ensuring fair and impartial elections.

Eliminating the problem of duplicate EPIC numbers will provide every voter with a unique identity, preventing any misuse of voting rights. Moreover, this initiative will pave the way for future advancements such as e-registration and digital voting, making the electoral process more transparent and convenient. This historic step will further deepen public trust in democracy. Now, every citizen will be able to exercise their voting rights without any doubts or obstacles. This initiative will serve as a milestone in steering Indian democracy towards the digital era.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

Russian strikes on Ukraine

Madam — US President Donald Trump on Friday, March 7, 2025, threatened serious sanctions against Russia for attacking Ukraine. Russia launched a wave of aerial bombings early Friday, hitting Ukraine with 67 missiles and 194 drones, according to Kyiv. Most of them were intercepted, but some did make it through, hitting gas and power facilities. These threats were the first strong warnings for Russia from Trump, who had, during the election campaign 2024, claimed the war would be over on the day he took office and even before.

He had then, as now, also claimed Russia would have never invaded Ukraine if he was still president. The second claim cannot be tested, but the first, his confidence in finishing the war, is being tested, as the war has been on for two months now after the start of his second term. Trump has managed to strong-arm Ukraine into getting ready for a ceasefire and a final settlement. After a heated exchange with President Volodymyr Zelensky at an Oval Office meeting, he announced a pause in all US aid to Ukraine, stopping even the exchange of intelligence. Mollified by a "regret" letter from Ukraine, Trump has said he is ready to work with Zelensky towards peace. Officials of the two sides are to meet next week for talks, including on a US-Ukraine agreement that will grant Washington rights in Ukraine's rich reserves of rare earth minerals.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Unfair criticism of Shami

Madam — The statement from the All India Muslim Jamaat President Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Bareilly's criticism against the Indian cricketer Mohammed Shami is quite shocking. The cleric stated that fasting during Ramadan is an obligatory duty in Islam, and anyone who deliberately avoids it is committing a sin. The Indian cricketers have been held in high esteem worldwide not just for their passion towards the game but also for their patriotism towards the nation when it comes to delivering their best on the field. I can bring up the incident of the past when Mohammed Siraj lost his father in November 2020 while he was with the team on his tour of Australia. Though he was given the option of returning home, the pacer chose to stay back with the team for the series.

It was such an emotional moment even for the fans when he shared later that he went to his father's graveyard straight after landing in Hyderabad. The traumatic state was fought out by Siraj then because of his commitment towards national duty. The same is the case here with Mohammed Shami, whose commitment towards the game is well known and who is delivering his might in the absence of Jasprit Bumrah in the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy. When the game of cricket unites all religions, it is unfortunate that the cleric, by his remark, has brought out unreasonable division among religions and is unpardonable as per Islam.

AP THIRUWADI | CHENNAI

Bangladesh's National Citizen Party: A new dawn or fleeting revolution?

Breaking Free from Cloth Clutter

On February 28, 2025, Bangladesh witnessed the birth of the National Citizens Party (NCP), or Jatiya Nagorik Party (NJP) in Bengali. Emerging from the embers of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM)—the very force that toppled former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, the NCP represents both hope and uncertainty

In today's fast-paced and consumer-driven society, the accumulation of clothing has become a significant issue, leading to what is commonly referred to as cloth clutter. The ease of online shopping, the rise of fast fashion, and the influence of social media have all contributed to an excessive and often unnecessary collection of garments.

The National Citizens Party (NCP) or Jatiya Nagorik Party (NJP) in Bengali, was born in Bangladesh on February 28, 2025. It is a progeny of the student leaders who spearheaded the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) that ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina from power on August 5, 2024, and the National Citizens Committee (NCP) or the Jatiya Nagorik Committee (JNC), that emerged from the same political cradle on September 8, 2024.



The country was pregnant with it for almost seven months. A report by Reuters, datelined August 16, 2024, and issued under the heading 'Student protesters plan new party to cement their revolution,' quoted Mahfuz Alam, who then chaired a committee charged with liaising between the interim government, which had assumed office on August 8, and groups like teachers and activists, that the decision to form such a party would be known in about a month. It further quoted Alam, who had been a key leader of the ADSM and is now an adviser to the interim government, as saying, "People are tired of the two political parties (obviously the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party). They trust in (sic) us."

According to the report, Nahid Islam, another of ADSM's important leaders, who resigned as an adviser on February 25 and is now the convener and leader of the NCP, said that the spirit of the students' movement was to build a new Bangladesh where no fascist or autocrat could return. He had added, "To achieve that, we need structural reforms, which will undoubtedly require some time." Nahid further stated that the government was not heeding calls by the Awami League and BNP to hold new elections as early as the fall (of 2024). Another Reuters' report by Ruma Paul, Krishn Kaushik, Devjyot Ghoshal and Krishna N Das, carried under the headline "Insight: Bangladesh student protesters eye new party to cement their revolution" and datelined August 16, 2024, however, cited Alam as having said on Facebook that his statement to Reuters "had come out wrong" and that "We are not thinking about political organisations right now."

The main focus was to maintain the spirit of the mass uprising and to consolidate the government. Others also expressed the same view. Statements, denials and volte faces—nothing new in politics—often reflect tensions and conflicts kept under wraps. Was Alam under pressure to retract or deny his statement? One does not know. There, however, have been indications of differences among both leaders—called coordinators—and rank-and-file of the Students Against Discrimination (SAD), the moniker given to the organisation emerging out of the ADSM, even in the heady immediate aftermath of the formation of the interim government led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

Thus, a report in *The Daily Star*, datelined August 16, 2024, stated that a coordinator and four assistant coordinators of Chittagong University's ADSM had resigned from their posts, alleging that the central coordinators took unilateral decisions and ignored their demands. According to another report in the *Daily Star* datelined January 3, 2025, eight persons were injured in Khulna town in a clash among ADSM supporters.

There have been several reports of internal conflicts and tensions. According to a report in Prothom Alo English, adherents of the ADSM blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway for an hour on February 24, 2025, demanding the dissolution of the organisation's new district committee announced earlier in the month. Not surprisingly, though a consensus was subsequently achieved, there have been reports of arguments and tensions over the naming of the NCP's office-bearers and members of the central convening

committee. Wrangling and power struggles seem programmed into the genes of all political parties. In the case of the NCP, however, factional fissures are accompanied by the presence of incompatible ideologies.

The NJP includes alumni of the Shibir, Jatiotabadi Chhatradal (Bangladesh Nationalist Students Party) affiliated with the BNP, several students' organisations of both leftist and fundamentalist Islamist outfits and those without any political involvement prior to joining the ADSM. They seem to be sticking together because they feel that the future belongs to the new party. What would happen when the latter loses its sheen with time? Signs of trouble are already manifest.

Questions have been asked as to how the enormous amounts of funds needed to mobilise for the gargantuan rally that marked the NCP's formation were found. According to a report in *The Daily Star* datelined March 2, 2025, the Pirojpur district administration had requisitioned several privately owned buses to facilitate local students joining the NJP's inaugural rally on February 28.

It was a partisan act and a grim pointer of this becoming a regular factor if the NJP comes to power. Besides, the declaration of the party's vision for Bangladesh raises questions. It talks of a "cruel fascist" regime—obviously referring to Sheikh Hasina's—ruling for 15 years, destroying state institutions and democracy, and making all-encompassing corruption and money laundering a part of state culture.

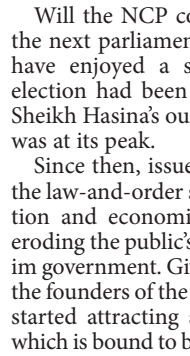
A lot of what it says—relief to marginalised and disadvantaged communities, the protection of fundamental rights, preserving ethnic, social, gender, and cultural diversity, and ensuring strong safeguards against poverty, inequality, and abuse of power—is unexceptionable.

One, however, wishes that it said more about the 'Second Republic', which, and the enactment of a new constitution, are the party's overarching goals. Also, one wonders as to how seriously are pronouncements to



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

be taken, particularly because it says that the party is committed to a culture where justice replaces vengeance. It is liable to make the dead rise up laughing given the interim government's relentless and savage persecution of Awami League leaders and supporters, conducted in blatant disregard of all juridical fairness.



Will the NCP come to power following the next parliamentary elections? It might have enjoyed a sweeping victory if an election had been held immediately after Sheikh Hasina's ouster, when its popularity was at its peak.

Since then, issues like a steep decline in the law-and-order situation, runaway inflation and economic instability have been eroding the public's confidence in the interim government. Given the latter's links with the founders of the new party, they too have started attracting a measure of cynicism, which is bound to be transferred to the NCP.

The latter will also meet growing challenges from parties like the BNP, which had their backs to the wall during Sheikh Hasina's second innings as prime minister but are now flexing their political muscles. Further, the NCP lacks a nationwide, grassroots-level political infrastructure and a leader with charisma and gravitas. Its leaders' demands for not holding parliamentary elections until the reforms are completed and Sheikh Hasina is on the gallows are obviously ploys to gain time to build up its organisation. Time, however, takes its own toll even on the most resplendent of shrines. It cannot be otherwise with the NCP. Its leaders will do well to remember the saying, "Sic transit gloria mundi," which literally translates as "thus passes the glory of the world" but is generally meant to convey that earthly glory is fleeting.

Bangladesh: A backgrounder

A 17-member interim government, led by Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus as its chief advisor, took charge in Bangladesh on August 8, following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina. Hasina resigned as prime minister on August 5, following weeks of deadly student-led protests. Her ouster was followed by a chaos in Muslim-majority country of over 170 million people and it reverberated in neighbouring India.

Sheikh Hasina's departure from Dhaka to neighbouring India resulted from months of growing anger in Bangladesh. After the January 2024 general election, perceived as flawed, critics accused Hasina's government of becoming increasingly arrogant and serving its minions.

The turning point came in June 2024, when Bangladesh's High Court re-instated a quota reserving 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans from Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. With government jobs in high demand due to elevated graduate unemployment, students protested the quota, which they also viewed as favouring supporters of Hasina's Awami League party.

The Supreme Court eventually reduced the quota in late July to 5 per cent. The reversal was too little, too late. Violence between the protesters and the police increased, further fuelled by Hasina's refusal to release detained student leaders.

The protesters, viewing Hasina as responsible for the deaths of some 600 people killed in the clashes with the police, began seeking her overthrow.

To control the protests, Hasina announced a curfew, repeatedly shut down internet and jailed over 11,000 protesters. The army eventually withdrew its support after refusing Hasina's order to open fire on civilians to enforce the curfew. On August 5, 2024, with a large number of angry protesters heading to her official residence, Hasina resigned and fled to India.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

Unlike previous generations who have always valued durability and longevity in clothing, today's generation – the Gen Alpha born between 2010 and 2025, is caught in a cycle of overconsumption, leading to cluttered wardrobes, financial waste and severe environmental consequences.

Cloth clutter or fashion hoarding refers to the excessive accumulation of clothing, often resulting in disorganised spaces filled with unused or rarely worn garments. With trends changing rapidly, many individuals feel pressured to keep up with fashion, leading to impulsive purchases contributing to a growing pile of clothes.

Unlike past generations who owned fewer but high-quality garments, today's generation is surrounded by cheap, trendy options that encourage frequent buying. Moreover, the convenience of online shopping, where clothes are just a click away, has made it even easier to accumulate unnecessary clothing. The result is overcrowded closets, confusion in outfit choices, and a constant feeling of having nothing to wear despite an overflowing wardrobe. There is no denying that the fast fashion industry thrives on quick production cycles, offering new styles almost every week at an affordable price.

This rapid turnover has created a sense of urgency among consumers to buy more before trends change, leading to excessive clothing accumulation. Above all, online shopping platforms such as Amazon, Myntra, Meesho and many more offer constant discounts such as buy-one-get-one deals, and fast delivery, making it incredibly tempting to buy clothes even when they are not needed. Subscription-based shopping models and exclusive online sales have also encouraged unnecessary purchases, filling wardrobes with items that may never be worn.

Today, with the increased stress, boredom or emotions imbibed among many individuals, the concept of mindless shopping is being used, leading to impulsive buying decisions. This has resulted in wardrobes filled with clothes that were purchased out of momentary excitement but have no long-term use.

Various studies and research have shown that a cluttered environment negatively affects mental wellbeing, making it harder to focus and feel at ease. Today, the textile industry is one of the largest contributors to pollution. Overproduction of clothing has led to increased carbon emissions, water consumption and waste. Many discarded clothes end up in landfills, as most fast fashion items are made from synthetic fabrics that take decades to decompose. Constantly buying new clothes without fully utilising existing ones results in unnecessary expenses.

As a result, many individuals end up spending large amounts on fashion while struggling to save money for essential needs. Adopting a minimalist approach to fashion will encourage owning fewer but high-quality, versatile pieces that can be mixed and matched.

This will not only reduce the clutter but also promote mindful consumption. Choosing sustainable brands, buying second-hand clothes, and donating unused garments can significantly reduce the impact of fashion waste.

Supporting ethical fashion brands that prioritise durability over trends can help break the cycle of overconsumption. Donating, selling, or repurposing clothes instead of hoarding them can also free up space and prevent unnecessary purchases.

Asking questions like "Do I need this?" or "Will I wear this at least 20 times?" before making a purchase can help in avoiding impulsive buying. Cloth clutter is a growing problem among today's generation, fuelled by fast fashion, digital influence, social media influencers and impulsive shopping habits.

While the allure of trendy and affordable fashion is strong, it comes at a high cost—both personally and environmentally. By embracing mindful consumption, adopting sustainable fashion choices, and prioritising quality over quantity, individuals can break free from the cycle of cloth clutter, leading to a more organised, stress-free, and eco-conscious lifestyle. There are various reasons for it.

Cloth clutter can arise from various factors, such as: Buying more clothes than needed, holding onto clothes that no longer fit or are out of style and above all reluctance to ward off the old clothes.

It may look innocuous but cluttering can have a negative impact on your well being and mental state. It also has practical issues arising from the problem of plenty.

One can have reduced storage space and difficulty accessing clothing and one can experience the a sense of being overwhelmed and disorganised. It often leads to stress and anxiety which can impact your overall wellbeing. But there is solution to it. To combat cloth clutter, you may start declutter your wardrobe regularly and get rid of the items you no longer wear or need.

Besides, organising your clothing storage, using bins, shelves, and drawers effectively declutters your storage space.

One of the easiest way to declutter is to avoid mindless purchasing and buying only what you need and love. Indeed it is not a big problem or something which cannot be dealt with but it must be acknowledged and taken into stride.

It is a lifestyle problem arising from our inability to be mindful of our actions. And don't forget there are people who need your clothes so why not give it to people who need them and experience the feeling of gratitude

Let your wardrobe smile!

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)



SHAINY SHARMA

A trade deal between India and the US remains a strong possibility

The strategic partnership and geopolitical compulsions of both India and the United States could significantly contribute to clinching a long-awaited trade deal, laying the foundation for future cooperation. While President Donald Trump has positioned himself ideologically closer to Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un—thus isolating European nations—his administration saw the need to counter China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific, making India a crucial ally.

US Demands and India's Position

US Commerce Secretary, Howard Lutnick has stressed the necessity of India opening its agriculture market, asserting that this sector could not be "off the table" in trade negotiations. He advocates a broad, macro-level trade pact rather than product-specific agreements, arguing that aligning India's tariff policies with the US would be more beneficial for both nations.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently concluded productive trade discussions in Washington with US counterparts, including Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Secretary Lutnick. The talks hold significance as both nations move towards negotiating a bilateral trade deal. During Prime Minister Modi's recent US visit, India and America committed to doubling bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030, targeting the completion of the first phase of a trade pact by fall 2025.

In 2023, US-India trade in goods and services reached \$190.08 billion, with India enjoying a \$43.65 billion trade surplus. Trump, echoing Lutnick's optimism, emphasised that a trade deal is within reach, underlining its strategic importance.

The Indian Diaspora's Growing Influence

Reports suggest that the Indian diaspora in the US has emerged as a significant economic and political force, subtly shaping US-India trade policies. Indian-Americans, one of the most prosperous and educated ethnic groups in the US, have wielded considerable influence in strengthening bilateral ties. In a shift, a notable portion of the Indian diaspora supported Trump in the November elections, affecting the political calculus. As of 2021, the average household income for Indian-Americans was \$123,700—surpassing all other ethnic groups.

Between 1995 and 2005, they founded more technology and engineering companies than immigrants from the UK, China, Taiwan, and Japan combined, contributing significantly to innovation and job creation.

The Indian-American population has grown from 2.3 million in 2005 to approximately 4.4 million by 2023, making them the second-largest immigrant group in the US. Their increasing economic and political clout has played a pivotal role in strengthening US-India relations, including current on-going

trade deal dialogue.

Trump's Foreign Policy and Its Impact on India Trump's foreign policy has been defined by an "America First" approach, often at the cost of traditional alliances. His controversial actions—isolating European allies, supporting Russia in the UN by refusing to name it as an aggressor, and potentially attempting to pull Russia away from China—signal a major shift in global geopolitics. These moves could have far-reaching consequences, impacting not just Europe and Asia but also India's strategic positioning.

If Trump successfully distances Russia from China, India stands to benefit. Moscow has historically been a key defense and energy partner for New Delhi.

Europe's Strategic Shift under Trump

Trump's presidency has been marked by tensions with European allies over defense spending, trade policies, and multilateral agreements like the Paris Climate Accord. His criticism of NATO and demands for Europe to shoulder more security costs have strained US-Europe ties. Trump's questioning of NATO's Article 5 (the

mutual defense clause) could leave Eastern European nations vulnerable. Europe might be forced to increase defense spending and coordination, but a lack of American support would weaken the alliance's deterrence against Moscow.

Indo-Pacific Security Dynamics

In the Indo-Pacific, key US allies like Japan, South Korea, and Australia rely on Washington to counterbalance China. If Trump reduces support for alliances like AUKUS and Quad, these nations may strengthen security ties with India and European powers like France and the UK. Trump's retreat from alliances could create a vacuum that China might exploit. Beijing has been expanding its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), offering economic and military incentives to countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. If US allies feel abandoned, China might step in, further eroding American influence.

Trump's Alignment with Russia

On the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, US support for Moscow at the UN exposed a growing rift with European allies. Washington sided with Russia, North Korea, and Belarus in opposing a Europe-backed resolution condemning Moscow. The motion still passed 93-8, with 73 abstentions, including China. Furthering this shift, the US pushed a UN Security Council resolution calling for an end to the war—conspicuously avoid-

ing any reference to Russia's invasion.

Trump's alignment with Moscow signals a potential unravelling of America's transatlantic security commitments. His pivot to Russia, ostensibly to end the war, side-lines Kyiv and Brussels, making lasting peace unlikely, though pressure tactics may yield results. Meanwhile, China sees a strategic advantage in this shift, hoping to mend its strained ties with Europe and Washington as the global order tilts towards an authoritarian axis.

The Future of India-US Trade Relations

While Trump may attempt to realign US-Russia relations, Russia's deep economic and strategic ties with China make a complete pivot unlikely. However, his policies could still reshape global trade and security dynamics in ways that affect India. A trade deal between India and the US remains a strong possibility, driven by economic and geopolitical imperatives.

The Indian government will need to carefully navigate these complexities to safeguard its trade interests while ensuring strategic autonomy. As the global power balance shifts, India's ability to leverage its relationships with the US, Russia and China will determine its long-term geopolitical and economic standing.

(The writer is a political analyst; views are personal)



KS TOMAR

Russian forces walk inside gas pipeline to strike Ukrainian troops from rear

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv

Russian special forces walked inside a gas pipeline to strike Ukrainian units from the rear in the Kursk region, Ukraine's military and Russian war bloggers reported, as Moscow moves to recapture parts of its border province that Kyiv seized in a shock offensive.

Ukraine launched in August a daring cross-border incursion into Kursk, in what marked the largest attack on Russian territory since World War II. Within days, Ukrainian units had captured 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of territory, including the strategic border town of Sudzha, and taken hundreds of Russian prisoners of war.

According to Kyiv, the operation aimed to gain a bargaining chip in future peace talks, and force Russia to divert troops

away from its grinding offensive in eastern Ukraine.

But months after Ukraine's thunder run, its soldiers in Kursk are weary and bloodied by relentless assaults of more than 50,000 troops, including some from Russia's ally North Korea. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers run the risk of being encircled, open source maps of the battlefield show.

According to Telegram posts by a Ukrainian-born, pro-Kremlin blogger, Russian operatives walked about 15 kilometers (9 miles) inside the pipeline, which Moscow had until recently used to send gas to Europe.

Some Russian troops had spent several days in the pipe before striking Ukrainian units from the rear near the town of Sudzha, blogger Yuri Podolyaka claimed. The town had some 5,000 resi-

dents before the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, and houses major gas transfer and measuring stations along the pipeline, once a major outlet for Russian natural gas exports through Ukrainian territory. Another war blogger, who uses the alias Two Majors, said fierce fighting was underway for Sudzha, and that Russian forces managed to enter the town through a gas pipeline.

Russian Telegram channels showed photos of what they said were special forces operatives, wearing gas masks and moving along what looked like the inside of a large pipe. Ukraine's General Staff confirmed on Saturday evening that Russian "sabotage and assault groups" used the pipeline in a bid to gain a foothold outside Sudzha. In a Telegram post, it said Russian troops were "detected in a timely manner" and that Ukraine responded with rockets

and artillery.

"At present, Russian special forces are being detected, blocked and destroyed. The enemy's losses in Sudzha are very high," the General Staff reported. The Associated Press could not independently verify these accounts, and there was no immediate comment from Russian officials.

Meanwhile, French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said Sunday that France will use profits from frozen Russian assets to finance an additional 195 million euros package (USD 211 million) in arms for Ukraine, the latest in a series of military aid deliveries funded through the mechanism. In an interview with the La Tribune Dimanche newspaper, Lecornu said that Paris will send new 155-mm artillery shells and glide bombs for Mirage 2000 fighter jets it previously gave to Ukraine.

2 days of clashes in Syria leave over 1,000 dead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beirut

The death toll from two days of clashes between Syrian security forces and loyalists of ousted President Bashar Assad and revenge killings that followed has risen to more than 1,000, a war monitoring group said on Saturday, making it one of the deadliest acts of violence since Syria's conflict began 14 years ago.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in addition to 745 civilians killed, mostly in shootings from close distance, 125 government security force members and 148 militants with armed groups affiliated with Assad were killed. It added that electricity and drinking water were cut off in large areas around the city of Latakia.

The clashes, which erupted Thursday, marked a major escalation in the challenge to the new government in Damascus, three months after insurgents took authority after removing Assad from power.

The government has said that they were responding to attacks from remnants of Assad's forces and blamed "individual actions" for the rampant violence.

Retribution killings between Sunnis and Alawites: The revenge killings that started Friday by Sunni Muslim gunmen loyal to the government against members of Assad's minority Alawite sect are a major blow to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the faction that led the overthrow of the former government. Alawites made up a large part of Assad's support base for decades.

Residents of Alawite villages and towns spoke to The Associated Press about killings during which gunmen shot Alawites, the majority of them men, in the streets or at the gates of their homes. Many homes of Alawites were looted and then set on fire in different areas, two residents of Syria's coastal region told the AP from their hideouts. They asked that their names not be made public out of fear of being killed by gunmen, adding that thousands of people have fled to nearby mountains for safety.

Residents speak of atrocities in one town: Residents of Baniyas, one of the towns worst hit by the violence, said bodies were strewn on the streets or left unburied in homes and on the roofs of buildings, and nobody was able to collect them. One resident said that the gunmen prevented residents for hours from removing the bodies of five of their neighbours killed Friday at close range.

Ali Sheha, a 57-year-old resident of Baniyas who fled with his family and neighbors hours after the violence broke out Friday, said that at least 20 of his neighbors and colleagues in one neighbourhood of Baniyas where Alawites lived, were

killed, some of them in their shops, or in their homes. Sheha called the attacks "revenge killings" of the Alawite minority for the crimes committed by Assad's government. Other residents said the gunmen included foreign fighters, and militants from neighbouring villages and towns.

"It was very very bad. Bodies were on the streets," as he was fleeing, Sheha said, speaking by phone from nearly 20 kilometers (12 miles) away from the city. He said the gunmen were gathering less than 100 meters from his apartment building, firing randomly at homes and residents and in at least one incident he knows of, asked residents for their IDs to check their religion and their sect before killing them. He said the gunmen also burned some homes and stole cars and robbed homes.

Death toll has multiplied: The Observatory's chief Rami Abdurrahman said that revenge killings stopped early Saturday. "This was one of the biggest massacres during the Syrian conflict," Abdurrahman said about the killings of Alawite civilians.

The previous figure given by the group was more than 600 dead. No official figures have been released. A funeral was held Saturday afternoon for four Syrian security force members in the northwestern village of Al-Janoudiya after they were killed in the clashes along Syria's coast. Scores of people attended the funeral.

Official reports say Syrian forces regaining control: Syria's state news agency quoted an unnamed Defense Ministry official as saying that government forces have regained control of much of the areas from Assad loyalists. It added that authorities have closed all roads leading to the coastal region "to prevent violations and gradually restore stability."

On Saturday morning, the bodies of 31 people killed in revenge attacks the day before in the central village of Tuwaym were laid to rest in a mass grave, residents said. Those killed included nine children and four women, the residents said, sending the AP photos of the bodies draped in white cloth as they were lined in the mass grave. Lebanese legislator Haidar Nasser, who holds one of the two seats allocated to the Alawite sect in parliament, said that people were fleeing from Syria for safety in Lebanon. He said he didn't have exact numbers. Nasser said that many people were sheltering at the Russian air base in Hmeimim, Syria, adding that the international community should protect Alawites who are Syrian citizens loyal to their country. He said that since Assad's fall, many Alawites were fired from their jobs and some former soldiers who reconciled with the new authorities were killed.

Israel will send delegation to Qatar to try to 'advance' ceasefire negotiations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Deir Al-Balah

Israel said that it would send a delegation to Qatar on Monday "in an effort to advance the negotiations" around the ceasefire in Gaza, while Hamas reported "positive signals" in talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators on starting negotiations on the truce's delayed second phase.

The statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office gave no details except to say it had "accepted the invitation of US-backed mediators." Hamas spokesman Abdel-Latif al-Qanoua also gave no details. Talks on the second phase should have started a month ago.

There was no immediate comment from the White House, which on Wednesday made the surprise confirmation of direct US talks with Hamas.

Over the past week, Israel has pressed Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for an extension of the first phase, which ended last weekend, and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas is believed to have 24 living hostages and the bodies of 35 others.

Israel last weekend cut off all supplies to Gaza and its more than 2 million people as it pressed Hamas to agree. The militant group has said that the move would affect the remaining hostages as well.

The ceasefire has paused the deadliest and most destructive fighting ever between Israel and Hamas, sparked by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The first phase allowed the return of 25 living hostages and the remains of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli forces have withdrawn to buffer zones inside Gaza, hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have returned to northern Gaza for the first time since early in the war and hundreds of trucks of aid entered per day until Israel suspended supplies. Before their weekly rally in Tel Aviv, relatives of hostages appealed to U.S. President Donald Trump, who met with eight former hostages on Wednesday.

"Mr. President, a return to war means a death sentence for the living hostages left behind. Please, sir, do not allow Netanyahu to sacrifice them."

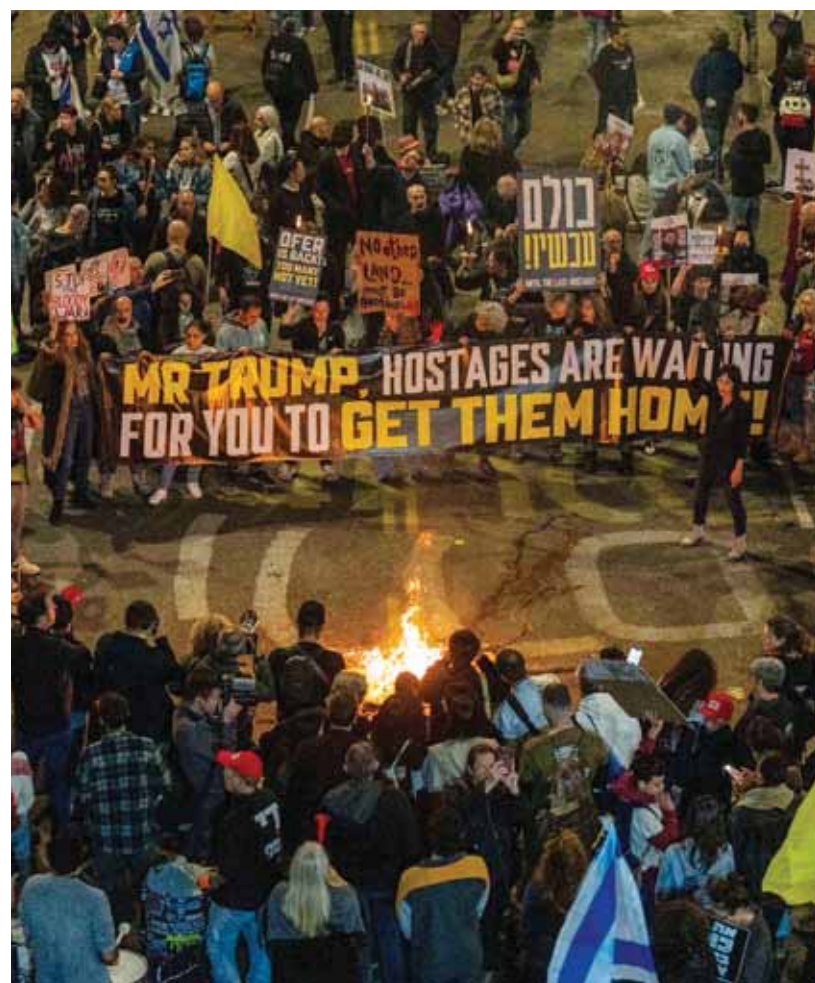
Muslim countries reject moving Palestinians from Gaza: Also on Saturday, foreign ministers from Muslim nations rejected Trump's calls to empty the Gaza Strip of its Palestinian population and

backed a plan for an administrative committee to govern the territory to allow reconstruction to proceed.

The foreign ministers gathered in Saudi Arabia for a special session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to address the situation in Gaza. The OIC has 57 nations with largely Muslim populations. They supported a plan to rebuild Gaza put forward by Egypt and backed by Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Without mentioning Trump, the ministers' statement said that they rejected "plans aimed at displacing the Palestinian people individually or collectively ... as ethnic cleansing, a grave violation of international law and a crime against humanity."

They also condemned "policies of starvation" they said aim to push Palestinians to leave, a reference to Israel's cutting off all supplies to Gaza. Trump has called for Gaza's population to be resettled elsewhere permanently, so that the United States can take over the territory and develop it for others. Palestinians have rejected calls to leave. The ministers at the OIC gathering supported a proposal that an administrative committee replace Hamas in governing Gaza. The committee would work "under the umbrella" of the Palestinian Authority, based in the occupied West Bank. Israel has rejected the PA having any role in Gaza, but hasn't put forward an alternative for postwar rule.

The foreign ministers of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom said in a joint statement that they welcome the Arab initiative for a Gaza reconstruction plan, calling it "a realistic path." They added that "Hamas must neither govern Gaza nor be a threat to Israel anymore," and they support the central role for the PA. Early Saturday, an Israeli strike killed two Palestinians in the southernmost city of Rafah, the Health Ministry there said. The Israeli military said that it struck several men who appeared to be flying a drone that entered Israel. Israel's military offensive has killed more than 48,000 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't say how many of the dead were militants. Hamas' attack in October 2023 killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, inside Israel and took 251 people hostage. Most have been released in ceasefire agreements or other arrangements. The militants also hold the remains of a soldier killed in the 2014 war.



People take part in a protest in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Saturday, demanding the immediate release of hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip

Pope thanks volunteers for 'miracle of tenderness'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rome

Pope Francis issued a message Sunday thanking volunteers for the "miracle of tenderness" they offer the sick, as he continued his recovery from double pneumonia and doctors reported positive news. After more than three weeks in the hospital, the 88-year-old pope is responding well to treatment and has shown a "gradual, slight improvement" in recent days.

For the fourth Sunday in a row, the 88-year-old Francis didn't appear for his weekly noon blessing, but he met with his top deputies and the Holy See distributed the text he would have delivered if he were well enough. In it, the Argentine pope thanked all those who were caring for him and others who are sick and experiencing a "night of pain."

"Brothers and sisters, during my prolonged hospitalisation here, I too experience the thoughtfulness of service and the tenderness of care, in particular from the

doctors and health care workers, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart," read the message from Gemelli hospital.

"And while I am here, I think of the many people who in various ways are close to the sick, and who are for them a sign of the Lord's presence. We need this, the miracle of tenderness' which accompanies those who are in adversity, bringing a little light into the night of pain," he wrote.

Francis, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, has remained in stable condition at Gemelli, with no fever and good oxygen levels in his blood for several days, doctors reported in a Vatican statement Saturday. The doctors said that such stability "as a consequence testifies to a good response to therapy." It was the first time the doctors had reported that Francis was responding positively to the treatment for the complex lung infection that was diagnosed after he was hospitalised on February 14.

But they kept his prognosis as "guard-

ed", meaning he's not out of danger. On Sunday morning, the Vatican reported he was resting after a quiet night.

In his absence, the Vatican's day-to-day operations continued alongside celebrations of its Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century Jubilee that brings millions of pilgrims to Rome.

On Sunday, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, who is close to Francis, celebrated the Holy Year Mass for volunteers that Francis was supposed to have celebrated.

During the Mass in St. Peter's Square, the giant banner bearing Francis' papal coat of arms fluttered from the loggia of



the basilica above. Even while in the hospital, Francis is very much still the pope and in charge of the Catholic Church.

That was evident too by the fact that the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, visited the pope on Sunday for the third time since he has been in the hospital.

The Vatican has noted that such meetings are the routine way the pope governs while at the Vatican, making clear that he was getting essential work done from Gemelli. Francis has been using high flows of supplemental oxygen to help him breathe during the day and a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask at night.

Francis was hospitalised February 14 for what was then just a bad case of bronchitis. The infection progressed into a complex respiratory tract infection and double pneumonia that has sidelined Francis for the longest period of his 12-year papacy and raised questions about the future.

Man with Palestinian flag who climbed London's Big Ben tower arrested

London (PTI): A man was arrested early Sunday after he climbed the Big Ben tower at the Palace of Westminster in central London while barefoot and holding a Palestinian flag. The man, who appeared to be staging a protest on a ledge several metres (yards) up Elizabeth Tower, which houses Big Ben, stepped off the building after midnight and onto a cherry picker following a long conversation with negotiators. He got into a waiting ambulance.

Traffic around the Palace of Westminster in London had come to a standstill for much of Saturday as emergency crews tried to reach the man. Negotiators were lifted up on a fire brigade ladder platform several times before eventually talking him down. Westminster Bridge and a nearby street were closed for much of the day and several emergency services vehicles were at the scene as crowds looked on. Police also blocked off all pedestrian access to Parliament Square. A small group of supporters shouted "Free Palestine" from behind a police cordon nearby. Officials said tours of the Houses of Parliament were cancelled because of the incident. The Metropolitan Police confirmed that the man has now been arrested. "This has been a protracted incident due to the specifics of where the man was located and the need to ensure the safety of our officers the individual and the wider public," it said in a statement.

Wu says Chinese military faces tough challenges in safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beijing

China on Sunday defended its USD 249 billion defence budget, which is next only to the US, saying it faces tough challenges in safeguarding sovereignty and the increased amount will be used to develop new-domain forces with the latest combat capabilities and joint strikes by its armed forces. Chinese Premier Li Qiang announced on Wednesday in the parliament that the planned defence expenditure for the country this year is 1.784665 trillion yuan (about USD 249 billion).

"The Chinese military faces tough challenges in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Defence Spokesperson Sr. Co. Wu Qian said during the ongoing annual parliament session.

Last year, China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 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 USD 890 billion as proposed by President Donald Trump. While China cites the heavy US budget, its increasing defence spending is putting pressure on neighbours, especially India. The Chinese defence spending

amounted to three times that of India's Rs 6,81, 210 crore (about USD 78.8 billion).

China's defence budget figures are viewed by critics with scepticism in 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.

Wu said the increased expenditure will be mainly used to develop new-domain forces with new combat capabilities and to enhance systems and capacity for reconnaissance and early warning, joint strikes, battlefield support and integrated logistics support. The spending will also be put into improving military training under combat conditions and deepening national defence and military reform, Wu said. Compared to major military powers like the US, China's defence spending remains relatively low in terms of the spending's share in GDP, its share in national fiscal expenditures, the country's per capita defence spending, and expenditure per service member, he added. On Tuesday, Lou Qinjian, spokesperson for the National People's Congress, also defended China's increasing defence expenditure, saying that "peace needs to be safeguarded with strength".

China learned from Trump's first trade war, changed tactics when tariffs came again

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

The leaders of both Canada and Mexico got on the phone with President Donald Trump this past week to seek solutions after he slapped tariffs on their countries, but China's president appears unlikely to make a similar call soon. Beijing, which unlike America's close partners and neighbours has been locked in a trade and tech war with the US for years, is taking a different approach to Trump in his second term, making it clear that any negotiations should be conducted on equal footing.

China's leaders say they are open to talks, but they also made preparations for the higher US tariffs, which have risen 20 per cent since Trump took office seven weeks ago. Intent on not being caught off guard as they were during Trump's first term, the Chinese were ready with retaliatory measures — imposing their own taxes this past week on key US farm imports and more.

"As Washington escalates the tariff, Beijing doesn't see other options but to retaliate," said Sun Yun, director of the China programme at the Stimson Centre, a Washington-based think tank. "It doesn't mean Beijing doesn't want to negotiate, but it cannot be seen as begging for talks or mercy."

As the world's second-largest economy,

China aspires to be a great power on both the regional and global stage, commanding respect from all countries, especially the United States, as proof that the Communist Party has made China prosperous and strong.

After the US this past week imposed another 10 per cent tariff, on top of the 10 per cent imposed on February 4, the Chinese foreign ministry uttered its sharpest retort yet: "If war is what the US wants, be it a tariff war, a trade war or any other type of war, we're ready to fight till the end."

The harsh rhetoric echoed similar comments in 2018, when Trump launched his first trade war with China and it scrambled to line up tit-for-tat actions. Beijing's leaders have since developed a toolkit of tariffs, import curbs, export controls, sanctions, regulatory reviews and measures to limit companies from doing business in China. All are designed to inflict pain on the US economy and businesses in response to the American measures.

That allowed the Chinese government to react swiftly to Trump's recent across-the-board doubling of new tariffs on Chinese goods by rolling out a basket of retaliatory measures, including taxing many American farm goods at up to 15 per cent, suspending US lumber imports and blacklisting 15 US companies.

Beijing showed restraint in its response to leave room for negotiation, analysts say. Xi Jinping's leadership of the ruling Communist Party spans both of Trump's terms, giving Beijing more continuity in its planning. He is the one who decided it's not yet time to speak with Trump, said Daniel Russel, vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

"That's not a scheduling issue, it's leverage for China," said Russel, who previously served as the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. "Xi won't walk into a call if there's a chance he'll be harassed or humiliated and for both political and strategic reasons, Xi won't play the role of a supplicant."

"Instead, China is hitting back promptly — but judiciously — to each set of tariffs," Russel said. At his annual press conference Friday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that "no country should fantasize that it can suppress, contain China while developing good relations with China."

"Such two-faced acts not only are bad for the stability of bilateral relations but also will not build mutual trust," Wang said. He added that China welcomes cooperation with the US, but noted that "if you keep pressuring, China will firmly retaliate."

Trump's transactional approach driving force on world stage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

Donald Trump, the real estate developer turned commander in chief, is laying bare his style of diplomacy in the early weeks of his new term: It's a whole lot like a high-stakes business deal, and his No. 1 goal is to come out of the transaction on top. The tactics are clear in his brewing trade war with Canada and Mexico, in his approach to Russia's war on Ukraine and in his selection of the first country he will visit in his second term.

"President Trump approaches diplomacy and engages in a very transactional manner, with economics as the foundation and driving force behind international affairs," retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, the president's special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, explained at an event in Washington this past week.

For Trump, it's about leverage, not friendship; dollars as much as values; and hard power versus soft. It's not just a matter of negotiating style. At stake is the post-World War II international order as Trump's actions raise doubts about American leadership around the globe.

He's shaping a foreign policy that's more inward looking and conscious of the bottom line, dismissing American soft-power levers such as the US Agency for International Development as dubious and riddled by waste and suggesting that the United States might not defend fellow NATO members that aren't meeting defence spending benchmarks set by the alliance. Politics and presidents to a certain degree are all transactional. But Trump, who helped make himself a household name by burnishing an image as an intrepid real estate dealmaker, is taking it to another level as he navigates an increasingly complicated world.

The Republican president, in his previ-

ous life as a real estate titan, saw every deal as one in which there were clear winners and losers. In his return to the White House, he is more demonstrably injecting a what's-in-it-for-me approach to his dealings with both friend and foe.

Money talks: Edward Frantz, a University of Indianapolis historian who has studied the American presidency, said Trump's "ledger" approach might not be the most practical way to conduct diplomacy. Frantz observed that Trump, 78, a baby boomer and football fan, seems inspired in his foreign policymaking by the ethos of legendary pro football coach Vince Lombardi, who famously said, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing."

"But diplomacy, especially in a more complicated world, might be more like soccer," Frantz said. "Sometimes you just need a tie. Sometimes you need to just survive and move on."

Trump on Thursday told reporters that he has decided to make Saudi Arabia the first overseas visit of his new term because the oil-rich kingdom has agreed to make a huge investment in the United States over the next four years. "They've gotten richer, we've all gotten older. So I said, 'I'll go if you pay a trillion dollars, USD 1 trillion to American companies,'" Trump said. He also made the kingdom his first overseas stop during his first White House term after the Saudis promised USD 450 billion in US investment. Trump acknowledged that the United Kingdom, one of America's oldest allies, has traditionally been the first stop for US presidents. But money talks.

Who has the cards' matters to Trump: In his dealings with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump has highly focused on who has the leverage. Putin has "the cards" and Zelenskyy does not, Trump has said repeatedly.

Zelenskyy appeared to be making some strides in assuaging Trump after their recent rocky meeting in the Oval Office ended with Trump and Vice President JD Vance criticising the Ukrainian leader for what they said was insufficient gratitude for the tens of billions of dollars in US assistance provided in the three years since Russia invaded. Zelenskyy said later that how that meeting went down was "regrettable".

He also made clear he was ready to sign off on a minerals deal with the US — even without the explicit American security guarantees sought by the Ukrainians — that Trump wants.

In his Tuesday address before a joint session of Congress, Trump acknowledged Zelenskyy's fence-mending efforts. Trump also announced plans to send top advisers to Saudi Arabia this week for talks with Ukrainian officials. But soon Trump was back to criticizing Zelenskyy, saying he does not have the leverage to keep fighting the war with Russia.

"I'm finding it more difficult, frankly, to deal with Ukraine, and they don't have the cards," Trump said. "In terms of getting a final settlement, it may be easier dealing with Russia, which is surprising, because they have all the cards."

Trump departs from years of US scepticism toward Russia: Trump's push on Zelenskyy — and pivot toward Moscow — marks a significant departure from traditional US foreign policy toward Russia since the Cold War. Others before Trump, including Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, have tried resets with Russia, but perhaps never at a time as fraught. Deep scepticism toward Moscow, even in the best moments in the relationship, has been the standard operating posture in both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Houston teen indicted for terrorism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Houston

A 17-year-old has become the first person in Harris County to be indicted for terrorism under a new state law, officials say. Laith Adil Shehzad appeared in the court on Friday, wearing an orange jumpsuit and showing no apparent nervousness, even smiling at the cameras.

Prosecutors say the FBI was alerted by Meta in August 2024 about messages between Shehzad and an alleged ISIS militant jailed in the Philippines. Court documents state Shehzad sent photos of himself holding a Glock with extended magazines via Facebook messenger on August 17. The next day, as the FBI agents arrived at his home, he allegedly dumped the gun and ammunition in a detention pond before speaking with investigators.

The prosecutors also claim that Shehzad sought guidance on martyrdom and was previously under juvenile supervision for possessing homemade explosives. The investigators believe that he was radicalized as early as 2021, at the age of 13.

Defense Attorney John Stevenson described Shehzad as young and scared, arguing that many Texas teenagers post with firearms. "This case involves a lot of words and no one was actually harmed," he said. Prosecutors allege that Shehzad planned an attack but was unable to carry it out because his Uber account was suspended. A grand jury indicted Shehzad under a law targeting those who conspire to commit crimes "to intimidate or coerce the public".

"I'm incredibly grateful to law enforcement for preventing what could have been a tragic act," said Harris County DA Sean Teare. Shehzad remains jailed without bond and faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

Panama releases dozens of detained deportees from US into limbo

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Panama City

After weeks of lawsuits and human rights criticism, Panama on Saturday released dozens of migrants who were held for weeks in a remote camp after being deported from the United States, telling them they have 30 days to leave the Central American nation.

It thrust many like Hayatullah Omagh, a 29-year-old who fled Afghanistan in 2022 after the Taliban took control, into a legal limbo, scrambling to find a path forward.

"We are refugees. We do not have money. We cannot pay for a hotel in Panama City, we do not have relatives," Omagh told the Associated Press in an interview. "I can't go back to Afghanistan under any circumstances... It is under the control of the Taliban, and they want to kill me. How can I go back?"

Authorities have said deportees will have the option of extending their stay by 60 days if they need it, but after that many like Omagh don't know what they will do.

Omagh climbed off a bus in Panama City alongside 65 migrants from China, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Nepal and other nations after spending weeks detained in poor conditions by the Panamanian government, which has said it wants to work with the Trump administration "to send a signal of deterrence" to people hoping to migrate.

Human rights groups and lawyers advocating for the migrants were waiting at the bus terminal, and scrambled to find the released migrants shelter and other resources. Dozens of other people remained in the camp. Among those getting off buses were migrants fleeing violence and repression in Pakistan and Iran, and 27-year-old Nikita Gaponov, who fled Russia due to repression for being part of the LGBTQ+ community and who said he was detained at the US border, but not allowed to make an asylum claim.

"Once I get off the bus, I'll be sleeping on the ground tonight," Gaponov said. Others turned their eyes north once again, saying that even though they had already been deported, they had no other option than to continue after crossing the world to reach the US.

The deportees, largely from Asian countries, were part of a deal struck between the Trump administration and Panama and Costa Rica as the US government attempts to speed up deportations. The administration sent hundreds of people, many fam-

ilies with children, to the two Central American countries as a stopover while authorities organize a way to send them back to their countries of origin.

Critics described it as a way for the US to export its deportation process. The agreement fuelled human rights concerns when hundreds of deportees detained in a hotel in Panama City held up notes to their windows pleading for help and saying they were scared to return to their own countries. Under international refugee law, people have the right to apply for asylum when they are fleeing conflict or persecution. Those that refused to return home were later sent to a remote camp near Panama's border with Colombia, where they spent weeks in poor conditions, were stripped of their phones, unable to access legal council and were not told where they were going next.

Lawyers and human rights defenders warned that Panama and Costa Rica were turning into "black holes" for deportees, and said their release was a way for Panamanian authorities to wash their hands of the deportees amid mounting human rights criticism.

Those who were released Saturday night, like Omagh, said they could not return home. As an atheist and member of an ethnic minority group in Afghanistan known as the Hazara, he said returning home under the rule of the Taliban — which swept back into power after the Biden administration pulled out of the country — would mean he would be killed. He only went to the US after trying for years to live in Pakistan, Iran and other countries but being denied visas.

Omagh was deported after presenting himself to American authorities and asking to seek asylum in the US, which he was denied. "My hope was freedom. Just freedom," he said. "They didn't give me the chance. I asked many times to speak to an asylum officer and they told me No, no, no, no, no."

Still, he said that leaving the camp was a relief. Omagh and other migrants who spoke to the AP detailed scarce food, sweltering heat with little relief and aggressive Panamanian authorities. In one case, Omagh and others said, a Chinese man went on a week-long hunger strike. In another, a small riot broke out because guards refused to give a migrant their phone. The riot, they said, was suppressed by armed guards.

Macron's diplomatic comeback: From France's domestic crisis to reshaping Europe's defence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron is back at the centre of global diplomacy, seeking to ease relations with President Donald Trump, championing a Ukraine peace plan alongside his British counterpart, and seeing his longstanding desire to boost European defence turning into reality. Six months ago, Macron seemed weaker than ever after his call for early legislative elections produced a hung parliament, sparking an unprecedented crisis. Known for his nonstop political activism, Macron shifted his focus to foreign policy, leaving domestic struggles largely to the prime minister.

Now, he appears as the one leader who speaks to Trump several times per week and takes the lead in European support for Ukraine, while positioning himself as the commander-in-chief of the European Union's only nuclear power.

Key world player: Macron, 47, is one of the few leaders who knew Trump during his first term in office, maintaining despite disagreements a cordial relationship, which both describe as "friendship". He was the first European leader to visit Trump since his reelection, seeking to persuade him not to abandon Ukraine in pursuit of a peace deal with Russia. Macron is also a heavyweight of European politics, and shifting US policies gave momentum to his longstanding views.

Since he was first elected in 2017, Macron has pushed for a stronger, more sovereign Europe. That same year, in a sweeping speech at Sorbonne University, he called for a common European defence policy, with increased military cooperation and joint defence initiatives.

He later lamented the "brain death" of the NATO military alliance, insisting the EU should step up and start acting as a strategic world power. On Thursday, EU leaders committed to strengthening defences and freeing up hundreds of billions of euros for security in the wake of Trump's warnings that they might face the Russian threat alone.

Nuclear power: In a resounding declaration last week, Macron announced he would discuss extending France's nuclear deterrent to European partners to help protect the continent.

France's nuclear power is inherited from the strategy set by wartime hero Gen. Charles de Gaulle, president from 1958 to 1969, who sought to maintain France's independence from the US and assert the country's role as a global power.

That went through the development of an independent French nuclear arsenal. Poland and Baltic nations welcomed the proposal. France's Minister for European Affairs Benjamin Haddad praised Macron's efforts, saying they were aimed at ensuring that "in the face of this world upheaval, Europeans are not spectators but players".

New British and German partners: Some other key players appear to back Macron's approach. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, in office for eight months, has sought closer defence cooperation with Europe as part of a "reset" with the EU after years of bitterness over Brexit.

Macron and Starmer are now spearheading a desperate diplomatic drive to bolster Ukraine's defences, drawing up a peace plan with Kyiv at its core. That plan includes the possibility of sending European troops to Ukraine to enforce a potential peace agreement. Meanwhile, Germany's conservative election winner Friedrich Merz said his top priority would be to "strengthen Europe as soon as possible" and gradually move toward "real independence" from the US.

Only three days after his victory last month, Merz, who has called for a discussion on "nuclear sharing" with France, travelled to Paris for a working dinner with Macron. No statement was released after the meeting, but French officials with knowledge of the matter said both men's visions for Europe align. They spoke anonymously because the talks were not to be made public.

Russia's criticism: Russia's foreign ministry accused Macron of "demonstrative militarism dictated by the domestic agenda". The ministry said that Macron seeks to distract the French public from "worsening socio-economic problems in France and the European Union". Moscow dismissed Macron's nuclear deterrent offer as "extremely confrontational," saying the remarks reflected Paris' ambitions to "become the nuclear patron of all of Europe", despite the fact that France's nuclear forces are far smaller than those of the US.

Armed man shot near White House

Washington (PTI): An armed man believed to be travelling from Indiana was shot by US Secret Service agents near the White House after a confrontation early Sunday, according to authorities. No one else was injured in the shooting that happened around midnight about a block from the White House, according to a Secret Service statement. President Donald Trump was in Florida at the time of the shooting.

The Secret Service received information from local police about an alleged "suicidal individual" who was travelling from Indiana and found the man's car and a person matching his description nearby. "As officers approached, the individual brandished a firearm and an armed confrontation ensued, during which shots were fired by our personnel," the Secret Service said in a statement.

The man was hospitalised. The Secret Service said his condition was "unknown". The Metropolitan Police Department will investigate because the shooting involved law enforcement officers. A message left Sunday for the police department wasn't immediately returned.

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh brace for upcoming food reductions

Cox's Bazar (PTI): Rohingya refugees in cramped Bangladeshi camps say they are worried about a US decision to cut food rations by half beginning next month, while a refugee official says the reduction will impact the nutrition of more than 1 million refugees and create "social and mental pressure".

President Donald Trump abruptly stopped most foreign aid and dismantled the US Agency for International Development, which has significantly hampered the global humanitarian sector. Trump's Jan 20 executive order froze the funding for a 90-day review.

The World Food Programme, the main UN food agency, recently announced that cuts to food rations will take effect from April 1 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where dozens of camps are inhabited by Rohingya refugees. More than 700,000 Muslim Rohingya fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar starting in late August 2017 when Myanmar's military launched a "clearance operation". The ethnic group faces discrimination and are denied citizenship and other rights in the Buddhist-majority nation. Following a military takeover in 2021, the country has been engulfed in an armed conflict widely seen as civil war.

It was not immediately clear if the WFP's decision was directly related to the Trump administration's action.

"We received a letter that (says) previously it was \$12.50, and now it is \$6. They used to get \$12.50 per month, and from now \$6, this will greatly affect them," Shamsud Douza, additional refugee relief and repatriation commissioner of Bangladesh, told The Associated Press.

"As the food is cut, they will get less nutritious food, which may lead to a lack of nutrition. There will be social and mental pressure created amongst the Rohingya people in their community. They will have to look for an alternative for the food," he said.

Douza said there are more sectors where budgets have been cut beyond the food rations, but he would not say whether WFP cuts were related to the U.S. funding rollback. "Generally, there will be less (support) for the (Rohingya) response after the funding cuts. The response already has been slowed, and some people, including Rohingya, have lost their jobs, and some services are reduced. It does not bring a good result when the available services get reduced," he said.

The interim Bangladesh government said the end of USAID payments would stop other projects in Bangladesh, but funding for Rohingya refugees will continue to flow. The US has been the top donor to Bangladesh for Rohingya refugees,

Helicopter companies require registration before flying in Nepal's Annapurna area

Kathmandu (PTI): Helicopter operating companies now require registration before flying to the Annapurna Base Camp area, authorities said. Annapurna Rural Municipality in the Kaski district of western Nepal enforced regulations for flights at the base camp area at an altitude of 4,130 metres.

Helicopter companies registered with the rural municipality are required to pay Rs. 10,000 per flight, said Bishnu Bahadur KC, chairman of the rural municipality. Rs. 20,000 will be charged per flight for the unregistered companies, he said. "The rural municipality for-

mulated the Annapurna Base Camp Helicopter Flight Tourism Fee Management Procedure in 2023 but was not strictly adhered to," he said. Now the rural municipality has strictly enforced the regulation, requiring the helicopter companies to register their company. So far three helicopter companies — Simrik Air, Air Dynasty, and Heli Everest — have registered their helicopters with the rural municipality, he said.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Gemarbhai Momanbhai Vankar S/o Shri Momanbhai Vankar R/o H.NO.-1745, First Floor, Block -G, Jahangir Puri, Delhi-110033 declare that My name has been wrongly written in My bank Account as Gemar Instead of Gemarbhai Momanbhai Vankar. Hence, Gemar & Gemarbhai Momanbhai Vankar both are the Same & One Person.

PD(1654)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that my client Smt. Rekha Rani W/o Sh. Chandar Pal R/o A-155, Defence Colony, Bhopur, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201005 have severed their all relations with their son Deepak Chaudhary and her wife Aakasha Chaudhary debarred/dissolved their from movable and immovable properties/assets. My clients shall not be liable for their any act of deeds in any manner whatsoever. Anybody dealing with them will be at his own cost and risk.

Yogesh Kumar (Advocate) Ch.No. M-11, Western Wings Near SBI, Tis Hazari Court Delhi-110054

Public Notice

Notice is hereby given that one Mrs. Swati Rastogi W/o Mr. Vikas Rastogi (hereinafter referred to as the said Mortgagee/Purchaser) have agreed to create mortgage in respect of the Property more particularly described in the Schedule hereunder written in favour of my client PNB Housing Finance Limited, 8th Floor, DCM Building 16, Barakhamba Road, C/P New Delhi - 110001 to the Seller Mrs. Ruby D/o Mr. Charan Singh has (mistakenly placed the Original Sale Deed executed by Mr. Madan Mohan Jaiswal W/o Mrs. Isha Ram in favour of Mr. Anand Chugh) S/O Late Mr. R.C. Chugh, registered on 05.08.2010 in the Office of Sub-Registrar-A/1, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi/Delhi as per Book No. 1 (2) of No. 827 Page No. 177/184 & Document No. 3667, in respect of the said property. Any person having any claim against or in respect of the said property more particularly described in the Schedule hereunder or any part thereof by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable or deposit of title deed or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sub-lease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to me with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned here below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim, if any, of such person will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned any my client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan and creation of mortgage on the scheduled property. The Schedule showing the description of the property Freehold Residential Second Floor Portion (without roof right) of Built-up Property bearing No. 15421, having its covered area 58.63 sq. mtr., Out of Khata No. 15421 & 15422 situated at Ballar Nagar, Gurgaon, Distt. Gurgaon, Haryana. (U.P.) - 201002 / Also @Chamber No. 76/A, Tehsil Compound, Ghaziabad. (W.) 981834005

Dated this 07th day of March 2025

Name(s) of Applicants

1. Pooja Puri
Designated Partner
DIN: 07288888

2. Prachi Khanna
Designated Partner
DIN: 07861894

'New citizens enrich Singapore, invigorate eco'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Singapore

New citizens enrich Singapore and invigorate the city state's economy "in ways beyond what numbers can show", a senior minister said on Sunday.

Singapore minister Lee Hsien Loong welcoming newly naturalised Singaporeans at the citizenship ceremony said new arrivals bring fresh experiences, diverse perspectives and global connections, helping the country plug into the world and thrive as a regional hub and a global node.

"This is how cities like London, New York or Shanghai become great centres of culture and prosperity. They attract enterprising and adventurous people from all over the world to live and work there," Channel News Asia quoted the former prime minister as saying. "And the steady infusion of new arrivals

sharpens them, sparks cross-fertilisation of ideas and cultures, and creates an environment of constant innovation and enterprise," he said.

Every year, there are about 30,000 babies born in Singapore, which takes in about 22,000 new citizens to keep up with the demand for manpower across all sectors. Recalling his visit to Google headquarters in Silicon Valley two years ago, Lee noted that most of the presenters he met had grandparents who hailed from all around the world.

"That is America's enormous advantage — it draws top talent from every continent, and therefore it can innovate and stay ahead," he said, adding that Singapore must always be open to ideas and talent from around the world. "This is how we became a shining red dot (a common reference to the city state). Because our ancestors came

here from many lands, made this their home, and built up this country. This is what we must continue to do to shine even brighter in future — not just for our own sake, but for our children and grandchildren too."

Multinational Singapore's population is predominantly Chinese and about 9 per cent Indians whose forefathers came a century ago to the island state and were joined by indigenous Malays, building the city state as an Asian business and financial hub. The Singapore government is "keenly aware" of the need to handle immigration and integration sensitively, especially as the inflows (foreigners into the growing economy) are not small either, said Lee.

"Even dragon year - last year - still not quite 30,000 citizen babies born. So, we do need to bring in more people, more talent, more contributions," he said.

ESAF GOLD AUCTION NOTICE

REGD. OFFICE: ESAF Bhavan, Mannuthy, Thrissur - 680 651, Kerala.

Notice is hereby given for the information of all concerned that Gold ornaments pledged with ESAF Small Finance Bank and not redeemed by borrowers, despite repeated reminders and notices, of our branches, are listed below. This will be auctioned as per the details given below:

DATE OF AUCTION: 21-03-2025 **TIME: 2 PM TO 5 PM**

AUCTION VENUE: THROUGH E-AUCTION

AUCTION ADDRESS: https://gold.matextnet.org/
Contact Number: 9500173386/9962979770

To register as bidder for the e-Auction with terms and conditions, and full details of e-Auction please visit the above site.

BRANCHES & LOAN ACCOUNT NUMBERS

FARIDABAD: 63240000639215, 75240000414322.

Customers who are interested to release the ornaments by paying the total due amount may do so, at the respective branches, on or two days before the date of the auction.

Bidders who wish to participate in the auction shall produce their KYC documents. GST No. is mandatory for registered firms/companies. Bidders shall deposit a sum of Rs.50,000 as EMD before participating in the auction.

Thrisur Sd/-
Date: 10-03-2025 Authorized Signatory

IPO activity slows down, listings pulled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

After heightened activity in 2024, there has been a slowdown in new listings, with no main-bourse Initial Public Offerings (IPO) hitting the market in the past three weeks due to a correction in the secondary market.

This slowdown in IPO activity is reflected in the numbers, as only five companies went public in January and four in February, compared to 16 listings in December 2024.

Quality Power Electrical Equipment Limited was the recent IPO—which opened for three-day bidding on February 14. However, the trend of slower activity is evident as at least three companies—Advanced Sys-tek, SFC Environmental Technologies, and Viney Corporation—withdrawn IPO plans by pulling their draft papers in January and February.

This shift follows a remarkable 2024 in which 91 maiden public issues collectively raised ₹1.6 Lakh Crore, driven by robust retail participation, a resilient economy, and booming private capital expenditure.

Bhavesh Shah, Managing Director and Head of Investment Banking at Equirus, said that the slowdown is largely a result of the secondary market correction, especially in January and February, which negatively impacted the share prices of several listed companies.



As a result, investors have shifted focus to their existing portfolios rather than exploring new listings.

Shah emphasised that the diminished investor attention on new IPOs has contributed to the slowdown in market activity.

Despite this caution, V Prashant Rao, Director and Head of ECM Investment Banking at Anand Rathi Advisors,

pointed out that the longer-term outlook remains positive, with a strong IPO pipeline.

“We are seeing an impressive number of documents getting filed and waiting for market conditions to stabilise. Currently, 45 companies with Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) approval are looking to raise over ₹67,000 Crore and 69 companies are awaiting SEBI-approval,

aiming to raise over ₹1.15 Lakh Crore.

Notably, out of the 69 companies, 45 companies filed DRHPs in the last couple of months,” he said.

In the last two months alone, close to 30 companies have filed preliminary IPO papers with SEBI, and in addition, Knowledge Realty Trust sponsored by Sattva Group and Blackstone last week filed documents to launch its maiden REIT public issue to raise more than ₹6,200 Crore.

This influx of filings suggests that while market conditions are currently subdued, the IPO market is not stagnant.

Looking ahead, Equirus' Shah remains optimistic, forecasting a revival of the IPO market in the next few months as market conditions stabilise.

He believes that investors will eventually return to fresh investments in new companies, supported by strong mutual fund inflows, which continue to show resilience despite some impact from market volatility.

To maintain investor interest amid these fluctuating conditions, Shah suggests that issuers may need to recalibrate their IPO valuations in line with the current market realities, potentially offering more attractive pricing to entice investors.

“To sustain investor interest amid this volatility, the companies may do some adjustments in the IPO pricing, potentially offering more attractive valuations,” Anand Rathi Advisors' Rao said.



People shop for colours and other essentials ahead of Holi

PIONEER PHOTO

High demand for Indian products in Holi, says BJP MP

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The festival of colour 'Holi' this year is all set to bring cheer to business communities in the country as it is expected to generate business worth around ₹60,000 Crore for traders and retailers.

For playing Holi with colors, people are demanding white T-shirts, kurta-pajamas, and salwar suits. At the same time, T-shirts with "Happy Holi" written on them are also witnessing steady demand in the market.

According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) Secretary General and BJP MP from Chandni Chowk, Praveen Khandelwal, only Indian-made herbal colors, gugal, water guns (pichkari), balloons, sandalwood, puja materials, apparel, and other items are being sold extensively.

“Along with these, sweets, dry fruits, gift items, flowers and fruits, clothing, furnishing fabrics, groceries, FMCG products, consumer durables, and many other products are also in high demand across markets. Due to increased consumer spending, various business sectors are witnessing a sharp rise in Holi-related sales,” he said.

Holika Dahan will be held on March 13, while the festival of colors will be celebrated on March 14.

According to CAIT data, the Holi festival this year is expected to generate business worth over ₹60,000 Crore, reflecting a nearly 20 per cent increase compared to the previous year's figure of ₹50,000 Crore.

In Delhi alone, an estimated business of over ₹8,000 Crore is anticipated.

Khandelwal further mentioned that large-scale Holi celebrations are taking place across Delhi and the entire coun-

try, leading to a high demand for venues. As a result, banquet halls, farmhouses, hotels, restaurants, and public parks are fully booked for Holi events.

More than 3,000 Holi Milan celebrations of varying scales are being organised in Delhi alone, bringing visible joy and enthusiasm among the people. Several business, social, cultural, and religious organisations are actively hosting Holi Milan events.

The BJP MP Praveen Khandelwal said that similar to previous years, this time too, both traders and customers have boycotted Chinese goods during Holi sales.

Praveen Khandelwal emphasised that India is a land of festivals, and every festival or religious occasion inevitably boosts trade. Holi is expected to stimulate economic activities, benefiting local businesses, small traders, small-scale industries, and the MSME sector in particular. This Holi festival will also prove to be highly beneficial for traders and retailers across the country.

As the festival of Holi approaches, Delhi's wholesale and retail markets are completely decorated and stocked.

Shops are witnessing heavy footfall, especially for gugal, pichkaris, and other festive items as expected, sweets shops are experiencing a massive surge in sales, particularly for Holi-special gujiyas and other festive treats. Markets are already embracing the festive spirit with colorful gugal, water guns, gujiya garlands, and dry fruits filling shop displays.

The increasing number of shoppers indicates a strong festive buying trend.

Praveen Khandelwal also noted that it is customary for people to gift dry fruit garlands along with sweets and fruits to their relatives, which has further boosted market activity.



SRM University's collaboration with Carnegie Mellon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Amaravati

SRM University-AP (SRM-AP), Andhra Pradesh announced a transformative five-year collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University's School of Computer Science (CMU SCS), US— one of the world's foremost institutions in artificial intelligence (AI) and cutting-edge research. This strategic collaboration aims to push the boundaries of knowledge, innovation and education in AI-related disciplines, including machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, infrastructure and systems, and AI ethics and policy.

At the heart of this collaboration is a shared vision to foster an ecosystem that nurtures groundbreaking research, cultivates exceptional talent and accelerates advancements in AI-driven technologies.

“CMU's School of Computer Science is excited to work with SRM University-AP on this landmark collaboration to advance research and bolster AI education. Together, we will shape the future of AI and empower the next generation of researchers, educators and industry leaders to push the frontiers of technology and drive meaningful change in society,” said Professor Martial Hebert, Dean of CMU's School of Computer Science.

As part of this collaboration, SRM University-AP's research faculty and researchers will have the opportunity to engage directly with the esteemed faculty and researchers at CMU's School of Computer Science. They will immerse themselves in CMU SCS's pioneering AI labs, working alongside global experts in key research domains.

This will facilitate research, knowledge sharing and the development of state-of-the-art AI innovations that address real-world challenges.

Dr P Sathyanarayanan, pro-chancellor of SRM University-AP said that “To further strengthen research capabilities, this collaboration will also pave the way to

establish advanced AI labs at SRM University-AP.

These labs will be incubators for novel AI research, fostering a stimulating environment that promotes academic rigor, interdisciplinary collaboration and technological innovation.”

Beyond research, this collaboration is designed to enrich the academic experience of SRM-AP's teaching faculty and research scholars.

Selected faculty members and scholars can audit cutting-edge AI courses at CMU's School of Computer Science as visiting participants.

This exposure will allow them to engage with CMU SCS faculty and contribute to developing robust AI curricula at SRM-AP.

They will also gain hands-on experience in designing assignments, worksheets and examinations that mirror real-world AI problem-solving scenarios, enhancing the quality of AI education at SRM University-AP.

Professor Manoj K Arora, Vice Chancellor of SRM University-AP expressed that “In a move that underscores its commitment to nurturing future AI leaders, the collaboration will offer SRM-AP students the opportunity to undertake research internships at CMU's School of Computer Science.”

Selected students will spend approx. six weeks each summer immersed in a world-class research environment, gaining first-hand experience in tackling complex AI challenges alongside leaders in the field.

This experience will provide students with unparalleled insights and exposure to global research methodologies, setting them apart in the highly competitive AI landscape.

By leveraging Carnegie Mellon University's SCS's expertise and SRM-AP's commitment to academic excellence, this collaboration will drive innovation, expand knowledge horizons and create a lasting impact on the AI ecosystem between the universities.

Chhattisgarh FM presents 100-page handwritten Budget

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Raipur

In an age where even court rulings are drafted using AI-powered chatbots, Chhattisgarh's Finance Minister OP Choudhary showcased his personal dedication by presenting a 100-page handwritten Budget in Hindi, reflecting his hands-on approach and commitment to the budget preparation process.

Choudhary, a former IAS who quit service to join politics as he saw it as a bigger medium to serve the public, literally burnt midnight oil, hardly sleeping for a couple of hours in the day's leading to the March 4 presentation of the Budget for the fiscal year starting April 1 in the Chhattisgarh Assembly.

The rare act that displayed a sense of ownership and dedication to the state's financial planning and goals stood out, especially since most Budget documents are typically prepared by a team of officials or typed out on computers.

“I was writing my own (Budget)

speech and I realised that a handwritten document expresses my feelings, my emotions, my vision, my commitment, and my attachment more. And so, I thought, I should write in my own handwriting,” he said.

A handwritten document reflects the attachment and emotions better, he said, displaying his handwritten 100-page document. Asked how long it took to write the entire document, he said the Budget had been in the works for five-six months but the actual writing on the components of the Budget started about a week or 10 days before the presentation.

“I literally did not sleep for four nights (prior to the Budget presentation). I hardly slept one to one-and-a-half hours in those four nights. And this is when I wrote the Budget,” he said. The act, he said, about his personal involvement and commitment to the state's finances. This is perhaps the first time a finance minister has presented a handwritten annual Budget in the Assembly.

India, European Union to hold next round of free trade agreement talks amid tariff threats



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen at the Hyderabad House

PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India and the 27-nation European Union (EU) bloc will start the tenth round of negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement from Monday in Brussels amid Trump tariff threats, according to an official.

The talks are expected to focus on

resolving remaining issues so that the agreement can be finalised by the end of this year.

During the recent visit of EU Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maros Sefcovic, the two sides have discussed ways to accelerate efforts towards a balanced and mutually beneficial trade pact.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen last month agreed to conclude the ambitious India-EU free trade deal by this year amid fears of the Trump administration's threat of higher tariffs.

“The two sides are scheduled to hold the tenth round of negotiations for the FTA from March 10-14 in Brussels,” the official said.

In June 2022, India and the 27-nation EU bloc resumed the negotiations after a gap of over eight years.

It stalled in 2013 due to differences over the level of opening up of the markets.

The two sides are also negotiating an investment protection agreement and an agreement on Geographical Indications (GIs). According to the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), key sticking points include agricultural tariffs, especially on dairy and wine import duties, automobile tariffs, and regulatory barriers affecting labour-intensive goods. India is reluctant to lower auto import duties and is cautious about committing to EU demands on sustainability and labour standards, it said, adding that services trade remains another contested area, with India seeking easier mobility for professionals and data security recognition under the EU's GDPR framework (European Union's General Data Protection Regulation).

ONGC's OPaL exits from Dahej SEZ, eyes local market

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

ONGC PetroAdditions Limited, a subsidiary of the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), has relinquished its 'only-for-export' unit status as it aims to tap into the booming local petrochemical market to drive a turnaround.

In a stock exchange filing, ONGC said OPaL has received the final approval for its exit from the Dahej Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

“Accordingly, OPaL shall operate as a Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) unit with effect from March 8, 2025,” ONGC said. “Further, this exit from SEZ will improve the competitiveness of OPaL for supplies to be made to the DTA.”

This essentially means primarily catering to the domestic Indian market instead of focusing on exports, which is the primary purpose of an SEZ unit. It will now not have to pay customs duty on products sold within India, helping improve margins.

The move is primarily to gain access to the wider domestic market and potentially benefit from the lower corporate tax regime. ONGC's C2C3 project extracts ethane (C2) and propane (C3) from the liquefied natural gas (LNG) imported from Qatar. C2 and C3 - the basic building blocks of petrochemicals - are provided to OPaL which uses them to make polymers and chemicals like benzene and butadiene.

High debt and unattractive exports had pushed OPaL into the red. It made a loss of ₹3,546 Crore in the 2023-24 fiscal year and ₹2,392 Crore loss in the first nine months of the current year. To mitigate the situation, ONGC extended financial support. It infused additional equity capital upto ₹10,501 Crore, converted back stopped compulsorily convertible debentures (CCDs) amounting to ₹7,778 Crore and paid ₹86 Crore with respect to share warrants, totaling ₹18,365 Crore. This has led to its stake in the company rising from 49.36 per cent to 95.69 per cent. OPaL dealt with global geopolitical uncertainties “by focusing on the strategic pillars of cost-efficiency programs, innovation, brand building, and distribution in order to sustain growth and profitability and a judicious improvement in the petrochemical export market share,” according to its latest annual report.

Cityflo expands to Delhi, plans to deploy 100 buses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Premium app-based commute service Cityflo has launched operations in Delhi, aiming to transform daily travel for corporate professionals. Founded in 2015 by IIT Bombay alumni, the Mumbai-based company has already served over 2.5 Million commuters in Mumbai and Hyderabad.

Cityflo will initially operate on key routes like DLF Cyber City, targeting 100 buses and 80,000 riders in its first year. The expansion is expected to add ₹25 Crore to its topline.

Backed by marquee investors, Cityflo promises a reliable, comfortable alternative to existing transport options.

US tariffs to hit pharma sector, auto minimal effect

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Enhanced tariffs on pharma imports in the United States (US) can severely impact Indian drug manufacturers as it would lead to higher production costs, making shipments less competitive against products from other countries.

Smaller drug firms operating on thin margins can face severe pressure potentially forcing consolidation or closure.

The automobile sector, on the other hand, is expected to have a very minimal impact owing to the US being a small export market.

Terming India as a very high tariff nation, US President Donald Trump has said that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in on April 2.

India currently levies around 10 per

cent import duty on American drugs, while the US does not charge any import duty on Indian drugs.

Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas and Co Partner Arvind Sharma said as of recent history, the US has been a net importer of pharmaceutical products to meet its domestic demand.

“In the event the US decides to impose substantial tariffs on pharmaceutical imports from India, the impact could send noticeable ripples through the Indian pharma sector and simultaneously disrupt its own domestic consumption,” he noted.

Indian pharmaceutical companies supply a substantial proportion of drugs to US residents, with four out of ten of all prescriptions filled in the US in 2022 being supplied by Indian companies.

As per industry sources, overall, medicines from Indian companies provided

\$219 Billion in savings to the US healthcare system in 2022 and a total of \$1.3 Trillion between 2013 and 2022.

Generics from Indian companies are expected to generate an additional \$1.3 Trillion in savings over the next five years.

Sharma stated that India's pharmaceutical industry, at present, significantly relies on the American market, with the US accounting for roughly a third of its total exports.

“A sudden tariff increase could significantly raise the cost of medicines manufactured in and exported from India to the US, making them less competitive against products from other countries,” he added.

By imposing tariffs, the US might inadvertently increase its domestic healthcare costs, burdening consumers and, in turn, making healthcare access scarcer,

Sharma stated.

Additionally, in the situation where substantial tariffs are imposed by the US on Indian pharmaceutical products, then that might encourage Indian pharma companies to diversify their export markets, possibly shifting focus to Europe, Latin America or Africa, he said.

Elaborating on the automobile sector, Shashi Mathews, Partner, IndusLaw, said the recent announcements and pushback by the Trump Administration on India's tariff, especially in the auto sector, will have a very minimal impact.

“Reason being that while entry into India may be well protected and thus, heavily taxed, a reciprocal tariff for importing into the US, which is a smaller export market for the Indian automotive sector will not affect us much,” he added.

Holistic Beauty in a Hectic Lifestyle

In a conversation with **ABHI SINGHAL**, renowned ayurvedic beauty expert Shahnaz Husain offers vital advice on self-care, achieving radiant skin, and inner balance for women juggling with the relentless pressures of modern life



Every morning is a hectic morning in a woman's life. The alarm blares, and before the snooze button is even considered, the day begins. After waking up, there is a quick breakfast, a hurried school drop-off, a barrage of work emails, and a mental checklist that grows every minute. This is the reality for countless women today. In all this hurricane responsibilities self-care often takes a backseat. But amidst this chaos, women are reclaiming their well-being, recognising that nurturing themselves is not a luxury but a necessity.

To illuminate the path to healthy skin, we turned to Shahnaz Husain, a luminary in Ayurvedic beauty. She offers invaluable guidance for the time-pressed woman, revealing swift self-care practices, nature's potent remedies, and crucial skincare components. Husain champions a holistic approach, advocating for herbal solutions and stressing the imperative of prioritising personal wellness amidst life's relentless pace.



IN CONVERSATION WITH **SHAHNAZ HUSAIN**

Women today are often overwhelmed by their multiple roles. What are your top recommendations for quick self-care practices for a busy schedule?

Exposure to sunlight, pollution and irregular dieting results in premature skin ageing. It appears tired, dull, dry and flaky, so regular facials are recommended to help manage the symptoms. The Diamond Facial or Pearl Facial are designed

to provide the skin with ample nourishment and rejuvenate the skin, restoring its elasticity. The Ash of Diamond and Pearl Powder acts as a stimulant and awakens dormant cells, giving life and restoring the natural dynamics of a youthful appearance.

With the abundance of skincare products available, what are the key ingredients women should look for, especially those dealing with stress-related skin issues?

These days, the beauty industry is booming, with numerous new brands coming up overnight, and it is hard to choose the right one that is suitable for your skin. Therefore, you must check the labels that state ingredients like extracts of almonds, apricots, cabbage, Carrot, Wheat Germ, essential oils, Vitamins and other botanical extracts. While choosing creams for skincare and treatments, you must keep a lookout for these ingredients suitable for your skin type.

Many women suffer from stress-related skin issues. What natural remedies do you recommend for healthy skin?

I would like to remind you that our kitchen is a natural pharmacy that is full of countless herbs useful in treating skin-related issues and healthy skin. For instance, Turmeric is anti-inflammatory & antiseptic and helps in maintaining healthy, glowing skin. Mixing a pinch of Turmeric with 1 tsp of curd will help achieve an even skin tone, remove tan. However, you need to keep it on for 15 minutes and then rinse off your skin with water. Also, honey has excellent moisturizing properties. Apply raw honey on your face and let it sit for 20 minutes, and then rinse it off with water. Those who have oily skin can use honey with Rose water and a few drops of Lemon juice. It naturally moisturizes your skin without making it greasy.

Since women get less time for themselves, what are some affordable and natural skin care routines that women can perform at home?

Neem is the best skin ingredient that comprises natural sulphur compounds that are good for hair and skin. Prepare Neem water by adding Neem leaves to 5 cups of water, bringing it to a boil, and straining the water. This water is a potent elixir for soothing skin, you can rinse your face with this water daily or use it on your hair to keep your hair and skin healthy. For moisturising and cleansing your skin, milk is the best. Use a cup full of milk and add a few drops of Olive oil to it. Use it on your face for cleansing and moisturizing.

What are some of the biggest skin health mistakes that you see women make, and how can they be avoided?

Often, I have seen women complain about dry, flaky skin with a suntan. This is the result of UV rays damage and sun damage to the skin. Avoiding sunblock even if the weather is cloudy is a big mistake. It is essential to use a good quality sunblock and it should not be less than SPF 40 for better protection. Remember to reapply it every 2 hours. The next biggest mistake would be not exfoliating your skin and forgetting to moisturize it.

How can women in their 30s and 40s maintain youthful skin while managing work and family life?

Managing your skincare schedule between your 30s and 40s is difficult. You can begin with including Vegetable Peel and a Thermoherb mask. These are two specialised skin rejuvenating treatments that have produced good results. Some plant extracts used in the formulation of skincare products are powerful rehydrants like Cactus, Aloe Vera, Seaweed and Ginseng.

On this Women's Day, what message would you like to give to women who struggle to prioritise self-care?

I would like to emphasise that self-care is not limited to surface beauty but comprises of maintaining healthy mind and body. Meditation, yoga, healthy diet, including seeds and nuts in your platter and following a de-stressing activity are all a part of self-care.



Skin and Hair: Pre and Post Holi Care



The celebration of colours, *Holi*, brings excitement, happiness, and a burst of colour. However, your skin and hair may suffer from the harsh chemicals in synthetic colours, extended sun exposure, and frequent water splashes. This is your go-to resource for preserving your attractiveness throughout this colourful festival.

Pre-Holi Care for Skin

Moisturize Generously
Colours are more difficult to remove from dry skin because it absorbs them more quickly. Apply a thick layer of moisturizer, coconut oil, or almond oil. Particular attention should be paid to the hands, elbows, neck, and face.

Apply sunscreen

Since Holi is celebrated outside, exposure to the sun can cause skin damage and tanning. At least half an hour before leaving the house, apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 50 or higher. "A waterproof sunscreen is ideal, as water splashes are inevitable."

Use Very Little Makeup

Steer clear of excessive makeup as it may cause skin discomfort due to colour reactions. To keep your lips nourished, use waterproof lip balm and a mild, tinted moisturizer if needed.

Guard Vulnerable Areas

Use petroleum jelly on your lips, ears, and nails to keep colour from getting stuck in nooks and crannies that can be difficult to remove later.

Pre-Holi Care for Hair



Oil Your Hair

To build a barrier against colours, apply coconut, almond, or olive oil to your scalp and hair. Colours are easier to remove from oiled hair since they can't penetrate the cuticles.

Tie Your Hair Up

To reduce exposure, wear your hair in a ponytail, bun, or braid.

Cover Your Hair

Putting on a cap, bandana, or scarf helps shield your hair from colour fading and keep it from being dry and brittle.

Avoid Heat Styling

Refrain from using heat styling tools like straighteners and curling irons a day before Holi, as they can dry out your hair, making it more vulnerable to colour penetration.

Post-Holi Care for Skin

Use Gentle Cleansers

Do not scrub your skin vigorously to remove colours, as this can cause irritation. Instead, use a mild cleanser or oil-based makeup remover to break down colours before washing your face.

Exfoliate with Natural Remedies

Use a homemade scrub of gram

flour (besan) and yogurt or a mixture of honey and oatmeal to gently exfoliate your skin and remove residual colour.

Apply a Soothing Mask

Aloe Vera gel, curd, or mashed banana masks can help soothe any redness or irritation caused by colours. They also help in restoring the skin's natural moisture.

Hydrate and Moisturize

After cleansing, apply a hydrating serum followed by a thick moisturizer.

Avoid Harsh Chemicals

Do not use alcohol-based toners or harsh face washes immediately after Holi, as they can dry out the skin further and increase sensitivity.



Delhi's Growing Waistline

Delhi faces a critical health challenge as obesity rates surge, transforming the city into an obesity capital, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

World Obesity Day cast a stark light on Delhi's escalating health crisis. The city is rapidly becoming an obesity epicenter, with over 80% of residents in the NCR region classified as overweight or obese. This condition, far from a mere aesthetic issue, acts as a silent killer, significantly increasing the risk of severe health problems.

The consequences are devastating. Obesity fuels heart disease, high blood pressure, type-2 diabetes, and various cancers. Breathing difficulties, infertility, and osteoarthritis are also common. Beyond physical ailments, it takes a toll on mental well-being, contributing to depression and anxiety.

Experts identify a confluence of factors driving this epidemic. Processed foods, sugary drinks, and large portions have become dietary staples. Stress-induced overeating and a sedentary lifestyle, propelled by excessive screen time and limited physical activity, further compound the problem. Urban areas like Punjabi Bagh, Rohini, and South Extension are particularly affected.

"Obesity is not merely a cosmetic concern but a severe medical condition that



can lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and even various types of cancer," stated *Dr Sachin Ambekar*, Medical Director and Director of Minimal Access Surgery at MASSH Hospital. Modern medical advancements, including minimally invasive surgical techniques, offer effective solutions. Tackling this issue requires a collective effort. Promoting healthy eating habits, encouraging exercise, and reducing screen time are crucial.



POST-HOLI CARE FOR HAIR

Rinse with Cold Water First

Before applying shampoo, rinse your hair thoroughly with cold water to remove as much colour as possible. This prevents the colours from further settling into the hair shaft.

Apply a Gentle Shampoo

To gently cleanse your hair without depleting it

of its natural oils, use a shampoo without sulfates. To prevent injury, lightly massage your scalp.

Give Your Hair a Deep Conditioning Treatment

To replenish hydration and nutrients, use coconut or argan oil for an oil massage or a deep conditioning hair treatment.

Steer clear of Instant heat styling

After washing, let your hair air dry naturally. To give your hair time to heal, refrain from using curling irons, straighteners, or blow dryers for a few days.

— **By Dr Shweta Mishra**, Facial Cosmetic & Aesthetic surgeon

WPL: Mumbai Indians to face Gujarat Giants



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

With two games left in the league stage, Mumbai Indians will look to make the most of the opportunity and push for a first-place finish on the WPL points table, starting with the clash against in-form Gujarat Giants here on Monday.

UP Warriorz's win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru by 12 runs knocked the defending champions out from the race to the playoffs on Saturday, confirming the

qualification for Delhi Capitals, Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Giants in the process.

But what remains is the final classification of the points table. Harmanpreet Kaur's MI, who return to the Brabourne Stadium here for the final leg of the third WPL — their home ground where they had won the inaugural edition in 2023 — will look for a top-place finish.

The team that tops the points table at the end of the league round will get a direct entry into the final and MI, who play back-to-back matches on Monday and Tuesday,

will aim to go past DC who are currently at the first spot with 10 points and a Net Run Rate of 0.396.

For MI, topping the table will also help them avoid a possible fourth game in a span of six days — the Eliminator — which could test the squad to the hilt in hot and humid conditions here.

MI are currently third with 8 points and NRR of 0.267 and if they win both these matches — against GG and RCB — they can finish at the top with a maximum of 12 points.

The Giants, currently placed second 8 points and NRR of 0.334, can finish at best with 10 points provided they beat Mumbai Indians, which would place them at even keel with DC. In such a scenario, the NRR will determine how teams are placed on the points table.

The teams that finish second and third will meet in the Eliminator on Thursday, with the summit clash slated to be played on Saturday.

But it won't be an easy task to begin with for MI as the Giants have been on a roll recording three heavy wins on the trot to make it to the final three.

Not only have the Giants' batters been firing in unison, their bowlers have also found their rhythm which makes them a team to beat in this knockouts round.

A maiden appearance in the WPL playoffs would certainly inspire the Giants, who turned things around after a dismal start that had them losing three of their first four matches.

On the other hand, MI have four wins and two defeats in six outings so far which has helped them to make their third WPL playoffs. Once again, overseas stars Nat Sciver-Brunt (309 runs and 8 wickets), Hayley Matthews (181 runs and 9 wickets) and Amelia Kerr (10 wickets) have been at the forefront of their charge with skipper Harmanpreet (126 runs) in tow.

For the Giants, the troika of skipper Ashleigh Gardner (235 runs, 7 wickets), Beth Mooney (224 runs) and Harleen Deol (200 runs) in the batting line-up have found strong backing from their bowlers.

West Indies' all-rounder Deandra Dottin (132 runs, 9 wickets) has not really put a foot wrong but the revelation has been India's uncapped Kashvee Gautam (9 wickets) this season. Tanuja Kanwer (7 wickets) is not too far behind.



Paris Saint-Germain wins 4-1 at Rennes in Ligue 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Ousmane Dembélé came off the bench to score twice and help a shaky Paris Saint-Germain win 4-1 at Rennes to stay unbeaten in Ligue 1.

Bradley Barcola got one goal and set up another as PSG moved 16 points ahead of second-placed Marseille, which conceded a stoppage-time goal in a 1-0 home defeat to Lens in the late game on Saturday.

Third-placed Nice can move level on points with Marseille if it beats Lyon at home on Sunday.

PSG coach Luis Enrique rested captain Marquinhos ahead of the return leg at Liverpool in the last 16 of the Champions League next Tuesday. PSG lost the first leg 1-0 despite dominating.

Dembélé was joined on the bench by right back Achraf Hakimi, winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma.

PSG controlled the first half but made many mistakes after the break as Rennes attacked strongly, before Dembélé wrapped up the win late on.

Barcola put PSG ahead in the 28th minute when he placed the ball through goalkeeper Brice Samba's legs. Ludovic Blas almost equalised moments later and 17-year-old striker Mohamed Meité headed against the crossbar.

Barcola broke down the left again and picked out striker Gonçalo Ramos in the 50th for 2-0. Three minutes later, sloppy defending allowed defender Lilian Brassier to pull one back and it galvanized Rennes, which came close to equalising several times. An awful mistake from PSG defender Lucas Beraldo saw him

pass to Meité, giving him an easy chance from six meters. But the young striker hesitated to shoot with his weaker left foot and his tame shot with his right was blocked.

Dembélé's stoppage-time brace took him this season to 20 league goals for the first time.

Canada striker Jonathan David moved onto 14 league goals — third in the Ligue 1 scoring charts — after scoring in Lille's hard-fought 1-0 win against rock-bottom Montpellier.

The win moved fifth-placed Lille level on 44 points with Monaco, which is ahead on goal difference, in the race for one of the four Champions League spots.

Marseille loses to Lens

Marseille's Mason Greenwood — second in the scoring charts with 15 goals — was named as a substitute along with Brazilian winger Luis Henrique. Both players came on at the start of the second half at Stade Velodrome.

Luis Henrique's close-range volley was expertly stopped by Lens goalkeeper Mathew Ryan in the 83rd. Moments later, he made a superb one-handed save low to his right to deny forward Neal Maupay. Marseille paid the price when Lens launched a counterattack in the fourth minute of stoppage time and Colombia defender Deiver Machado teed up Neil El Aynaoui for a fine finish as Lens moved up to eighth.

All the players in Saturday's games had "WO=MAN" written on the back of their jerseys instead of their names as part of the French league's initiative centered around International Women's Day.

Jeneath Wong becomes first Malaysian to win WAAP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Da Nang

Saanvi Somu was the best Indian golfer at tied 38th while compatriots Guntas Kaur Sandhu and Mannat Brar finished way behind at the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific (WAAP) Championship here on Sunday.

Somu, who made the cut for the second year running, shot her second straight 1-under par 70. With rounds of 72-74-70-70, she totalled 2-over for the week.

The 14-year-old debutant Sandhu, who impressed by becoming the youngest Indian to make the cut at WAAP, had a

tough final round with a 7-over 78 and was 9-over to finish 47th.

Her aggression and some good putting helped her pick up 14 birdies, the most among the Indians, but she was held back by lack of experience of playing in strong windy conditions.

Brar, who made the cut after three unsuccessful attempts, had a very rough day when things just did not go her way. She shot 78 and with cards of 67-76-73-78, she finished at 10-over and in 48th place.

Meanwhile, Jeneath Wong, who moved to Australia when she was ten years old and

now plays at Pepperdine University in college golf in the United States, became the first Malaysian to win the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship.

She turned in a superb finish which included a clutch par putt on the 16th, a perfect tee shot to within six inches on the 17th and a great pitch for a 8-foot birdie on the 18th for a round of 68.

Wong, who now gets to play three Women's Majors and a host of other iconic events, totalled 18-under, and won by one shot over Korea's Soomin Oh (66), who made a great charge with a bogey-free 66, but fell short in the face of a nerveless finish from Wong.

Wong finished 18th in her only previous experience in 2022, when she also had a hole in one on the second day. In the final round here in Vietnam, she almost had another one on the Par-3 17th, when her tee shot came inside six inches.

Three Koreans finished in top-four as Sumin Hong (68) was sole third while another Korean Yunseo Yang (66) and Australian Jazy Roberts (66) were tied fourth.

The 2026 Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship will be held in Wellington, New Zealand.



Morikawa birdies final hole for a 1-shot lead at Bay Hill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Orlando

Collin Morikawa made a 12-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole on a baked out Bay Hill course for a 5-under 67, giving him a one-shot lead in the Arnold Palmer Invitational and a chance to win for the first time in 17 months.

Russell Henley on Saturday holed a long bunker shot for birdie on the opening hole, ran off four in a row to start the back nine and had a 67 to finish one shot behind. Corey Connors of Canada missed the 18th fairway, chipped out and made bogey for a 69 and was two back.

Even without much wind and occasional cloud cover, the heat and three days of sun brought a yellow shine to fairways and greens. Birdie putts from a reasonable range rolled out past the hole sometimes 8 feet or more away.

Shane Lowry, the 36-hole leader, got a taste of that at end. His tee shot on the 18th ran so far that only the collar of the rough kept it from rolling out into the water. He had a birdie chance just inside 25 feet and watched that roll 7 feet by the hole.

He managed to hole that for a 76, leaving him six shots behind. Rory McIlroy made bogey on three of his last four holes for a 73 to fall seven shots behind.

Scottie Scheffler tried to stay in range, except that birdies were hard to come by. He came up short on the 13th — a front pin and a crispy green — and went into the rocks. He managed to salvage bogey from that but he could only manage a 71 to fall eight shots back.

Collin Morikawa was at 10-under 206

"You have to hit good shots out there," he said. "It can get you from any direction." The final hour had Morikawa, Henley and Connors trading spots or sharing time

at the top. Morikawa was the only one to avoid a bogey over the final four-hole stretch. He laid up on the par-5 16th and hit lob wedge and let a 6-foot birdie trickle and swirl into the cup.

He barely touched his 12-foot birdie putt on the final hole. Every shot — trying to keep it in the fairway, on the green and putting — required respect. "Some of these pin locations, I feel I'm having to putt very defensively," Henley said.

Jason Day, who opened with a 76, put himself back in the mix with a tournament-low 64 on Friday and a wild round of 69 on Saturday. He was briefly tied for the lead until closing out the front nine with three straight bogeys. He was losing ground until making three straight birdies at the end, including a 20-footer on the 17th.

His measure of how firm it was from waiting his turn to putt. "Any time you put your putter down and you start sliding on your putter, that's when you know the greens are getting pretty slick," Day said.

"They're changing colour and you can kind of start to see the change in color."

Michael Kim had two eagles on the back nine for a 67, joining Tony Finau (68) at 5-under 205. Kim is the only player among the top five going into the final round who is not already exempt for the Masters, and a win would take care of that.

Morikawa is a two-time major champion whose last victory was in October 2023 at the Zozo Championship in Japan. He got back with longtime coach Rick Sessinghaus, and that buttery fade that gives him such great control has been giving him more chances.

Golf Channel reminded him it had been 502 days.

"Thank you for putting that in exact days. I hope you have it in hours and minutes," he said.

Leverkusen loses to Werder Bremen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Berlin

Bundesliga leader Bayern Munich squandered a two-goal lead and lost at home to struggling Bochum 3-2, but Bayer Leverkusen was unable to take advantage.

Leverkusen on Saturday lost 2-0 at home to Werder Bremen, a team that lost its previous five games across all competitions.

The Champions League weighed heavily across the league on a day of upsets.

Borussia Dortmund lost at home to Augsburg 1-0, leading to a chorus of whistles from home fans before the "Black and Yellows" go to Lille for the second leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Wednesday. The teams drew the first leg 1-1 last Tuesday.

Also, Stuttgart was held to 2-2 by Holstein Kiel, and Wolfsburg drew with St Pauli 1-1.

Freiburg drew with Leipzig 0-0 in the late game, denting their hopes of

Champions League qualification. Both needed a win to keep pace with Mainz, which won Friday to boost its qualification prospects.

Wirtz injured

Leverkusen's loss — its second blow this week after Wednesday's 3-0 defeat to Bayern in Munich in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie — was compounded by an injury to star player Florian Wirtz early in the second half.

Wirtz, who had only gone on after the break as a substitute, was unable to continue after a foul from Bremen's Mitchell Weiser in the 52nd minute.

Weiser, who was booked, connected with Wirtz's right foot. Both Leverkusen and Bayern had rested players before they meet again for the second leg of their Champions League in Leverkusen on Tuesday.

Bochum wins in Munich

Bochum is celebrating its first win in Munich since 1991. It was also Bayern's

first defeat at home this season.

Raphaël Guerreiro got Bayern off to a flying start in the 14th minute, but Serge Gnabry missed a penalty shortly afterward when his effort crashed off the left post.

Harry Kane, who'd been rested, usually takes Bayern's penalties. Kane hasn't missed any of his last 30.

Guerreiro made the most of his rare start with his second goal in the 28th, only for Jakob Medic to pull one back three minutes later.

The game tipped in Bochum's favor when Palhinha was sent off in the 43rd for a studs-up challenge on Georgios Masouras' ankle.

Ibrahima Sissoko equalized in the 51st and Matus Bero put the visitors in front in the 71st. It proved to be the winner, but Bochum needed goalkeeper Timo Horn at his best to grab its first away win of the season.

Leverkusen's loss means Bayern still leads by eight points with nine rounds remaining.

Barcelona's Spanish league game postponed after death of team doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

Barcelona's home game against Osasuna in the Spanish league was postponed after the death of first-team doctor Carles Miñarro Garcia.

Fans were informed of the decision around 15 minutes before the game was scheduled to kick off at 9 pm local time (2000 GMT) in Barcelona at Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium on Saturday.

Barcelona said in a statement that it was "deeply saddened to announce the passing of first-team doctor Carles Miñarro Garcia this evening" and extended its "heartfelt condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time." Barcelona did not immediately provide any details on the cause of death, which local media reports said was due to medical reasons.

"I can't believe it," Barcelona defender Ronald Araújo wrote on X. "Rest in peace, Doc."

The 50-year-old Miñarro Garcia joined the medical staff of Barcelona's first team last season after having previously worked with its futsal team.

Osasuna said it agreed to the request by Barcelona to postpone the match. The Spanish soccer federation confirmed that the decision was official.

Barcelona club president Joan Laporta said that Miñarro Garcia had died "suddenly" as the team gathered hours before the game. Unconfirmed local media reports said the death occurred at a team hotel.

"The players, staff and coach were all incredibly sad because he was a man loved by everyone," Laporta said.

"We thought it was best to ask for the game to be postponed," Laporta thanked Osasuna and La Liga for their understanding. Barcelona leads the league by one point over Atletico Madrid. The Osasuna game will be rescheduled.

Letter No. 1327 Dated. 05.03.25
 Government of Odisha "e" procurement Notice
 Bid Identification No. TENDER ONLINE SNPR- 18 OF 2024-25

1. Name of the work	Building Works as per DTCN available in the website. www.tendersodisha.gov.in
2. Total No. of Work	03 (Three)Nos.
3. Approximate Estimated Cost	67.26lakh to 68.36Lakhs
4. Period of Completion	9 (Nine) Calendar months
5. Period and time of availability of bid document in the portal for bidding	12.03.2025 at 11.00AM to 25.03.2025 up to 5.00 PM
6. Date and time of opening of Tender	26.03.2025 at 11.00AM (Technical Bid) & (Financial Bid will be intimated later on)
7. Name and address of the officer inviting bid	S.E.R.W.Division, Sonepur

(1) Other details can be seen from detailed notice
 (2) Inviting tenders, available in website www.tendersodishagov.in
 (3) Corresponding if any shall only be published in the website: www.tenderodisha.gov.in

Executive Engineer,
 Rural Works Division, Sonepur.