



War beyond language: Stalin insults Indian currency

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Chennai

The decision of the Tamil Nadu government to replace the universally recognised symbol of Indian currency ₹ with the Tamil letter Ru has stirred a hornet's nest across the country if the initial reactions are any indication. But even DMK persons are of the view that Chief Minister MK Stalin's new found passion for Tamil language is to make the Centre to use Article 356 in order to dismiss the democratically elected government so that the party could romp home with increased majority in the 2026 Assembly election based on the sympathy wave.

The move to change the symbol from ₹ to Ru (rubaa, Tamil for Rupee) was publicised by the DMK government through advertisements in the Stalin-family owned newspapers and news channels which are galore in the state. Thangam Thennarasu, the minister for finance is all set to present the 2025-2026 budget for Tamil Nadu on Friday.

Thennarasu is not known for his

proress either in economy or education and is guided by a coterie of IAS officers, according to Prof C Murukadass, former head of the department of economics and who had been advisor to chief minister MG Ramachandran and J Jayalalitha.

Edappadi Palaniswamy, former chief minister, termed the move as political stunt and one of the many gimmicks deployed by Stalin to tide over the financial ruin Tamil Nadu is undergoing. The economic survey presented by the government at the Centre is also another ploy to cheat the general public, said Palaniswamy who took to social media.

K Annamalai, the state BJP chief, pointed out that Stalin has scored a self goal in his bid to emerge as the savior of Tamil. "It was Udhayakumar, a Tamil Nadu born youth who designed and developed the ₹ which was recognised and accepted by the then UPA Government headed by Manmohan Singh. The DMK was the second largest partner in that government and had supported the decision," said Annamalai.



The logo of the 2024-25 Tamil Nadu budget (left) and the logo of the 2025-26 Tamil Nadu budget (right). The Tamil Nadu government replaced the Devanagari rupee symbol with a Tamil letter in its logo for the budget 2025-26, which will be tabled in the state Assembly on Friday

Udhayakumar is the son of Dharmalingam, a former DMK MLA who had represented Rishivandhyam constituency. "It is like humiliating the Tamil youth who had the rare privilege to design the emblem of the national currency," said Prof Murukadass.

Stalin is engaged in a battle with the BJP-led Centre over the implementation of the three-language policy in school and college curriculum. He has convened a meeting of the non-BJP chief ministers to form a united front against the BJP-led NDA

government's NEP 2025 and the alleged order to impose Hindi.

"Stalin or for that matter any other chief ministers in the country are incapable to replace the ₹ with the design or letter of their choice as this comes under the prerogative of the Centre. What the DMK government is doing is to divert the attention of the public from the failure of the Stalin government. The state is burdened with debt of ₹9.54 Lakh Crore and there is no money in the coffers for social welfare measures. Moreover, Stalin is fac-

ing indifferent health due to a series of ailments. His only mission is to facilitate the coronation of son Udhaidhi as the successor," said Prof Murugadass.

Political commentators in Chennai are of the view that Stalin's displeasure over the National education Policy and the campaign against it is much ado about nothing. "This is a move to grab national headlines and the people will forget the same after the initial excitement," said a senior commentator.

Dr YR Johnson, former principal of

Navodaya Vidyalaya and a widely respected educationist is of the view that the State Government was violating the provision enshrined in Indian Constitution that guarantees the right to education. "You cannot deny the children their right to learn a language. Let the politicians have their fights in the public arena but not in schools or colleges. The Supreme Court and High Courts in the country have reiterated many times the right of children to learn the language of their choice and what the Tamil Nadu Government does is gross violation of court order," said Dr Johnson.

Adding to the woes of Stalin, a former ADGP Pon Manickavel said that Stalin has lost all capabilities to administer the State and he is led by a group of advisors who are working against the interest of the nation.

The Lok Sabha had witnessed Dhayanidhi Maran, Stalin's nephew questioning the propriety over the translation of Indian Constitution into Sanskrit, to which the Speaker gave the former some basic lessons.

Nation outraged by attack on national symbol

A beacon of unity, not division

PROF GOURAV VALLABH ■ New Delhi

Since time immemorial, the progress of civilization has been defined by its ability to connect-first through roads that linked villages and kingdoms, then through canals and boats that carried commerce and culture across waters, and later through airways that brought distant lands closer than ever before.

These physical networks, however, have always been paralleled by intangible forces-shared beliefs, traditions, and above all, the financial systems that unify economies and enable prosperity. Since the dawn of our independence, the Indian rupee has been one such force, binding together a nation of unparalleled diversity, where every region's traditions are

equally unique and equally important.

It is within this context that the Tamil Nadu government's decision to replace the universally recognised rupee symbol (₹) with the Tamil letter 'Ru' in their budget document must be examined. This move appears to be less about cultural pride and more about political posturing, stoking regionalism at the cost of national unity, echoing past language-related controversies. Tamil Nadu, which adheres to a two-language policy (Tamil and English), has long opposed the three-language framework, branding it an imposition of Hindi. Yet, the National Education Policy (NEP) fosters multilingualism and grants states the autonomy to determine their linguistic preferences.

"I don't have any reaction"

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

IT Guwahati Professor D Udaya Kumar, who had designed the Indian rupee symbol refused to be drawn into the controversy over language and said it is a mere coincidence that his father was a DMK MLA. "I don't have any reaction. It's the government which suddenly felt that there was a need for a change and they wanted to implement their own script. This is up to the state government. So, I don't have anything to say about that. It's entirely up to the government," said Kumar.

Kumar's father N Dharmalingam was an MLA from the Rishivandiyam constituency in 1971 from the DMK party, which is in power in Tamil Nadu presently. "My father was an MLA even

before I was born. Now, he is old and living in our village, leading his life peacefully. It just happened to be a coincidence, probably I could have been somebody else as well," the professor said.

Recollecting his experience while designing the Indian rupee symbol, Kumar said the design which he created was based on certain requirements that the government had asked for. "It was a competition by the Government of India. I participated and my design got selected as the winner of the competition, and it was implemented then," said the IIT professor.

The Indian Rupee sign was adopted by the Government of India on July 15, 2010. Udaya Kumar is a post-graduate in Design from the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay.

Opposition divided

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Opposition members of the INDIA bloc said including Congress which is part of the DMK led Tamil Nadu government slammed Stalin for the decision to lock horns with the Centre in this perspective while Left parties held there was not inappropriate to State have its own symbol. Congress MLA PM Narendraswamy and Karnataka Minister Eshwar Khandre viewed the symbol change as an expression of frustration over the central government's approach to southern states. They urged for immediate steps to bridge the growing divide and promote inclusivity.

CPI leader and a member of INDIA bloc of opposition parties, D Raja said that decision to

replace the Rupee symbol with a Tamil alphabet is not against the Constitution in any form.

"Tamil Nadu government has taken a few initiatives in order to enlighten all sections of the society. This budget is in Tamil and is meant for Tamil Nadu... The government has not changed the numbers, and that needs to be understood. Only the symbol has been changed... It is not against the Constitution in any form," said Raja.

DMK spokesperson Saravanan Annadurai meanwhile defended the state government's decision and was quoted, "The usage of Ru is to signify protest of the state against the policies of the government. The people of the state are aware of what the BJP is trying to do. Everybody across the country is aware of the nefarious designs of the BJP government."

Yamuna found dead in the Capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources in its report on "Review Of Upper Yamuna River Cleaning Project Upto Delhi And River Bed Management In Delhi", said the Yamuna river's capacity to sustain life have been found to be almost non-existent in the Delhi stretch, noting that 23 out of the 33 monitored sites, including six in the national capital, failed to meet primary water quality standards.

Having taken note of the presence of heavy metals like lead, copper, zinc, nickel, cadmium and chromium in the riverbed of Yamuna which pose a serious threat to the health and ecosystem of the river, the Committee recommended that the Department explore the possibility of controlled dredging. The Department has through their Action Taken Replies furnished the submissions of various Departments of the Yamuna basin States. However, the Delhi Jal Board has not furnished its reply.

The Yamuna flows through a 40 km stretch in Delhi, entering at Palla from Haryana and exiting at Asgarpur into Uttar Pradesh. The dissolved oxygen (DO) levels, which reflect the river's capacity to sustain life, were found to be almost non-existent in the Delhi stretch, the report said. It said the Yamuna has been categorised into three parts viz. the part from Yamunotri to Hathnikund Barriage may be considered as unpolluted stretch, the part from Hathnikund Barriage to Palla is moderately polluted. However, the part from Palla to Okhla, basically the Delhi stretch is severely polluted. Further, as per the Primary Water Quality Criteria for organised outdoor

Even if Delhi Jal Board treats the entire sewage generated in Delhi, lack of minimum flow and fresh water downstream makes the Yamuna ecosystem unsustainable for life

bathing, the Dissolved Oxygen (DO) is specified as 5 mg/l or more, the Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) is specified as 3 mg/l or less and Fecal Coliform (FC) is specified as less than 2500 MPN/100 ml.

The water quality data of monitored 33 locations during January, 2021 - May, 2023 was analysed for 4 parameters viz. Dissolved Oxygen (DO), pH, Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) and Fecal Coliform (FC). The results were compared with the Primary Water Quality Criteria for Outdoor Bathing (PWQC) notified by Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change under the Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986. The analysis revealed that: All the 04 monitored locations each in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are complying while all the 06 monitored locations are non-complying with the criteria in Haryana. All the 07 monitored locations in Delhi were non-complying with the criteria during 2021. 06 locations were non-complying except at Palla (entry point of Delhi) which is observed complying during 2022 & 2023. Out of 12 monitored locations in Uttar Pradesh, 11 are observed non complying during 2021-2023.

"Further, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) in their reply has cited the observation of a Committee headed by Dr MA Chitale which in their

Report - For Preparation of Guidelines for Works on De-siltation from Bhimgauda to Farakka submitted in February 2017 did not recommend the large scale de-silting or dredging of rivers. Taking into account the replies of various Departments of Yamuna Basin States and deteriorating water quality of river Yamuna due to existence of heavy metals beyond permissible limits, the Committee reiterated that the Department may take pro-active steps at least for controlled dredging of the sludge which cannot be left to the vagaries of monsoon rains and whose continued presence may further decay the water quality of such an important river," the report said.

The report stated even if Delhi Jal Board (DJB) treats the entire sewage generated in Delhi upto Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) of 10 mg/l desired water quality of BOD less than 3 mg/l & Dissolved Oxygen (DO) more than 5 mg/l may not be achieved in river Yamuna due to unavailability of fresh water in the river downstream of Wazirabad and importance of minimum flow for sustenance of river ecosystem.

In its report the Committee warned that despite the construction and upgrade of sewage treatment plants (STPs) in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, pollution levels remain alarmingly high. The Committee called for a coordinated response from all stakeholders to tackle pollution and restore the river's health.

The panel raised particular concerns over encroachment along the Yamuna floodplains. While Delhi and Haryana provided information on encroachments, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand are yet to furnish complete details.

No country for women: British national raped in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A British national, who came to Delhi to meet a man she befriended on Instagram, was raped by him at a Mahipalpur hotel in South West Delhi. However, her ordeal did not end there, and she was molested by another person in the hotel lift when she went to ask for help. The police have arrested the accused, Kailash, in a rape case and his friend, Wasim, has been charged with molesting the British tourist. The British High Commission has been informed, and the victim is receiving necessary support. According to police, the victim said she met the accused on social media. They started conversing regularly, and she decided to visit India to meet him in person.

The British national came to India a month ago and stayed in Maharashtra for some time, before travelling to Goa. On Tuesday, she came to Delhi allegedly to meet the 24-year-old Kailash who had befriended her on Instagram recently. She was allegedly first molested by a house-keeping staff in the hotel's lift. Later, she met Kailash who allegedly raped her in a hotel room, police said.

"Separate cases have been registered in both matters. They are not related to each other," Deputy Commissioner of Police (South West) Surendra Chaudhary said. She visited a hospital on Wednesday and police were then informed about the incident, a police officer said.

The woman first spoke to the accused on a social media platform a month and a half earlier and after that, they talked frequently, he said. According to police, Kailash, a resident of east Delhi, struggled to speak English and used some transla-

tion application to communicate with her.

When the woman came to India, she and Kailash made plans to meet each other in Delhi, the officer said. The victim travelled from Goa to Delhi and booked a room in a hotel in Mahipalpur. When Kailash came to meet her, she alleged that he raped her, the officer added.

Police teams are checking CCTV footage of the hotel to know the sequence of the events. A special team, led by an ACP and under the overall supervision of the DCP, has been formed to probe the case. Police have seized the accused's phone and will check if he has contacted any other women on social media.

The victim first spoke to the accused on social media. The accused struggled to speak English and used some translation application to communicate with her

Kailash, it is learnt, works at a private firm. The woman has told police that he struggled to speak English and used Google Translate to communicate with her. The incident is reported days after an Israeli tourist, along with a homestay owner, was gang-raped in Karnataka by three men. The mishap occurred when a group of travellers was stargazing near the canal situated near the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hampi. All three suspects have been arrested.

Another traveller from Odisha was found dead in the incident after he and two others were pushed into a canal by the attackers in Karnataka.

President sanctions prosecution against Sisodia, Jain

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

In fresh trouble for the AAP former ministers Manish Sisodia and Satyendra Jain, President Droupadi Murmu has granted prosecution sanctions against them in the ₹1,300 Crore scam in construction of classrooms in Delhi government schools, during their tenure as ministers in the national Capital.

Official communications to the office of Lieutenant Governor of the NCT of Delhi, the President through the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), said, the required permission to register an FIR and institute a probe against then education minister Manish Sisodia and then public works department (PWD) minister Satyendar Jain is granted.

Under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (as amended in 2018) prosecution of former PWD minister, Satyendra Jain has been ordered. The file number 17A/4/DOV/2021 has been moved ahead as further action will take it forward. The MHA's move comes after reviewing findings from the Department of Vigilance (DoV)'s investigation into alleged financial irregularities linked to them. In 2022, the Delhi government's vigilance directorate recommended a probe into the alleged scam and submitted a report to the chief secretary.

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), in a report dated February 17, 2020, highlighted "glaring irregularities" in the construction of over 2,400 classrooms in Delhi government schools by the Public Works Department (PWD).

It is alleged that a huge scam to the tune of over ₹2,000 Crore have been carried out in NCT of Delhi for the construction of School Rooms/Buildings at a highly inflated cost by the Govt, of NCT of Delhi. The scam involves construction of around 12,748 School Rooms at a very high and inflated construction cost. The total cost incurred for constructing the school rooms/buildings is around ₹2,892.65 Crore. The school rooms/buildings are being allegedly constructed at the rate of ₹8,800 Sqft whereas it is common knowledge that average construction cost (even for a builder of flats) is around ₹15,00 Sqft. The lump sum cost for constructing a school room/building as per the tender awarded is around ₹24.86 Lakh per room, whereas such rooms are easily constructed at Delhi by/through any person at around ₹5 Lakh per room.

Since the offices of The Pioneer shall remain closed on March 14, 2025 on account of Holi, there will be no edition dated March 15, 2025

Abandoned, blinded, maimed; each rescued camels breathes a story

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ Jaipur

Ranu was abandoned, blind, and helpless. Blackie was rescued from smugglers. Rani spent years performing in a circus, while Martin, left lame from an injury, was no longer wanted. Each of them found safety and dignity at the Camel Rescue Centre (CRC) in Bassi, where, for the past 14 years, hundreds of camels have been treated and rehabilitated.

Established in 2011 by Help In Suffering (HIS) with support from the ELSU Foundation, the centre provides critical medical care for working camels-those used in transport, brick kilns, and tourism.

Located 30 km from Jaipur, it has become a sanctuary for camels suffering from injuries, malnutrition, and disease. With a full-time veterinary team, CRC

treats 250-350 camels every month, offering emergency care and long-term rehabilitation.

"The centre is part of HIS's camel welfare programme, running since 2001. Each year, 5,000-7,000 camels receive free veterinary care through mobile clinics, reaching remote areas where medical services are scarce. HIS also conducts annual treatment camps at major camel hubs like Pushkar, Jaisalmer, and Nagaur, treating thousands of camels during these events," said Timmie Kumar, Managing Trustee, HIS.

Beyond medical care, HIS has introduced humane welfare measures, such as replacing wooden nose pegs with gentler alternatives, fitting over 1,000 camel carts with reflectors to prevent accidents, and conducting regular deworming programmes for 2,000 camels annually.



For many families, camels are their livelihood, yet without proper veterinary care, these animals suffer from preventable illnesses and injuries. The Bassi

centre bridges this gap, ensuring camels receive treatment while also training owners in better welfare practices.

The centre was set up because there was

nowhere else for these camels to go, added Kumar. "We have treated, rescued, and rehabilitated thousands, but beyond the numbers, it's about relieving suffering and supporting the people who depend on them," he further said.

CRC veterinarians routinely treat camels for lameness, infections, digestive disorders, and respiratory diseases. Its mobile team reaches remote areas where veterinary care is often unavailable. "Every camel has a story," said Dr. Abhinav Swani, Veterinary Doctor at CRC, Bassi.

Many have worked in extreme conditions for years. Others are abandoned once they are no longer useful. The Camel Rescue Centre is one of several animal welfare initiatives by Help In Suffering (HIS), Jaipur, which continues to be a beacon of compassion for Rajasthan's gentle giants.



200 hectares land transferred to State Govt over land laws violations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The Dehradun district administration has transferred approximately 200 hectares of land to the State government after identifying violations of the Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act. Authorities took action under sections 154(4) (3)(a), 154(4) (3) (b), 166 and 167 of the Act against individuals who acquired land without proper permissions or failed to use it as per regulations, the Dehradun district magistrate Savin Bansal said.

He informed that many individuals from outside the State had purchased more than 250 square meters of land without permission, while others who obtained approval did not utilise the land within the stipulated time or used it for unauthorised purposes. He said that the administration is targeting individuals who misrepresented facts to acquire land in Dehradun and nearby areas. Some purchased land under specific approvals but later developed homestays and farmhouses, leading to increased land prices and



limiting access for local residents.

The government has taken action to curb these practices by reclaiming the land, he said. He also informed that under the enforcement of the new land law, which aims to protect local interests, cultural heritage and the environment, the district administration has been actively monitoring land transactions. The implementation of this law has put stricter regulations on land purchases and sales.

He said that the administration has identified 21.89 hectares of land in Rishikesh, 2.82 hectares in Doiwala, 68.84 hectares in Sadar Tehsil and 107.12

hectares in Vikasnagar for legal action. Out of 393 cases registered under relevant sections, the administration has taken action in 280 cases, leading to 200 hectares of land being vested in the State government. The DM informed that all sub-divisional magistrates were directed to expedite proceedings in such cases. Legal notices were issued and a fast-track process was also adopted to address violations. Bansal said that if the individuals concerned fail to present their evidence before the court in such cases within the given timeframe, the land will be permanently vested in the State government as per the law.

Congress leaders brainstorm on future plan and strategy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Senior leaders of Uttarakhand Congress participated in a brainstorming session on Thursday in which the party's future strategy and plan to start a public movement against the policies of the BJP government in the State. The meeting was held in a virtual mode. The co-in charges the State Congress Surendra Sharma and Pargat Singh asked the party leaders to prepare a plan for a public movement against anti-people policies of the State.

The former chief minister Harish Rawat suggested that the communal card of the BJP in the State should be countered with a call for Uttarakhandi pride and aspiration and said that a campaign called 'Uttarakhandi Chhon' should be launched by the party.

The leader of opposition in Vidhan Sabha, Yashpal Arya said that corruption is at its peak in the State and the mining mafia is getting protection from the government. He said that the State government is on the backfoot on the issue of land laws and the BJP leaders are engaged in petty politics of dividing the people of the State on regional lines.

Former Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Ganesh Godiyal said that the Congress party is committed to protect harmony and love in the society. He said that all

the leaders of the Congress party will follow the orders of the central leadership and effectively protest against the anti-people policies of the BJP government.

AICC secretary Qazi Nizamuddin said that the BJP is engaging in the politics of communal polarisation and the Congress party will expose this in the public.

Former Member of Parliament Pradeep Tamta said that the BJP is exploiting the dalits and is trying to use them as a vote bank.

The PCC president Karan Mahara said that the suggestions of all the leaders are praiseworthy. He said that all the district presidents and every worker of the Congress party are working actively to expose the rampant corruption, inappropriate comments of the BJP leaders and the issue of the irregularities in the voter list in the recent elections of the urban local bodies in the State. Mahara added that the party will organise a training session on March 21 and 22 for the district presidents and to make the programme effective a special meeting of senior leaders of the party has been convened on March 19. He said that the party is trying to formulate a strong strategy against the anti-people and divisive policies of the BJP government.

Arya questions merger plan of Sports & Youth Welfare departments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The leader of opposition (LoP) in Vidhan Sabha, Yashpal Arya has said that the plan of the State government to merge the Sports and the Youth Welfare and Prantiya Rakshak Dal (PRD) departments is impractical and unjustified.

In a statement Arya said that the Sports department is a completely technical department while the Youth Welfare and PRD is nontechnical department.

sports.

Arya said that the players take training in institutes such as Indian Sports Institute, Patiala, Kolkata and Bengaluru and get diploma certificates from them and on that basis they are appointed as coaches. The Youth Welfare and PRD department is meant to essentially provide work to the volunteers and Mahila Mangal Dals.



He said that while the Sports department conducts sports activities, the Youth Welfare and PRD implements many programmes, and out of them the rural sports activity are only five per cent. He said that 95 per cent of the activities of this department are not related to

Arya said that the merger of the two departments will result in a situation wherein the non-technical employees will be entrusted with technical tasks. He said that the government should drop the idea of merger of the two departments.

Shoppers throng markets for last-minute deals ahead of Holi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Last-minute shoppers in Dehradun thronged major markets including Paltan Bazaar, Hanuman Chowk and Jhanda Bazaar here on Thursday to finalise their preparations for the Holi celebration. Residents were spotted purchasing Pichkaris, balloons, colours and various festive foods. Many shopkeepers expressed excitement over the increased sales of colours and other items during this busy shopping period.

One shopkeeper, Raju Verma said that he has set up a small stall outside his permanent shop, selling Holi colours, Pichkaris, and other items. He said that since 8 AM, residents have started visiting his stall to complete their last-minute shopping for the occasion. According to him, Holi-themed tee shirts and eco-friendly colours have been particularly popular among customers.

Another shopkeeper, Harish, said that he has stocked all types of Holi items at his

stall. Parents particularly demanded cartoon water guns for their children. Additionally, eco-friendly colour sprays are also in high demand this year.

Many other shopkeepers have also expressed similar excitement about the sales during the Holi festival.

"The busy schedule at my office has influenced me to do last-minute shopping for Holi. I have observed a variety of Pichkaris for children. This year, I bought a cartoon-themed Pichkari for my son. Additionally, I also purchased fried chips to make the Holi celebration more exciting," said local resident Tarun Gupta.

Another local resident, Jai Dixit, said that he visited the market to complete his preparations for Holi. He bought eco-friendly colours along with Holi-themed tee shirts for his family. This time, he also purchased colour crackers to add a new touch to the celebration, he said.

Holi celebrated with hawan and flowers in Patanjali

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HARIDWAR

The University of Patanjali chancellor Swami Ramdev and vice chancellor Acharya Balkrishna headed Holi celebrations at the university here on Thursday. The Holikaotsav was marked by a hawan and celebrated with flowers. Speaking on the occasion, Ramdev said that in addition to being a festival of colours, Holi also symbolises social harmony, brotherhood and of victory of good over bad. "We should deide on Holi

should not mar this occasion with alcohol which is bad for society," he said.

Balkrishna said that Holi is a celebration of the surrender of pride. All should forget differences and celebrate this festival with colours and joy. "We should celebrate the festival in a clean manner, abstaining from cowdung, mud and chemicals, and use flowers and herbal colours instead. Skin and eye ailments can be



to follow the path of truth and Sanatan as taught in the Vedas and by our Rishis. We celebrate every festival of Sanatan culture with Yoga and Yagya as these are the life forces and soul of Sanatan culture. We

caused by the use of chemical colours. One should apply mustard or coconut oil, or cold cream on the skin before playing Holi to decrease the risk of chemicals harming the skin," he said.

Seamless transactions: All-in-one digital payment revolution

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The era of fumbling for cash or waiting in ATM queues is over. Digital payment apps have transformed everyday transactions, offering speed, security and convenience. With India's rapid shift towards cashless payments, several key players have emerged, each providing unique benefits.

Amazon Pay, integrated within the Amazon ecosystem, simplifies digital payments for Amazon and other platforms. It offers discounts, cashback and the "Amazon Pay Later" feature, enabling eligible customers to pay next month or via EMIs. PhonePe processes 48% of India's UPI payments, offering speed, reliability and a user-friendly, multi-lingual interface. It enables instant transfers, bill payments, investments, QR payments and rewards users with cashback and points. Google Pay offers fast, secure UPI transactions with a minimalist interface. It features a rewards system with scratch cards, cashback and discounts. Users can easily link multiple bank accounts and split bills. Paytm, handling 15% of India's UPI payments, is a comprehensive financial app. It supports UPI, card transactions, bill payments, recharges, ticket bookings and investments in equity and mutual funds. CRED specialises in UPI payments and credit card management, offering high cashback and CRED coins for rewards. Integrated with e-commerce platforms, it makes financial responsibility engaging with discounts and exclusive deals.

These apps have transformed the way we spend, making transactions faster, safer and more rewarding. Whether you prioritise speed, security, cashback or seamless integrations, there's an app designed to fit your financial needs. So, choose the app that fits your lifestyle and



purchase type and enjoy the ease of modern, digital payments. Amazon Pay's focus on secure and convenient transactions, en-

hanced financial inclusion and its ecommerce marketplace is making it a partner in digital payment adoption.

IN BRIEF

Stop opium cultivation by vigil and campaign: DM

UTTARKASHI: The district magistrate Meharban Singh Bisht directed the Revenue, Police, Excise and Narcotics Control Bureau officials to conduct a joint campaign in the potential areas to effectively stop opium cultivation. He further asked the officials concerned to prepare and send a proposal to the State government for setting up a de-addiction centre in the district, adding that sale of cigarettes, gutka and other forms of narcotics should be strictly stopped near the educational institutions. A strict vigil should also be kept on medical stores to prevent them from selling illegal narcotic drugs. He also laid stress on conducting continuous awareness campaigns to save the youth from the drug menace.

IYF's 5th Day: Participants pray, meditate at 'Beatles Ashram'

RISHIKESH: On the fifth day of the International Yoga Festival at Parmarth Niketan, the participants from across the globe gathered at the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Ashram, popularly known as the Beatles Ashram. Swami Chidanand Saraswati and Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati led the gathering in meditation and prayers at this site where Maharishi Mahesh Yogi once lived, practised and taught Transcendental Meditation. The ashram was also home for some time to the world-famous Beatles. Those who gathered collectively took the pledge for world peace and environmental preservation. A special concert led by a London-based Kiratan artist and Bhakti Yoga teacher Radhika Das was held. This was followed by the celebration of Holi festival at Parmarth Niketan with eco-friendly colours and fragrant flowers.

Jhanda Mela committee discusses arrangements with police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The Jhanda Mela committee recently held a meeting with police officials to discuss the arrangements for the Jhanda Mela slated to start on March 19. Chief manager of the Mela committee Madhusudan Semwal informed that security measures and a traffic plan were addressed during the meeting. A police post will be established at Darshani Gate to ensure security at the Jhanda Mela and the functioning of the CCTV cameras was also discussed as a precautionary measure to monitor every activity in the Mela.

Semwal said that installation of fire extinguishing equipment has been sought for safety. This year, it is anticipated that five lakh devotees will visit the Mela. In response to this expected

crowd size, the Police department has been asked to facilitate security for the crowd. Additionally, private security personnel will also be deployed alongside police personnel during the Jhanda Mela. If the number of devotees increases, private security will be adjusted accordingly.

Semwal emphasised that other important decisions were taken in collaboration with the police administration to ensure the smooth conduct of the main event—the hoisting of the holy flag—on March 19. Notably, from Wednesday, the arrival of devotees from across the country and abroad has started in Darbar Sahib. A group of 150 members of a group reached here on Wednesday evening.

NORTHERN RAILWAY Tender Notice

SR.DEN/C/MB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against following Tender Notice, closing date & time are mentioned against each column, and will be received online up to 16:00 hrs. on same day. Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards earnest money only through online payment modes available on IREPS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payments through Demand Draft, Banker's cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed. Details regarding tender is available on IREPS (www.ireps.gov.in) website.

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Tender No. | 359-DRM-MB-21-22, Dt. 12.03.2025 |
| Name of Work | Loading, leading, unloading and stacking of Pway materials PSC line sleeper, T/Out sleepers, TWS, CMS SEJ, Glued joints OR switch, rails etc. from different track depots/plants of Northern and other Railways to track depot C/BJ and various site of work over MB division in the section of SSE/TD/CBJ under DEN/Track/MB. |
| Tender Closing Date | 08.04.2025 |
| Tender Closing Time | 16:00 hrs. |
| Advertised Value (Rs.) | 3,13,26,054.14 |
| Earnest Money (Rs.) | 3,06,600.00 |
| Tender Doc. Cost (Rs.) | Nil |
| Period of Completion | 12 Months |
| Bidding Start Date | 25.03.2025 |

No.: 75W/2/3/WA/DEN/T/T. Notice Dt.: 13.03.2025 802/2025
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY E-Auction Notice

The Bids have been invited on 27.03.2025 at 10:00 am under E-Auction for 05 Years "Contract for the work of provision of Parcel Scanner Machine for scanning of all outgoing parcels at parcel office." at Bareilly, Moradabad, Haridwar & Dehradun station of Moradabad Division through www.ireps.gov.in. The detailed terms and conditions for the same are available on the website itself. 810/2025
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE

Sr.DEN/III/MB acting for and on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tenders against following tender bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date and time only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored. Contractors are allowed to make payments against this tender towards earnest money only through online payment modes available on IREPS portal like net banking, debit card, credit card etc. Manual payments through Demand Draft, Banker's cheque, Deposit receipts, FDR etc. are not allowed.

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Tender No. Date | 363-DRM-MB-24-25 DATE 12.03.2025 | 364-DRM-MB-24-25 DATE 12.03.2025 |
| Name of Work | Heavy repair and improvement to ORH at RMU & BE under ADEN/BE | AT Welding of rails in situ with single shot crucible fitted as per RDSO Specifications in connection with track renewal works in the section of Sr. DEN/III/MB |
| Tender Closing Date Time | 07.04.2025 16:00 | 07.04.2025 16:00 |
| Advertised Value (Rs.) | 7991587.42 | 8807606.17 |
| Earnest Money (Rs.) | 159800.00 | 176200.00 |
| Bidding Start Date | 24.03.2025 | 24.03.2025 |
| Validity of Offer (Days) | 60 Days | 60 Days |
| Period of Completion | 8 months | 12 months |

No. 75-W/2/3/WA/Publication DATED : 12.03.2025 796/2025
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

In my husband army records by mistake my DOB was wrongly recorded as 03.04.1983 whereas as per my records my correct date of birth is 01.05.1984. Manju Devi W/o Army No 4083287X HAV MANOJ SINGH, R/o Padampur Sukhrow, Negi Colony, Kotdwara, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand-246149

It is informed to the general public that Mrs Renuka Rathore has purchased land at Khata No 13, Khasra No 124 min ad-measuring 161.71 sq mtrs situated at village Danda Khudaneywala, Pargana Parwadone, Dehradun from Shri Brij Mohan Gusa.in. The registration of the same is duly registered on 27.08.2014 in sub registrar office, Dehradun in Book No 1, Volume 1328, Page No 333 to 374 at serial No 4425. The said original sale deed has been lost somewhere and FIR for the same is registered with Raipur Police station with GD No 52 dated 17.10.2023. Mrs Renuka Rathore is selling the plot to Ms. Richa Rana and Mr Abhishek Nautiyal for which loan application has been submitted to SBI Defence Colony (8228). If anyone has any objection regarding the purchase and sale of this property, please contact: 9978991322

It is hereby informed to the general public that Sh. Shrawan Verma S/o Late R.M. Verma. R/o 46-E, Pathri Bagh, Dehradun is absolute owner of "All that Residential Property/House constructed on land bearing Khata Khatoni No. 2120 (Fasli Year 1416 to 1421), Khasra No. 692 Da (Old Khasra No. 494 Min) area measuring 291.37 Sq. Mts., Khasra No. 687 Gha (Old Khasra No. 497 Min), area measuring 68.797 Sq. Mts., total land area measuring 360.16 Sq. Mts. and having total covered area measuring 353.33 Sq. Mts.. Situated at Mauza Niranjanpur, Pargana Pachwadone, Tehsil & Distt. Dehradun, Uttarakhand" and he had lost original deed and documents related to the said property details mentioned below:

1. Original Sale Deed executed by Smt. Harbans Kaur W/o S. Kuldeep Singh in favour of Sh. Amit Sakhuja S/o Sh. Hansraj Sakhuja, which is duly registered in the office of SRO-Dehradun in Book No. 01 Volume 6016 Pages 61 to 146 at Serial No. 7449 on 26.08.2014.
2. Original Sale Deed executed by Smt. Neeru Goyal W/o Dr. Girish Goyal in favour of Smt. Harbans Kaur W/o S. Kuldeep Singh, which is duly registered in the office of SRO-Dehradun in Book No. 01 Volume 02 Pages 184 ADF No. 01 Volume 295 Pages 31 to 38 at Serial No. 5699 on 10.12.1993.
3. Original Sale Deed executed by 1- Smt. Mithlesh Sharma W/o Late Pramod Kumar as mother & natural guardian of Master Manish (then minor) S/o Late Pramod Kumar through her POA Holder Sh. Ram Kumar Agarwal S/o Late Purushotam Das, 2- Sh. Rakesh Kumar S/o Sh. Ram Chandra for self and as POA Holder of 3- Sh. Anant Ram S/o Sh. Shiv Ram in favour of Smt. Harbans Kaur W/o S. Kuldeep Singh which is duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar, Dehradun in Book No. 01 Volume 02 Pages 184 ADF No. 01 Volume 292 Pages 217 to 230 at Serial No. 5562 on dated 03.12.1993
4. Original Sale Deed executed by 1- Smt. Mithlesh Sharma W/o Lat Pramod Kumar as mother & natural guardian of Master Manish (then minor) S/o Late Pramod Kumar, 2- Sh. Rakesh Kumar S/o Sh. Ram Chandra for self and as POA Holder of 3- Sh. Anant Ram S/o Sh. Shiv Ram in favour of Smt. Neeru Goyal W/o Dr. Girish Goyal, which is duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar, Dehradun in Book No. 01 Volume 02 Pages 90 ADF no. 01 Volume 100 Pages 319 to 332 at Serial No. 3288 on dated 14.05.1992 A Police Complaint has also been got registered in this respect on dated 06/03/2025 in Kotwali, Patelnagar, Distt., Dehradun. If anybody found the said lost documents or anybody having claim or claiming any prior rights or interest in any manner in the property may approach the undersigned and may submit objections within 14 days from the date of this public notice.

Parvender Kumar Advocate 9758527116
Block No. 2, Chamber No. 58, New Building, Near Bar Association, Court Compound, Dehradun, U.K.

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Four killed, two hurt by rash driver in Doon, 22-year-old arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The police arrested 22-year-old Vansh Katyal on Thursday, who reportedly killed four people and injured two near Sai Mandir in the Rajpur area of Dehradun on Wednesday evening. The incident occurred when Katyal, driving a Chandigarh-registered Mercedes at high speed, lost control of the vehicle and reportedly hit four pedestrians and a scooter near Uttaranchal Hospital. The pedestrians died on the spot, while the two individuals on the scooter sustained serious injuries, the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said. In a Press conference on Thursday, Singh informed that a case was registered based on a complaint filed by Sanjay Kumar, the uncle of one of the deceased, under sections 105, 125, 281, and 324 (4) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).



Recognition (ANPR) cameras to trace the suspect. Police narrowed down on 11 vehicles matching the description of the Mercedes in the area at the time of the accident. One of them, a silver-grey Mercedes with damage on one side, became the primary suspect. Further investigation revealed that the vehicle was registered in Chandigarh. The police tracked the car's ownership

history, learning that it was sold to Delhi-based dealers before being purchased by Jatin Prasad Verma, a businessman from Lucknow, who frequently visited Dehradun. According to Singh, the breakthrough came when the police located the abandoned vehicle near a vacant plot in the Sahastradhara area. "During inquiries, a local resident, Mohit Malik, revealed that

his acquaintance, Vansh Katyal, had parked the car there at night, claiming it had developed a technical issue. Later, Katyal borrowed Mohit's scooter to drop off his nephew in Jakhan before returning it. This led the police to Jatin Prasad Verma, who confirmed that his brother-in-law, Vansh Katyal, had taken the car on March 12," he said.

He further stated that with the investigation narrowing in on Katyal, he was apprehended near the ISBT in Dehradun on Thursday. During interrogation, he revealed that he was originally from Moradabad and had moved to Dehradun after losing his job in Delhi. He was living in a paying guest accommodation near Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology at GMS Road. The SSP stated, "According to him, on the night of the accident, he had taken his brother-in-law's Mercedes for a drive with his nephew. While returning, two scooters suddenly appeared in front of his car. As he tried to maneuver, he accidentally hit one of them from behind, lost control and crashed into four pedestrians walking along the road. After the accident, he abandoned the car at a vacant plot and sought help from Mohit to drop off his nephew. He then returned the borrowed scooter and went into hiding until the police caught him."

Mishaps and deaths continue due to official apathy?

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Dehradun residents were taken aback after a tragic accident killed four people and injured two when a speeding Mercedes, driven by 22-year-old Vansh Katyal, ran them over near Sai Mandir in Rajpur Road on Wednesday night.

The incident has sparked widespread concern among residents, who believe that such accidents are becoming increasingly common due to the poor enforcement of traffic rules. Locals expressed their frustration, highlighting how reckless driving has become a frequent issue in the city. Sahastradhara Road resident Anuj Bhatt stated that overspeeding is rampant and even the presence of police does little to deter offenders in Dehradun. "People drive recklessly right in front of the author-

ities but no one is held accountable, possibly due to staff shortage or just sheer apathy. Violations like overspeeding and jumping red lights are seen as minor offenses even though they are not minor offences as they put lives at risk," he said. Echoing similar sentiments, senior citizen Tej Prakash stated that many young drivers overtake dangerously, leading to unnecessary traffic congestion and accidents. "There is no patience left among drivers. Everyone is in a rush and even when the police are present, they do not intervene."

I highly doubt that all violators even get fined. There are no serious repercussions for reckless drivers and when they finally cause a major accident, it results in tragedies like this one," he said. Social activist

Anoop Nautiyal also raised concerns over the state of road safety in Uttarakhand. He said that the government's approach to the issue is inconsistent and lacks proper enforcement. "The current measures are episodic, with no long-term impact. Uttarakhand needs a dedicated road safety campaign to address this issue, as the problem will only grow worse if appropriate steps are not taken in time," he said. Nautiyal also appealed to chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, urging him to implement the Surakshit Uttarakhand Abhiyan in a serious and structured manner. He emphasised that without proper reforms, such accidents will continue to claim innocent lives on Dehradun's roads.

Dhami meets former CMs on the occasion of Holi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami met the former CMs Harish Rawat, Bhagat Singh Koshyari and Trivendra Singh Rawat at their residences on Thursday on the occasion of Holi. The CM had met former CMs Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank and Teerath Singh Rawat on Wednesday to extend his wishes.

A group of artists from the Rath area of Pauri district was a special attraction on the occasion. This group which was performing in different areas of Dehradun from last two days highlighting the problem of migration and other issues was invited specially by the CM.

The CM also hosted a Holi Milan programme at his residence on Thursday in which

Folk artists of Tharu tribe also enthralled the Holi revellers on the occasion. A live-



many senior leaders, officers of the State administration and folk artists from all parts of the State participated. In the programme the artists danced to the tunes of Garhwali, Kumaoni and Jaunsari folk songs and music.

ly Chholiya dance was performed by artists from Almora.

Completely immersed in Holi colours and festive mood the CM actively participated the festivities with the folk artists. He appreciated the performers, danced with them, and tried his hand at traditional instruments like the Dhol and Thali.

Dhan Singh and Baluni attend Holi programme in Srinagar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Cabinet minister Dhan Singh Rawat and Garhwali MP Anil Baluni participated in a Holi Milan programme on the banks of Alaknanda river in Srinagar on Thursday. The programme was attended by large number of people.

society and create an atmosphere of social harmony. Garhwali MP Baluni said that the Holi is festival of colours and social harmony and love. The two leaders greeted the people on the occasion of Holi and were immersed complete-



Speaking on the occasion, minister Rawat said that our cultural heritage and folk arts have always supported human values and interests. He said that our festivals enliven the

ly in festivities. Former district president of BJP Sushma Rawat, Maya Upadhaya, district president Kamal Kishore Rawat and others attended the programme.

108 ambulance service geared up for Holi challenge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The 108 emergency ambulance service has cancelled the leaves of its employees and kept its fleet on high alert to meet the increased flow of calls expected on the festival of Holi.



Additional mobile teams have been pressed into service for Holi in all the districts of the State. These teams would remain active from 6 AM to 8 PM on Holi and would keep an eye on the alertness of the employees. The service has also kept 18 ambulances as back up so that immediate replacement can be sent for ambulances which develop snag during the operations.

In Dehradun the ambulances will remain deployed at Survey Chowk, Ghantaghar, Jakhan, Raipur, Ballupur Chowk, Premnagar, Vidhan Sabha Chowk, Race Course and other important traffic junctions on Holi.

The general manager (Projects) Anil Sharma took a meeting at the headquarters of the service on Wednesday to take stock of the preparations for Holi. He said that arrangements should be made to ensure that the ambulances don't get stuck in traffic in Holi. It is pertinent to mention here that the ambulance service receives more accident related calls on Holi. In view of the expected increase in the number of calls the ser-

vice has decided to deploy additional technical staff in the central call center. Emergencies like road traffic accidents, violent brawls, and food poisoning on account of intoxication are received by the ambulance service during the Holi. The experience suggests that maximum numbers of emergencies are received from Dehradun, Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar and Nainital district on the day.

The service received 169 calls related to traffic accidents in three days (March 24 to 26) during Holi last year. It received a total of 1390 calls during these three days last year. The service has also decided to keep its fleet of ambulances in Khushiyon Ki Sawari (KKS) fully operational during Holi. The service has a fleet of 128 ambulances in KKS

GDMC and district hospital doctors on alert mode for Holi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The authorities in Government Doon Medical College (GDMC) and Deen Dayal Upadhyay district hospital have instructed doctors to remain vigilant for any incidents that may occur during Holi. Notably, though the OPD department will be closed on this festive occasion, the hospital will still be ready to treat patients. It has been observed that there has been an increase in cases of accidents, allergies and injuries related to Holi celebrations. Regarding the GDMC hospital's preparations for Holi, chief medical superintendent Dr RS Bisht stated that the OPD services will not be available on that day; however, the emergency department will be fully operational. To ensure patient care, the administration has emphasised the need for all staff to maintain activity in the emergency department during this time.

premises during this time. Bisht urged individuals to refrain from consuming alcohol during Holi and to avoid reckless driving. Further, the medical superintendent of the district hospital Dr VS Chauhan stated that the hospital administration will be proactively addressing emergencies during the Holi festivities. He said that incidents of roadside accidents tend to rise during this time. To prepare for this, the emergency department has been put on high alert, with emergency medical officers available around the clock. Additionally, doctors from all departments have been instructed to remain vigilant and ready to respond to any serious cases that may arise. He also added that security guards have been assigned to specific areas to ensure they fulfill their responsibilities within the hospital premises during Holi.

He also added that extra staff has been assigned to the emergency department in preparation for Holi. Two doctors from each department will be on duty in the emergency area on the premises. Further to prevent any incidents of theft or other occurrences on campus, security guards have been instructed to stay vigilant. The police have also been requested to conduct patrols around the GDMC

II कार्यालय नगर निगम रुड़की, जिला-हरिद्वार II

पत्रांक - 1858 दिनांक - 12.03.2025

समस्त नगरवासियों को नगर निगम रुड़की परिवार की तरफ से होली, ईद, नवरात्री, रामनवमी एवं नवसतसंवत (हिंदू नववर्ष) की हार्दिक शुभकामनाएँ।

- स्वच्छता सर्वेक्षण-2025 में सिटीजन फिडबैक से वोटिंग कर, नगर निगम रुड़की को प्रथम स्थान लाने में अपना सहयोग प्रदान करें।
- स्वच्छ भारत मिशन के तहत घर-घर से गीला व सूखा कूड़ा पृथक्कीकरण कर नगर निगम रुड़की को सहयोग प्रदान करें।
- प्लास्टिक कूड़े को न जलायें व प्रतिबंधित प्लास्टिक बैगव प्लास्टिक पॉलिथिन का प्रयोग न करें।

(राकेश चन्द्र तिवारी) नगर आयुक्त नगर निगम रुड़की

स्वच्छ रुड़की सुन्दर रुड़की

(अनिता देवी अग्रवाल) महापौर नगर निगम रुड़की

Renowned chef Balkrishan joins Saffron Indian Cuisine in Cary, USA



Saffron Indian Cuisine in Cary, USA, has just welcomed Chef Balkrishan as their specialty Indian cuisine chef. Known for his expertise in Indian fusion cuisine, Chef Balkrishan brings over 15 years of international culinary experience to the table.

Chef Balkrishan began his illustrious career at the Taj Umaid Bhawan Palace, one of Asia's top hotels. His journey from India to the USA is a testament to his passion and dedication to Indian cuisine. He has showcased his culinary skills at food festivals in India and beyond, bringing Indian flavours to the global stage. During his tenure with Carnival Cruise Line as an Indian chef, he elevated Indian cuisine to new heights, impressing guests from around the world. His subsequent roles in Bermuda at the Coral Beach and Tennis Club and in Canada at Fishhook Restaurant further solidified his reputation, with the latter being recognised as a top restaurant in 2022.

Educational background
 Chef Balkrishan hails from a farming family in Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, where his deep understanding of grains and vegetables was cultivated. After completing his primary education in his village, he pursued a postgraduate degree in Economics. However, his passion for cooking led him to the Food Craft Institute in Dehradun from where he earned a Diploma in Hotel Management and completed HACCP Training.

A Pioneer in his family
 As the first member of his family to enter the hospitality industry, Chef Balkrishan's journey is inspiring. Despite suggestions to pursue a government job after graduation, his love for cooking, nurtured since childhood as he watched his mother in the kitchen, guided him towards a career in the culinary arts.

Innovator in Indian Fusion Cuisine
 Chef Balkrishan's extensive experience in India laid the foundation for his innovative fusion recipes. His dishes gained widespread popularity in Bermuda and Canada with guests at Fishhook Restaurant and Coral Beach and Tennis Club eagerly ordering his creations. His unique sauces and recipes quickly became a sensation, earning him both fame and loyal patrons.

Awards & Accolades
 Chef Balkrishan's talents have not gone unnoticed. He was part of the team that won the prestigious Maggy Awards 2024 for Best Indian Restaurant in North Carolina, USA. His exceptional work in Bermuda earned him the Employee of the Year award at Food Hub Bermuda in 2017. He was again recognised as the Best Employee of the Year in 2019 at Coral Beach and Tennis Club.

Reflecting on his career, Chef Balkrishan says, "It is a wonderful moment in life when you are chosen to serve high-profile VVIP dignitaries and Heads of States. However, I put in my best, no matter whether I am serving VVIPs or regular customers. I have learned great culinary details and uncovered hidden recipes throughout my journey."

As he embarks on this new chapter with Saffron Indian Cuisine, Chef Balkrishan is eager to continue his mission of taking Indian spices and dishes to the world.

आप सभी को खुशियों और रंगों का त्योहार

होली की हार्दिक शुभकामनाएँ

होली का यह पावन पर्व सभी भेदभाव, नकारात्मकता और द्वेष का दहन कर हर देशवासी के जीवन में खुशियों, समृद्धि और रंग लाये ऐसी कामना करता हूँ।

गौरव अग्रवाल
 स्वामी

श्री गणेश स्टोन क्रेशर तथा बालाजी स्टोन क्रेशर, भोगपुर हरिद्वार

Only surviving INA vetran celebrates 99th birthday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Madavan Pillai, one of the last surviving veterans of the INA, celebrated his 99th birthday on Thursday with a visit to the National War Memorial and had a special message for India's youth — embrace the unity, faith and sacrifice espoused by Netaji.

Several officials of the Indian Army were also present when Pillai arrived at the memorial in a wheelchair to pay homage to fallen heroes at the National War Memorial and to Subhas Chandra Bose at his statue at India Gate.

Holding a walking stick, he was helped by an Army official to the 'Amar Jawan Jyoti' to lay a ceremonial wreath and pay his tributes to the fallen bravehearts. Despite age-induced infirmity, he looked up and saluted with pride writ large on his face. Bespectacled Pillai later also wrote his thoughts in a visitor's book. The ceremony, hosted by the Army, stood as a powerful reminder of India's enduring legacy of sacrifice and patriotism.

"Youth must work for the country and take the nation forward. Netaji taught us unity, faith and sacrifice, follow these three (values), then you can make a strong nation. Work by staying together... Number one, even ahead of America, we (India) should be (in growth)," he said after paying tributes. "Lt R Madavan Pillai, born on March 13, 1926, in Swryan Township, Burma (now Myanmar), is one of the last surviving INA veterans. He belongs to a family originally from Tamil Nadu and joined the Indian Independence League as a civilian before enlisting in the Azad Hind Fauj (INA) on November 1, 1943," an official said.

The INA veteran commemorated his birth anniversary with the wreath-laying ceremony at the National War Memorial as



Lt R Madhawan Pillai (Indian National Army) a World War II Veteran, lays wreath at the National War Memorial on his 100th birthday in New Delhi PFI

he entered the 100th year of his eventful life.

After laying a wreath at the solemn memorial, he paid tribute to Netaji at Bose's statue under the India Gate canopy. A wreath was placed next to the reflecting pool surrounding the canopy by the INA veteran. Serving as a recruiting officer and a fund-raiser, Pillai mobilised support for the INA across 32 locations in Burma (now Myanmar), including the Hanthawaddy, Sawbawgale, Ywadsanghe, Swryan, Yangan and Mayongone.

His active involvement in the freedom

struggle led to his imprisonment in a Rangoon (now Yangon) jail from May to December 1945, officials said. "Later, he served in the Administrative Branch at the INA Headquarters in Rangoon under Major General K P Thimayya (elder brother of General K S Thimayya).

He was officially recognised as a freedom fighter by the government of India on August 1, 1980," a senior official said. In 2021, on the 125th birth anniversary of Netaji, he was awarded a silver medal for his role in the INA and India's Independence

movement.

On January 23, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi felicitated him at the Parakram Diwas celebrations at the Red Fort, they said. Even at 99, the INA veteran remains an active advocate for keeping Netaji's and the INA's role alive.

The Azad Hind Fauj was first formed by Mohan Singh in 1942 and later revived by Netaji on October 21, 1943. United by the powerful war cry of 'Chalo Delhi', the INA aimed to secure India's complete independence from British rule, the officials said.

India announces \$1 Billion fund to boost creators' economy



Pioneer photo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A \$1 Billion fund is being created to boost the India creators' economy, said Ashwini Vaishnaw Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Railways and MeitY at Global Media Dialogue ahead of the World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES) on Thursday. The function took place at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan, New Delhi, to encourage participation from various governments before the WAVES Declaration in Mumbai on May 2.

In his keynote speech, Minister Vaishnaw announced that a \$1 Billion fund will be created for the creators' economy. This fund will be dedicated to ensuring that the energetic creators, who are using the latest technologies today, will be able to access capital, hone their skills, upgrade their production levels, and reach the global market.

The Union Minister also clarified that the Global Media Dialogue will not focus on regulation but will serve as a

platform for exchanging views and sharing perspectives.

Speaking on Cabinet approving the establishment of the Indian Institute of Creative Technologies (ICT), similar to IITs, IIMs, and AIIMS — Vaishnaw said that ICT will be established in Film City, Goregaon Mumbai, and to establish ICT, ₹391 Crore has already been sanctioned.

Vaishnaw shared that over 25 Lakh submissions were received, more than 80000 creators participated and out of which only 1000 will be selected. "...so, it is a democratic online process. The vision behind this initiative, as stated by the Prime Minister, is to bring together the creative world and modern technological usage to create unique content," he said.

The Minister also highlighted that over 100 countries are participating in it and it is a confluence of tech, media and entertainment. "Technology will serve as the base for this (WAVES) platform, bringing creators together from diverse fields," he added.

Fire breaks out in Gurugram's KOD



Firefighters douse a fire which broke out in Kingdom of Dreams, in Gurugram, Thursday PFI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

A major fire broke out in Gurugram's Kingdom of Dreams (KOD) in Sector-29 on Thursday morning.

Officials said that there were no casualties in the fire accident that took place around 11 am on Thursday. An electrical short circuit inside the KOD is suspected to be the cause of the fire. In July 2022, the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) sealed the KOD due to outstanding dues of crores of rupees. Since then, there have been no theatre shows or other entertainment and cultural programs in it, and it was closed for two years.

More than 10 fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the flames, and the fire-

fighting operation went on for one and a half hours before the blaze was completely doused. According to the fire brigade officials, a security guard in the KOD reported the fire, but by the time the fire-fighters arrived at the spot, the blaze had engulfed the Cultural Lane inside the KOD. Investigations are underway to ascertain the losses and damage caused in the fire accident.

"When we reached the spot, they were engulfed in fire. Fire tenders were immediately called from different fire stations. As furniture was inside, the fire spread rapidly through the KOD," said a fire official. Gulshan Kalra, Deputy Director (Technical) of the Fire Department, said a short circuit is suspected to have caused the fire, the exact reason is yet to be ascertained.

President Murmu, PM Modi extend Holi greetings to citizens

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday extended greetings to the fellow citizens on the eve of Holi.

"This festival nurtures the spirit of unity and brotherhood in our lives. The diverse colours of Holi reflect the values of unity in diversity.

This festival also symbolises the triumph of good over evil. It teaches us to spread love and positivity around us. "May this festival of colours fill your lives with joy and prosperity," President Murmu said.

Prime Minister Modi greeted people on the eve of Holi, wishing the festival further deepens the colour of unity among the citizens.

He wished that the auspicious festival full of joy and celebration infuses fresh enthusiasm and energy in everyone's life. Holi will be celebrated on Friday.

Committee suggests expanding health coverage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A parliamentary committee has recommended that the age criterion of 70 years and above for Ayushman Vay Vandana Cards should be rationalised to 60 years and above irrespective of the people's socio-economic status in order to widen the coverage of the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme.

Keeping in view the huge expenditure on critical healthcare, the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare in its 163rd report presented in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday also recommended revising healthcare coverage from the existing ₹5 Lakh per family per year to ₹10 Lakh per family per year.

It also pointed out that several high-end interventions/procedures and even high-end diagnostics are not included in Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

The panel thus recommended that the number of packages, procedures covered under the Yojana should be reviewed and the fresh packages, procedures related to treatment of critical illness with high cost of treatment and expensive high-end investigations, diagnostics like radiological diagnostics (CT, MRI and imaging including nuclear imaging) be incorporated in AB-PMJAY instead

of leaving the same to be booked as add-on packages.

The committee appreciated that the government has recently expanded the AB-PMJAY to cover six crore senior citizens of age 70 years and above belonging to 4.5 Crore families under the Vay Vandana scheme, irrespective of their socio-economic status.

An amount to the tune of ₹1,443 Crore has been earmarked for the treatment of senior citizens of the age of 70 years and above holding Ayushman Vay Vandana Cards. "The Committee is of the view that the age criteria of 70 years and above for Ayushman Vay Vandana Cards should be rationalised to 60 years and above irrespective of their socio-economic status for widening the coverage of the scheme in the better interest of common masses," the panel said in its report.

The committee, however, pointed out a persistent trend of underutilisation of allocated funds, particularly in the previous year as well as in the current financial year.

It stated that the AB-PMJAY is a pivotal and visionary health initiative aiming to provide financial protection and healthcare access to a large number of India's vulnerable population.

While the scheme has seen substantial growth in terms of state participation, card creation and hospital admissions, several key areas require attention

like budget utilisation and state participation. The committee observed that in the FY 2023-24, ₹7,200 Crore was allocated as budget estimates (BE) 2023-24 which was reduced to ₹6,800 Crore at revised estimates (RE) stage, however, the actual expenditure was ₹6,670.47 Crore.

In 2024-25, ₹7,300 Crore was made in BE 2024-25 which was revised to ₹7,605.54 Crore at RE 2024-25, however, the actual expenditure was to the tune of ₹5,034.03 Crore till January 9.

In 2025-26, the enhanced amount of ₹9,406 Crore has been allocated as BE 2025-26.

This indicates potential inefficiencies in fund disbursement or implementation bottlenecks. The committee, therefore, recommended a thorough review of the fund release mechanisms to states and Union Territories (UTs). This review should focus on identifying and eliminating bottlenecks that contribute to underutilisation.

The department should implement a system of proactive monitoring of fund utilisation by states, coupled with targeted support to address any implementation challenges. Furthermore, the committee suggested that the release of funds be linked to the performance of states in terms of card creation, hospital admissions and beneficiary feedback, ensuring that funds are directed to areas of greatest need and impact.

CBI probes gold smuggling case involving Ranya Rao

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has launched a probe into the alleged role of public servants in facilitating gold smuggling from Dubai following a complaint by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), which recently made two arrests, including that of actor Ranya Rao, from Bengaluru, officials said on Thursday.

The DRI arrested Ranya Rao from the Kempe Gowda International Airport in Bengaluru on March 3 for allegedly trying to smuggle over 14 kg of gold from Dubai.

The action was followed by the arrests of two foreigners (Omani and UAE nationals), also coming from Dubai, from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai while attempting to smuggle 21.28 kg of gold into India valued at Rs 18.92 crore on March 6. "These two foreign nationals previously arrived at the Mumbai airport multiple times," the DRI complaint to the CBI said.

Searches at Rao's residence led to the recovery of gold jewellery worth Rs 2.06 crore and Indian currency amounting to Rs 2.67 crore. She also made multiple international travels, including to and from Dubai, officials said.

These arrests in "quick succession" involving alleged smugglers with large quantities of gold coming from Dubai and the high frequency of these visits involving Indian and foreign nationals sent the alarm bells ringing about a "coordinated smuggling syndicate", possibly operating from Dubai, the officials said.

The DRI roped in the CBI because of the larger national and international ramifications.

96 districts hit by water contamination: Parliamentary panel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A parliamentary panel has raised concerns over water contamination issue in the country, highlighting that 11,348 habitations in 96 districts across seven states have not been provided with short-term measures for pollutants such as iron, nitrate, and heavy metals.

In its report tabled in Parliament on Tuesday, the Standing Committee on Water Resources has urged the Centre to take swift action to ensure safe drinking water in these vulnerable regions.

The report further revealed that uranium contamination remains a pressing issue in Punjab, where 32 habitations across nine districts are affected. Despite interim measures in 22 of these

areas, 10 habitations still await any mitigation efforts, it said. The committee has called for urgent and long-term interventions to safeguard public health.

"The Committee notes that all arsenic and fluoride affected habitations have been covered by community water purification plants as an interim measure. However, they (panel) further observe that there are 11,348 quality affected habitations (iron, salinity, nitrate, and heavy metals) spread over 96 districts of seven states where short-term measures have not been provided," the report said.

The government has also extended the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) Phase II until 2025-26, maintaining an annual budget of ₹7,192 Crore.

This phase focuses on sustaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and achiev-

ing comprehensive solid and liquid waste management (SLWM) in rural India, the panel said.

As of January 2025, 5.62 Lakh villages have declared themselves ODF Plus, with 4.21 Lakh achieving the advanced 'Model' category.

However, the committee raised concerns about underutilization of funds during the financial year 2024-25, where only 33 per cent of the revised budget was spent.

Delays in adopting the new 'just-in-time' fund release system, integrated with the Reserve Bank of India's e-Kuber platform, have been cited as a major bottleneck, according to the report.

The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation is planning a structural shift from a "Department-based"

approach to a "service delivery" model that emphasizes community participation through "Jan Bhagidhari" (people's involvement), according to the report.

To ensure long-term sustainability and reliable water service delivery, the government plans to sign memorandums of understanding with states and Union Territory administrations, the report said.

The standing committee has emphasized the importance of better pre-budget planning to prevent drastic reductions at the revised estimate stage.

It has also called for increased efforts to accelerate water coverage and mitigate contamination, ensuring that the Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat Mission meet their ambitious targets and improve quality of life in rural India.

IIT-Guwahati unveils plan to prevent student suicides

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Ice-breaking sessions for freshers during their first week on campus, morning walks with faculty members, mandatory counselling sessions and comprehensive medical check-ups, and stress escape room workshops are part of IIT-Guwahati's plan to ensure students' mental wellbeing and prevent suicides.

The measures come after the institute faced massive protests last semester following back-to-back student suicides.

According to Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)-Guwahati Director Devendra Jalihal, the institute has chalked out a comprehensive plan to prevent suicides among students. "We have established a dedicated mental health and counselling system in the form of a Center for Holistic Wellbeing. SAATHI Counselling Club, a part of this centre consisting of student volunteers, sup-

ports fellow students in their mental and overall wellbeing with the help of professional counsellors," he said.

"We are exploring roping in retired army personnel as hostel special stewards who will routinely interact with the students to make them comfortable and share their observations with the counsellors. All of this will be done in a confidential manner and while ensuring that the students do not feel intimidated or there is no violation of their privacy," Jalihal said.

Nutritionists are also being hired to help the students with diets that can help address anxiety and stress, he added.

Faced by suicides among students, several IITs are taking different measures to address concerns over their mental health.

Perumal Alagarsamy, the dean of student affairs at IIT-Guwahati, is spearheading the mental wellbeing initiatives on campus. "We have decided that for the first week, when the freshers arrive

on campus, there will be no classes but an acclimatisation programme so they do not feel out of place. The students will be invited for morning walks with faculty members so they are able to build a rapport with each other before entering the classroom," Alagarsamy said.

"The Peer Mentorship Programme aligns with this notion by assigning peer mentors to the new students. These mentors (will) play a pivotal role in providing relevant information, clearing doubts, and assisting with various challenges, serving as guiding lights for the newcomers when they feel lost," he added. As soon as the freshers arrive on campus, an ice-breaking session will be conducted to establish a warm and inclusive atmosphere and facilitate connections, Alagarsamy explained.

"These sessions aim to raise awareness about mental health and overall wellbeing while acquainting the students with the resources and the support available through the Counselling Cell and the

Center for Holistic Wellbeing," he said. "These ice-breaking sessions will be conducted within each hostel to help expand the students' social networks, enabling them to connect with their peers through enjoyable games and activities," he added.

To help the students cope with the pressure of semester examinations, the SAATHI Counselling Club recently conducted a stress escape room workshop aimed at sharing knowledge on dealing with and manage stress and exploring entrepreneurship and career choices.

The institute has four full-time counsellors while Your Dost a start-up incubated at IIT-Guwahati has been roped in to provide round-the-clock access to the counsellors.

Mandatory interactions will be scheduled with the counsellors for all students so any early signs can be identified and mandatory comprehensive health checks conducted.

Rahul calls exam paper leaks a systematic failure

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said examination paper leaks were a "systematic failure" and asserted that the "serious problem" would be eradicated only when all political parties and governments forget their differences to take strict steps together.

The former Congress chief said the future of 85 lakh children in six states is at risk as paper leak has become the most dangerous "padmavyuh" for our youth.

"Paper leaks put hardworking students and their families into uncertainty and stress, taking away the fruits of their hard work. It also sends the wrong message to the next generation that dishonesty can be better than hard work, which is completely unacceptable," he said in a social media post in Hindi.

"It has not even been a year since the NEET paper leak shook the country. After our protest, the Modi government hid behind a new law and called it a solution, but so many recent leaks have proven that to be a failure as well," he said.

"This serious problem is a systematic failure, Rahul Gandhi asserted. It will be eradicated only when all political parties and governments forget their differences and take strict steps together, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

"The dignity of these exams is the right of our children and it has to be protected at all costs," Rahul Gandhi said.

Using the 'chakravayuh' metaphor as a leitmotif, he had last year claimed that an atmosphere of fear prevails all around with a group of six trapping the entire country in a 'chakravayuh' he promised would be broken by the INDIA bloc.

UP gears up for Holi, Friday prayers amid tight security

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

As Uttar Pradesh prepares to celebrate Holi on Friday, which coincides with the holy month of Ramzan and the offering of Friday prayers (Jumma), the state administration is leaving no stone unturned to ensure communal harmony and peaceful celebrations.

To prevent any tension between the two communities, the government, in coordination with religious leaders, has made special arrangements, including altering the timing of Friday prayers and enhancing security across the state.

In a precautionary measure, the Uttar Pradesh Police have directed authorities to cover mosques with tarpaulin in most districts where Holi processions pass through sensitive areas. So far, 189 mosques have been covered with tarpaulin across UP. The move aims to prevent any untoward incident and maintain religious harmony during the festivities. In Sambhal district, where communal tension has flared up in the past, the administration has covered at least ten mosques with tarpaulin to avoid any damage during Holi processions. The district is considered sensitive due to its demographic composition and history of communal clashes.

Sambhal District Magistrate Rajendra Pensa emphasised that robust security arrangements are in place. Multiple peace committee meetings have been held, and 27 Quick Response Teams (QRTs) have been deployed in sensitive areas. The city has been divided into six zones and 29 sectors, each overseen by a magistrate and senior police officer. PAC (Provincial



Police conduct a flag march on the eve of Holi festival in Prayagraj on Thursday. PTI

Armed Constabulary) battalions have been stationed as part of a three-tier security plan. To enhance monitoring, 250 CCTV cameras have already been installed, with an additional 100-150 cameras set up for real-time surveillance. Drone technology is also being used to track movements in crowded areas. Similarly, in Shahjahanpur, mosques located on the routes of Holi processions have also been covered to prevent any provocative incidents.

To further ease the situation, the Shahi Imam of Lucknow's Eidgah, Maulana Khalid Rashid Farangi Mahali, announced that Friday prayers will be offered at 2 pm instead of the usual 12:45 pm. This decision has been welcomed by Muslim religious leaders across the state, including Ayodhya, where the chief cleric has also decided to conduct *namaz* after 2 pm.

The Uttar Pradesh Police have issued strict guidelines, urging citizens to celebrate Holi in a peaceful manner and avoid any new traditions that could spark tension. Additional police forces have been deployed in sensitive areas, and drone surveillance will be conducted in districts like Kanpur, Aligarh and Meerut to monitor crowd movement. Yogi Adityanath has appealed to people to respect each other's religious sentiments. "Holi comes once a year, but Friday prayers is held every week. Those who wish to avoid the festive chaos can offer prayers at home," he said.

The administration is also keeping a close watch on social media platforms to prevent the spread of fake news and inflammatory content. With these proactive measures, the state hopes to celebrate Holi and Friday prayers in an atmosphere of peace and brotherhood.

ASI team inspects Jama Masjid in Sambhal

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Prayagraj

Acting on the directives of the Allahabad High Court, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) team visited the historic Jama Masjid on Thursday to assess the site for whitewashing and decoration ahead of the holy month of Ramzan.

The court's intervention came after the Jama Masjid Committee filed a petition seeking permission for whitewashing and decoration, a tradition that has been followed every year during Ramzan. However, this year, the local administration denied the request, prompting the mosque committee to approach the High Court.

During the initial hearing, the High Court directed the ASI to conduct a site inspection and submit a report on the condition of the mosque. In its report, the ASI stated that there was no need for whitewashing, and only cleaning work could be done. However, after hearing the arguments presented by the mosque committee, the court ordered the whitewashing and decoration of the mosque, with the condition that the process would be carried out under the supervision of the Archaeological Survey of India.

On Thursday, the ASI team arrived at the mosque for measurements and assessment. Jama Masjid Committee office bearer, Advocate Zafar Ali, stated that the team will identify the specific areas where whitewashing is required. If the team provides instructions by today, the work will begin immediately. Otherwise, the whitewashing process will commence from Monday.

"After the whitewashing is done, the decoration work will also be carried out

as part of our tradition during Ramzan," said Zafar Ali. The mosque committee revealed that every year, the mosque is whitewashed and decorated before the holy month of Ramzan. However, this year, the local administration refused to grant permission for the same, leading to legal action.

The High Court, after reviewing the ASI report and hearing the arguments from the mosque committee, granted permission for the whitewashing and decoration of the mosque. However, the court instructed that the entire process

The Allahabad High Court's intervention came after the Jama Masjid Committee filed a petition seeking permission for whitewashing and decoration

would be monitored by the ASI to ensure that no structural or historical damage is caused to the heritage site.

The ASI's role will be crucial in determining the extent of whitewashing and decoration. The team will assess the condition of the walls and other structures and specify the areas that can be whitewashed. The mosque committee expressed satisfaction with the court's decision and assured full cooperation with the Archaeological Survey of India team.

This decision comes as a relief to the Muslim community, as the beautification of the mosque ahead of Ramzan holds great religious and cultural significance. The mosque committee hopes that the whitewashing and decoration will be completed before the start of the holy month.

Maharashtra's police to address each other without surnames

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar

Police personnel in Maharashtra's Beed district will now put up their name plates without surnames, in an attempt to eliminate caste-based discrimination, an official said on Thursday. Nearly 100 such name plates have been distributed across police stations and other offices of the department in the central Maharashtra district, the official said. Earlier, Beed Superintendent of Police (SP) Navneet Kanwat in January directed the officials to address each other by their first name, and not surname, with an aim to curb the caste bias. Now, the SP's office has distributed name plates, for display on tables in the offices of the security personnel, which do not have a mention of their surname, the official said. The small name plates put up by police on their uniforms will have to be made individually without them displaying their surnames, the official said.

Kanwat was posted as the SP of Beed in December last year after the murder of Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, who was abducted, tortured and killed for trying to stop an extortion attempt against an energy firm operating a windmill project there.

Deshmukh's murder on December 9, 2024, had acquired a caste angle as the victim was a Maratha, while most of the accused are Vanjari, a dominant community in the Beed region.

17 Naxalites surrendered in Chhattisgarh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bijapur

Seventeen Naxalites, nine of them collectively carrying cash rewards of ₹24 Lakh on their heads, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Thursday, a senior police official said. The cadres, including a couple, turned themselves in before senior police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officials here, he said.

The Naxalites cited disappointment with the "hollow" and "inhuman" Maoist ideology, exploitation of innocent tribals by senior cadres and increasing influence of security forces, Bijapur Senior Superintendent of Police Jitendra Kumar Yadav said. They were also impressed with the 'Niya Nellanar' (your good village) scheme under which security forces and administration have been striving to provide basic amenities and carry out development works in interior areas, he said.

All the surrendered Naxalites were active in different capacities in the Gangoor area committee of the outlawed Maoist organisation, he said.

Of them, Dinesh Modiam (36), a divisional committee member of Maoists, was wanted in 26 cases in Bijapur district and carried a reward of ₹8 Lakh, the senior police official said.

Modiam's wife Jyoti Tati, alias Kala Modiam (32), and Dula Karam (32), both active as area committee members, carried a reward of ₹5 lakh each, he added.

Threat to Adhikari life: Bengal BJP leader

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

A section of the Bengal BJP leadership has claimed that there is a threat to the life of State Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari. This, after more than one Trinamool Congress MLAs including a Minister threatened him with dire consequences after Adhikari said that the BJP would throw out all the Muslim MLAs from the State Assembly after coming to power in 2026.

"Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari's life is in threat ... he may be murdered any day ... even inside the Assembly House ... only today a man in black robes had entered the Assembly area ... before he was identified he was mingling with the BJP MLAs who too were donning black clothes as a mark of protest," BJP's Chief Whip inside the Assembly Shankar Ghosh said demanding an apology from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, senior Minister Firhad Hakim and party MLA Humayun Kabir "who had issued the threats."

While Kabir remained defiant saying his community was dearer to him than his party Ghosh said, "This man Humayun Kabir has issued physical threats to Suwendu Adhikari ... he and Firhad Hakim should immediately apologise for this ... but before this the Chief Minister should offer an apology ... whatever has been going on in Bengal signifies a black chapter in the States political history ... the ferocity exhibited by some of their MLAs is deplorable ... where do they get this audacity from."



Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari

Kabir however remained defiant regarding the statement he made on Wednesday. "Whatever I have said has been said deserves no apology ... to me my community is ahead of my party ... I will not apologise," Kabir said going to the extent of asking "why the police have not taken suo motu cognizance against his statements insulting members of other religion ... why the Government has not taken any action against him for making such irresponsible, communal remarks."

Earlier issuing a 72 hours' ultimatum to Adhikari he had said that, the Leader of Opposition had crossed all limits and "he has brought down the dignity of his office by threatening to assault the

Muslim MLAs ... if he does not publicly apologise for his remarks then all the 42 Muslim MLAs will assemble outside his chamber and give him what he deserves." Another senior TMC leader and Minister Siddiquilla Chowdhury too threatened of physical attack saying "Suwendu Adhikari has conducted in a most undemocratic manner ... he has defied the Constitution and the penal laws and should be penalised for this ... his legs should be broken for what he has said."

Adhikari had while protesting against Bengal Speaker Biman Banerjee's decision denying the BJP legislators chance to speak against alleged desecration of temples and attack on shops and houses of Hindus at various place on Tuesday said that if his party would come to power in 2026 it would not let the Muslim MLAs enter the Assembly.

"Mamata Banerjee will be defeated in the next year's Assembly elections and when we come to power in 2026 we will throw all the Muslim MLAs out the Assembly," Adhikari said attracting immediate reaction from some minority MLAs. Meanwhile, the Opposition Leader on Thursday said that he was not attaching much importance to Kabir's threats and he would go to the Assembly House alone daring him to touch and face the consequence.

Referring to Kabir as an "eccentric person deserving no attention," Adhikari said, "I will go alone to the Assembly House ... there will be no security forces with me ... I will go to my office and do my work ... I dare him to touch me and ... then see the consequence."

Polavaram Dam case: Odisha Assembly adjourned twice

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha Assembly was adjourned twice on Thursday due to a din created by opposition BJD MLAs over the controversial Polavaram Dam project in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. As soon as the House assembled for Question Hour, the BJD members rushed to the well and staged a protest after their notice for a discussion on the Polavaram issue was rejected by Speaker Surama Padhy.

They shouted anti-BJP slogans and accused the saffron party of sacrificing the interest of Odisha for the sake of its political gains in Andhra Pradesh.

Keeping in view the noisy scene in the House, the Speaker first adjourned the proceeding for about an hour till 11.30 am and later till 12.15 pm.

When his party members were shouting in the Well of the House, BJD's deputy leader in the Assembly Prasanna Acharya claimed that Odisha will be severely affected after completion of the Polavaram project. "Andhra Pradesh government's unilateral and forceful construction of Polavaram project has become intolerable for Odisha. Therefore, we demand a discussion on the matter," Acharya said.

The state government rejected the BJD's notice for a discussion on the Polavaram project stating that the House cannot debate over the matter which was sub judice.

Senior BJD MLA Arun Kumar Sahoo rejected the BJP's argument and said that the Polavaram project's design was changed during the NDA government though it was sanctioned during the UPA government. He rejected the BJP's argument that the matter under sub-judice cannot be discussed in the House.

"Odisha is in deep trouble over the Polavaram project. Should we wait silent-

As soon as the House assembled, the BJD members rushed to the well and staged a protest after their notice for a discussion on the Polavaram issue was rejected by Speaker

ly till the dam project inundates our villages because the matter is sub judice?," Sahoo said.

BJD member Irashish Acharya justified the Assembly rejecting the notice for discussion on Polavaram issue. "The Rules of the Business of Odisha Legislative Assembly clearly says that the matter under sub judice cannot be discussed in the House," he said.

The Opposition Congress MLAs were sitting on dharna near the Mahatma Gandhi statue on the Assembly premises protesting the suspension of its senior member Taraprasad Bahinipati. The Congress members wear black badges as a mark of protest.

ASI dies after scuffle in Bihar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Araria (Bihar)

An assistant sub-inspector (ASI) died after a scuffle between police personnel and a group of people broke out in Bihar's Araria district, a senior officer said on Thursday.

The incident occurred in Lakshmiapur area under the jurisdiction of Phulka police station on Wednesday night when a police team went there to nab a person, and subsequently a brawl broke out between the personnel and those protesting the arrest, Araria Superintendent of Police Anjani Kumar said.

"The incident took place when the ASI along with other police personnel went to Lakshmiapur to nab Anmol Yadav, wanted in a case. When the police team arrested Yadav, locals started protesting.

The accused was taken away by locals and the ASI fell unconscious during the scuffle," the SP said.

The ASI was immediately taken to the nearest hospital where he died during treatment, Kumar said. The deceased has been identified as Rajeev Ranjan.

The body of the ASI has been sent for post-mortem examination, the SP said. "The body did not bear any external injury marks. Preliminary investigations have revealed that the ASI was not assaulted by the locals. Investigation is on...And the exact cause of death can only be known after the post-mortem report," he said.

A manhunt has been launched to nab Yadav, and efforts are on to identify those who forcibly freed him from the clutches of police, the SP added.

₹100 Crore scam: Drone empanelment rigged in Andhra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Hyderabad

In a startling revelation, the drone empanelment process has been allegedly rigged by the Department of Agriculture, Andhra Pradesh and its Technical Team headed by Dr Sambiah Angirekula has allegedly favoured two local firms namely Drogo Drones Private Limited and Vihanga Technologies Private Limited in the process.

According to a complaint letter to the Principal Secretary, Department of Agriculture, AP, the Vihanga Technologies did not have the mandatory Type Certification even after the EOI submission deadline, however they were selected. The complaint mentioned, Drogo Drones lacked the mandatory technical specifications such as the 'Detect and

Avoid Capability' as per their certificate but was selected without any scrutiny. Vihanga Technologies is also acting as a Benami Company for Drogo with the sole intention to create an illusion of competition for the empanelment, alleged the letter. It alleged the trials conducted by Dr Sambiah and the technical team issued heavy restrictions on speed and battery recharging which was not mentioned in the EOI. This was followed with objective of disqualifying all companies except Vihanga and Drogo Drones that had a higher battery capacity, read the complaint a copy of which is with The Pioneer.

The other companies, as furnished in the complaint with more than 250 pages of annexure, were disqualified without any valid reasons stating that the drones suffered deviations from their Type

Certification which is completely false. Moreover, the drones of Drogo in fact suffer significant gaps from the Type Certification as per the test reports they submitted. The battery capacity, life cycles are below the minimum requirements and their software is completely different from the certification approved by the DGCA, highlighted the complaint.

"All drone manufacturers except Drogo and Vihanga were subjected to intense scrutiny and were disqualified without valid reasons, whereas, the firms that did not have a type certification and mandatory technical features were selected and qualified through a biased process. The project is worth ₹100 Crore for supply of 875 drones which has been awarded through an unfair and rigged selection process," said an industry insider.

After Maha Kumbh, agricultural, economic boom in Prayagraj

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Prayagraj

With the successful conclusion of the Maha Kumbh, new avenues of employment and economic growth are emerging in the Ganga-Yamuna belt, including areas like Ganga Paar, Yamuna Paar, Jhansi, Phaphamau, and Jasra. Local farmers are now turning to large-scale cultivation of watermelon, cucumber, muskmelon, and sponge gourd, aiming to transform their fortunes.

Taking advantage of the sandy soil and the pure water of the Ganga and Yamuna, farmers have already begun sowing crops along the banks of the Sangam. This farming boom is not only expected to yield a bumper harvest but also create thousands of job opportunities for local youth.



On the directions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a record amount of water has been released into the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, ensuring uninterrupted irrigation for farmers. With the increased water availability, farmers have started sowing crops without worrying about water scarcity. According to Dr Himanshu Singh, a horticulture scientist from Prayagraj, the sandy soil of this region is ideal for growing watermelons, cucumbers, and muskmelons. He believes that with proper irrigation and guidance, farmers can earn up to ₹5 lakh within a month from these crops.

The post-Maha Kumbh agricultural shift is expected to provide a significant boost to the local economy. Apart from farming, new opportunities in packaging,

transportation, and marketing are emerging, creating employment for thousands of local youth. The initiative has also received support from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (Agriculture Science Centre) in Prayagraj. Dr Anurag Singh, a senior scientist, is providing special training to farmers to enhance productivity and adopt modern farming techniques.

The Maha Kumbh may have elevated Uttar Pradesh's economy to new heights, but now, the fertile land along the Sangam is set to write a new success story in agriculture. With the blessings of Mother Ganga and the support of the government, farmers are hopeful that their hard work will bear fruit in the coming months, filling their lives with prosperity and joy.

No pressure to withdraw CID probe into Ranya Rao case, says Parameshwara

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Thursday said there was no pressure on him to withdraw a CID probe into the gold smuggling by Kannada actress Ranya Rao.

Karnataka government withdrew its order for a CID investigation into the lapses and dereliction of duty by police personnel deployed at the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) with regard to Ranya, within 24 hours after pronouncing it. The Minister said since the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms (DPAR) ordered appointing Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta to probe the possible role of Ranya's step father K Ramachandra Rao, a DGP rank officer, a parallel investigation was not needed.

He insisted that he was the one who immediately ordered CID investigation into the protocol lapses as soon as the matter came to light. "In the meantime, the Chief Minister's Office also gave direction to the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms since he (Ramachandra Rao) is an IPS officer. So we decided not to order inquiry by our (police) department and let the DPAR probe it," Parameshwara told reporters here.

Hence, the DPAR order is retained. We withdrew because two separate investigations should not take place, he explained.

Editor's TAKE

Balochistan on the Boil

The deadly train hijacking episode has brought the region's struggle to the fore

The recent hijacking of the Jaffar Express in Balochistan marks another deadly episode in the decades-long struggle for Baloch independence. The attack, orchestrated by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), underscores the escalating insurgency in Pakistan's largest but most neglected province. The Pakistani military's swift operation to neutralise the hijackers may have ended the immediate crisis, but it has done little to address the underlying grievances that continue to fuel the Baloch nationalist movement.

On March 11, armed militants targeted the Jaffar Express, a passenger train traveling from Quetta to Peshawar. The BLA demanded the release of Baloch political prisoners and individuals allegedly abducted by Pakistani security forces. Pakistani military forces swiftly launched a rescue operation. The successful yet costly operation highlights the deteriorating security situation in Balochistan and the growing boldness of separatist groups.

The hijacking is not an isolated incident but rather a continuation of the Baloch people's longstanding quest for self-determination. Balochistan, rich in natural resources but historically marginalised, has seen multiple uprisings since Pakistan's creation in 1947. The roots of the conflict date back to what many Baloch consider a betrayal by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founder. At the time of Partition, the princely state of Kalat, a major part of present-day Balochistan, opted for independence. However, in 1948, under pressure from Pakistan and with little international support, Kalat was forcibly annexed. This fueled deep resentment among the Baloch people and led to an armed insurgency that has resurfaced in different forms over the decades.

Balochistan, despite being rich in resources such as gold, copper, and natural gas, remains the most impoverished province in Pakistan. Baloch nationalists argue that the region's wealth is exploited by the central government, with little benefit to the local population.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has further intensified tensions, as Baloch rebels view Chinese investments and infrastructure projects as a means of increasing Pakistan's control over their land without addressing local grievances. Adding to the discontent are widespread allegations of human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of activists and civilians. The Pakistani state has often responded with heavy-handed military crackdowns, further deepening resentment.

While the Baloch nationalist movement has waxed and waned over the years, recent developments suggest it is gaining momentum. The BLA and other militant groups, such as the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), have intensified their attacks on security forces, government infrastructure, and projects associated with CPEC. Targeted assaults on Chinese nationals working in Pakistan further indicate a strategy aimed at destabilising foreign investments and pressuring the Pakistani state. The hijacking of the Jaffar Express is a testament to the insurgents' evolving tactics and growing audacity. By targeting civilian infrastructure and taking hostages, the BLA has demonstrated its capability to conduct large-scale operations, signalling an emboldened separatist movement.

A military response alone will not quell the insurgency. Addressing the root causes—political disenfranchisement, economic marginalisation, and human rights violations—is crucial for any long-term resolution. The ongoing struggle in Balochistan is a reminder of the consequences of neglecting ethnic and regional grievances. Without meaningful dialogue and political solutions, Pakistan risks further destabilisation in its most resource-rich yet volatile province. The recent train hijacking may have been neutralised, but the broader Baloch insurgency remains far from over.

Leaderspeak

We fully respect the sovereignty of Mauritius with regard to Chagos. We will extend our cooperation through forums such as the Colombo Security Conclave, Indian Ocean Rim Association, and Indian Ocean Conference. Be it the Global South, the Indian Ocean, or the African continent, Mauritius is our important partner. We have come up with SAGAR vision for the stability and prosperity of this entire region. India shall also assist in setting up of National Maritime Information Sharing Centre in Mauritius

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Towards a Fit and Trim India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's latest initiative to combat obesity and curb excessive oil consumption is timely as obesity rates are rising sharply, underscoring urgent need for preventive healthcare and dietary reforms

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent initiative to combat obesity and reduce excessive cooking oil consumption has ignited nationwide discussions on health and nutrition. The campaign underscores the importance of preventive healthcare and dietary changes in addressing India's growing obesity crisis. Given the alarming rise in obesity worldwide, this initiative is both timely and necessary and has received support from healthcare professionals, sportspeople, and the World Health Organisation.

India is witnessing a sharp increase in obesity, with the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reporting that 23% of men and 24% of women are now overweight or obese. Urban areas show even higher numbers due to sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy diets. By now, we all know that obesity increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and certain cancers, placing a heavy burden on India's healthcare system. The WHO has identified obesity as a major global health crisis, and India is rapidly catching up with Western countries in obesity rates.

However, while addressing obesity through lifestyle changes is essential, an even more pressing concern needs urgent attention—food adulteration. In 2018-19, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) found that almost one-third of food samples tested in India failed quality checks due to adulteration. Media reports highlight alarming instances of harmful substances being added to food, such as urea, starch, and detergent in milk; synthetic dyes and artificial ripening agents in fruits; chalk in common salt; artificial colors in spices; formalin in fish; iron filings or colored leaves in tea; synthetic whiteners, chalk powder, or soapstone in rice and wheat; and lead chromate in pulses. These adulterants pose serious health risks, including food poisoning, kidney damage, cancer, and neurological disorders.

Food adulteration is now so rampant that, at times, we don't even need food inspectors to detect it. Walk through any vegetable market, and you will see unnaturally shiny apples, bright green peas, pointed gourds, and glossy brinjals. These are not signs of freshness but of harmful chemicals like wax, artificial dyes, and pesticides. Soak vegetables in water, and you may see colors leaching out—clear evidence of adulteration.

While obesity can be managed by raising awareness about the dangers of consuming processed foods with unhealthy



ingredients or overconsuming edible oil and encouraging lifestyle changes, avoiding adulterated food is far more challenging. It is difficult to detect adulteration, and the issue is deeply rooted in systemic flaws in food production and regulation. Unless food adulteration is effectively tackled, even so-called "healthy" choices can be hazardous, exposing consumers to harmful substances despite their best efforts to maintain a nutritious diet.

Due to the widespread issue of food adulteration, many people have stopped eating fruits with their peels or raw salads, fearing pesticide residues and chemical coatings. This shift highlights how food adulteration forces people to compromise on natural and healthier eating habits, ultimately hindering efforts to promote a balanced diet and combat obesity.

With adulteration becoming so prevalent, it's no surprise that people are turning to organic food. The organic food market is expanding rapidly worldwide. In India, it was valued at around \$1.5 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach \$8.9 billion by 2032. However, organic food in India is much costlier than conventionally grown food, making it less accessible to middle—and lower-income groups. To make matters worse, fake organic labels

have become a growing concern. As demand rises, many brands and sellers misuse the "organic" tag, passing off conventionally grown food at a premium price under the guise of organic produce. If left unchecked, this defeats the very purpose of switching to organic food, leaving us right back where we started.

PM Modi's past campaigns, such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the promotion of yoga through the International Day of Yoga, have demonstrated his ability to mobilise public participation and drive meaningful change. His efforts to combat obesity are also likely to strike a chord with the masses. However, while his past initiatives have successfully influenced public hygiene and global health trends, his latest campaign against obesity will have a meaningful impact only if the issue of food adulteration is effectively addressed.

In the fight against obesity, food adulteration is the elephant in the room. Addressing it first will ensure that when

Indians make healthier choices, they are truly consuming safe and nutritious food. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to combat obesity and reduce excessive cooking oil consumption is a crucial step toward improving public health in India.

Indeed, rampant food adulteration undermines even the best health-conscious efforts, exposing consumers to harmful substances despite their intent to eat well. The presence of hazardous chemicals in everyday foods, from fruits and vegetables to dairy and staples, poses severe health risks.

PM Modi's past campaigns have successfully driven large-scale behavioral changes, and his anti-obesity initiative holds similar promise. However, its success depends on a holistic approach that includes stringent food safety regulations, public awareness about adulteration and affordable access to truly healthy food.

Strengthening regulatory frameworks, enforcing stricter penalties for food fraud, and promoting verified organic practices can help bridge the gap.

(The writer is Additional Director, Research Division, Rajya Sabha Secretariat. Views expressed are personal)

Four-Day Workweek: Challenges and Promises

SECOND Opinion



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

The concept of a four-day workweek has taken the world by storm, promising enhanced work-life balance and efficiency. However, implementing such a model in a heterogeneous and populous nation like India—home to over 1.4 billion people—presents significant challenges.

India's labor market has distinct complexities, making a four-day workweek more of an aspiration than an immediately achievable solution. The country's economy encompasses sprawling informal sectors alongside emerging knowledge industries, creating a stark divide in working styles and employment patterns.

The informal economy, which employs approximately 90% of India's workforce, operates beyond conventional employment paradigms. Agricultural laborers, small business owners, and daily wage earners typically work based on demand rather than a fixed schedule. For such workers, a four-day workweek may hold little relevance, as their earnings are directly tied to the number of hours worked.

Conversely, India's expanding service and technology sectors may be better positioned to experiment with compressed workweeks. Some e-commerce organisations have already tested four-day workweeks, reporting promising results in employee satisfaction and productivity. However, these

remain exceptions rather than the norm.

Cultural perceptions of work in India present another significant hurdle. The deeply ingrained belief that long hours demonstrate commitment and dedication fosters resistance to reduced workweeks. This cultural mindset suggests that even if policies change, shifting attitudes may take considerably longer.

Infrastructure challenges further complicate the feasibility of a four-day workweek. Many Indian workers endure long commutes due to inadequate transportation networks and urban congestion. As a result, even with a compressed work schedule, the actual time available for leisure and personal activities might remain limited.

Despite these challenges, there are compelling reasons to explore pathways toward introducing a four-day workweek in India. Research suggests potential benefits, including reduced burnout, lower absenteeism, and improved mental health-factors that could address key workplace issues currently affecting Indian employees.

A sector-specific approach may offer the most viable path forward. Pilot programs in knowledge-intensive industries could serve as testing grounds, allowing successful models to be gradually expanded to other sectors. Additionally, government incentives for businesses willing to adopt such programs could accelerate broader acceptance.

The pandemic has already reshaped work arrangements worldwide, including in India. Remote and hybrid work

models have demonstrated that productivity is not necessarily dependent on physical presence or rigid schedules. This shift in perspective creates opportunities for workplace innovations, including compressed workweeks.

Rather than viewing the four-day workweek as a universal, short-term solution, India could integrate it into a broader movement toward more flexible, worker-oriented employment practices. While full-scale implementation across industries may be a distant goal, selective adoption in specific sectors could lay the groundwork for wider acceptance as the economy and infrastructure continue to evolve.

The journey toward workweek reform in India will be long, culturally complex, and closely tied to the nation's economic landscape. However, initiating the conversation is a crucial first step in the right direction.

The four-day workweek presents both opportunities and challenges for India. While its informal economy and cultural perceptions pose obstacles, the growing service and technology sectors offer a testing ground for its feasibility. Infrastructure limitations and deep-rooted work traditions may slow widespread adoption, but pilot programs and government incentives could drive gradual acceptance. The pandemic has already reshaped work models, highlighting flexibility's potential. Rather than an immediate, universal solution, a sector-specific approach could pave the way for broader implementation.

(The author is a motivator and freelance writer. Views expressed are personal)

Letters to the Editor

PRIME MINISTER MODI IN MAURITIUS

Madam — Prime Minister Modi's second visit to Mauritius on its National Day, following his 2015 trip, has revitalized the previously weakened ties between the two nations. The ritual of pouring Gangajal into Mauritian waters symbolizes the cleansing of past grievances and has led to the signing of eight Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), including a strengthened strategic partnership focused on artificial intelligence, set to begin soon. Once under British rule, Mauritius saw the arrival of Indian laborers who endured harsh conditions and exploitation. These laborers, known as 'Girmityas' or 'People of Agreement', share a common history and cultural ties with India. This enduring rapport is expected to foster mutually beneficial developments in the region. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's second visit to Mauritius on its National Day, following his 2015 trip, has significantly strengthened the ties between the two nations. Historically, Mauritius and India share deep-rooted cultural and historical connections. Modi's visit included a symbolic ritual of pouring Gangajal into Mauritian waters, signifying the cleansing of past grievances. This visit resulted in the signing of eight Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), including a strategic partnership focused on artificial intelligence, set to commence soon. This visit marks a new chapter in their enduring relationship.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

EUROPE FIGHTS TRUMP TARIFFS

Madam — The European Union announced on Wednesday, March 12, that it would impose retaliatory trade measures, introducing new duties on U.S. industrial and agricultural products. This decision came just hours after the Trump administration increased tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports to 25 percent. As the world's largest trading bloc, the EU had anticipated the U.S. tariffs and prepared accordingly. However, the measures still place significant strain on already tense transatlantic relations. Just last month, in February, Washington warned Europe that it would need to take responsibility for its own security in the future. The EU's retaliatory measures will initially target U.S. goods worth approximately 26 billion euros (USD 28 billion). These measures will not be limited to steel and aluminum products but will also affect textiles, home appliances, and agricultural goods. Additionally, items such as motorcycles, bourbon whiskey, peanut butter, and jeans will face renewed tariffs. With this, an open trade war has erupted between the European Union and the United States, which may escalate into a serious and dangerous situation in the coming days. The economic impact could extend beyond these regions, affecting countries like India, which may be particularly vulnerable due to its weaker economy. This escalating trade war between the EU and the US threatens global economic stability, with potential ripple effects on various nations.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

TRUMP PUSHING INDIA INTO TRADE WAR

Madam — President Donald Trump, who champions the slogan "America First," has drawn India into his trade war. He has threatened that if India does not reduce import tariffs on American goods, the US will impose equivalent tariffs on Indian goods starting in April. This has placed India in a difficult position. Calling India the "Tariff King," Trump argues that the taxes India imposes on American goods are unfair. When he took a similar stance against China, the Chinese government responded aggressively, demonstrating its readiness not only for a trade war but for any kind of confrontation. However, the situation between India and the US is different, raising the question: Is India prepared for such a scenario? Last year, trade between India and the US amounted to \$118 billion, with India exporting goods worth \$77 billion and importing \$40 billion. The major imports from the US include crude oil, pearls and precious stones, nuclear reactors and related materials, boilers, machinery, and other equipment. On the other hand, India's major exports to the US consist of automobiles, textiles, and metals. If Trump's tariff threat becomes a reality, these three Indian industries could suffer a significant blow. The US is struggling with a \$1.2 trillion trade deficit and a market flooded with Chinese products, which has become a major concern. Trump's policies aim to address this issue. Trump's background as a businessman is evident in the strategic moves he is making.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

TRAIN HIJACKING IN BALOCHISTAN EXPOSES PAKISTAN'S FAULTLINES

The recent hijacking of the Jaffar Express in Balochistan has once again highlighted the deep-rooted insurgency in the region. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) seized control of the train, which was carrying over 500 passengers, including 214 Pakistani soldiers.

The group issued a 48-hour ultimatum, demanding the release of Baloch prisoners and the withdrawal of Pakistani forces. In response, the Pakistani military launched a rescue operation, deploying Special Service Group (SSG) commandos. Reports indicate that 104 hostages have been freed, while 16 militants were killed. However, several hostages also lost their lives during the operation, further escalating tensions.

The local population has long accused the government of exploiting their resources while denying them political and economic rights. This discontent has fueled multiple insurgencies over the decades, with separatist groups like the

BLA leading armed resistance against the state. The Pakistani military's heavy-handed response, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, has only intensified the unrest.

A major factor driving the insurgency is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which includes the strategic Gwadar Port, is seen as an effort by Pakistan and China to exploit Balochistan's resources without benefiting the local population. Baloch insurgents have repeatedly attacked CPEC infrastructure and Chinese investments, viewing them as symbols of foreign occupation.

The BLA's warning after the hijacking—demanding that Pakistan and China leave Balochistan—reinforces this narrative. The crisis in Balochistan poses a significant challenge for Pakistan. A sustainable solution requires dialogue, economic inclusion, and an end to military repression.

SACHIN TRIPATHI | BHOPAL

Carney: From Central Banker to Prime Minister

Mark Carney's rise from a globally respected central banker to Canada's Prime Minister signals a dramatic shift in the country's political landscape. Among his most urgent tasks is repairing Canada's strained relationship with India, a key economic and geopolitical partner

FIRST Column



Defense in 2021.
Bardish Chagger: Former Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.
Chandra Arya: MP for Nepean, Ontario, and advocate for economic development and immigrant integration.

Political Engagement and Diplomatic Tensions

The Indian community's active political participation underscores its commitment to Canada's democratic processes. However, relations between Canada and India deteriorated following the October 2024 murder of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia.

Trudeau accused the Indian government of orchestrating violence against dissidents in Canada, leading to reciprocal diplomatic expulsions and further straining bilateral ties. This crisis has raised concerns among the Indian diaspora, particularly regarding immigration, education, and economic exchanges. For Carney, engaging constructively with the Indian community is crucial. Addressing their concerns, fostering inclusive policies and working toward diplomatic reconciliation with India will be essential steps in strengthening Canada's social and economic fabric.

Domestic Political Challenges

Carney assumes office amid deepening political divides. The Liberal Party has suffered declining public confidence, particularly in Western Canada, where Trudeau's policies alienated oil-dependent provinces like Alberta and Saskatchewan. Meanwhile, right-wing populism has gained traction, mirroring global trends.

While Carney's lack of electoral experience may be a vulnerability, his credibility as an economic strategist could help him regain voter trust.

Managing inflation, stabilising interest rates, and addressing affordability concerns will be immediate priorities. Gaining support from both progressive and conservative voters will be crucial for effective governance, while restoring confidence within his party and among centrist voters will determine his political longevity.

Conclusion

Carney's leadership will be defined by his ability to steer Canada through complex domestic and global challenges.

A strategic recalibration of ties with India could elevate his stature, but any misstep—particularly on the Khalistan issue—risks deepening tensions and undermining economic prospects in South Asia. India will also have to understand the prioritise and compulsions of the new Canadian prime minister to reboot the relations

(Writer is a strategic affairs columnist and senior political analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Mark Carney's transition from a globally acclaimed central banker to Canada's Prime Minister marks a profound shift in leadership dynamics. Renowned for his crisis management at the helm of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England, he now faces the uncharted terrain of political leadership. Taking charge of a deeply divided political landscape, he must navigate a strained Indo-Canadian relationship and the resurgence of protectionism in a Trump-led America.

From Central Banker to Political Leader

While his economic acumen lends him credibility in managing fiscal policy and trade relations, his greatest challenges will be diplomatic—repairing strained ties with India, navigating a hostile White House, and restoring public trust in Canada's institutions. His leadership style, devoid of political baggage but rooted in financial pragmatism, will determine whether he succeeds in stabilising Canada's position on the global stage.

Repairing Indo-Canadian Relations

It is well known that former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alienated much of the Indian community in Canada by openly supporting Khalistani elements, severely straining relations with India. Carney has indicated that he favors stronger ties with India, a move that would benefit both nations. Unlike Trudeau, who pursued a self-serving political agenda at the cost of diplomatic relations, Carney must now leverage his skills and experience to mend fences with New Delhi.

One of Carney's most urgent foreign policy tasks will be repairing Canada's damaged relationship with India. Rebuilding trust through direct talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior officials—while avoiding public accusations that could further aggravate tensions—will be crucial.

- Key measures include:
1. Addressing India's concerns about pro-Khalistan extremism operating from Canadian soil.
 2. Strengthening counterterrorism collaboration with India.
 3. Reviving discussions on the stalled Canada-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
 4. Encouraging Canadian investments in India's technology and infrastructure sectors.
 5. Attracting Indian investments into Canada's energy and AI industries.
 6. Easing visa restrictions for Indian students and professionals to reinforce diaspora-driven relations.

Tackling Khalistani Extremism

Managing the presence of Khalistani elements in Canada remains a significant challenge. Trudeau's perceived leniency toward these extremists led to a diplo-

matic crisis, especially after the Nijjar controversy. If Carney aims to restore relations with India while maintaining domestic stability, he must strike a balance between national security and democratic freedoms.

- Potential steps include:
1. Directing CSIS and the RCMP to closely monitor extremist groups.
 2. Increasing surveillance on pro-Khalistan funding networks.
 3. Implementing stricter regulations on events that glorify violence against India.
 4. Enhancing intelligence-sharing with India's RAW and IB.

5. Considering the deportation of individuals involved in terrorist financing or inciting violence against India.
6. Establishing a bilateral security task force to monitor extremist activities.

Carney must also distinguish between moderate Sikhs and extremist Khalistanis, ensuring that law enforcement targets violent elements rather than peaceful Sikh advocacy groups. His approach must be security-driven rather than politically motivated—unlike Trudeau's strategy of appeasement.



KS TOMAR

GARNEY MUST ALSO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MODERATE SIKHS AND EXTREMIST KHALISTANIS, ENSURING THAT LAW ENFORCEMENT TARGETS VIOLENT ELEMENTS RATHER THAN PEACEFUL SIKH GROUPS

Balancing Indo-Canadian Relations and Domestic Politics

Restoring trust with India while managing domestic political sensitivities will require a delicate balancing act. Carney's lack of political baggage allows him to take a fresh approach, while his global reputation ensures India takes his diplomatic overtures seriously.

Leveraging economic incentives to reset relations with India could provide him with a major diplomatic victory early in his tenure. However, he will face opposition from pro-Khalistan groups in Canada, accusations of suppressing free speech and resistance from left-leaning Liberals who supported Trudeau's stance. If he implements a balanced policy—cracking down on extremists while protecting legitimate Sikh voices—he can repair Indo-Canadian ties without shaking domestic instability.

The Indian Diaspora's Influence

The Indian community in Canada, comprising approximately 1.86 million individuals according to the 2021 census, represents about 5.1 per cent of the national population. This demographic has significantly influenced Canada's multicultural landscape, particularly in urban centers such as Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and Montreal.

Notable political figures from this community include:

Jagmeet Singh: Leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP) since 2017 and the first person of Indian descent to lead a major federal party.

Harjit Singh Sajjan: MP for Vancouver South and former Minister of National Defense.

Anita Anand: Appointed Minister of National

Ramzan and Navratri: A Shared Journey of Self-Restraint and Purity

Ramzan and Navratri symbolise the essence of all that is good, pure, and noble in the two religions: Islam and Hinduism. The common message for devotees of these respective religions is to achieve excellence in behavior through introspection and self-restraint.

The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, once said, "There are limits to self-indulgence, none to self-restraint." Truly, self-restraint plays an important role in shaping human behavior in different societal and cultural settings. The entire concept of social control is based on the type, range, and depth of restraint exhibited in human behavior. More often than not, we see laws being violated, manipulated, and disobeyed because they are externally imposed. In contrast, by practicing self-restraint, we become the masters of our actions and, in turn, our destiny.

Ramzan, the ninth lunar month in the Islamic calendar, is a period of spiritual reflection and piety, observed through fasting from dawn to sunset and increased charitable deeds by Muslims worldwide.

The objective behind this month-long exercise is to cultivate self-control and self-restraint through fasting, with the goal of achieving excellence in behavior and guarding against evil. According to the Quran (Verse 2:183):

"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed to those before you so that you may become righteous."

Ramzan is seen as a time for introspection and strengthening one's connection with God. One night during Ramzan, known as Laylat al-Qadr, is believed to be a night of exceptional blessings, during which the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad. The first revelation of the Holy Quran took place on Laylat al-Qadr.

However, fasting does not mean abstaining only from food and water; it also necessarily includes refraining from all evil actions and thoughts. One must not indulge in falsehood, gossip, backbiting, or foul language while fasting.

Once, as Prophet Muhammad was passing through a street with his followers, he heard a woman shouting and abusing others. The Prophet asked, "Who is this woman? Is she a Muslim?" His followers replied, "She is a Muslim and is observing the fast." The Prophet then instructed his followers to offer dates to the woman to break her fast, explaining that by using vulgar language and expressing anger, she had rendered her fast meaningless.

In essence, a fasting person must exercise utmost control to eliminate even the slightest traces of unworthiness in behavior and demeanor. The observer of a fast must ensure that their thoughts and deeds remain pure, noble, decent, and benevolent toward others, including all of humanity.

There are two types of sinners:

1. Fasiq-ul-Amal - One who commits sin while knowing it is wrong.

2. Fasiq-ul-Aqeeda - One who commits sin and does not believe it is wrong.

Fasting can refine and purify those in the first category. During Ramzan, believers are given the opportunity for repentance and forgiveness. If a person sincerely seeks pardon from the Lord for their misdeeds, the Lord listens to their prayers during this holy month.

The faithful are instructed to adopt taqwa (refraining from sin and guarding against evil). If those observing the fast do not adhere to this principle, their fast will not be accepted by Allah. As the Quran (79:40-41) states:

"As for him who fears to stand before his Lord and restrains himself from low desires, Paradise is surely the abode."

Fasting detoxifies the body when observed properly. Namaz (prayer), besides being an act of worship, is similar to yoga and meditation. Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Hazrat Fatima Zehra, highlighted the benefits of fasting during Ramzan, stating that one of its purposes is to help the rich understand the pangs of hunger experienced by the poor. For this reason, Zakaat (charitable alms-giving) is prescribed during this period.

The Quran states:

"And spend in the way of Allah and cast not yourself to perdition with your own hand."

It further clarifies:

"He loves those who purify themselves."

Someone once asked Hazrat Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the Caliph of Islam, "How do we know that Allah has accepted our prayers during Ramzan?"

Hazrat Ali replied, "If, between the sighting of the moon at the beginning of Ramzan and the sighting of the moon for Eid, you notice a positive change in your behavior, your prayers have been accepted."

Similarly, in Hinduism, Chaitra Navratri is observed between April 2-11, while Sharad Navratri is celebrated in the autumn season, around October-November. According to the Shastras, devotees observing Navratri fasts must practice Brahmacharya (celibacy), as it helps in reducing negative qualities such as anger, pride, deceit, and greed.

It also aids in keeping and honoring different vows and commitments in life. Devotees observing the fast should also abstain from falsehood and refrain from using intoxicants like gutka, tobacco, and wine. Consumption of non-vegetarian meals is also prohibited during these periods.

Currently, the month-long Ramzan is being observed, and Chaitra Navratri will be celebrated from March 30 to April 7, 2025. From a cultural

perspective, Delhi has a unique character of celebration, as people from all corners of the country reside here.

The great Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib, beautifully captured the fervor of the holy month of Ramzan in Delhi in a letter to his close friend, Mir Mehdi Husain 'Majroh':

"How did you presume that during the month of Ramzan, I would be staying in Rampur? Although Nawab Sahab insisted that I stay in Rampur, tempting me with mangoes, I left and, by 'Chand Raat' (the night before Ramzan), reached Delhi, for Delhi is a place where people feel the pulse of absolute bliss.

"In Delhi, during Ramzan, I have three commitments: At dawn, I go to Masjid Hamid Ali Khan, at Kashmiri Gate, to listen to the soulful recitation of the Holy Quran by Hazrat Qari Jafar Ali Jarchavi; in the evening, I break my fast at Mehtab Bagh, near Jama Masjid; and at night, I perform Namaz-e-Isha at Jama Masjid. How mirthfully life is passing here!"

Ramzan and Navratri, two sacred observances in Islam and Hinduism, exemplify the virtues of self-restraint, introspection, and spiritual elevation. Both are deeply rooted in religious traditions and serve as periods of reflection, discipline, and devotion, guiding individuals toward moral and ethical excellence.

Spiritual fasting

Ramzan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is a time for fasting, prayer, and increased charitable acts. It is believed that during this holy month, the first revelation of the Quran was bestowed upon Prophet Mohammad on Laylat al-Qadr, a night of immense blessings.

Fasting during Ramzan is not merely about abstaining from food and drink but also about refraining from falsehood, anger, and immoral behavior. The objective is to cultivate 'taqwa'—a heightened sense of God-consciousness and righteousness. Acts of charity, such as 'Zakaat' (alms-giving), further strengthen the bond of empathy between the rich and the poor.

Similarly, Navratri, a Hindu festival observed twice a year, emphasises devotion, purity, and self-discipline. Devotees engage in fasting, prayer, and abstinence from material indulgences, aiming to purify the mind and body. Observing celibacy and refraining from falsehood, intoxicants, and non-vegetarian food are integral to this practice.

In a culturally diverse city like Delhi, these spiritual occasions are observed with great fervor, reflecting the city's unique ethos of religious harmony. Ultimately, both Ramzan and Navratri remind us that true devotion lies in self-restraint, moral conduct, and a compassionate heart.

(The author is a lawyer. Views expressed are personal)

India's fragile trade deal with the US

India is currently in a tight spot regarding its economic relations with the United States. In less than two months since the new US President took office, high-level Indian officials, led by the Prime Minister himself, have visited Washington, D.C. Last week, India's Commerce Minister was in Washington for discussions with the newly appointed US Trade Representative and Commerce Secretary. According to news reports, Piyush Goyal is expected to return to Washington towards the end of March. The reason? President Trump's simultaneous announcement, during Goyal's visit, of imposing reciprocal tariffs on all countries with high import duties, including India.

President Trump has consistently targeted India as a high-tariff nation since taking office. His public outbursts against various allies and friendly countries have become a near-constant spectacle, akin to a reality show streaming across the globe. Several world leaders who managed early meetings with Trump were relieved that they were spared the harsh treatment that the Ukrainian President faced in the Oval Office. Trump's confrontational style is now well known, and global leaders fear reputational damage from their bilateral conversations with him. He employs his blunt, undiplomatic rhetoric to put foreign leaders in a difficult position, compelling them to return with lucrative economic deals for the US.

It was no surprise, then, that after meeting India's Commerce Minister, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick stated, "We would like to focus on a bilateral conversation just between India and the United States—to bring down the tariff levels that India has, which protect some of its sectors." Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US last month, discussions on a bilateral trade agreement have been actively initiated, with expectations of finalisation by the end of the year. Intense consultations are underway in Delhi, with all relevant ministries contributing their recommendations.

One of India's key priorities is retaining control over the agricultural sector, which has significant domestic political implications. The US is pushing for greater access to the Indian agriculture market, while India seeks reciprocity without jeopardising its small farmers. American farmers, who are generally more prosperous and own larger farmlands, rely on advanced machinery to boost crop output. However, the US Commerce Secretary made it clear that access to India's agriculture market remains a top priority. He stated, "Maybe certain products have quotas. Maybe certain products have limits... And then we do the same thing on the other side and craft an agreement that makes sense for both of us. The Indian agriculture mar-

ket has to open up. It can't just stay closed."

Meanwhile, back in India, the government is considering reducing import duties on certain products, including electronics. India currently imposes nearly 16.5 per cent import duties on several ICT hardware products, while the US maintains rates well below 1 per cent. Many experts believe that lowering duties on electronics could benefit India by encouraging US companies to shift their supply chains to the country. However, there seems to be some confusion over the definition of "US-manufactured" and "Made in the US" when determining tariff reductions. At present, many US technology companies do not manufacture in the US but operate their largest factories in China or Southeast Asia.

President Trump, meanwhile, is pressuring American companies to relocate their manufacturing bases back to the US, threatening consequences if they fail to do so. This move could further complicate the already fragile global supply chain. India is closely monitoring these developments and must remain agile in its decision-making.

Conclusion

India and the United States have shared a complex yet evolving economic relationship, marked by cooperation and contention. Over the years, India has worked towards strengthening trade ties with the US, which remains one of its largest trading partners. However, friction has persisted over issues such as tariffs, market access, and trade imbalances. With the new US administration taking a firm stance on protectionist policies, India faces increasing pressure to lower its trade barriers and open its markets to American goods, particularly in agriculture and technology. President Trump's aggressive trade policies, including reciprocal tariffs and demands for reduced Indian duties on US imports, have added new challenges to negotiations.

As India navigates these complex trade dynamics, it must strike a balance between fostering economic cooperation with the US and protecting its domestic industries, especially agriculture and manufacturing. While a bilateral trade deal could provide long-term benefits, hasty concessions could threaten small businesses and farmers. At the same time, global supply chain shifts present opportunities for India to attract investments from US firms. With careful negotiations and strategic decision-making, India can work towards a trade agreement that ensures mutual benefit while safeguarding its economic interests. The coming months will be crucial in shaping the future of India-US economic relations.

(The writer is a political analyst. Views expressed are personal)



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Russia says it has retaken Kursk's biggest town from Ukraine



Ukrainian serviceman of Khartia brigade known by call sign "Krystal" fires M101 Howitzer towards Russian positions in Kharkiv region, Ukraine

PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

Russian forces have driven the Ukrainian army out of the biggest town in Russia's Kursk border region, officials claimed Thursday, as US officials sought the Kremlin's response to a proposed 30-day ceasefire in the three-year war that Ukraine has endorsed.

The Russian Defence Ministry's claim that it recaptured the town of Sudzha, hours after President Vladimir Putin visited his commanders in Kursk and wore military fatigues, could not be independently verified. Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment on the claim.

The renewed Russian military push and Putin's high-profile visit to his troops came as US President Donald Trump presses for a diplomatic end to the war. The US Tuesday lifted its March 3 suspension of military aid for Kyiv after senior US and Ukrainian officials made progress on how to stop the fighting during talks held in Saudi Arabia.

Trump said Wednesday that "it's up to Russia now" as his administration presses Moscow to agree to the ceasefire. The US president has made veiled threats to hit Russia with new sanctions if it won't engage with peace efforts.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that US negotiators were on their way to Russia, but he wouldn't comment on Moscow's view of the ceasefire proposal.

"Before the talks start, and they haven't started yet, it would be wrong to talk about it in public," he told reporters.

Senior US officials say they hope to see Russia stop attacks on Ukraine within the next few days.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News that national security adviser Mike Waltz spoke Wednesday with his Russian counterpart. She also confirmed that Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, will head to Moscow for talks with Russian officials, possibly including Putin.

By signaling its openness to a ceasefire, Ukraine has presented the Kremlin with

a dilemma at a time when the Russian military has the upper hand in the war — whether to accept a truce and abandon hopes of making new gains, or reject the offer and risk derailing a cautious rapprochement with Washington.

The Ukrainian army's foothold inside Russia has been under intense pressure for months from a renewed effort by Russian forces, backed by North Korean troops. Ukraine's daring incursion last August led to the first occupation of Russian soil by foreign troops since World War II and embarrassed the Kremlin.

Speaking to commanders Wednesday, Putin said he expected the military "to completely free the Kursk region from the enemy in the nearest future."

Putin added that in the future "it's necessary to think about creating a security zone alongside the state border," in a signal that Moscow could try to expand its territorial gains by capturing parts of Ukraine's neighboring Sumy region. That idea could complicate a ceasefire deal.

Ukraine launched the raid in a bid to

counter the unceasingly glum news from the front line, as well as draw Russian troops away from the battlefield inside Ukraine and gain a bargaining chip in any peace talks. But the incursion didn't significantly change the dynamic of the war.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, assessed late Wednesday that Russian forces were in control of Sudzha.

Ukraine's top military head, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskiy, said late Wednesday that Russian aviation had carried out an unprecedented number of strikes on Kursk and that as a result Sudzha had been almost completely destroyed. He did not comment on whether Ukraine still controlled the settlement but said it was "maneuvering (troops) to more advantageous lines."

Meanwhile, Major General Dmytro Krasyniykov, commander of Ukraine's Northern Operational Command, which includes the Kursk region, was dismissed from his post, he told Ukrainian media outlet Suspilne on Wednesday.

Imran Khan's party slammed for spreading 'fake narrative'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Thursday slammed jailed former premier Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party for spreading a "fake narrative" regarding the deadly terrorist attack on a train in Balochistan.

At least 21 passengers were killed in the attack by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) terrorists on the Jaffar Express in Bolan areas of Balochistan on Tuesday. The stand-off with the militants ended after the security forces killed all 33 terrorists.

Speaking in the National Assembly, Asif accused PTI-affiliated social media accounts of misrepresenting the tragic incident and undermining national unity by promoting misinformation, instead of acknowledging the sacrifices made by the armed forces in the rescue operation.

"What's more upsetting is the way PTI's social media interpreted the situation," he said. "In yesterday's tweets, and otherwise as well, they target the armed forces. When the armed forces impose martial law, then they stand with them," Asif said, recalling that Khan supported Pervez Musharraf in his 2002 referendum.

Asif said Pakistan would emerge victorious in the war on terrorism with the nation's support for the armed forces.

"Our war against terrorism is a big milestone that the entire country can be proud of. If the entire nation stands proud like this with our armed forces, then there is no doubt we will be successful in our war (against terrorism)," the minister said.

The Parliament on Thursday unanimously passed a resolution to condemn the train attack and all acts of terrorism

that endanger people and public order.

Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Tariq Fazal Chaudhary moved the resolution that appreciated the armed forces for their unwavering commitment, bravery and sacrifice in safeguarding the lives of the citizens and protecting the integrity of Pakistan.

The House expressed the "resolve to take every possible measure to eliminate terrorism from every corner of the country, affirming that no group, individual and ideology that seeks to undermine the nation's security, prosperity and sovereignty will be allowed to spread fear, hatred and violence within the territorial limits of the country."

At least 21 passengers were killed in the attack by the Balochistan Liberation Army terrorists on the Jaffar Express in Bolan areas of Balochistan on Tuesday

It expressed the commitment to working relentlessly to root out terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

The House called upon the people regardless of their ethnicity and religion to unite in the fight against terrorism and reject extremism, ensuring peace, safety and prosperity for future generations.

Chairman Pakistan People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari strongly condemned the terrorist attack.

He said the terrorists, enjoying the backing of some foreign forces, only want to kill innocent people and impede the progress of Pakistan. He emphasized the need for unity in political ranks and consensus to once again defeat the terrorists.

Maintenance hole explosion at Texas Tech University causes fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Texas

An explosion inside a maintenance hole on the Texas Tech University campus in Lubbock set off fires and power outages, leading school officials to issue evacuation orders for several buildings and cancel classes for the rest of the week, university police said.

The explosion happened Wednesday night at the Engineering Key section of campus, which was evacuated.

Power was being shut down to the entire campus while repairs were underway, said Caitlynn Jeffries, a spokesper-

son for the university's police department. She asked that all public and unofficial personnel avoid campus.

"You can go ahead and go home for spring break. We are closing school down for the next couple days," Jeffries said at a news media briefing.

Firefighters responded to campus at about 7 p.m. For a possible gas leak, Lubbock Fire Rescue Capt. Jon Tunnell said at the briefing. They found "multiple manhole covers with active fire and smoke issuing from them," he said.

No injuries were reported, Tunnell said.

Musk, DOGE may get rid of programme that made tax filing free

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

Mia Francis, a 22-year-old barista from Boston, filed her taxes on her own this year for the first time, using a free government tax filing programme that made it easy because it did most of the work for her.

Francis said it took 45 minutes to finish her taxes with the IRS Direct File programme, an electronic tax return filing system that the IRS made permanent last year and that has rolled out to 25 states.

Francis is expecting a \$530 refund. And because she saved cash by not using a commercial tax preparation company to file her taxes, "that money will go a long way," she said. She plans to use it for a trip to Amsterdam this year.

Despite its popularity with Francis and other members of the American public, the IRS Direct File's fate remains unclear as Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency cleave their way through the federal bureaucracy.

So far, the programme is still available for use ahead of the April 15 tax filing deadline, and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent committed during his January confirmation hearing to maintaining it, at least for this tax season.

Representatives from the Internal Revenue Service and DOGE did not respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press on their plans for Direct File. But one Republican tax expert says the IRS never got congressional authorization to create Direct File.

And Republican lawmakers and commercial tax preparation firms complain the programme is a waste of money because free filing programs already exist, although they are hard to use.

Direct File was rolled out as a pilot program in 2024 after the IRS was tasked with looking into how to create a "direct file" system as part of the money it received from the Inflation Reduction Act signed into law by President Joe Biden in 2022. Last May, the agency announced that the programme would be made permanent.

The IRS accepted 140,803 returns filed by taxpayers using Direct File in the 12 states where it was available last tax season. It's been expanded to include half the country this year. It is unclear how many taxpayers have used Direct File this year.

Mercia Vinton, an original architect of Direct File from the US Digital Service, noted the ease and accessibility of the programme and called it "a great example of how people should interact with the government in the 21st century."



the IRS," she said. "It was built by an in-house product team, in an iterative manner, and we ship updates to the software to improve user experience in real time based on feedback. If we continue to invest in it, both taxpayers and the IRS can benefit." Musk posted last month on his social media site that he had "deleted" 18F, a government agency that worked on technology projects such as the IRS' Direct File programme.

This led to some confusion about whether Direct File is still available to taxpayers. However, conversations inside the IRS indicate that no decision has been made on whether to cut the program, two people familiar with these conversations tell the AP.

Former IRS Commissioner Daniel Werfel, who oversaw the rollout of the programme, said Treasury officials considering the future of the program should take into account "the voice of the taxpayers."

"My reflection is that taxpayers are in very different situations and have very different preferences for how they want to file," he said. "Those whose preference is to file electronically direct with the IRS for free, it's a good option to have on the menu. But it should not replace other options."

Derrick Plummer, a spokesperson for Intuit, one of the country's largest commercial tax preparation firms, said free tax preparation had been available for years before Direct File came along.

"IRS Direct File is a solution in search of a problem, a waste of taxpayer dollars and a drain on critical IRS resources," he said. A June 2024 Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration report estimates that the annual costs of Direct File may range from \$64 million to \$249 million.

"The IRS should focus on its core mission including data privacy and customer service while policymakers in Washington

focus on simplifying the tax code," Plummer said.

However, other taxpayers, like 31-year-old Aquiel Warner in Austin, Texas, say they want to avoid using commercial tax preparation software.

Warner filed her taxes with Direct File in 10 minutes using her phone and a chatbot that the IRS provides. She likes the program's convenience, that it prepopulated her tax forms and that it allowed for free filing. Although she has some concerns about data privacy in the government — DOGE is reported to have access to some of the IRS' internal systems — she feels more secure going through the IRS than commercial tax preparation services.

"I don't want to be a product. I don't want my information sold when I file my taxes," she said. "I have to file my taxes, and I don't want to be put in a situation where, in order to file my taxes, I have to pay to get the help I need because I'm not a professional tax preparer."

Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, said the IRS never got explicit permission from Congress to create the Direct File system.

"It really doesn't matter if it's a good idea. It was done illegally," he said, calling on Congress and the Justice Department to look into what he says is unauthorized spending that went into the creation of Direct File.

Democratic lawmakers in January asked Bessent and IRS commissioner nominee Billy Long to preserve the program. They wrote in a letter that "ending Direct File would hurt everyday Americans." Long has not yet received a nomination hearing.

In the meantime, Musk and his cadre of computer programmers could decide to wield their tech skills to boost the programme — or use the very same digital savvy to delete it.

Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif visits Balochistan after BLA insurgents attack train



A special train, organised by the army for the wounded and survivors rescued by security forces from a passenger train attacked by insurgents, arrives at a railway station in Much, in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province

PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday visited the restive Balochistan province to review the law and order situation and to express solidarity with the people there following the Jaffar Express hijacking incident in which 21 civilians and four soldiers were killed.

Sharif's visit comes a day after security forces killed all 33 Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militants who on Tuesday hijacked the Jaffar Express.

Sharif is accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Federal Minister for Planning, Development Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Nawabzada Mir Khalid Magsi and others.

The incident occurred when the train, travelling from Quetta to Peshawar and carrying 440 passengers, was ambushed by BLA militants near the mountainous terrain of Gudalar and Piru Kunri in a tunnel. They opened fire

on the train and held the passengers hostage, prompting the security forces to initiate an operation that lasted two days. Announcing the completion of the operation, Director General Inter-Services Public Relations Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry on Wednesday said the armed forces took part in the action against militants who "remained in contact with their facilitators and mastermind based in Afghanistan via satellite phone". Units from the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), Special Services Group (SSG), Army, and Frontier Corps (FC) took part in the operation, the army's spokesperson said.

Chaudhary said no one can be permitted to make innocent people of Pakistan the victim of their barbarism in the streets, trains, buses or markets because of their misleading ideas and instructions and facilitation of foreign masters.

"Whoever does this, let me say it very clearly, will be hunted down and brought to justice. Let me also say that this incident of Jaffar Express changes the rules of the game," he said.

The bodies of those killed in the attack will be sent to their native areas after necessary administrative prerequisites. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Thursday lambasted former prime minister Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for "politicising" the incident and misinterpreting the situation on social media.

"We need to rise above political interests and demonstrate national unity (on such occasions)," said Asif.

Asif slammed the former PTI-led government's decision to relocate thousands of fighters from the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to the country.

On the Jaffar Express rescue operation, the minister said, "God forbids, there could have been a lot of casualties, but the security forces eliminated the terrorists."

"Our war against terrorism is a big milestone that the entire country can be proud of. If the entire nation stands proud like this with our armed forces, then there is no doubt we will be successful in our war (against terrorism)," the minister asserted.

Syria under Islamist group's rule

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Damascus

Syria's interim president on Thursday signed a temporary constitution that leaves the country under Islamist rule for five years during a transitional phase.

The country's interim rulers have struggled to exert their authority across much of the country since the Islamist former insurgent group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, led a lightning insurgency that overthrew former leader Bashar Assad in December.

Former HTS leader Ahmad Al-Sharaa is now the country's interim president — a decision that was announced after a meeting of the armed groups that took part in the offensive against Assad. At the same meeting, the groups agreed to repeal the country's old constitution and said a new one would be drafted.

While many were happy to see an end to the Assad family's dictatorial rule of over 50 years in the war-torn country, religious and ethnic minorities have been sceptical of the new Islamist leaders and reluctant to allow Damascus under its new authorities to assert control of their areas.

Abdulhamid Al-Awak, one of the seven members of the committee al-Sharaa tasked to draft the temporary constitution, told a press conference Thursday that it will maintain some provisions from the previous one, including the stipulation that the head of state has to be a Muslim, and Islamic law is the main source of jurisprudence.

However, Al-Awak, a constitutional law expert who teaches at the Mardin Artuklu University in Turkey, also said the temporary constitution includes provisions that enshrine freedom of expression and the press. The constitution will "balance between social security and freedom" dur-

ing Syria's shaky political situation, he said.

A new committee to draft a permanent constitution will be formed, but it is unclear if it will be more inclusive of Syria's political, religious, and ethnic groups.

Al-Sharaa on Monday reached a landmark pact with the US-backed Kurdish authorities in northeastern Syria, including a ceasefire and a merging of their armed forces with the central government's security agencies.

The deal came after government forces and allied groups crushed an insurgency launched last week by gunmen loyal to Assad. Rights groups say that hundreds of civilians — mostly from the Alawite minority sect to which Assad belongs — were killed in retaliatory attacks by factions in the counter-offensive.

A key goal of the interim constitution was to give a timeline for the country's political transition out of its interim

phase. In December, Al-Sharaa said it could take up to three years to rewrite Syria's constitution and up to five years to organise and hold elections.

Al-Sharaa appointed a committee to draft the new constitution after Syria held a national dialogue conference last month, which called for announcing a temporary constitution and holding interim parliamentary elections. Critics said the hastily-organised conference was not inclusive of Syria's different ethnic and sectarian groups or civil society.

The United States and Europe have been hesitant to lift harsh sanctions imposed on Syria during Assad's rule until they are convinced that the new leaders will create an inclusive political system and protect minorities. Al-Sharaa and regional governments have been urging them to reconsider, fearing that the country's crumbling economy could bring further instability.

Bangladesh extends military's magistracy power

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh's interim government led by Muhammad Yunus on Thursday extended the magistracy power of the military forces for 60 more days for the third time amid a nationwide law and order situation.

"Commissioned officers holding the rank of captain and above in the Bangladesh Armed Forces have been granted special executive magistrate powers across the country," a Public Administration Ministry statement said here.

According to the statement, navy and air force officers too would hold the authority of executive magistracy while performing duties in aid of civil administration, including the military and navy officers serving on deputation in paramilitary Bangladesh Coast Guard and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

The renewal of the government order came as a nationwide operation called Operation Devil Hunt is underway as the country vandalism afresh since February 5.

Protestors that day first demolished the 32 Dhanmondi residence of Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman using excavators coinciding with a scheduled virtual speech by his daughter and deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina from India, where she fled last year after the students' massive protest that ousted her Awami League government.

The protesters subsequently attacked or set on fire the houses and business establishments of Awami League leaders and activists throughout the country. They were confronted while attacking a fugitive former minister's village home in suburban Gazipur on the outskirts of the capital.

The armed forces were first granted magistracy power on September 17, 2024, a little over a month after the fall

Bangladesh has called out military in aid of civil administration, especially, during elections but were never granted magistracy power

of Hasina's Awami League regime in a student-led mass protests when police were in a dilapidated state as the main law enforcement agency.

A large number of policemen were lynched or critically wounded and police stations were attacked by protestors for their role in protecting the ousted regime while the government said the police was gradually regaining its morale with a massive restructuring exercise.

In line with the authority, the armed forces' officers could arrest or issue orders to arrest any crime suspect.

But army chief General Waker Uz Zaman last month said the military forces were eager to return to their barracks as soon as possible saying army troops were not trained for policing.

Zaman also said that he ordered troops to use minimal force in discharging policing duties as part of joint forces and stressed the need for reorganisation of police to take their original responsibilities in the quickest possible time.

Bangladesh, in the past two decades, has called out military troops in aid of civilian administrative authorities particularly to enforce vigil during national elections and handle law order situations but they were never granted magistracy power.

The military, however, was given the magistracy authority in 2002 during former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government to carry out an anti-crime security clampdown called Operation Clean Heart when at least 40 people were killed in security custody.

UN secretary-general visitz Rohingya refugee camps, push for aid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DHAKA

UN Secretary-General António Guterres arrived in Bangladesh on Thursday on a four-day visit to review the situation of more than 1 million Rohingya refugees amid the fear of aid cuts that could seriously affect them.

Bangladesh's foreign affairs adviser, Touhid Hossain, received Guterres at Dhaka's main airport.

Guterres's visit, which is his second to the country, is seen as crucial after the announcement of possible aid cuts by the World Food Programme, or WFP, and others following the decision by Washington to shut down USAID operations.

The interim government, which came to power in August after the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a mass uprising in Bangladesh, is hopeful that the visit will strengthen international efforts to mobilise aid for the Rohingya refugees and attract new global attention to the Rohingya crisis.

The WFP, the main UN food agency, said in a letter to the refugee authorities earlier this month that cuts to food rations could take effect from April 1 in Cox's Bazar, where dozens of camps are inhabited by Rohingya refugees.

The agency said that the food rations could be half, or USD 6, from the existing USD 12.50 per month.

In a message to The Associated Press, the WFP said recently that whether the fund cuts would be effective from next month would depend on getting adequate funding that it requires to run their operations.

WFP spokesperson Kun Li said that they were "actively mobilising funds" to prevent any reductions in food assistance for Rohingya refugees. If the agency is unable to secure sufficient funding — USD 81 million to sustain operations through the end of the year, including USD 15 million needed for April — they will have no choice but to reduce rations starting in April.

Guterres and Bangladesh's chief adviser, Muhammad Yunus, are scheduled to visit Rohingya camps in the southern Cox's Bazar district on Friday.

On Saturday, Guterres will hold a meeting with Yunus at his office in Dhaka, the capital.

'We will just die in silence': US aid cuts hit Ethiopia's fragile Tigray region

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mekele

As a displaced person in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, 76-year-old Haile Tsege is no stranger to hunger.

During its war with Tigray fighters that devastated the region in 2020-2022, Ethiopian government restrictions on the rebellious region reduced aid flows to a trickle. Then in 2023, US and UN aid distributions of grain were halted for months over a corruption scandal.

Now the Trump administration's dismantling of the US Agency for International Development, or USAID, has again halted food deliveries to a sprawling camp of over 20,000 people outside Tigray's regional capital, Mekele.

"We will just die in silence," said Tsege, one of the 2.4 million people in Tigray who depend on humanitarian grain, most of it provided by the US.

Ethiopia with its over 125 million people had been the biggest beneficiary of US aid in sub-Saharan Africa, receiving \$1.8 billion in the 2023 financial year. In addition to life-saving food, the funds were spent on HIV medications, vaccines, literacy programs and jobs creation, as well as services for 1 million refugees hosted by Ethiopia.

Most of these programs have been stopped. The USAID staffers who oversee them have been placed on administrative leave and told not to work, as they face the threat of termination. The US Embassy didn't respond to questions.

Emergency food was exempted from President Donald Trump's executive order, signed on his first day in office, suspending foreign aid during a 90-day review amid the administration's allegations of waste.

Aid agencies in Ethiopia had to apply to USAID for waivers to continue handing out US grain. These have been

secured, but USAID's payments system is still not functioning.

As a result, a consortium of aid agencies in Tigray has had to stop distributions to the over 1 million people it has been responsible for feeding with US-provided grain. It has no money to pay for fuel, trucks and drivers to distribute existing food stockpiles.

That includes 5,000 metric tons of sorghum — enough to feed 300,000 people for a — stuck in a storage facility in Mekele that could rot before it reaches those in need.

"This is just one warehouse. There are several others across the region," said Teklewoini Assefa, head of the Relief Society of Tigray, part of the consortium. "This will create malnutrition, disease. If this situation continues, what follows? Death."

He added: "Everything boils down to the payment system."

The effects of the aid cuts are widespread, with many USAID contracts terminated. Already, Ethiopia has been forced to lay off 5,000 local healthcare workers who were working on its HIV response.

Tigray relied heavily on US funds. More than two years after the war killed hundreds of thousands, full-scale recovery efforts are yet to start. The region's health system is in ruins and hundreds of schools remain closed.

In 2024, child malnutrition stood at 21% in some areas, according to a survey reviewed by The Associated Press — far above the World Health Organization's threshold of 15% at which a situation is classified as an emergency. Now, aid workers say many programs to improve nutrition have halted. Projects to deliver medicines and vaccines have stopped. Dozens of camps for displaced people have had water sources cut off. "The impact has been

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huge," said Ashenafi Asmelash, executive director of Mhus for Mhus, which has had two USAID-funded programs terminated. One helped build long-term resilience among farmers. The other helped improve the nutrition of children and new mothers.

Management Sciences for Health, another Tigray organization, has halted a project to combat tuberculosis and told its staff to expect mass layoffs in March, according to a senior executive, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. Efforts to assist thousands of women who were raped during the war have been derailed, said Rigat Bishaw at Ayder Hospital, Tigray's biggest healthcare facility.

This includes counselling and physiotherapy sessions for survivors run by the US-based Center for Victims of Torture, which received a stop-work order from the Trump administration in February and furloughed its staff.

CVT also halted a program to train health workers to recognize sexual abuse cases and refer survivors to appropriate health services.

"This sudden disruption is having a huge impact on the healing of traumatized people," said Yohannes Fisseha, a CVT manager.

Lebanon names new army chief, top security officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beirut

Lebanon appointed a new army chief and heads of three security agencies on Thursday as the government seeks to firm up state authority, especially in the country's south, following the militant Hezbollah group's devastating war with Israel.

The appointments also come after Lebanese political faction in January overcame a crippling, two-year deadlock, electing a president, Joseph Aoun, a former army chief, and forming a new government under Prime Minister Nawaf Salam.

A US-brokered ceasefire went into effect in late November, halting nearly 14 months of fighting between Hezbollah and Israel. The militants began firing rockets

into Israel on Oct. 8, 2023, a day after a deadly Hamas-led incursion into southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza.

Israel responded with shelling and airstrikes in Lebanon, and the two sides became locked in an escalating conflict that became a full-blown war last September.

In announcing the new appointments, Aoun also said that five Lebanese nationals detained by Israeli troops during the fighting have been released following indirect negotiations.

Morgan Ortogus, deputy special envoy for Middle East in the Trump administration, told Lebanon's Al Jumei television on Tuesday that the five were a mix of soldiers and civilians. Ortogus said she was confident Lebanon and Israel would resolve outstanding territorial disputes.

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As a result, a consortium of aid agencies in Tigray has had to stop distributions to the over 1 million people it has been responsible for feeding with US-provided grain. It has no money to pay for fuel, trucks and drivers to distribute existing food stockpiles.

That includes 5,000 metric tons of sorghum — enough to feed 300,000 people for a — stuck in a storage facility in Mekele that could rot before it reaches those in need.

"This is just one warehouse. There are several others across the region," said Teklewoini Assefa, head of the Relief Society of Tigray, part of the consortium. "This will create malnutrition, disease. If this situation continues, what follows? Death."

He added: "Everything boils down to the payment system."

The effects of the aid cuts are widespread, with many USAID contracts terminated. Already, Ethiopia has been forced to lay off 5,000 local healthcare workers who were working on its HIV response.

Tigray relied heavily on US funds. More than two years after the war killed hundreds of thousands, full-scale recovery efforts are yet to start. The region's health system is in ruins and hundreds of schools remain closed.

In 2024, child malnutrition stood at 21% in some areas, according to a survey reviewed by The Associated Press — far above the World Health Organization's threshold of 15% at which a situation is classified as an emergency. Now, aid workers say many programs to improve nutrition have halted. Projects to deliver medicines and vaccines have stopped. Dozens of camps for displaced people have had water sources cut off. "The impact has been

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the Public at large that Sh. Kritivas Mukherjee S/o. Sh. Basudeo Mukherjee and Smt. Teja Arun Baidya W/o. Kritivas Mukherjee both are the joint "Title Holders" in possession of Entire Ground Floor of Freehold Built up Residential Property Bearing Plot No. L-1636, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi-110019 measuring 251.00 sq. yards, hereinafter referred to as "Schedule Property" vide Sale Deed dated 28th October, 2022 duly registered as Regn. No. 8814, Book No. 1, Vol. No. 16739, pp. 51-96 on 01.11.2022 in the Office of the Sub Registrar - V, Mehrauli, New Delhi. That original documents of the aforesaid title deed, i.e. (1) Lease Deed dated 01.11.1987, (2) Letter for Conversion dated 24.12.1999, (3) Conveyance Deed dated 24.12.1999, (4) Will (Registered) of Sh. Pralima Gupta dated 03.03.2000, (5) Death Certificate of Parsharan Ranjan Gupta dated 14.04.2000, (6) Collaboration Agreement dated 17.04.2014, (7) Will (Registered) of Smt. Pralima Gupta dated 30.05.2014, (8) Relinquishment Deed dated 30.05.2014, (9) Sanction for Construction Letter dated 25.08.2014, (10) Mutation Letter dated 03.09.2021 and (11) Special Power of Attorney dated 07.09.2021 w.r.t. the Schedule Plot (Plot No. L-1636, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi) have all been lost/misplaced and are untraceable as on date, in lieu of which Information Report dated 13.03.2025 bearing LR No. 2686639/2025 has been filed with Delhi Police. This notice is thus issued to the Public at large, i.e. any Person(s), Company(ies), Authority(ies), Society(ies), Organisation(s), Financial Institution(s), Bank(s), HUF(s) etc. having any knowledge, custody or possession of the above mentioned lost/misplaced/untraceable original documents or otherwise having any claims, rights, title, interests, possession etc. in the Schedule Property, by way of Ownership, Succession, Inheritance, Sale, Mortgage, Exchange, Charge, Lien, Gift, Trust, Encumbrance etc., may come forward with supporting documents to be delivered to the undersigned within 15 days from the date of this Publication, post expiration of which, any claim(s) or objection(s), if raised or received, shall be treated as null and void and unavailing.

For further details, please contact:-
Joni Kashyap, Advocate
Address: Chamber No. 6, Block-E, Karkardooma Court
New Delhi-110032. Contact No. +91 99119 25467

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE

| SR. NO. | NAME OF BOARD/CORP./AUTH. | NAME OF WORK/NOTICE TENDER | OPENING DATE/CLASING DATE (TIME) | AMOUNT / EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES | WEBSITE OF THE BOARD CORP./AUTH. | MODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL |
|---------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1 | GURU JAMBHESHWAR UNIVERSITY HISAR | LASER CLASS 4 (HIGH POWER LASER) | 15.03.2025 22.03.2025 | 6.10 LACS | http://www.gjust.ac.in | 01662-263169 physiotherapy@gjust.org |

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT : www.haryanaprocmgmt.gov.in or www.etenders.hry.nic.in RO 32817-1-27-7

verka
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THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022. EPABX NO. 0172-5041812,66

Notice Inviting Tender www.verka.coop

e tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

| Sr.No. | Name of Work/Item | Period/Tentative Qty |
|--------|--|--|
| 1. | For Verka Bathinda Dairy Manpower required for job contract i.e. for processing, manufacturing, packing of milk & milk products & panjiri and loading & unloading of milk, milk products, edible, non edible & packing material. | 01.05.2025 to 30.04.2026 |
| 2. | For Verka Gurdaspur Dairy a) Labour contract for different jobs in Prod. Engg., Mktg, Cleaning & Housekeeping of factory. b) Providing of security manpower as per required Verka Gurdaspur Dairy. | Annual |
| 3. | For Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy a) Hiring of vehicles for:- i. Road milk tanker for lifting of raw milk from various BMC/MCC to Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy. ii. Lifting of milk from various MPCs to concerned MCC/ Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy, (Mahindra Bolero, Pick-up/Max-pick-up, Tata 407/ Tata 207). b) Construction of hall for CIP system and allied civil works at Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy on labour rate. c) Construction/fabrication of new milk & milk product cold store as per technical specification laid down in tender document at Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy. d) Sale of unserviceable machineries & scrap items lying at Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy. e) Allotment of Milk Booths for :- i. Padrana Milk Bar ii. Balachaur Milk Bar iii. Civil Hospital, Garshankar iv. Civil Hospital, Dasuya v. Municipal Corporation Office, Hoshiarpur vi. Khera Kotli Park, Dasuya | 04 No's (Cap.09 to 15 MT) 20 No's (Cap.1.5 to 2 MT & above) |
| 4. | For Verka Jalandhar Dairy Disposal of unserviceable scrap material one time basis and annual rate contract. | As per site |
| 5. | For Verka Ludhiana Dairy Pest control service at Verka Ludhiana dairy and MCCs which include control of flies, mosquitoes, lizards, rodent etc. | Annual/ One job |
| 6. | For Cattle Feed Plant, Bhatiani (Khanna) i. Niacin ii. Red alae based buffer with prove buffering action in cattle feed. iii. Beta carotene iv. Calcium propionate v. Sodium borate vi. Zeolite vii. Biotin viii. Cobalt sulphate ix. By-pass fat | Annual for Ktn Qty in MTs Annual for GKB/Qty in MTs |
| 7. | For Cattle Feed Plant Ghaina-ke-Banger Wall/shop painting in the state of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu area. | 2,00,000 sqft |

NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

NA/12/28675/2023/42542 Dated CHD :- 3/13/2025 Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

VERY SHORT TENDER NOTICE
IIM Ranchi invites tender from eligible bidders for 'Supply and Installation of Aluminum Composite Panel and 3D Acrylic Letters at IIM Ranchi'. The last date for submission of the sealed bid is up to 03.00 PM on 20.03.2025. For More details, please refer to our website: www.iimranchi.ac.in.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Sangeeta, W/o Rinku Kumar Giri R/o Flat No 423, 4th Floor, Tower T8, Dream Homes, Wavacity, Ghaziabad have changed my name to Sangita Kumari for all Purposes.

PD(1666)A
I, Sanam Pudi Ramesh Babu S/o Sivasankaraiya, Permanent R/o 00, Sankaranagaram, Revuru, PO-Revuru, Sub District-Ananthasagaram, District-Nellore, AP-524303, Present R/o Qtr-129, Type-2, Sector-9, R K Puram, New Delhi-110022 have changed my name to Sanampudi Ramesh Babu.

PD(1675)C

कार्यालय नगर निगम, भोपाल
विद्युत शाखा
आई.एस.बी.टी. मोविन्डपुत्रा
निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना

दिनांक 07/03/2025

क्रमांक 124/वि.शा./2025
निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु दो लिफाफा पद्धति के अनुसार परसेन्डेज/आयटमरेंट मोहरबंद निविदायें निर्धारित प्रपत्र पर आनलाईन आमंत्रित की जाती हैं।

| क्र. | आन लाईन टेण्डर नं. | कार्य स्थल का नाम | अनुमानित राशि | धरोहर राशि | निविदा की कीमत | टेकेदार की श्रेणी | कार्य हेतु निर्धारित एस ओ अवधि | निविदा की अवधि | कार्य की अवधि |
|------|--------------------|---|---------------|------------|----------------|---|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. | 2025_UAD_407899_1 | Supply, installation, testing and commissioning of LED Street light/LED flood light 45 watt, 60 watt, 90 watt, 120 watt and 250 watt in all Vidhan Sabha area in Bhopal | 84591000/- | 425000/- | 20000/- | Original manufacturer or their authorized dealer who registered Electrical contractor in centralized registration system in MPPWD having valid electrical license | Non SOR item | 1 माह | 06 Months (including Rainy Season) |

नियम व शर्तें :-
निविदा प्रपत्र की निर्धारित राशि, धरोहर राशि एवं अन्य आवश्यक दस्तावेज आनलाईन प्रस्तुत करने होंगे। समस्त विस्तृत जानकारी www.mptenders.gov.in पर देखी जा सकती है। यदि किसी प्रकार का संशोधन होता है तो वह website पर प्रदर्शित होगा। वह पृथक से सामाचार पत्र में प्रकाशित नहीं किया जाएगा।

कार्यालय नगरी (वि.) नगर निगम भोपाल
नि.क्र. 1482/024/025

Office of the Superintending Engineer
1st Circle, Public Works Department, Almora
Phone/Fax: 05962-230295 Email: sepwdalm@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 1036(i)/Nivida-01/2024-25 Dated : 11/03/2025

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (E-Tendering)
E-TENDER NOTICE

The Superintending Engineer, 1st Circle, PWD Almora invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of Honourable Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other information will be available from dated 18/03/2025 & onwards on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

| Sl. No. | Name of Work | Cost of Tender Form | Earnest Money (Rupee in lakh) | Validity of Tender | Time of Completion | Contractor's Category of Registration for tendering |
|---------|---|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| 1 | Construction of Bageshwar-Amsarkot Motor Road to Nadigaon Motor road in district and Constituency Bageshwar Under State Sector. | Rs. 5000.00 + 18% GST | ₹ 14.86 Lakh | 120 Days | 15 Month (Including Rainy Season and Winter Season) | Class "A" & Higher in Road work in Central Govt./Any state Govt./Any Govt. Undertaking. |

PROVISION OF IOCL SIDING & ELECTRICAL WORKS

Tender Notice No. : Sr.DEE/LMG/40 of 2024-25, dtd. 10-03-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work; SN-1; Tender No.: EL/LM/24-25/49; Name of Work : At Sekerkote-Provision of IOCL siding. Tender Value: ₹ 2,40,36,774.56/-; Earnest Money: ₹ 2,70,200/-; SN-2; Tender No.: EL/LM/24-25/48; Name of Work : (i) At Guwahati & Kamakhya: Electrical works of segregation of essential load and (ii) Provision of 30%/70% lighting of Railway station. Tender Value: ₹ 2,65,17,503/-; Earnest Money: ₹ 2,82,600/-; Date & time of closing of above tenders at 11:00 hrs. and opening at 11:30 hrs. on 02-04-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 11:00 hrs. on 02-04-2025 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>.

Sr. DEE, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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India launches first exploration licence auction for minerals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Panaji

Union Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy on Thursday launched the nation's first-ever auction of Exploration Licences (ELs) for 13 exploration blocks for critical minerals.

Reddy launched the ELs in the presence of Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant in Dona Paula near here, a major reform aimed to unlock India's untapped critical and deep-seated mineral resources.

The licenses are for the exploration blocks for minerals like REE (rare earth elements), zinc, diamond, copper, PGE (platinum group minerals) and others.

The programme also featured a roadshow on the 5th Tranche of Critical Mineral Blocks and the launch of AI Hackathon 2025, a Mineral Exploration Hackathon focused on "Mineral Targeting

using AI" (Artificial Intelligence).

Addressing the gathering, Union minister Reddy said that in the last 10 years, India's mining sector has achieved many milestones and emerged as one of the fastest and most dynamic sectors of the country.

Today marks another milestone in the industry, he said.

"We are laying the foundation for new era in mineral exploration," he said adding that the era is faster, more technologically-driven and globally competitive.

"We have established ourselves as a serious player in the global mineral landscape, it has also opened flood gates of opportunities for the private sector," he said.

Reddy said even greater milestones will be achieved in the coming years and it will pave the way for the rise of India as a global leader.

"Today we are launching 13 blocks for

various critical and deep-seated minerals," the minister said.

The exploration possibilities have been contemplated from multiple states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Karnataka, he said.

The exploration access would be granted exclusively, which would empower private companies to explore up to 1,000 square metres per licence, Reddy said.

This new framework will encourage transparency, efficiency, innovation, ensuring that only the most promising areas remain for a detailed exploration, he said.

"In the first 10 years (of Narendra Modi government), we increased the exploration activities manifold. The biggest reform is the introduction of a transparent auction regime and the involvement of private sector," Reddy said.

The minister said India's legal frame-

work for mining exploration was limited until now.

"There was a crucial gap. There was no structural mechanism for the private companies. Recognising this, the Government of India introduced amendment to the MMDR Act in 2023. This is a reform that will open doors for a systematic exploration of minerals," he said.

Addressing the gathering, CM Sawant thanked the Union Mines Ministry for choosing Goa for the roadshow and the launch of the ELs. Sawant said mining has always been integral part of the economy, contributing significantly for employment, industrial growth and development.

"As we stand at the cusp of a new era of mineral exploration, this initiative reflects the government's firm commitment in self-reliance in critical minerals," he said.

"These minerals are an integral part of

our electronic industry, green industry and others," Sawant said, adding that a lot of countries are yet to explore for the mineral availabilities.

The chief minister said there is a need to increase the pace of exploration in the country. The amendment in the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Act is a bold step which will help to tap the untapped mineral wealth of the country, he said.

Goa will immensely benefit from such an initiative, the CM said.

As India moves for a green energy future, securing the supplies of critical minerals will play a key role, he said.

Referring to the Hackathon 2025, Sawant said that Goa, with its mining legacy, stands to benefit from such technology advancement.

Mines Secretary V L Kantha Rao said this is a big event for the Union Ministry

of Mines. "Today there are 4 to 5 important initiatives that are showcased here, including critical mineral auction. Some of the critical minerals which are 100 per cent imported currently are part of the auction," he said.

These blocks, once they are auctioned and mined, will ensure self-reliance for minerals in India, the official said. "This is a very important event in our journey towards Atmanirbharta," he added.

Kantha Rao said the way in foreign countries people go and do exploration on their own, the same concept is introduced here.

"A private company will do the exploration and if they find the deep-seated or critical mineral, then they will get an income for 50 years," he said.

"If nothing found in the exploration, 50 per cent of the risk is borne by the Government of India," he added.

Rupee surges 22 paise to settle at 87 against USD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The Rupee surged 27 paise to settle at 87 (provisional) against the USD on Thursday following robust macro-economic data and easing crude oil prices.

Besides, recent weakness in the US dollar index also supported the local currency, forex dealers said.

However, losses in domestic equities and unabated foreign capital outflows capped the sharp gain, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the Rupee opened at 87.13 and hit the intraday high of 86.94 against the greenback. The unit touched the day's low of 87.15 before ending the session at 87 (provisional), 22 paise higher from its previous closing level.

In the previous session on Wednesday, the rupee settled 1 paise lower at 87.22 against the US dollar.

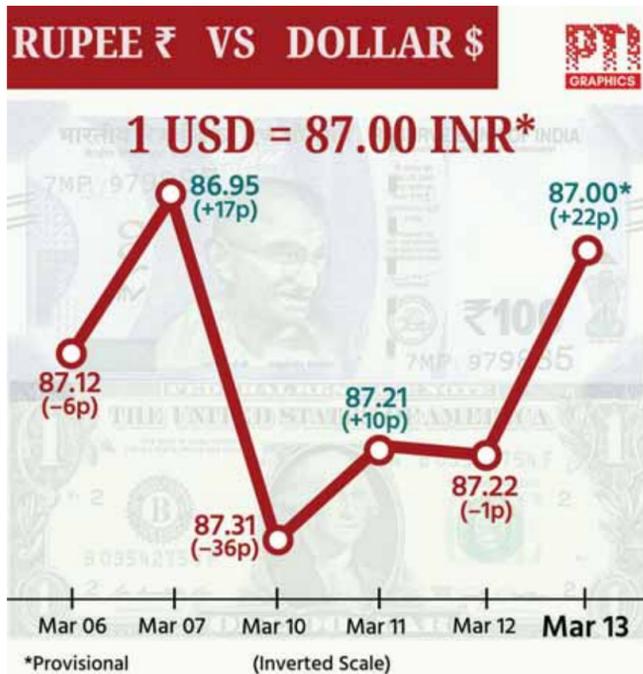
Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the Rupee recovered on upbeat macroeconomic data and a soft US dollar.

However, weak domestic markets capped sharp gains.

Choudhary further said that weak domestic markets, the ongoing trade tariff issue and Foreign Institutional Investment outflows may cap a sharp upside.

"Traders may take cues from PPI and weekly jobless claims data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹86.80 to ₹87.25."

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which



gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.12 per cent at 103.70.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 0.37 per cent lower at \$70.69 per barrel in futures trade.

SEBI expands unpublished price sensitive information's scope

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Markets regulator SEBI has widened the ambit of the scope of Unpublished Price Sensitive Information (UPSI) by including any proposed fundraising activities agreements which can impact the management or control of the company, restructuring plans, and one-time bank settlements.

The move is aimed at enhancing regulatory clarity, certainty and uniformity in compliance in the ecosystem.

To give this effect, SEBI, in a notification issued on March 11, amended insider trading regulations. The new rules would come into force from June 10.

In its notification, SEBI said that any proposed fundraising activity, upward or downward revisions in credit ratings, other than ESG ratings, and agreements affecting the management or control of the company would be considered as UPSI.

Further, developments relating to corporate insolvency processes, including the clearance of resolution plans, one-time settlements, or restructuring of loans and borrowings from banks or financial institutions would fall under the UPSI ambit.

SEBI said that fraud or defaults by the company, its promoter, director, key managerial personnel, or subsidiary or arrest of key managerial personnel, promoter or director of the company,

whether occurred within India or abroad would be classified as UPSI.

Any initiation of forensic audits or receipt of final forensic audit report; with regards to financial mis-statements, misappropriation, siphoning, or diversion of funds by the company would come under the scope of UPSI.

Any action initiated or orders passed within India or abroad, by regulatory, statutory, enforcement authority or judicial body against the company or its directors, key managerial personnel, promoter or subsidiaries would be categorised as UPSI.

In addition, flexibility has been provided to make entries in the structured digital database on a deferred basis, within two days, as well as to not have mandatory trading window closure.

"Entry of information, not emanating from within the organisation, in structured digital database may be done not later than 2 calendar days from the receipt of such information.

For unpublished price sensitive information not emanating from within the listed company, the trading window may not be closed," SEBI said.

With this amendment now events that are deemed to be UPSI have increased from the earlier five events to 16 events, Makarand M Joshi, Founder partner MMJC and Associates, a corporate compliance firm, said. This will lead to a decrease in litigations on whether a particular event is UPSI or not.

Sensex falls by 200 points on sell-off in realty

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Benchmark BSE Sensex reversed its early gains to close lower by 200 points on Thursday, marking its fifth straight session of losses due to selling in realty, IT and auto counters.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 200.85 points or 0.27 per cent to close at 73,828.91 with 22 of its constituents ending lower and eight with gains. The index opened higher and hit a high of 74,401.11 in the late morning session.

The index failed to hold onto gains due to persistent selling in select bluechips and shed 259.17 points or 0.35 per cent to hit a low of 73,770.59 later.

The NSE Nifty fell 73.30 points or 0.33 per cent to settle at 22,397.20. In the session, the benchmark declined by 93.15 points or 0.41 per cent to hit an intraday low of 22,377.35.

From the 30 Sensex companies, Zomato, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance, Maruti Suzuki India, Adani Ports, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv, UltraTech Cement and Infosys were among the laggards.

In contrast, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel, NTPC, Tata Consultancy Services, PowerGrid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Sun Pharmaceuticals were the gainers. "Shortened trading week and sell-off in the US short market are providing a hiccup to the global market. However, India is withstanding with resilience and healthy outperformance, by a narrow negative trend," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said, "On the weekly expiry day, markets remained range-bound and closed slightly lower. While positive global cues initially drove an uptick, selling pressure in heavyweight stocks across sectors pulled the Nifty into the red."

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul settled lower. European markets were trading higher in the mid-session deals. US markets closed on a positive note on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent Crude traded 0.34 per cent lower at USD 70.71 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) sold equities worth ₹1,627.61 Crore, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) purchased equities worth ₹1,510.35 Crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

South Africa to host first G20 trade and investment meeting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Johannesburg

South Africa will host the first G20 Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) meeting under its presidency from March 18 to March 20, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) announced here on Wednesday. South Africa officially assumed the presidency of the G20 in December 2024 for the year 2025 under the theme "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability".

The TIWG meeting, which will be held virtually, will bring together senior officials from G20 member countries as well as the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU).

The deputy director-general of trade at the DTIC, Ambassador Xolelwa Mlumbi-Peter, said this would be the first of the four proposed meetings of the TIWG, which will culminate in the G20 trade ministers' meeting to be hosted by South Africa in October.

Mlumbi-Peter said the first session will also be attended by international organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the United Nations Trade and Development (UNTAD), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD) and African regional communities. "We have identified four focus areas for the TIWG. The first is trade and inclusive growth, with an outcome being principles to promote trade and inclusive growth that aim to address common or shared challenges resulting from distributive effects of trade with adverse outcomes for economically-vulnerable regions, both within and between countries," she said.

"The second focus area will be looking at the responsive trade and investment agenda to address the challenge of global commons," Mlumbi-Peters added. She said other critical areas of focus are the G20 framework on green industrialisation and investments, with a view to promoting value addition of critical minerals close to the source as well as the development of low-carbon manufacturing value chains to support global decarbonisation and industrial adaptation. Inclusive economic growth, industrialisation, employment and reduced inequality are some of the high-level deliverables for South Africa during its year-long presidency of the bloc.

The G20 members include the world's major economies, representing 85 per cent of global GDP.

Temasek acquires stake in Haldiram's

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Temasek, Singapore's sovereign investment firm, is acquiring a minority 10 per cent stake in Haldiram Snacks Food - India's largest packed snack and sweets company and restaurant operator - at a valuation of USD 10 billion, according to industry sources.

It has signed a definitive term sheet agreement earlier this week at a valuation of USD 10 billion (around ₹85,000 Crore), which is considered to be the largest for the Indian packed food industry, they said.

The Agarwal family, promoters of Haldiram Snacks Food, may rope another investor for selling some more stake in the company which had a revenue of over ₹12,500 Crore in FY24.

The agreement with Temasek came after months of negotiations as several PE firms, including Blackstone, Alpha Wave Global and Bain Capital-led consortiums, were in the race to pick up a stake in Haldiram Snacks Food.

The Agarwal family may also opt for IPO (Initial public offering) route next year to capitalise on India's buoyant stock market.

Earlier, the promoters were intending



Temasek, Singapore's sovereign investment firm, is acquiring a minority 10 per cent stake in Haldiram Snacks Food: PTI

to divest a larger portion. However, they have decided to offload a minority stake only.

The National Company Law Tribunal has already approved the process of merger of the two fractions, while other regulatory approvals are awaited. Established in 1937 as a retail sweets and namkeen shop in Bikaner, Rajasthan by

Ganga Bhishen Agarwal, Haldiram products are now sold in over 80 countries.

In 2022, it was announced that the packaged snacks businesses of Delhi-based Haldiram Snacks and Nagpur-based Haldiram Foods International would be first demerged and then merged into an entity named Haldiram Snacks Food.

GenAI to drive productivity in Indian banking

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Mumbai

Generative AI (GenAI) is reshaping India's financial services landscape, driving significant advancements in customer engagement, operational efficiency, and risk assessment.

The EY report titled "How much productivity can Generative AI unlock in India?"

The Aldea of India: 2025", highlights that Generative AI is poised to improve productivity levels of Indian financial services by 34 percent to 38 percent by 2030 and up to 46 percent, specifically for banking operations.

The EY study reveals that 74 percent of financial firms have initiated proof-of-concept projects, and 11 percent have moved to production-level deployments. Investment in Generative Artificial Intelligence is also increasing, with 42 percent of organizations actively allocating budgets toward Artificial Intelligence initiatives.

They are rapidly adopting Generative AI across key areas such as voice bots, email automation, business intelligence, and workflow automation.

Customer service is the top priority,

with 68 percent of firms prioritizing it for Generative AI implementation, followed by operations (47 percent), underwriting (32 percent), sales (26 percent), and IT (21 percent).

These investments are already delivering measurable results: 63% have seen improved customer satisfaction levels, while 58 percent of firms report cost reductions.

Reflecting on the report findings, Pratik Shah, Partner and National Leader - Financial Services, EY India said, "The financial services industry has moved beyond innovation pilots to real-world implementation in 2024-25.

Firms are integrating Generative AI with core banking systems, including CRM, loan origination, card management platforms, among other areas.

These efforts have led to a significant reduction in operational costs, with Artificial Intelligence-driven solutions slashing the cost per unit of normal business activities to as low as 1/10th of traditional manual processes."

"As firms move from pilots to large-scale implementations, the focus must shift from isolated use cases to enterprise-wide integration.

The key to unlocking Generative AI's

full potential lies in building robust AI governance, ensuring data security, and aligning technology with core business objectives.

While NBFCs and mid-sized banks have demonstrated early success, large banks are now accelerating adoption.

The coming years will define how effectively financial institutions can balance innovation with regulatory compliance to drive sustainable growth, operational excellence, and superior customer experiences," he added.

The EY study, which analysed over 700 roles in the sector (more than 300 in banking and 400 in insurance) projects that Generative Artificial Intelligence will drive a 34 percent to 38 percent productivity improvement by 2030, paving the way for growth and operational transformation in the industry.

It is poised to significantly impact banking operations, customer service, and credit and collections.

As per EY's industry labor efficiency analysis, Artificial Intelligence-driven efficiencies are projected to contribute an additional 9 percent to labour productivity in financial services by 2030, raising overall productivity levels in the sector to 34per cent-38 per cent.

IN BRIEF

REC SIGNS ₹18,360 CRORE MOU WITH GOVERNMENT OF KERALA FOR PUMP STORAGE PROJECTS

GURUGRAM: REC Limited, a Maharatna CPSE under the Ministry of Power and a leading NBFC, has signed an MOU with the Energy Management Centre (EMC), Government of Kerala, for collaboration and financing of Pumped Storage Projects (PSP) in Kerala. The MOU was signed during the Global Green Hydrogen & Renewable Energy Summit 2025.



SRMIST RISES IN QS UNIVERSITY WORLD RANKINGS BY SUBJECT (2025)

Chennai: SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST) proudly announces its significant rise in the prestigious QS University World Rankings by Subject, further solidifying its position as a global leader in higher education.

QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS BY SUBJECT 2025

Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) has been named as one of the World's top Universities for study of 14 subjects in the latest edition of the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2025. For the first time, Data Science & Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been ranked under the top 100 subject in the World.

| Subject | World Rank | India Rank |
|--|------------|------------|
| Engineering & Technology | 143 | 9 |
| Computer Science & Information Systems | 112 | 4-7 |
| Data Science and Artificial Intelligence | 11-100 | 5-9 |
| Engineering - Electrical & Electronic | 101-200 | 2-10 |

MARCH READS



Book: Phantom Lovers
Author: Achala Moulik
Publisher: Niyogi books
Price: ₹595



Book: Guilt Trip and Other
Author: Lakshmi Kannan
Publisher: Niyogi books
Price: ₹395



Book: Quarterlife :
A Novel
Author: Devika Rege
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹599



Book: The Bandit Queens:
A Novel
Author: Parini Shroff
Publisher: Harper Collins
Price: ₹499

'Ratan Tata: A Life by Thomas Mathew,' offers a compelling tribute to India's legendary industrialist and philanthropist, says **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**

The Architect of India's Aspirations

The demise of an 87-year-old human being is neither shocking nor does it bring everlasting grief to the mind. If the deceased happens to be our father, mother, brother, or sister, we may be in a sense of bereavement for a couple of months. The general feeling among us is that each day that one gets after crossing the age of 60 is a bonus from Yama Raj. But there are certain persons for whom we pray to God Almighty to bless them with a much longer life. Ratan Tata, India's legendary industrialist topped the list of such people who made this world a much better place because of their presence.

The entire Indian society, barring a Malayalam satellite news channel, received the news of Ratan Tata's demise with a pang in their hearts. Born into a Zoroastrian family (popularly known as Parsees), Ratan Tata lived a life based exclusively on the essence of Zoroastrianism-Humata, Hukta, and Huvarsta (good thoughts, good words, and good deeds). For Ratan and the Tata Group, industry and business were means to serve humanity, either through philanthropy or social service. The catchphrase "We Also Make Steel" campaign launched by TISCO, the flagship company of the group, speaks volumes about the mission of this industrial conglomerate.

No doubt, the central government had honoured J.R.D. Tata and Ratan Tata with Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan, respectively. But it is still doubtful whether the powers that be gave these great sons of India the honour they truly deserved. J.R.D. Tata, predecessor to Ratan

Tata, did all he could to elevate the country economically and socially, despite the outdated socialist ideology that prevailed from 1947 to 1991. He had been pleading with the policymakers to loosen the government's shackles over the economy, which would have made India competitive in the global arena.

It is said that for every industry launched by them, the Tata Group set up institutions like schools, colleges, vocational training institutes, hospitals, and old-age homes.

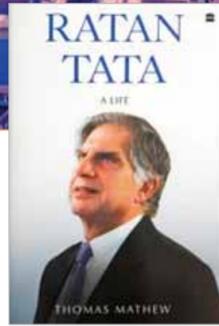
During the 1980s, I do remember watching J.R.D. Tata interviewing the then World Population Council chairman who visited India. It is rated as one of the best interviews in Indian television. Imagine the numero uno of our industry, who is held in awe by the world, appearing on Indian TV to interview a guest!

The second TV programme featuring J.R.D. Tata was also broadcast by Doordarshan-it was an interview by Rajiv Mehrotra in the famous series "In Conversation," a popular talk show. Interestingly, those were

the days when there were no satellite TV news channels and "angry young anchorpersons" who interrogated the interviewees instead of interviewing them.

There are exceptions, like "Rendezvous with Simi Garewal," in which the diva of Hindi cinema interviewed the crème de la crème of Indian society. They were all talk shows shot inside aesthetically designed studios and, hence, the series could not always capture the real person being interviewed. But with all due respect, it has to be said that Simi Garewal did a wonderful job. She successfully brought to our drawing rooms personalities like Ratan Tata (the first time I saw Ratan Tata appear on a TV show).

Ratan Tata: A Life authored by **Thomas Mathew**, a former IAS officer. I do not know whether there are any other books on Ratan Tata. The 666-page book is a moving tribute to Ratan, who was once described as the Most Eligible Bachelor of India. Ratan reached the zenith of Indian industries not just because he was born with the surname



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: Ratan Tata: A Life
Author: Thomas Mathew
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹1499/-



Ratan Tata receiving the Padma Vibhushan from the then President Pratibha Patil at the Civil Investiture-II Ceremony



Young Ratan Tata shares a heartfelt moment with his beloved dog, showcasing his lifelong bond with animals

CAG ex-DG diagnosis malaise with Top Auditor

BY DEEPAK KUMAR JHA

Auditors most often cite the statement of B. R. Ambedkar that the **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)** of India is the most important official. Over the decades, the CAG emerged as India's highly respected institution. The people also look upon the CAG to keep a check on the executive by preparing no-holds-barred reports. **P. Sesh Kumar** spent decades in the office of the CAG. Hailing from the Indian Audit and Accounts Service (IAAS), **Kumar** gained a ringside view of the functioning of the CAG. He, thus, has expectations on him to reveal if the CAG is facing new challenges.

The CAG made a comeback to the popular discourse over tabling of reports in the Delhi Assembly. Else, the CAG had almost faded from the popular discourse in the recent years. **Kumar** examines sharp reduction in number of reports of the CAG since 2011. He notes that the CAG reports peaked in 2015 when a total of 52 reports were submitted on Union government. Afterwards, reports turned to trickle, coming down to just 15 in 2018. **Kumar** after retirement has come out with an inside account of the functioning of the CAG. His book 'CAG Ensuring Accountability Amidst Controversies: An Inside View' deals with several turning points in the journey of the top auditor of India. The book also dwells upon the tenure of Vinod Rai and takes a critical view of the famous "presumptive losses to the exchequer" shown in the reports during the last few years of the Manmohan Singh-led UPA government. **Kumar** indeed also cites the gains made by the government with the course corrections in policy making after the CAG reports were made public.

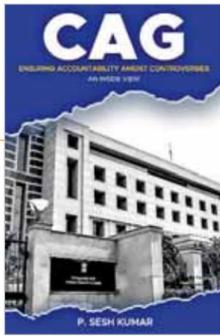
In 17 chapters, **Kumar's** book gives an exhaustive account of the history, current controversies, challenges, and also a reform roadmap. The book critically examines the tenures of Rajiv Mehrotra and GC Murmu as CAG. The author also brings out concerns in the IAAS cadre over the manner in which some of the CAG reports were handled. He details unhappiness in the cadre of auditors over the manner in which the report on the collections of tolls on national highways were handled by the CAG. **Kumar** stresses that the CAG report on the collections of tolls on national highways listed timely reform roadmap also for policy actions by the government.

But the people are genuinely concerned over the CAG not going public with its reports. **Kumar** answers the people's curiosity by examining in details the Supreme Court judgment that termed the CAG reports as "mere views" until they are tabled by Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of parliament or Assemblies. This explains why the CAG is not going public with reports after submitting them to parliament or Assemblies.

Taking a ringside view, the book argues that the CAG is not mandated to be a property of the PAC that its reports can wait endlessly to go public. The CAG is accountable to the people, and, therefore, the top auditor should move to the Supreme Court to review the judgment. **Kumar** details that almost half the reports of the CAG are awaiting action on the parts of the PAC of parliament and Assemblies for the people to know about them. If the CAG reports are not made public, the Constitution's arrangements of checks and balances for the healthy functioning of democracy too gets affected, suggests the book. It argues that the people need to know about the CAG reports to make informed decisions.

Besides, **Kumar** also raises a pertinent question on the appointment of the CAG. A single member CAG may be susceptible to personal biases, he argues, while suggesting that a multi-member top auditor body should be constituted. **Kumar** calls for Constitutional changes so that an appointment committee on the lines of the Election Commission and the Director of the CBI can also decide the members of the CAG. **Kumar** revisits some of the major controversies over the CAG reports. The CAG report on Bofors Scam in 1989 sets the backdrop for the political slugfest in the PAC in not recommending actions on the report to parliament. The book also exhaustively dwells upon the CAG reports on 2G spectrum allocations, Coal blocks, Rafale deal, and many others.

Kumar's book, published by White Falcon Publishing, is a complete account of the functioning of the CAG, while also seeking space as a historical document. Until 1978, CAG was appointed from among IAS and IAAS, writes **Kumar** in the book, while making a case for reopening the post for non-IAS officials also. The book makes for an interesting read while also being an important document on the functioning of the CAG.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: CAG
Author: P. SESH KUMAR
Publisher: White Falcon Publishing
Price: ₹799/-

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA SHAPES CONVERSATIONS

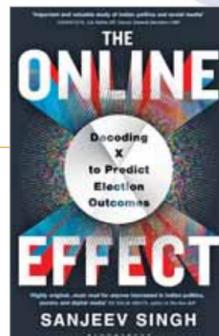
The New Ballot Box?

BY SHALEEN KUMAR SINGH

In **The Online Effect**, **Sanjeev Singh**, a seasoned journalist and academic, delves into the intricate relationship between social media and political communication in India, offering a compelling narrative that is both scholarly and accessible. With a sharp analytical focus on X (Formerly Twitter) influence on electoral outcomes, Singh presents the fascinating story of the Singh-Srivastava Vote Predictor (SSVP) model, a groundbreaking tool he co-developed with data scientist Rishabh Srivastava. The preface sets the stage with a personal anecdote, recounting **Singh's** early encounters with X and its transformative potential. The book meticulously examines how X evolved from a microblogging site into a critical tool for political communication.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to the development of the SSVP model, a pioneering effort to correlate X engagement metrics—such as tweets, retweets, likes, and interactions—with electoral outcomes. **Sanjeev Singh** provides a detailed account of the challenges involved, from navigating the complexities of data collection via X APIs to employing advanced statistical analyses and rigorous testing to validate the model.

The study's findings are striking—in six out of seven states analysed, there was a strong correlation between X engagement and vote share. He emphasises the shrinking digital divide between rural and urban India, highlighting the model's relevance across diverse demographics. He also critiques traditional sentiment analysis methods, advocating for a



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: The Online Effect
Author: Sanjeev Singh
Publisher: Bloomsbury India (2024)
Price: ₹479/-

more nuanced approach to studying political communication in the digital age.

Despite the technical nature of the subject, **Sanjeev Singh's** engaging and conversational tone makes complex concepts accessible to both academics and general readers. The book is enriched with empirical data, case studies, and real-world examples, offering a comprehensive exploration of X impact on Indian politics. By weaving together insights from journalism, political science, and data analytics, he provides a holistic understanding of the digital transformation in electoral campaigns. As India approaches

its next general election, the book serves as a practical guide for psephologists, political strategists, and voters alike, offering tools to navigate the evolving landscape of digital political communication. The book also prompts deeper reflection on the ethical implications of using social media data for electoral predictions. While author briefly touches on the limitations of sentiment analysis, he does not fully address pressing concerns about data privacy, misinformation, and algorithmic biases.

The Online Effect is a thought-provoking and timely exploration of how X has transformed Indian politics. By demystifying the SSVP model, the author offers valuable insights into the intersection of technology, communication, and democracy. The book is an essential read for scholars, journalists, and anyone interested in the digital future of electoral politics.

Shaleen Kumar Singh teaches English at Swami Shukdevanand College, Shahjahanpur, India, edits creativesaplings.in an online journal.

I am comfortable in top order, feels natural to me: KL Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

KL Rahul has been performing consistently irrespective of his position in the batting order but given a choice, the stylish keeper-batter would be "most comfortable" occupying one of the top-order slots. Rahul, who usually bat No 5, was pushed down a position lower in the Champions Trophy, and made 174 runs in five innings in Dubai. Rahul's success was a reflection of his preparedness for this new challenge and dedication to keep working on his game. "I have grown up playing in the top order. From my first competitive match in Mangalore at the age of 11 to my early days playing for India, and for most of my career, I have been in a top-order batter. It is the position I am most comfortable in and the one that feels most natural to me," Rahul said. "That said, when you play a team sport, you don't always get to choose what you want. You have to be flexible and willing to adapt to the team's needs. Over the years, I've learned to embrace that and give

my best in whichever role I'm assigned," he added during an interaction with JioHotstar. Rahul, who has led Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants in the past, has reportedly turned down an opportunity to captain his new franchise Delhi Capitals in the upcoming IPL. Speaking about the IPL auction, he said it can significantly impact a player's future in the game. "Having been a captain for the last three seasons, I have been actively involved in the process of building a team. I understand the kind of pressure franchises face when assembling a squad. "But from a player's perspective, it's even tougher because your career is at stake. The auction can shape a player's future or present unexpected challenges. "I was definitely nervous, even a little anxious (during the last auction). But at the same time, I knew this was the right step for my career. There was excitement too, though it didn't last very long because reality sets in quickly." If not Rahul then spin-bowling all-rounder Axar Patel is the favourite to lead



DC this season. After a forgettable season at LSG last year, Rahul is looking for a fresh start at the Capitals. "I'm really happy to be joining Delhi Capitals. Parth Jindal, the team's owner, is a close friend, and we have spent a lot of time outside of cricket discussing various things. "I know how passionate he is about the sport, and I'm thrilled to be a part of this team. We have a strong squad, and I'm looking forward to the season ahead. This will be a new experience for me joining a new franchise, possibly my fourth or fifth team in the IPL. I feel both excited and a little nervous. "Every time you step into a new team environment, a lot of thoughts cross your mind - how the players will be, how the owners run the team, how the fans will respond all of that. So, it's a mix of emotions," he added. DC have never won the IPL, but Rahul is optimistic of putting up a good show with a "solid team." "Looking at the squad and how the management has built the team, it looks like a well-balanced side with most areas covered. There's a great combination of experienced players and young talent, and I'm excited to play alongside some incredibly skilled youngsters and learn from them as well. "With players like Mitchell Starc, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, many of whom I have played with before, we have a solid squad. I can't wait for the IPL to begin." Rahul, who has maintained an impressive average in recent times, remained not out on a fluent 34 in the final of the Champions Trophy against New Zealand on Sunday, also reflected on his journey in international cricket. "The journey has been filled with challenges there have been highs and lows, and I have experienced everything an athlete possibly can. But looking back, it has been a beautiful ride, and I wouldn't want it any other way. "Now, I am excited for the next 10 years of my career. I want to build on everything I have learned in my first decade, apply that experience, and continue evolving. My focus is on improving every day, growing as a player, and winning more matches for my team," he added.

Sport ministry updates draft NCAAFS, invites suggestions from general public

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Uniform penalties, amnesty scheme, and a whistle-blower mechanism are some of the key features of the Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) which was released for public consultation by the Sports Ministry on Thursday. The Draft NCAAFS 2025, which is a significant update to the existing framework, invites suggestions and comments from the general public till March 31. "The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has put in the public domain the Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) 2025 for inviting comments/suggestions from the general public and stakeholders, as part of the consultation process," the ministry said in a statement. This addresses age fraud comprehensively, aiming to protect genuine athletes and uphold the integrity of sports competitions nationwide. "This revision has been undertaken almost after 15 years marking a significant update to the existing framework to ensure fair competition, ethical governance, and enhanced accountability in Indian sports." The Draft Bill has 10 salient features, including Mandatory Age Verification & Digital Locking, Medical

Examination for Age Discrepancies, Two-Tier Appellate Mechanism, Dedicated National Database and QR-Enabled ID Cards. According to Draft NCAAFS, "Athletes found guilty on the first violation will face a two-year ban from all competitions, along with forfeiture of any titles or medals won. "A second violation will result in a lifetime ban and initiation of legal proceedings under the penal code. Coaches and other officials found guilty will also face suspension and debarment from their roles," the statement said. As part of the amnesty scheme, a one-time amnesty window of six months will be provided, "allowing athletes to voluntarily declare their correct age without penalties." "Athletes who participate in this amnesty program will undergo a performance review and subsequently be reassigned to the appropriate age group," the ministry said. There will also be a Whistle-blower Mechanism where "a secure and confidential platform will be created for stakeholders to report cases of age fraud anonymously. Additionally, a reward system will be implemented to encourage and incentivise whistle-blowers to come forward with genuine reports." There will also be a Two-tier Appellate Mechanism to "handle disputes related to

age determination" and a "centralised digital portal linked with the National Sports Repository System (NSRS) will be established to securely store all age verification data of athletes." The draft also says "athletes will receive ID cards embedded with QR codes" after verification. "These ID cards will be made accessible digitally through the DigiLocker platform and must be presented mandatorily for participation in all sporting events," the statement said. "A robust monitoring framework will be established to ensure effective implementation of the Code." As per the draft Bill, "all athletes must submit three mandatory documents during the registration process. Upon verification, the athlete's age will be securely recorded in a centralised digital database, permanently locking their verified age to prevent any future manipulations." Also for cases involving age discrepancies, "medical examinations will utilise the TW3 method, MRI scans, and general physical and dental examination. "Further, AI-based bone assessments to accurately determine an athlete's age will be done in pilot phase. Any disputes arising from these examinations may be appealed through designated appellate medical panel for further review."

DC ready for WPL final, says Rodrigues

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi Capitals vice-captain Jemimah Rodrigues emphasised that the long gap between the last league match and the Women's Premier League final has revitalised the team, and said it will work to her side's "advantage" in the title clash. The Capitals have qualified for their third straight WPL final after Mumbai Indians were defeated by Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the last league match at Mumbai on March 11. The Capitals had finished their league engagements on March 7 with a defeat against Gujarat Giants. Hence, they had to wait until the match between RCB and MI to decide the group leaders. "It's (the gap) actually working for our team. We've had a lot of team bonding sessions and at the same time, this WPL was a bit hectic for us. We did play back-to-back games, we traveled and we played too," Rodrigues said in a virtual press meet on Thursday. Rodrigues said the DC have had good training sessions in the last six days, and that will stand her team in good stead. "I think getting this break is, honestly, how I look at it and I think how the team is looking at it, that it's working to our advantage," she said. The Capitals will meet the winner of the Eliminator between Mumbai and Gujarat Giants in the title clash on March 15. "So I think sometimes it's nice

to have this break and yes, you know, we're ready for the finals. They are looking forward to it. We're prepared well. You know, like the other two years, this year has not been like the smoothest sailing for us. "But like I said in one of the interviews that this team just doesn't know how to give up and we're going to come back stronger this year," she noted. However, the WPL draw meant that the Capitals advanced to the final without having played a single league match at the Brabourne Stadium. Rodrigues did not read too much into that. "The thing is that everyone in our team has played on these pitches (in Mumbai). Everyone's pretty familiar with the conditions and the pitches. "And like I said, we've been having good practice sessions on these off days, which is preparing us well enough to adjust to the conditions. "The Mumbai pitch is a batter's dream. The outfield's fast. So yeah, I mean, we are really looking forward to it and so are our bowlers. They've come up with their plans," she said. Rodrigues said the experience of skipper Meg Lanning will help DC in landing their maiden WPL title after defeats in the last two editions. "I think Meg is someone who wants to win, who wants to win every game. The thing I love about Meg, and this is something that I would like to add in myself also. She's calm but aggressive at the same time. And I think as a leader,

that's a very, very crucial quality to have. "She told me last year that as a captain, it's very important that I set the tone for the team. If I stay calm and because everyone's looking up to me and if I am calm, I know the team is calm." Shafali Verma made a bright return to her run-making ways after a slew of disappointing moments last year, where she was also dropped from the Indian team. Rodrigues patted the opener for keeping her composure during tough times. "Shafali is such an inspiration in the way she's come back. The kind of strike-rate and the kind of impact she's been having for the team. I think it just shows her character," she said. Shafali has made 300 runs from eight WPL 2025 matches with four fifties and made those runs at a strike-rate of 157. "But to be dropped and to come back the way she did, I think hats off to her. I can't wait to see her. I'm sure she'll be back soon in the Indian team too," said Rodrigues. Veteran pacer Shikha Pandey has also contributed heavily to DC's win, taking 11 wickets from eight matches at an acceptable economy rate of 7.01. In fact, she is currently holding the fifth place in the wicket-taker's list, and Rodrigues lauded Pandey for continuing to churn out impressive performances. "She's always bowled those crucial overs, always nailed her yorkers, always been so crucial in DC winning. She wants the tougher overs.



Toto Wolff denies rumours of signing Verstappen for 2026

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Melbourne

Mercedes team principal and chief executive Toto Wolff has denied rumours on the eve of the Australian Grand Prix weekend that he's still seeking to sign reigning F1 world champion Max Verstappen for 2026. Mercedes, which has a new driver line-up this year that sees rookie prospect Andrea Kimi Antonelli join George Russell, is hoping to emerge from its recent lean spell in F1 that has seen it score just five wins from the last three seasons, four of which came in 2024. But while Verstappen was reportedly on Mercedes' shopping list last year as a top-gun replacement for its then-outgoing star Lewis Hamilton, Silver Arrows' team boss Wolff says extending Russell's contract beyond 2025 is the priority. "I think we've said it pretty clearly last year, and (Verstappen) said the same, we need to concentrate on our driver line-up, we need to do (the best with) that we have," Wolff said Thursday in Melbourne. "I don't flirt outside if I'm in a good relationship, and that is true for this year, too. So, at the moment that is not on any, let's say, radar and I don't plan to shift my concentration away from these guys and make sure that George has a contract (extension) pretty soon and we agree on the final things."

Plenty of decisions to come Wolff's future driver lineup came into focus this week after McLaren extended its deal with Australian Oscar Piastri, which puts him out of reach during the sport's next big expected grid shuffle in 2027. "We have had a chat (with Russell) a few weeks ago about what the right timing would be to liaise, and I'm naively or not someone that sticks to what he says," Wolff said. "These three (including reserve driver Valtteri Bottas) are the combination that I want to go forward with Mercedes, and I have no reasons to doubt that. We're going to find some time, I guess, before the summer." Russell, a long-time Mercedes protégé who joined the works team in 2022 fresh from three years at Williams, is keen to stay in silver. "We've had such a long-term relationship, and there's so much trust," Russell said. "We are focused on getting Mercedes back on top and trying to win races, and championships, and to be honest in this sport, the performance speaks." Hamilton: "most exciting period of my life" Hamilton made it clear in Melbourne that he's moved on, following his record-breaking stint with Mercedes, with the seven-time F1 world champion enjoying life at Ferrari as he prepares for his maiden start with the Scuderia.

Satwik-Chirag pair enters All England second round

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Birmingham

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the second round of the men's doubles competition at the All England Championships, registering a straight-game victory over Denmark's Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard. Returning to the court after his father's loss last month, Satwik, along with his doubles partner Chirag, put on an impressive display, securing a 21-17, 21-15 win in just 40 minutes late Wednesday. Moments after sealing the victory, Satwik raised his finger to the sky, his gaze fixed skyward perhaps reaching out to his father, searching for him in the beyond. "It's tough, but that's how life is," said Satwik. "It wasn't expected." The 24-year-old from Amalapuram expressed his gratitude to his partner for

During hard times he (Shetty) came to my home town, we practised there a bit, and for that I'm thankful. He was there during my injury

— SATWIKSAIRAJ RANKIREDDY, PLAYER

being there during this challenging time. "During hard times he (Shetty) came to my home town, we practised there a bit, and for that I'm thankful. He was there during my injury; his parents came down and sssour coach also came down to my home town. "My father always wanted to bring them there." Reflecting on the sudden turn of events in the past fortnight, Chirag said: "Credit to Satwik, what he's gone through and how he's come back and decided to play here, nobody could do that. "Kudos to him, he's a strong-willed person to come out of it, and keep it all

aside, because that's what his dad would've wanted him to do. I'm proud to be his partner." The duo, seeded 7th, will next take on China's Hao Nan Xie and Wei Han Zeng in the round of 16 on Thursday. In other matches involving Indian players, Lakshya Sen will face Indonesia's Jonatan Christie, while Malvika Bansod takes on Japan's third seed Akane Yamaguchi, a two-time World Champion. Malvika had earlier stunned Singapore's Yeo Jia Min in her debut match at the prestigious tournament. World No. 9 Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who reached back-to-back semifinals at this event, will meet the eighth-seeded Korean pair of Hye Jeong Kim and Hee Yong Kong. Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde will square off against the fifth-seeded Chinese duo of Yan Zhe Feng and Ya Xin Wei.

Special Olympics Games: India win five medals on Day 2

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India secured two gold, two silver, and one bronze medal across two sporting disciplines to extend their medal tally to nine on the second day of the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Turin, Italy. Snowboarding, which brought India four medals on the opening day of the tournament, added two more accolades to the tally. Bharti (division F25) clinched a gold medal in the Novice Slalom Final, while Harshita Thakur (division F26) secured a bronze in the same event. This marked Bharti's second gold medal in the tournament, while Harshita had previously won a silver on the inaugural day. The Indian contingent also made its mark in Alpine Skiing, securing one gold and two silver medals in the discipline.

Real Madrid thrashes Atletico Madrid in Champions League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Real Madrid beat Atletico Madrid in a Champions League penalty shootout again to keep its title defense alive Wednesday and advance to the quarterfinals. Defender Antonio Rüdiger scored the decisive spot-kick in a 4-2 shootout win after two Atletico players missed. Marco Llorente's shot struck the bar after Julián Álvarez's score despite slipping was disallowed on video review because he touched the ball twice. Madrid also beat Atletico in a shootout to win the 2016 final part of a streak of eliminating its city rival in the knockout rounds for four straight years. That hard-luck run started with the 2014 final when Atletico gave up an equalising goal in stoppage time. Madrid moves on to the quarterfinals to face Arsenal, which also advanced Wednesday along with Aston Villa and Borussia Dortmund. The quarterfinals lineup was completed with Madrid's win in a tense derby that had ended 2-2 on aggregate score. Atletico led 1-0 after 90 minutes and extra time in a typically tenacious performance at its Metropolitan Stadium to cancel out Madrid's 2-1 advantage from the first leg last week. "When you get knocked out, it is not easy to digest." Atletico coach Diego Simeone said, "but I go out with a feeling of peace." Two key incidents defined reg-



ulation time. Atletico Madrid scored within 30 seconds and Real Madrid missed a penalty in the 70th minute. Atletico took the lead with its first attack when England midfielder Conor Gallagher pounced on the ball from close range when a cross by Rodrigo De Paul was deflected into the goalmouth. Madrid star Vinicius Júnior blazed a penalty kick high over the Atletico goal when he could have sent the 15-time champion through. He was substituted in extra time for his teenage fellow Brazilian, Endrick. Kylian Mbappé and Jude Bellingham stepped up to score Madrid's first two spot-kicks, and Fede Valverde also scored before Lucas Vazquez's kick was saved by Jan Oblak.

It was more relaxed in London, where Arsenal rested some regulars in a 2-2 draw with PSV Eindhoven to run up a 9-3 aggregate score. Aston Villa also had a stress-free evening at home to ensure England has two teams in the quarterfinals, one night after Premier League leader Liverpool was beaten at Anfield by Paris Saint-Germain in a shootout. Villa won 3-0 against Club Brugge, which played with 10 men from the 17th, after a 3-1 win in Belgium last week. Brugge defender Kyriani Sabbe was sent off for pulling back Marcus Rashford when running clear on goal. Substitute Marco Asensio, on loan at Villa from PSG, scored twice in the second half to ensure his temporary club will

meet his parent club next. Borussia Dortmund rallied with two second-half goals to win 2-1 at Lille and advance 3-2 on aggregate. The beaten finalist last season now faces Barcelona. **Quarterfinals draw** The quarterfinals pairings are: Arsenal vs Real Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain vs. Aston Villa, Barcelona vs. Borussia Dortmund, Bayern Munich vs. Inter Milan. First-leg games are on April 8-9 and return games are one week later. **England's unexpected challenge** There's only one former European champion from England left in the Champions League. Villa's unbeaten home record has driven its run to the quarter-final, with wins against Bayern, Bologna, Celtic and now Brugge. Liverpool's exit to PSG followed Manchester City being pushed out of the knockout playoffs last month by Real Madrid. Without the Champions League winners in 2019 and 2023, respectively, England's challenge halved to just two. Villa's 1982 European Cup title is perhaps a less-remembered one in the competition's 70-year history. Arsenal's only time in the final was a loss to Barcelona in 2006. Villa manager Unai Emery now goes back to Paris where his two seasons as coach there until 2018 seemed to be unsatisfactory for both parties.