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MONEY 10
NEW MODEL BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY TAILORED FOR GLOBAL INVESTMENT TRENDS: CEA

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INDIA DEFEATS AUSTRALIA



PTI ■ DUBAI

Virat Kohli did not finish the chase for once but his measured 84-run knock steered India into their fifth Champions Trophy final with a clinical four-wicket win over an under-strength and profligate Australia in the first last-four clash here on Wednesday.

The Indian triumph ensures that the final of the eight-team competition will now be held here instead of Lahore, the original host of the marquee clash, as Rohit Sharma's men will not travel there owing to security concerns.

Player of the match Kohli (84) was the fulcrum of Indian batting as they scaled down 265 in 48.1 overs after Steve Smith (73) and Alex Carey (61) led the Aussies to 264.

Now, India will await the winner of the second semi-final between South Africa and New Zealand at Lahore on Wednesday.

Kohli had wonderful support from Shreyas Iyer (45) with whom he realised 91 runs for the third wicket, and steadied the ship after the early departures of skipper Rohit Sharma (28) and Shubman Gill (9).

Australia were weakened by

the absence of some of their premier stars, but India had not beaten them in the knockouts of an ICC tournament since the quarterfinal of the 2011 World Cup. However, Kohli was determined to correct that anomaly. The pitch used for the semifinal was fresh but much smoother than the ones on which the previous matches were played.

Kohli does not need a second invitation to exploit such conditions and a near-perfect control helped him keep pace with the asking rate.

Kohli's struggle point in an ODI innings is his inability to

force the pace against spinners, but here the champion batter negated leg-spinner Adam Zampa, who had his number on a few occasions in the past, quite effectively.

The 36-year-old used the pull and drives, two of his most productive shots, to optimum effect. He placed him in the wide arc between sweeper cover and mid-wicket for easy, risk-free runs.

He lost the company of both Iyer, who played some delectable shots, and Axar Patel (27) in rather quick succession but Kohli went past his 50 in 53 balls.

Continued on page 2

HC stays order directing FIR against Buch, five others

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday stayed for four weeks a special court's order directing FIR against former Sebi chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch and five other officials for alleged stock market fraud and regulatory violations, noting it was passed mechanically.

A single bench of Justice Shivkumar Dige said the special court order of March 1 also did not attribute any specific role to the accused in the matter.

"After hearing all the parties concerned and after going through the order of the special court, it appears that the order is passed mechanically without going into details and without attributing any specific role to the applicants (Buch and others)," Justice Dige said.

"Hence, the order is stayed till next date. Four weeks time is given to the complainant in the case (Sapan Shrivastava) to file his affidavit in reply to the petitions," the court said.

The HC's judgement came on petitions filed by Buch, three current whole-time Sebi directors Ashwani Bhatia, Ananth Narayan G and Kamlesh Chandra Varshney, Bombay Stock Exchange's Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Sundararaman Ramamurthy and its former chairman and public interest director Pramod Agarwal.

Continued on page 2

CBI nabs several rail officials in job racket

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a massive crackdown, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Tuesday said it has arrested 26 railway officials including a senior divisional electrical engineer of East Central Railway for allegedly leaking papers of a departmental examination and seized ₹1.17 crore cash during its raids.

The railway officials were arrested on Monday night for allegedly leaking papers of examination for the elevation to posts of chief loco pilot at Mughal Sarai, the agency said, adding the exam was to be conducted on Tuesday.

Sources in the agency said that the examination has now been cancelled.

The arrest has come just a fortnight after the central probe agency had arrested five railway officers, including two of the Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS) posted at the Vadodara Division, for alleged bribery in favouring candidates in departmental examination, officials said.

"During the checks conducted by CBI, at three spots on the intervening night (March 3-4) at Mughal Sarai, a total of 17 candidates were found with photocopies of hand-written question papers," a CBI spokesperson said.

All 17 departmental candidates who are presently working as loco pilots had allegedly paid money for the question paper and were caught red-handed with the copies during the raid, he



said. "Overall, 26 railway officials (including the 17 aspirants) have been arrested in this case so far," the spokesperson said in a statement.

The agency has registered the FIR against a senior divisional electrical engineer (operations) who was given the responsibility for setting and preparing the question paper for the said examination. "He himself had written the questions in English and allegedly gave it to one loco pilot who in turn translated it into Hindi and further gave it to another official. The said official allegedly gave it to the candidates through few other railway employees," the spokesperson said.

Accused senior divisional electrical engineer (operations) is among the arrested officials, he said.

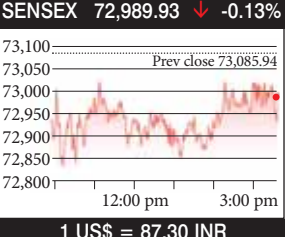
"Searches were conducted at eight locations which resulted in recovery of ₹1.17 crore in cash. The amount was reportedly collected from the candidates for leaking the question papers.

"The hand-written question papers along with their photocopies were seized. These question papers have been tallied with the original question paper and were found to have matched," the spokesperson said.

On February 19, 2025, CBI arrested 2008-batch IRPS officer Sunil Bishnoi posted as a senior divisional personnel officer in Vadodara, 2018-batch IRPS officer Ankush Wasan, posted as divisional personnel officer there, Deputy Chief Commercial Manager Sanjay Kumar Tiwari posted at Mumbai's Churchgate, Deputy Station Superintendent Neeraj Sinha and Nursing Superintendent Dinesh Kumar posted at Divisional Railway Hospital in Ahmedabad, officials said. The agency has also arrested Mukesh Meena in the case, they said.

The federal probe agency seized 650 grams of gold and ₹5 lakh cash during its searches at 11 locations, including in Gujarat's Vadodara, a CBI spokesperson said.

MARKETS



WEATHER

AQI 148
MAX 31.1°C(+3.7)
MIN 15.6°C(-2.2)

No Manusmriti-Baburnama in DU

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid row over inclusion of 'Manusmriti' and 'Baburnama' in History syllabus, Delhi University's vice chancellor Professor Yogesh Singh on Tuesday clarified that there is no plan to introduce Manusmriti or Baburnama in any course or study material at the university. He stated that such subjects are neither under consideration nor will they be included in the future.

"Baburnama is the autobiography of a tyrant. It has no relevance in the present time, and there is no need to teach it," Professor Singh said. He emphasised

that under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, DU is focusing on introducing new courses aligned with Indian traditions that will benefit the country and society. "We are working towards Viksit Bharat and designing study material that contributes to the vision of making India a developed nation by 2047," he added.

This decision to incorporate Manusmriti and Tuzuk-i-Baburi (Baburnama), the memoirs of Mughal emperor Babur, in the syllabus has already been approved by the history department's Joint Committee of Courses. However, it has yet to be cleared by DU's Academic

Council and Executive Council, which are expected to discuss it in the coming weeks.

This is not the first time Manusmriti has faced opposition at DU. A similar issue took place in July 2024 when Delhi University had found itself in trouble after the Faculty of Law suggested teaching the ancient Hindu legal text Manusmriti to the LLB students. The Faculty of Law had submitted a proposal to include the Hindu manuscript in unit 5 of an undergraduate programme which invited major criticism from a large section of teachers.

Continued on page 2

Teen murders family over online gaming addiction

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESHWAR

In a heart-wrenching incident, a 21-year-old college student bludgeoned his parents and sister to death in Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district on Tuesday morning as they were opposed to his addition to online games.

Superintendent of Police Bhawani Sankar Udgata said the incident took place in Jayabada Sethi Sahi area under the Jagatsinghpur police station limits around 3 am as the student used stones or any other hard objects to smash the heads of his father, mother and sister.

A preliminary investigation revealed that accused Surjyakant Sethy was annoyed with his parents and sister for "opposing him playing online games on his mobile phone," Jagatsinghpur police station inspector-in-charge Prabhakar Sahu said. The deceased were identified as Prasant Sethy alias Kalia (65), his wife Kanaklata (62) and daughter Rosalin (25).

"After the incident, Surjyakant Sethy hid near the village, and later he was arrested," the SP said. Udgata said the youth was suspected to have a mental problem.

Local MLA Amarendra Das said the family members had once come to him over some

land dispute. Villagers claimed that Surjyakant admitted to them that he killed his parents. A police team led by the SP and a scientific team reached the spot and started an investigation, another officer said. The bodies were sent for post-mortem examinations, he added.

In a separate incident, a 40-year-old man in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district beheaded his father on Tuesday after he refused to give him Rs 10 to buy gutkha, a tobacco product. The police reached the village along with a forensic team, and an investigation is underway, the officer said.

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Gujarat forms committee for UCC public input

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

The high-level committee constituted by the Gujarat government to draft the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will hold public consultations and focus on equal rights for women and care for children, its chairperson Justice (retired) Ranjana Desai said on Tuesday.

The five-member UCC committee convened its first meeting in Gujarat at the state capital, where Justice Desai launched a web portal, www.Uccgujarat.in, to take suggestions regarding the UCC from the public, government agencies, NGOs, social groups, communities, religious organisations and political parties.

"Our work starts today. The committee has been tasked with assessing the need for the UCC in Gujarat. We will come up with a draft after the exercise, and for that, we will hold public consultation," the ex-Supreme Court Justice said. She said public consultation is a vital part of the exercise, and two sub-committees have been formed — one for public consultation and another to prepare the draft. The committee met at the Gujarat Bhavan in Delhi last month.

Justice Desai said, "We will focus more on equal rights to women and care for children. There should be equal rights for marriage and divorce. Marriages and divorces will have to be registered, but rituals of marriage are not to be disturbed."

Continued on page 2

LIONS OF GUJARAT



PM Narendra Modi looks at a lion through a glass partition during the inauguration of 'Vantara' in Jamnagar, Gujarat. PTI

Maintain regular dialogue with parties: EC to states

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid allegations of a cover-up on its part over electors having duplicate voter ID card numbers, the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday asked all state Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs), District Election Officers (DEOs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to meet political parties regularly to resolve their issues according to procedure.

The directions came at a two-day conference of state CEOs amid allegations by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) that voters in different states had identical voter card numbers. This is the first such conference held since new Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar assumed charge last month.

CEC Kumar directed officials to be approachable and responsive to political parties. He added that all party meetings at all statutory levels be held regularly to



resolve any issues within the existing statutory framework by the concerned competent authority ie ERO or DEO or CEO. The issue wise action taken report by each CEO is to be submitted by March 31, 2025 to their concerned Deputy Election Commissioner (DEC)," a statement from the ECI reads.

This is the first time that officials below the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) levels have been called for such a meeting as the District Election Officers (DEOs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are also taking part. While CEOs are in-charge of the elections at the state levels, the DEOs are for districts and EROs is for the assembly constituency levels.

Continued on page 2

ECI from time to time. "He directed officials to be approachable and responsive to political parties. He added that all party meetings at all statutory levels be held regularly to resolve any issues within the existing statutory framework by the concerned competent authority ie ERO or DEO or CEO. The issue wise action taken report by each CEO is to be submitted by March 31, 2025 to their concerned Deputy Election Commissioner (DEC)," a statement from the ECI reads.

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Continued on page 2

Calling someone 'miyan-tiyan', 'Pakistani' not offence: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court held using terms such as "miyan-tiyan" and "Pakistani" was not an offence of hurting religious sentiments though made in poor taste. A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma therefore discharged a man in a criminal case filed by an Urdu translator and acting clerk Right to Information (RTI) in the sub-divisional office, Chas in Jharkhand. The February 11 court order said, "The appellant is

accused of hurting the religious feelings of the informant by calling him 'miyan-tiyan' and 'Pakistani'. Undoubtedly, the statements made are poor taste. However, it does not amount to hurting the religious sentiments of the informant. Hence, we are of the opinion that the appellant shall also be discharged under Section 298 IPC."

Section 298 of IPC deals with words or gestures made with a deliberate intent to wound religious feelings. It came on record that accused, Hari Nandan Singh,



sought information under the RTI Act from additional collector-cum-first appellate authority, Bokaro, and the information was dispatched to him.

However, he filed an appeal before the appellate authority, allegedly after manipulating the documents sent to him by the office through the registered post and making false allegations of manipulation in the documents.

The appellate authority directed the translator to personally serve the information to the appellant. On November 18, 2020, the informant, accompanied by the messenger of the sub-divisional office, Chas, went to the accused's home to hand over the information.

The accused initially refused to accept the documents but upon insistence by the informant, accepted it. It was alleged that he abused the informant while referring to his faith and used criminal force against him.

The matter prompted the translator to an FIR registered against the accused.

Following an investigation, the trial court ordered framing of charges against the accused also under Sections 353 (assault or criminal force on a public servant) and 504 (intentional insult) of IPC. The Jharkhand High Court

dismissed the accused's plea for quashing the proceedings. While hearing the man's plea against the high court order, the bench discharged him of the offence of intentional insult observing "no act on his part that could have provoked a breach of peace" apart from Section 353.

"We set aside the order of the high court which has sustained the order of the trial court and consequently allow the application filed by the appellant and discharge the appellant from all the three offences alleged against him," it added.

Trump pauses US aid to Ukraine

AGENCIES ■ WASHINGTON/BEIJING

US President Donald Trump has directed a "pause" to US assistance to Ukraine after a disastrous Oval Office meeting as he seeks to pressure Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to engage in peace talks with Russia. Meanwhile, he also said late on Monday that 25% taxes on imports from Mexico and Canada would start on Tuesday, sparking renewed fears of a North American trade war that already showed signs of pushing up inflation and hindering growth. His announcement rattled US stock market.

China on Tuesday retaliated against Trump's imposition of a second round of 10 per cent tariffs on its export by slapping an additional 15 per cent tariff on American goods and initiated legal action against Washington at the WTO. On Ukraine, a White House official late Monday said Trump is focused on reaching a peace deal to end the more than three-year war sparked by Russia's all-out invasion of Ukraine, and wants Zelenskyy "committed" to that goal. The official added that the US was "pausing and reviewing" its aid to "ensure that it is contributing to a solution." The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the assistance. The moment comes some five years after Trump held up congressionally authorised assistance to Ukraine in 2019 as he sought to pressure Zelenskyy to launch investigations into Joe Biden, then a Democratic presidential candidate. The moment led to Trump's first impeachment. Trump in the lead up to his 2024 election win vowed to quickly end

the war in Ukraine. He's expressed increasing frustration with Zelenskyy over the war, while simultaneously expressing confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin can be trusted to keep the peace if a truce in the conflict is reached.

Trump earlier on Monday slammed Zelenskyy for suggesting that the end of Russia's war against Ukraine likely "is still very, very far away". The comments come as prominent Trump allies escalate pressure on Zelenskyy to dramatically change his approach to the US president, who has made quickly ending the war a top priority, or step aside. "This is the worst statement that could have been made by Zelenskyy, and America will not put up with it for much longer!" Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform about the comments Zelenskyy made late Sunday while speaking to reporters in London.

Trump at an event at the White House later on Monday referred to Zelenskyy's reported comments, and asserted the Ukrainian leader "better not be right about that." "If somebody doesn't want to make a deal, I think that person won't be around very long," Trump added. "That person will not be listened to very long." Meanwhile, Trump is scheduled to address Congress on Tuesday with a speech that will offer him an opportunity to outline his vision for ending the war. As regards tariffs, Trump said Monday "Tomorrow - tariffs 25% on Canada and 25% on Mexico. And that'll start," Trump told reporters in the Roosevelt Room. "They're going to have to have a tariff." He has said the tariffs are to force the two US neighbours to step up



Vice President JD Vance, right, speaks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, left, as President Donald Trump listens in the Oval Office at the White House

their fight against fentanyl trafficking and stop illegal immigration. But Trump has also indicated that he wants to even the trade imbalance with both countries as well and push more factories to relocate in the United States. His comments quickly rattled the US stock market, with the S&P 500 index down 2% in Monday afternoon trading. It's a sign of the political and economic risks that Trump feels compelled to take, given the possibility of higher inflation and the possible demise of a decades-long trade partnership with Mexico and Canada. Yet the Trump administration

remains confident that tariffs are the best choice to boost US manufacturing and attract foreign investment. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said Monday that the computer chipmaker TSMC had expanded its investment in the United States because of the possibility of separate 25% tariffs. In February, Trump put a 10% tariff on imports from China. He reemphasised Monday that the rate would be doubling to 20% on Tuesday. "If Trump is imposing tariffs, we are ready," said Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly. "We are ready with \$155 billion worth of tariffs and we're ready with the first tranche of tariffs, which is \$30

billion." President Claudia Sheinbaum went into Monday waiting to see what Trump would say. "It's a decision that depends on the United States government, on the United States president," Sheinbaum said ahead of Trump's statement. "So whatever his decision is, we will make our decisions and there is a plan, there is unity in Mexico." China retaliated against Trump's imposition of a second round of 10 per cent tariffs on its export by slapping an additional 15 per cent tariff on American goods and initiated legal action against Washington at the WTO. China stands ready to work with the US

to address each other's concerns through dialogue and consultation. China will impose additional tariffs on some products imported from the United States, effective from March 10, the China's Customs Tariff Commission said Tuesday. An additional 15-per cent tariff will be imposed on imported chicken, wheat, corn and cotton originating from the US, it said in a statement. Sorghum, soybeans, pork, beef, aquatic products, fruits, vegetables and dairy products will be subject to an additional 10-per cent tariff. Additionally, China decided on Tuesday to add 10 US firms to the country's unreliable entity list and take corresponding measures against them. They include a number of companies linked to defence and security besides AI, aviation, IT and "dual-use" items that carry both civilian and military applications. Also, China has initiated legal action against the US under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute settlement mechanism regarding the latter's latest tariff increase on Chinese products, the Ministry of Commerce said Tuesday. Its retaliatory actions followed after the US imposition of an additional 10-per cent tariff on products imported from China, effective from March 4. The unilateral imposition of tariffs by the US undermines the multilateral trading system, increases the burden on American businesses and consumers, and erodes the foundation of China-US economic and trade cooperation, the commission said. Trump's announcement of a second round of 10 per cent tariffs on Chinese exports to the US coincides with the opening of China's annual parliament session.

The twin sessions consisting of the Parliament, the National People's Congress and the advisory council, the China People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) were opened on Tuesday. Trump's tariffs loomed large on the parliament session as the US was one of the biggest importers of Chinese goods. Chinese exports to the US constitute nearly 15 per cent of China's global trade. In 2023, the trade between the US and China amounted to USD 575 billion. This included USD 427.2 billion of China's exports to the US and USD 147.8 billion of American exports to China. While retaliating, China, however, urged the US to work with it to resolve trade disputes through equal-footed consultation. Commenting on Trump's tariffs in his press briefing, Lou Qinjian, spokesperson of the NPC, said the US unilateral tariff move violated the WTO and disrupted the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains. China stands ready to work with the US to address each other's concerns through dialogue and consultation on the basis of mutual respect, equality, reciprocity and mutual benefit, but "will never accept any act of pressuring or threatening," Lou said. "We will firmly defend our national sovereignty, security and development interests," he said. China is willing to work with the 27-member EU against unilateralism, Lou told a media briefing here on Tuesday. "Over the past 50 years, facts have proven again and again that there are no fundamental clashes of interest or geopolitical conflicts between China and Europe; rather, they are partners that contribute to each other's success," Lou said.

Situation across the border is very bad: Omar

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Showing mirror to the two neighbouring countries without meddling in the International Affairs, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Tuesday said there is no comparison between the divided parts of Kashmir as the situation across the border is "very bad" despite a Chinese filip to Pakistan. Omar made this sharp observation while pacifying the members sitting on the opposition benches after a National Conference legislator compared development between the two parts of Kashmir during the question hour in the legislative assembly. Omar said every part of Jammu and Kashmir is far developed even though "we have never sought help from

China, America, England or France to construct our roads." "Whatever progress has been made in the areas across the border is because of the blessings of China," Abdullah said. During question hour NC MLA and former minister Saifullah Mir triggered sharp reactions from the BJP legislators while claiming that border infrastructure is better in PoK than on this side. Advocating the need for the construction of a tunnel to provide an all-weather connectivity to border areas of Keran and Jumagund in Kupwara district NC MLA made this statement in the house. As BJP's R S Pathania objected to his statement one of the ruling party MLA Nazir Gurezi and Peoples

Conference legislator Sajad Gani Lone came out in support of Mir, who highlighted the challenges being faced by the locals, especially during the winter when snow cuts off roads for several months. Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather, attempted to restore the order in the house and sought a clarification from the leader of the house Omar Abdullah. "He (Mir) praised a country with which we have no diplomatic relation. Our country did not send its cricket team there to play in the Champions Trophy and this is the country which is promoting separatism and terrorism in India. Mir's remark is of concern and condemnable and the chief minister should clarify his party's stand on it," Pathania told reporters outside the assembly. However. In his

defence NC MLA said, "My intention was not to draw a comparison between the two parts (of Kashmir). The National Conference is a party which has rendered the highest number of sacrifices for the country."

No Manusmriti-Baburnama in DU

From page 1

On the issue that led to an uproar in the entire Varsity then, the Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had also stated that there is no question of including any controversial portion of any script. With the proposal now set to be scrapped, DU will explore other options for the syllabus while ensuring alignment with the National Education Policy 2020.

ABVP threatens surgical strike in JU, smuggling bid foiled

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Jadavpur University imbroglio continued to get complicated with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad — the students' arm of the BJP — now entering the battleground threatening a "fierce surgical strike" against the Left wing students of the Trinamool Congress and its students' wing Trinamool Congress Chatra Parishad vowing to weed out the "Leftist goons" from the JU campus. Alleging that the Saturday's rumour at JU was created by the TMC in order to provide oxygen to the CPI(M) and the Left Front ahead of the next year's election so that the Opposition votes get divided, the State ABVP leadership on Tuesday said that the "any conspiracy to make the Left relevant will be thwarted and Jadavpur University campus will be sanitised like many other universities in India ... the way the one sided savagery of the Left goons will have to be stopped and none other than the ABVP can do it ... now a surgical strike will be conducted in JU and that surgical strike will be a

furious one that they will not be able to bear." The ABVP — whose supporters had on Monday entered the JU campus brought down the red flags and also planted their own — said "a premium place like JU has become a place of debauchery ... anti-national activities and hooliganism ... the State Government has failed to address these issues and now the TMC is trying to make them relevant once again in the State politics which will not be tolerated." Curiously the TMCP leadership too spoke the same lingo and threatened to ambush the Leftists. "JU has become a hub of hooligans and drug addicts ... there is no democratic atmosphere inside the campus ... the students who enter the campus are hijacked by the Leftist godfathers ... when on Saturday Education Minister entered the campus to conduct a meeting of WBCUPA they felt threatened and mounted attack on him ... if they think that they can do anything in Jadavpur then they are living in fools' ... it will take a few minutes to take control of the campus if we send our boys inside the

University ... but we are being prevented from doing so because our Chief Minister and party chief Mamata Banerjee has preferred a moderate view and asked us not to take revenge ... but they must not take our tolerance as our weakness," TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said. Bengal Minister Babul Supriyo — who was also gheraoed by JU students in 2019 when he was a Union Minister and had visited the campus — said "the left goons had tormented Bengal for three decades ... now they have been punished by the people and they have been reduced to Zero seats in the State Assembly." Udayan Guha another State minister from Cooch Behar said referring to attacks on some CPI(M) party offices in his district "I am surprised why all the party offices were not ransacked ... why only a few ... I don't say that they should be attacked but I am only expressing my wonder as to how the remaining party offices are still safe." The Marxists however dared both the TMCP and the ABVP to attack the Left workers.

"We have seen hundreds of such attacks ... let them go for a surgical strike and we will handle them adequately," CPI(M) central committee members Sujan Chakrabarty said adding "if asking for elections to students' unions — that has been held up for the past 7-8 years — is a crime then we are ready to do that once again." The faceoff started on Saturday when Left wing students gheraoed Bengal Education Minister Bratya Basu when he went to the JU to address a meeting of West Bengal College and University Professors' Association (WBCUPA) a TMC backed teachers association. The students were asking for a specific time within which elections to college and university students' unions would be conducted. In the melee the Minister's vehicle made a forced exit causing grievous injuries to at least four students. Meanwhile, WBCUPA and SFI took out long rallies in Kolkata and districts amid reports of fresh clashes between TMCP and Left students at Kalyani University in Nadia district, sources said.

Gujarat forms committee for UCC public input

From page 1

The registration of all marriages and divorces is the only requirement, and divorces will have to be carried out as per the law, she said, adding that a draft for the law of inheritance and live-in relationships will be prepared soon. Justice Desai said, "We will soon start preparing a draft for the UCC and hope to complete it at the earliest. But before that, we will hold public consultation with

common people, religious leaders and the press. We will then go through suggestions submitted on the portal. We will study them for new ideas and objections. We will begin preparing a draft after that and try to complete it at the earliest." Citing that the UCC has been implemented in Uttarakhnad, she said the code is in the directive principles of the Constitution, and even the Supreme Court has passed several judgments regarding this.

She said the committee will meet and listen to people, but the exercise may not be completed within the prescribed time as public consultation will take time for a big state like Gujarat. As per an official release, stakeholders can submit their suggestions and opinions regarding the UCC online or through post by March 24. "This committee today held discussions with various commissions of the state government, representatives of religious organisations and

political parties and obtained their suggestions and opinions," it said. The committee, headed by Justice Desai, is required to submit its report within 45 days, after which a decision about the implementation of the UCC will be made, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has said. Other members of the committee include retired IAS officer CL Meena, advocate RC Kodekar, educationist Daxesh Thakar and social worker Gita Shroff.

Maintain regular dialogue with parties: EC to states

From page 1

The EROs are responsible for preparing and revising the electoral roll for each constituency. The ERO is appointed by the EC and is a civil service or revenue officer of Sub Divisional Officers. All party meetings at statutory levels should be held regularly to resolve any issues within the existing

statutory framework by the competent authority concerned, Kumar said. He emphasised that all chief electoral officers, district election officers, returning officers and electoral registration officers should be thorough with their roles and responsibilities, as clearly delineated within the statute and the EC's instructions. Kumar said the officials

should ensure that all citizens above 18 were registered as electors, according to constitutional provisions. He directed that all booth-level officers be trained to be courteous with electors while also ensuring no electoral staff or officer was intimidated by anyone using false claims. After a comprehensive mapping of the constitutional

framework and statutes, the EC has identified 28 distinct stakeholders in the entire election process including chief electoral officers, district election officers, electoral registration officers, political parties, candidates and polling agents. The conference aims to strengthen the capacity-building of each identified stakeholder.

HC stays order directing FIR against Buch, five others

From page 1

The pleas sought quashing of the order passed by the special court directing the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) to register an FIR against them pertaining to certain allegations of fraud committed in 1994 while listing a company on the BSE. The pleas said the order was illegal and arbitrary. The special court had passed the order on the complaint filed by Sapan Shrivastava, a media reporter, seeking investigation into the alleged offences committed by the accused, involving large scale financial fraud, regulatory violations and corruption. Solicitor General of India, Tushar Mehta, appearing for the three Sebi officials, said there has been complete non-application of mind by the special court in passing the order. "Based on a vague and vexatious complaint, the special court has ordered an

FIR. For something allegedly done in the year 1994, how can the current members of Sebi be held responsible," Mehta argued. He claimed that complainant Shrivastava was an extortionist who was working under the garb of being a public spirited person. Senior counsel Amit Desai, appearing for Ramamurthy and Agarwal, said to take such an action against senior members of the BSE was an "attack on the economy itself" especially on such frivolous allegations. "If there was any merit in the allegations, then yes, every public servant is open for prosecution, but not on some bald allegations like the present case," Desai said. Buch's advocate Sudeep Pasbola reiterated the arguments put forth by Mehta and Desai. Public prosecutor Hiten Veneogaonkar, appearing for the ACB, said the bureau would comply with whatever

order is passed by the HC. Shrivastava, who appeared in person, refuted the allegations made against him by Mehta and sought time to respond to the petitions. The petitions claimed the special court order was "manifestly erroneous, patently illegal and passed without jurisdiction". "The court has failed to consider that the complainant has failed to make out a prima facie case against the applicants for failing to discharge their duties as officers of the Sebi," the pleas said. There was no material submitted by the complainant to support the allegations made by him, they added. "At the relevant point of time, there was no requirement for obtaining an NOC from Sebi for listing of any shares on the BSE," the pleas said. No vicarious liability can be fastened on Sebi officials in respect of the alleged offence, as per the pleas.

The pleas sought quashing of the special court order and stay on its execution by way of interim relief. The order was not legally sustainable as the petitioners were not even issued a notice or heard before the decision was taken, the pleas pointed out. Special ACB court judge SE Bangar, in his March 1 order, noted there was prima facie evidence of regulatory lapses and collusion, requiring a fair and impartial probe. The ACB court also said it will monitor the probe, and sought a status report within 30 days. The allegations in the complaint pertained to "fraudulent listing of a company on the stock exchange in 1994 with the active connivance of regulatory authorities", particularly the Securities and Exchange Board of India, without compliance under the SEBI Act, 1992 and rules and regulations there under.

INDIA DEFEATS AUSTRALIA

From page 1

Glenn Maxwell dropped him on 51 off left-arm spinner Cooper Connolly, a perceived early signal of an inevitable Kohli hundred. But it did not arrive as an ugly hit off Zampa ended in the hands of Ben Dwarshuis near long-on when India were 40 runs away from victory. KL Rahul (42 not out) and Hardik Pandya (28) played some smart and aggressive cricket as India cantered home without much ado. However, the Indian bowlers too deserve some credit as they kept the Aussies batting on a tight leash despite well-paced

fifties from Smith and Carey. Australian skipper Smith (73, 96b, 4x4, 1x6) won a good toss, but the batters could not exploit fine batting conditions, throwing their wickets away through silly shots. Throughout his stay, Smith was the pillar of Australian innings, and was involved in three 50 stands — 52 with Travis Head for the second wicket, 56 for the third wicket with Marnus Labuschagne and 54 for the fifth wicket with Carey (61, 57b, 8x4, 1x6). Australia would have been in a much better position had two of those alliances bloomed into something

more substantial. Few batters have a higher fortune quotient than Head and his cameo of 39 had several slices of fortune — a dropped catch by Mohammed Shami (3/48) off his own bowling in the first legal delivery of the match, a near run-out, and a couple of inside edges that missed the stumps by a whisker. Labuschagne played back and across to a straighter one from the impressive Ravindra Jadeja (2/40) to get trapped in front. However, Smith chugged along nicely with excellent control and his thumping straight six off Jadeja was a work of art in timing and

power. However, a rather mindless charge at a full toss from Shami ended his stint, as the ball crashed onto the stumps. Glenn Maxwell came in a perfect situation for him at 198 for five with 13 overs to spare, but an inexplicable back-foot punch off Axar curtailed his stay prematurely. Carey carried on with determination at one end, and was engaged in a useful 34-run alliance with Dwarshuis for the seventh wicket to see them past the 250-run mark. But the target was way too feeble to give any real test to this Indian batting unit.

PWD hands over parts of Delhi-Rohtak to NHAI for upgradation, maintainance

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a first, the Delhi government has planned to hand-over the maintenance of PWD roads in the city border areas to NHAI, with a 13.23-km stretch of Delhi-Rohtak Road being transferred to the authority as part of its initiative to strengthen road network. The move will also boost a larger infrastructure development strategy in the national Capital. According to the government, the 13.23 stretch from Peeragarhi Chowk to Tikri Border (Delhi-Haryana border) will soon be handed over to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). The stretch between Delhi-Rohtak Road has been described as the "worst road of the city". Rohtak Road is in a dilapidated condition due the rapid unplanned population growth along the stretch, and the inadequate capacity of drains to carry water from these areas.



PWD minister Parvesh Verma at his office at Delhi Secretariat

Minister Nitin Gadkari, I have approved and forwarded a proposal to NHAI for the transfer of the stretch to its much-needed upgradation," PWD Minister Parvesh Verma said. He said that other such stretches are also being identified for further strengthening the highway network and reducing

travel time for commuters. This will ensure better road maintenance, faster execution of projects, and long-term sustainability of Delhi's highway network, a statement from Verma's office said. The development comes after the PWD minister approached Gadkari who has given in-principle approval to it.

"The move will facilitate the upgradation of this crucial corridor into a world-class highway," the statement said. Last week, BJP's Mundka MLA Gajender Singh Drall requested the PWD minister in the Delhi Assembly to give special attention to the Delhi-Rohtak road as congestion and long-hours traffic jams are a major

issue for lakhs of daily commuters.

The new move will facilitate smoother traffic flow, better road conditions, and enhanced connectivity for thousands of daily commuters travelling between Delhi and Haryana. The double-engine government of the BJP is focused on ensuring smoother traffic flow, enhanced connectivity, and world-class infrastructure, the minister said. This initiative highlights seamless Centre-State coordination and Modi government's commitment to large-scale infrastructure development, ensuring Delhi's roads meet global standards and contribute to a stronger national highway network, he added.

The previous AAP government had sanctioned ₹183 crores to overhaul the New Rohtak Road with an aim to eliminate the problem of water logging and traffic congestion, which will bring relief to lakhs of commuters and residents of areas starting Nangloi, Mundka, Ghevra and upto Tikri around the Delhi-Haryana Border. The project remained on the paper.



LG VK Saxena with CM Rekha Gupta at the Bhalswa landfill

Ranjian Dimri

LG, CM launch bamboo plantation drive in landfill

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta launched a bamboo plantation drive at the Bhalswa landfill site on Tuesday and assured people that the area would soon be turned green. Addressing reporters along with the chief minister and other ministers, the L-G Saxena said bamboo was chosen for the plantation drive because it releases 30 per cent more oxygen, requires less water and grows fast. "Within a year, when you pass this landfill site, you will see a green patch instead of heaps of trash," said L-G Saxena. He said efforts to reclaim landfill sites began two years ago and with the start of the plantation drive, the process of turning these areas into green zones has begun. The L-G reiterated the government's promise to make the city pollution-free and launched a

new initiative to convert the Bhalswa landfill near the northern border into a green patch of bamboo groves planted on the land that has been cleared over the last two years. L-G Saxena said the land was cleared over the last two years and today around 2,000 bamboo trees were planted. "Today, 200 bamboo plants have been planted here. In the coming months, 54,000 more trees will be added," the L-G said, adding that once the plantation is completed, commuters will get to see green patches instead of towering garbage mounds. "We had promised to free Delhi of pollution and this initiative marks the beginning of a cleaner and greener city," he added. CM Rekha Gupta lauded the efforts of the L-G and the Central government while alleging that previous dispensations "only made tall claims" about tackling the landfill issue but failed to take concrete action. She further highlighted the Central government's

role in utilising waste material from landfill sites in various projects across Delhi, including DDA grounds. "The LG has played a crucial role in ensuring Delhi's transformation. His leadership has been like a shield, protecting the city and guiding its development," Gupta said. Promising to conduct monthly visits to monitor the project, CM Gupta said the Delhi government is working in mission mode and its results will be visible in the greening of this patch of land. "We will visit all the three landfill sites and within one year we aim to lower the height of the mountains of garbage and develop green projects. The 'Double Engine' government will work with double speed as the government is in mission. "In a year, this place will be completely transformed into a green land. Our mission is to clean and beautify Delhi, and with a double-engine government, we will achieve this goal at double speed," she added.

Yamuna beautification leaves residents homeless



People vacate their residence ahead of a demolition drive at Yamuna bridge area Shastri Park

PTI

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

An anti-encroachment drive that was to begin on Tuesday in the Usmanpur area of Delhi's Shahdara has left in the lurch several residents, who were given just a day's notice to vacate their homes of decades. On March 2, the authorities served an eviction notice to residents of the locality near the Old Iron Bridge, asking them to vacate their homes by Monday. The raze drive, a part of the Yamuna beautification project, was scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday. For many, the land on which they built their homes represents a lifetime of memories,

struggles and survival. A woman in her 60s, Pushpa Devi has called the place home for the past 40 years. She lost her eldest son and his wife several years ago in an accident, leaving her to raise their daughter. Describing the weight of her responsibilities, she said, "I work as a house help. I take care of my granddaughter and my sick husband. If I am forced to move, I will have nowhere to go. We don't have relatives we can camp with." "I urge the government to let us stay a little longer until we find a new job and a shelter," the sexagenarian said. Pinky Kashyap (21) is facing a simi-

lar crisis. Five months pregnant and a one-and-a-half-year-old daughter to take care of, she is struggling to make ends meet. Her husband works as a shopkeeper in Greater Kailash, earning ₹12,000 a month. "Where will I go with my child in this condition? We don't have enough money to rent a house or a room. My husband earns only ₹12,000 a month and, in a city like Delhi, it is extremely difficult to afford rent, along with other expenses," she said. Seema, in her 50s, has lived under the fear of displacement. That fear has now become a reality. "We have lived

in constant fear that someone might come and ask us to leave. We are poor, where will we go with our children? If we could afford to pay rent, we would not be living here," she said. Like others, Seema also requested the government to provide them with a shelter. In a related development, a senior police officer said heavy deployment would be made during the anti-encroachment drive. "More than 1,500 Delhi Police officers, along with paramilitary personnel, will be deployed. No one will be allowed to breach law and order," he said.

Unknown gunmen injure five in NE Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Five people, including two bystanders, were injured in a firing incident between two groups in northeast Delhi's Jyoti Nagar area, an official said on Tuesday. According to the police, the incident was reported around 9 pm on Monday at Jyoti Nagar police station by a man who claimed that his son had been shot at by unknown assailants. Upon arrival, police found that multiple rounds had been fired during the clash, the official said, adding that the injured people were rushed to GTB Hospital for treatment. According to the police, those who received bullet injuries are identified as Akash (21), Abhishek (30), Vasu (22). "During the firing incident, two bystanders also received bullet injuries who are identified as Ram Kumar Rana (55) and Mukesh (45). During our initial investigation, we got to know that there is an old rivalry over cable connection between the two groups," the police officer said. "Members of both groups clashed on Monday night and opened fire on each other. Two people who were standing nearby were injured.

CM surveys GTB hospital, slams AAP for mismanagement



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta during a visit to the Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital

PTI

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday attack the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government's health model, calling it "zero" and alleging large-scale mismanagement at government hospitals during AAP's tenure. During a visit to the Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital, Gupta claimed the facility has turned into a "dumping ground" with unused medical equipment and incomplete hospital infrastructure. "Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the warehouse here has been completely filled. Even today, 458 oxygen concentrators, 146 ventilators, 36,000 PPE kits, multiparameters, masks, and other medical supplies are lying unused. This is not just the case with GTB Hospital, but

with many hospitals across Delhi," Gupta alleged. She also claimed that hospital buildings were constructed without proper planning, leading to wasteful expenditure. "AAP built seven structures inside hospitals, turning parking lots and sports grounds into buildings that do not meet the medical facility parameters. These so-called 'semi-permanent structures' are only 60 per cent complete, and they will not be of any use even if ₹2,500 crore more is spent on them," she said. The chief minister also alleged that hospital staff had not been paid their salaries for six months. "The health and management system of Delhi's hospitals is itself sick. How will the hospitals function in such a situation," she asked. Accusing the previous AAP government of governance failures, Gupta said, "AAP's health

and education model is nothing but zero. Their governance is only about publicity, not real work." On Monday, Gupta had targeted the AAP over a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on public health infrastructure and management of health services in the capital during the latter's rule, calling it an "expose of widespread corruption." "Every department under the AAP government was in shambles and needed treatment. The 'Mohalla Clinics' became a den of corruption, with no doctors, no medicines, and no patients," Gupta alleged on Monday. The CAG report on Delhi's health sector from 2016-17 to 2021-22, which Gupta tabled in the assembly on February 28, highlighted multiple irregularities in public healthcare spending.

Sirsa promises no more landfills in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Tuesday said the Bhalswa landfill will be cleared by March 2026 and asserted that no new "mountain of garbage" would be created in the future in the national capital. The minister said that 35 per cent of waste has already been cleared at the landfill and thanked Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena for his "efforts in clearing Delhi of all three mountains of garbage at Bhalswa, Okhla, and Ghazipur." "The Bhalswa landfill was once a 70-acre mountain of garbage. Since the LG has started work on this project, nearly 35 per cent of the waste has been removed. "Of the 70 acres, 25-acre land has been reclaimed, and today, we have planted 2,000 bamboo saplings on five acres of reclaimed land," Sirsa said during a bamboo plantation drive



Delhi Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa talks to the media

PTI

here. According to the minister, the height of the garbage mound at Bhalswa landfill has been reduced to 53 metres, which once was 60 metres. "By December 2025, the waste will be reduced to a point where it will no longer be visible (from a distance). The Bhalswa landfill will be completely cleared by

March 2026. Our biggest goal is to ensure that work continues at all three landfill sites, preventing the formation of new mountains of garbage," he said. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised the importance of keeping Delhi clean by stopping waste accumulation at landfill sites and ensuring efficient waste recycling.

Amity inter university festival begins

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The 38th AIU Inter University National Youth Festival-2024-25 known as Amity Utsav kick-started on Monday. Christened as Mahakumbh of Talent over 2407 students from 148 Universities from across India are participating in 28 competitions such as classical music, vocal music, western music, folk dance, classical dance, quiz competitions, debate competitions, plays, skits, poster making, collage amongst others. Inaugurating under the aegis of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) renowned Kuchipudi dancer Padma Bhushan Raja Reddy said India is famous across the world for its dynamic, vibrant, colourful and diverse customs, languages, culture and traditions. Local

MP former Union Minister Mahesh Sharma said Amity University has organized this Mega Youth Festival which is truly commendable. Prof. Vinay Kumar Pathak President, Association of Indian Universities (AIU), in his comments said Youth Festivals serve as a vibrant platform for the expression of creativity, talent, and innovation among our young minds. Dr. Balvinder Shukla, Vice Chancellor Amity University Uttar Pradesh said, "The AIU Inter-University National Youth Festival 2024-25 is a vibrant and highly anticipated event that brings together students from universities across India to showcase their talents, creativity, and cultural diversity, with an aim to celebrate the spirit of unity, national integration, and youth empowerment.

No more Assembly sessions in parts: Speaker Vijender Gupta

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming the AAP government for wrong practices which had been followed during the past 10 years, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijendra Gupta on Tuesday assured that the Assembly will no longer hold part sessions, unlike the previous AAP regime. Instead, sessions will be duly prorogued, and special sessions will only be called in

emergency situations. Addressing a press conference after the first session of the eight Assembly, Speaker Gupta said now all the sessions will be duly prorogued. "The practice of holding sessions in part for the whole year will not be followed. Special sessions will be called only in emergent and important situations. The sessions of the Assembly are very important. There will be Question Hour in the Budget session a practice

which had been almost done away by the previous government," he said. "However, in case Rules are violated, strict action will be taken. Maximum utilisation of the floor time shall be his primary concern. The House shall run with cooperation, balance, goodwill and established Rules," he said. The first session of the 8th Delhi Assembly, which commenced on February 24, was adjourned sine die on March 3. The session

saw heated exchanges between BJP and AAP MLAs, particularly on the last day. During the five sittings, 126 members expressed their views on various issues, with the House conducting business for 18 hours and 18 minutes. Defending his action against AAP MLAs for suspending for the three days and not allowed to enter in the Assembly premises, Speaker Gupta expressed anguish over the unruly action and disturbance to Lieutenant Governor

Vinai Kumar Saxena's address to the House, an action that forced him to suspend Opposition members. "The LG's address is a solemn occasion and he was discharging his constitutional duties. The Rules of Procedure forbid such disturbances during the LG Address. The members were later suspended by the House for three sittings for disturbing the LG's address," he said. Speaker Gupta said that he was

pained by the fact that Leader of Opposition Atishi and her AAP colleagues disturbed the proceedings when she was asked to speak on her election as the Speaker. Reflecting on the just-concluded Assembly session, Speaker Gupta said, "The CAG's Performance Audit Report on Regulation and Supply of Liquor in Delhi" was laid on the Table of the House on February 25 by Chief Minister and it was discussed in the House for two days.

A total of 23 members participated in this discussion." Gupta said that the House committees, including the Public Accounts Committee, of the newly constituted Delhi Assembly will be formed in the Budget Session to be held on March 24-26. The Excise and Health departments have been directed to send their action-taken reports within a month," he said. Speaker Gupta said tabling of two

CAG reports on the Delhi government's performance in the House was just a beginning. "In the coming days, very significant decisions will be made by the House regarding the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India reports tabled in the House. He also announced plans to turn the Old Secretariat building into a national monument or tourist attraction, and to implement the e-Vidhan project to make the Assembly paperless.

India must adapt to new, emerging threats, develop solutions: Rajnath



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visits an exhibition of products for internal security and disaster relief operations in New Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday that India's security apparatus must remain adaptive to emerging threats such as cyber and hybrid warfare as well as "space-based espionage". He said internal security is not just about managing conventional threats like terrorism, separatist movements, and left-wing extremism but it is also about preparing for unconventional threats that can destabilise the nation's economic and strategic interests. "The adversaries of today do not always come with traditional weapons; cyber-attacks, misinformation campaigns, and space-based espionage are emerging as new-age threats that require advanced solutions," he said. The defence minister was speaking at a conference on 'Advanced Technologies for Internal Security and Disaster Relief Operations' organised jointly by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). In his address, Singh highlighted the growing complexities in global security and the increasing overlap between internal and external threats. "Security challenges in the modern world

are evolving rapidly, and the overlap between internal and external security is increasing," he said. "It is imperative that our institutions break silos and work collaboratively to ensure a strong, secure, and self-reliant India." The defence minister said India's national security must be viewed holistically, integrating efforts across different security agencies and leveraging the latest technological advancements. "The DRDO has played a pivotal role in enhancing India's defence capabilities, and its contributions to internal security are equally commendable," he said. "From small arms and bulletproof jackets to surveillance and communication systems, DRDO's innovations are empowering our security forces," he underlined. Singh urged DRDO and MHA to work together to create a common list of scalable products that can be jointly developed and deployed in a time-bound manner. "Our security forces require the best tools and technologies to remain ahead of the curve," he said. "It is encouraging to see DRDO's focus on modernisation, with products like small arms, surveillance equipment and drone systems either inducted or undergoing evaluation for deployment in inter-

nal security agencies," he highlighted. Singh recalled his tenure as the home minister, highlighting how the collaboration between security agencies and scientific institutions led to significant technological advancements. He cited examples of DRDO-developed technologies such as the corner shot weapon system, INSAS rifles, IED (Improvised Explosive Device) jammer vehicles and riot control vehicles, which were effectively integrated into the operations of Central Armed Police Forces. Singh also spoke about the importance of leveraging technology not just for security but also for disaster management and humanitarian relief. "The role of technology is not just in defence but also in ensuring peace and social welfare. Advanced systems like bulletproof jackets, drones, surveillance equipment and anti-drone technologies must be leveraged not only for security operations but also for disaster management and humanitarian relief," he said. Singh said the increasing frequency of natural calamities like cyclones, avalanches, earthquakes and cloud bursts underscored the critical need for advanced rescue tools. He mentioned that the use of tech-

nologies such as thermal imaging cameras, drone-based detection systems, and victim locating devices can significantly reduce casualties and damage. Referring to the recent avalanche at Mana in Uttarakhand, the defence minister lauded the use of advanced rescue equipment in saving lives and reducing the impact of the disaster. He said the impact of disasters can be minimised with the use of advanced technology. "Today, India is a prospering nation, and disaster management must become an integral part of our preparedness." It is not enough for security agencies and technology developers to take the lead; we must also educate the general public. Every citizen should know how to respond in times of crisis," he said. Singh also talked about varied security threats facing different regions of the country. "Security threats in India are not uniform. The issues faced in the Northeast due to insurgencies are different from those in Naxal-affected areas or border regions." "Similarly, urban security concerns are different from those in rural areas. We need to organise dedicated conferences that focus on region-specific challenges and solutions," he said.

Muslims being discriminated: Mayawati

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Tuesday said the Centre and state governments should treat all religions equally but alleged that step-motherly treatment is being meted out to Muslims. In a post in Hindi on X, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said such discrimination can be detrimental to peace and harmony in the society, which is a matter of great concern.



"India is a secular country that respects all religions. In such a situation, the central and state governments should treat the followers of all religions equally without any bias, but the step-motherly treatment being

meted out to Muslims in religious matters is not justified," she said. "The rules and laws related to restrictions and exemptions regarding festivals of all religions should be implemented equally without any bias, which does not seem to be happening. It is natural for peace and mutual harmony in the society to deteriorate due to this, which is a matter of great concern. Governments must pay attention to this," she said in another post.

Man held for extorting, threatening minor

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Gurugram Police arrested an accused for allegedly extorting ₹80 Lakh from a 15-year-old girl by threatening to leak her objectionable photos on social media, which turned out to be morphed, police said. At least five other suspects have already been arrested in the matter, police said on Tuesday. The arrested accused was identified as Naveen Kumar (28), a resident of New Colony, Garhi Harsaru, Gurugram.

SC seeks Telangana response on disqualification of turncoat MLAs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought Telangana government's response on pleas against the purported delay by the Assembly speaker to decide on the disqualification of BRS MLAs, who defected to Congress, saying a timely decision was key and there couldn't be a case of "operation successful but patient is dead". A bench comprising Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih said the decision on pleas over the disqualification of the lawmakers "cannot go on till the end of the Assembly session". The court also issued notices to the office of the speaker of Telangana legislative assembly, the secretary of assembly and the Election Commission. Responses were also sought from MLAs Danam Nagender, Venkata Rao Tellam and Kadiyan Srihari who were directed to comply before the next hearing on March 25. "Every matter cannot be dealt with in a manner that the operation is successful but the patient is dead," Justice Gavai said. Senior advocate CA Sundaram, appearing for BRS

leader Padi Kaushik Reddy, said not taking a decision by the assembly speaker amounted to a failure in performing the constitutional mandate. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi opposed the submission and said a time frame couldn't be given to the speaker to decide the disqualification plea. He said on July 1, 2024, the plea for disqualification was filed with the assembly speaker and on July 9, a petition was filed in the Telangana High Court. "In a democracy, the process should not go on till the end of the term of the assembly and if it happens then what will happen to the democratic principles," Justice Gavai said. The court added, "People are not only interested in getting the law decided but also see how it affects them." The bench said when the case was first listed on January 31, it deferred the hearing to February 10 and asked senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi whether the assembly speaker would like to express the timeline within which he would decide the disqualification plea. Rohatgi said no such statement could be made on behalf of the

speaker, the bench observed. "Singhvi and Rohatgi state that no formal notice was there and thus no reply could be filed. Even though it is hyper technical we don't want it to be said that the case was decided against principles of natural justice. Hence we issue a notice returnable on March 25," the bench said. Telangana High Court registrar general was directed to ensure that notices were served. On February 10, the bench said in a democracy, rights of a party couldn't be permitted to be frustrated. It had asked as top what will be the "reasonable time" for Telangana Assembly speaker to decide pleas for disqualification of BRS MLAs. A high court division bench had said the state legislative assembly speaker must decide on the disqualification petitions against the three MLAs within a "reasonable time". One of the pleas challenged the November 2024 order of the Telangana High Court over the disqualification of three BRS MLAs, who joined the ruling Congress party in the state whereas another petition related to the remaining seven legislators who defected.

Centre finalises plan to restore Aravalli range

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Centre has planned to restore degraded ecosystems and land across more than eight lakh hectares of reserved forest in the first phase of its ambitious Aravalli Green Wall project, which aims to create a green buffer around the Aravalli mountain range in northwest India. According to the detailed action plan for Aravalli restoration, the government is likely to spend an estimated ₹16,053 Crore in the first phase. Stretching 700 kilometres from Gujarat to Delhi, the Aravalli range acts as a natural barrier against desertification, preventing the expansion of the Thar desert and protecting cities such as Delhi, Jaipur and Gurugram. The Aravallis, India's oldest mountain range, are the source of important rivers such as the Chambal, Sabarmati and the Luni. Its forests, grasslands and wetlands support endangered plant and animal species. However, deforestation, min-



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in Bengaluru

Government weakening RTI using data protection: Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday accused the Modi government of weakening the Right To Information (RTI) Act in the name of data protection and asserted that his party will keep fighting against the "dictatorial" regime to secure the rights of the people. Kharge asserted that the Congress will not let RTI weaken and will continue to raise its voice from the streets to Parliament. "On one hand, India has been topping the charts on Misinformation and Disinformation for the past years and on the other hand, the Modi government is bent

on weakening the Right To Information (RTI) Act implemented by the Congress-UPA by bringing in the Data Protection law," the Congress chief said in a statement. Whether it is information in the public sector like the list of ration cards, beneficiary labourers of MGNREGA, names of people involved in public welfare schemes, voter list in elections, or the names of scamster billionaires who fled abroad after taking loans from government banks - it is important for the public to have the names of all these in the public domain, he asserted. But now the Modi government is weakening the RTI in the name of Data Protection, due to which such names will no longer be made public, Kharge

claimed. The Right to Privacy is a fundamental right, and the Congress has fought for it, but when it comes to Public Welfare, the Right to Information is necessary, he asserted. The Right to Privacy was also taken care of in the RTI brought by the Congress, but this does not mean that the list of beneficiaries or the names of scamsters should not be made public, Kharge said. "The Congress party will not let RTI weaken, we have raised our voice for it earlier also, and will continue to raise our voice from the streets to the Parliament. We will keep fighting against this dictatorial government to secure the rights of the people!" the Congress chief said.

SC seeks details from election panel on disqualification of political leaders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the Supreme Court (SC) on Tuesday asked the Election Commission of India (ECI) to provide details of cases in which it had either removed or reduced the period of disqualification from electoral rolls of leaders post their conviction in criminal cases. A bench comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Manmohan asked the poll panel to furnish within two weeks details of such cases in which it exercised its power under Section 11 of the Representation of People Act (RPA), 1951. Under the RPA, the period of disqualification from electoral politics post-conviction in criminal cases varies depending on the offence and sentence. In cases relating to imprisonment of two or more years, a person is disqualified from the date of conviction until six years after their release, even if they are out on bail or awaiting appeal. However, the ECI is empowered under Section 11 of the Act to remove or reduce the period of disqualification after recording the reasons. The bench said PIL petitioner Ashwini Upadhyay and others could file a rejoinder to the EC's response within two weeks after

the details were furnished by the poll panel. The 2016 PIL, filed through advocate Ashwani Dubey, sought a life ban on convicted politicians aside from the expeditious disposal of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs in the country. On being informed that a similar plea of NGO Lok Prahari was pending and being heard by another bench, Justice Datta referred the PIL of Upadhyay to the Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna for clubbing them and listing them before one court. The bench said the matters should be listed expeditiously after the CJI passes an administrative order. During brief hearing, senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, assisting the bench as an amicus curiae, said the details of reduction or removal of disqualification of convicted politicians were not available and the same should be provided. Senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for the petitioner, said steps were needed to prevent criminalisation of politics and quoted the poll panel as saying that chargesheeted persons should be barred from entering into electoral politics. The ECI counsel said he had no difficulty in providing details of cases where the poll panel exercised its power to reduce or remove the period of disquali-



Pioneer Photos

fication and said the validity of Section 11 of the RPA was not under challenge in the present case. The Centre, however, opposed the PIL recently and said imposition of life ban on convicted politicians was solely within the domain of Parliament. In an affidavit, the Centre said the prayer amounted to re-writing of the statute or directing Parliament to frame a law in a particular manner which was wholly beyond the powers of judicial review. "The question whether a lifetime ban would be appropriate or not is a question that is solely within the domain of the par-

ED arrests SDPI national president

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) national president MK Faizy under the anti-money laundering law, official sources said on Tuesday. SDPI founded in 2009 and headquartered in Delhi, is alleged to be the political front of the now banned Popular Front of India (PFI). Faizy, according to the sources, was taken into custody on Monday night from the Delhi international airport under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The ED had earlier called SDPI as the "political front" of PFI. The PFI was banned by the Union government in September, 2022 calling it an "unlawful association". Before the ban came, raids and enforcement action were conducted against the PFI by multiple probe agencies, including the ED, NIA and various state police forces. The SDPI, however, denies such a link and calls itself an independent outfit. Faizy is among the founder leaders of SDPI and was elected its national president in 2018. He is an Islamic scholar and a political observer who served as a Masjid Imam in the 1980s. The organisation, according to officials in the investigative agencies, has "strong" influence in various pockets of Kerala and Karnataka. The ED, as part of its probe against the PFI in 2022, had linked Faizy with a Kerala-based PFI leader named Abdul Razak BP who is alleged to have "transferred" ₹2 Lakh to the SDPI national president as part of the fund raising activities.

ing, livestock grazing and human encroachment are worsening desertification, damaging aquifers, drying up lakes and reducing the range's ability to sustain wildlife. To tackle these issues, the government launched the Aravalli Green Wall initiative in March 2023. The project aims to estab-

lish a five-kilometre-wide green belt buffer, covering 6.45 Million hectares across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi. Within this buffer zone, about

42 per cent (2.70 Million hectares) of land is degraded. Of the total degraded area, 81 per cent is in Rajasthan, 15.8 per cent in Gujarat, 1.7 per cent in Haryana and 1.6 per cent in Delhi, according to the action plan.

Rajasthan's Udaipur district has the highest degraded area within the buffer zone (0.675 Million hectares), which is more than the combined degraded area of Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat (0.568 Million hectares).

In the first phase of the project, 8,16,732 hectares of recorded forest area will be restored. This includes 3,010 hectares in Delhi, 5,677 hectares in Gujarat, 3,812 hectares in Haryana, and 99,952 hectares in Rajasthan. The total budget for this phase is ₹16,053 Crore. This initiative will be crucial in meeting India's climate goal of creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 Billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent and restoring 26 Million hectares of degraded land by 2030, according to the central government.

Activist blame administrative negligence for death in Uttarakhand avalanche

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

Social activists have blamed the death of eight workers in an avalanche that hit a BRO camp at Mana in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district last week on "administrative negligence" and said the lives could have been saved had the authorities paid heed to a snowslide warning. They also blame "reckless construction" works in avalanche-prone areas for the rise in snowslide incidents. The Chandigarh-based Defence Geoinformatics Research Establishment (DGRE) issued an avalanche warning for a 24-hour period at 5 pm on February 27 for places located above the height of 2,400 metres such as Chamoli, Uttarkashi, Rudrapur, Pithoragarh and Bageshwar districts of Uttarakhand. The avalanche hit the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp in Chamoli between 5.30 am and 6 am on February 28, trapping 54 workers. While 46 of them were rescued alive, eight were found dead. Atul Sati, a social worker and the convener of



Rescue team members pose for group photos after the conclusion of Mana Rescue operations following an avalanche in Chamoli district PTI

Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti said "administrative negligence" led to the death of the eight workers. "There was an avalanche warning and authorities should have acted on time," he said. Following the incident, the Uttarakhand government issued an advisory for tourists staying in skiing destination Auli which has no history of avalanches, Sati said and alleged that it

looks like an attempt to divert people's attention from the state's failure. "When there was a warning and the authorities were aware that such a large number of workers were in Mana, why weren't they advised to move to safety?" asked another social activist. The weather office in Dehradun issued a yellow alert for February 27, two days in advance, predicting isolated heavy rain and snowfall in locations

situated at 3,500 metres and above. However, the State Emergency Operations Centre here alerted the district magistrates concerned on February 28 when the avalanche had already hit the camp. Over the last four years, two dwelling units of BRO workers have been destroyed by avalanches in the Chamoli district alone. An avalanche in April 2021 destroyed a settlement of workers in Niti Valley adjoining the Indo-Tibet border, killing as many labourers. Experts feel that the snowslides are a result of reckless construction being carried out in avalanche-prone areas. Renowned geologist MPS Bisht, an expert on weather movements in the Kedar Valley, said the entire area is vulnerable to avalanches that keep coming from the Nar Parvat. Construction activities are being carried out recklessly even in areas identified for vulnerability without thinking over the consequences, he said. "Disasters are the result of this."

SP's Azmi's remark on Aurangzeb rock legislature, members demands his suspension

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

The issue of SP MLA Abu Asim Azmi's remarks eulogising Mughal emperor Aurangzeb rocked both houses of the Maharashtra legislature on Tuesday, with members of the ruling Mahayuti demanding his suspension and charging him with treason. Both the houses were adjourned over the issue. The development came on a day when the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi planned to corner the government over the resignation of NCP minister Dhananjay Munde. As proceedings of both the houses began, the Mahayuti members started raising slogans seeking action against Azmi, who is the Samajwadi Party's state president. They claimed Azmi was a descendant of Aurangzeb, who tortured Maratha king Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and brutally killed him. Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena head Eknath Shinde led the attack on Azmi both in the legislative council and assembly. In the council, the former CM said Azmi also made objectionable statements in



Members of the ruling Mahayuti stage a protest against Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Asim Azmi during the Budget session of Maharashtra Assembly in Mumbai PTI

the past against Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. "Abu Azmi is purposely insulting Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and (his son) Sambhaji Maharaj's bravery and Aurangzeb's cruelty will give goosebumps to people," Shinde said in the council. Aurangzeb tortured Sambhaji Maharaj in an inhuman way. Abu Azmi referred to Aurangzeb as an able administrator who built temples but he razed Kashi Vishveshwar temple, Shinde said. The Mughal emperor not only killed Hindus but also people from other

religions, the deputy CM said. "Aurangzeb lost even after he won, but Sambhaji, through his bravery, won even after his sacrifice. He (Aurangzeb) is a demon. Even a true Muslim will not forgive the progeny of traitors. It is wrong to eulogise Aurangzeb," Shinde said. He also demanded that Azmi's membership of the legislative assembly be revoked. No one will tolerate the act of eulogising Aurangzeb, the Shiv Sena leader said. In the assembly, Shinde dubbed Azmi a "traitor" and said had no right to sit in the House.

He asked SP MLA Raees Shaikh to watch the recent Hindi film 'Chhaava', which has documented the bravery and sacrifice of Sambhaji Maharaj. "See the torture Sambhaji Maharaj endured for 40 days. Aurangzeb asked him to change his religion," he said. Praising Aurangzeb is an insult of the country's national heroes, Shinde said. Sambhaji Maharaj won 70 battles in nine years, he said, adding that Aurangzeb demolished temples and killed his own family. Industries Minister Uday Samant (Shiv Sena) reiterated the demand that Azmi be suspended from the House and be booked for treason. "We cannot tolerate praise of a person who harassed Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and tortured Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj," he said. Atul Bhatkalkar (BJP) demanded that Azmi be booked for treason and suspended from the assembly for the budget session. Shiv Sena minister Gulabrao Patil also demanded action against Azmi. Sudhir Mungatkar (BJP) demanded that Aurangzeb's grave be demolished.

Camera clash in Karnataka Assemblies: Discrimination allegations stir proceedings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly was briefly disrupted on Tuesday as the opposition BJP alleged discrimination, claiming that cameras covering the proceedings were not showing their party members when they spoke in the House. They pointed out that during the coverage, the cameras focused on the Speaker whenever opposition MLAs were speaking, whereas this was not the case when ruling party legislators or ministers took the floor. When the Leader of Opposition, R Ashoka, pressed for a discussion on the alleged irregularities in the Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC), his deputy Arvind Bellad pointed out to the Speaker that Ashoka was not being shown on television screens while speaking. He questioned whether there were instructions not to cover the opposition, saying, "The whole House is shown, the



Karnataka Deputy CM DK Shivakumar speaks during the Budget session of the Karnataka Assembly in Bengaluru PTI

ruling side and ministers are shown, even the Chair and the Speaker are shown. But when the Leader of the Opposition is speaking, he is not shown. He is speaking on an important issue, and people should know." Bellad also noted that this issue was raised during the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting on Monday. Several BJP MLAs, including C C Patil and Sunil Kumar, supported his concerns. Speaker U T Khader attempted

to reassure them, suggesting that it could be a technical issue and promising to instruct officials to resolve it. Ashoka reiterated that the issue had been brought up in the BAC meeting and that even members of the media had pointed out that opposition protests were not being shown in the House. "Whoever is speaking at a given time should be shown. But instead, others are being focused on. This doesn't seem like a technical issue-it looks

like an instruction problem," he said. BJP MLA Basangouda Patil Yataln questioned whether there was a deliberate ban on showing opposition members. When Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil later stood to speak, he was immediately shown on TV. Pointing this out, opposition members accused the government of a deliberate "adjustment," alleging that only opposition leaders were being ignored. BJP MLAs, including Yataln, Sunil Kumar, C C Patil, Bellad, and Ashoka, insisted that the issue be resolved before proceedings continued. "If it's a technical issue, get it fixed immediately... Tighten the nuts and bolts," they told the Speaker. At this point, Minister Priyank Kharge interjected, alleging that the practice of not showing opposition speakers was first introduced in Parliament under BJP rule and later implemented in the Assembly by former Speaker Kageri during the BJP's tenure.

Punjab police raid homes of farmer leaders ahead of protest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

SKM leaders early morning "With such actions, the government cannot stifle the voice of farmers," Lakhowal said, adding, "We are fighting in support of various farmers' demands." He said police personnel are also deployed at his residence. "It is our right to hold protests. We warn the state government not to indulge in such police actions," Lakhowal said as he called upon farmers to reach Chandigarh in large numbers. BKU (Rajewal) vice president Mukesh Chander Sharma too claimed that police raided the residences of farmer leaders in the state. "Police raided my residence at 4 am," Sharma claimed, adding that he condemned the police action. Talks between the Punjab government and SKM leaders to discuss farmers' demands broke down midway on Monday, with farmer leaders claiming a

"livid" Mann "walked out of the meeting in a huff without any provocation". However, Mann had said his doors are always open for talks with the farmers but inconvenience and harassment of the public in the name of agitation should be avoided. The SKM, which had led the 2020 agitation against the now-repealed three farm laws, is demanding the withdrawal of the Centre's draft of the National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing, a legal guarantee to minimum support price as per the Swaminathan Commission report, implementing the state's agricultural policy and purchase of six crops at MSP by the state government. They are also demanding a law for debt settlement, ensuring canal water to every field, payment of sugarcane arrears and stopping "forcible" acquisition of land for the Bharatmala projects.

The Punjab government on Tuesday asked the protesting revenue officers to join back their duties or face suspension. The strict orders came a day after the Punjab Revenue Officers' association suspended the property registration work till March 7 in protest against the vigilance bureau action against some revenue officials in Ludhiana in a fraudulent land deal. They are also protesting against the vigilance bureau action on some revenue officers, saying such actions are "creating an atmosphere of fear". On Monday, the revenue officers had gone on a mass casual leave, affecting the property registration work thus causing inconvenience to people. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also lashed out at the revenue officers for not undertaking the property registration work. He said revenue officers are protesting against certain officials who were caught in a corruption case by the vigilance bureau. "There is a zero tolerance against corruption," Mann asserted. He said the protesting revenue officers should not remain under an impression that they could blackmail the government by suspending the work. Speaking to reporters in Kharar tehsil office in Mohali, Mann said the government has authorised other officers for property registration work in the state. "If they do not join back their duties, we will appoint new officers," he said, adding that an approval for recruiting new revenue officers will be given in the next Cabinet meeting.

Join back duties or face suspension: Punjab Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

Yogi targets Opposition, calls Maha Kumbh testament to India's heritage



UP CM Yogi Adityanath speaks in the House during Budget session of state Assembly in Lucknow PTI

progress over the years. "Despite being the largest state with abundant resources, the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Uttar Pradesh stood at only ₹12.75 Lakh Crore from 1950 to 2017. However, after the people placed their trust in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policies in 2017, the state's GSDP is more than doubled and is expected to reach ₹27.51 Lakh Crore in 2024-25," he said. He added that Uttar Pradesh now holds a 9.2 per cent share in the national GDP, ranking second in the country. While India's GDP growth rate in 2023-24 was 9.6 per cent, Uttar Pradesh recorded a higher growth rate of 11.6 per cent. Emphasising Uttar Pradesh's leadership in the digital revolution, CM Yogi pointed out the rapid adoption of digital transactions. "In 2017-18, the state recorded 122.84 Crore digital transactions, which surged to 1,024.41 Crore by December 2024. Uttar Pradesh is now the leader in digital payments, with more than half of the transactions happening via UPI," he said. He attributed this success to better internet connectivity in rural areas, financial awareness, and the availability of banking infrastructure.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath launched a sharp attack on the Samajwadi Party (SP) during the budget session, accusing the opposition of playing with India's faith. "You claim that our ideology is communal, but tell us, how can we be communal? We believe in 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' (inclusive development for all)," he asserted.

Meerut-made cricket bats take center stage in ICC Champions trophy

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MEERUT

As the ICC Champions Trophy unfolds, cricket bats crafted in Meerut are proving to be the weapon of choice for several top international players. Stars from India, England, South Africa, New Zealand, and Afghanistan are delivering powerful performances using these premium-quality bats, many of which are made from high-grade English willow. The ongoing tournament, being held in Pakistan and Dubai, has showcased the growing influence of Meerut's bat-making industry, with Group A and B leaders New Zealand and South Africa among the teams relying on them. Indian players like Hardik Pandya, KL Rahul, Axar Patel, Rishabh Pant, and Kuldeep

Yadav have all been spotted wielding bats from leading Meerut-based manufacturers such as SG, SS, and PR. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the demand for cricket equipment from Meerut has witnessed a sharp rise, particularly in Asian and European markets. With the Champions Trophy in full swing, international cricketers like England's Jofra Archer, Liam Livingstone, and Mark Wood, along with Afghanistan's Hasmatullah Shahidi, Azmatullah Omarzai, Ibrahim Zadran, Rashid Khan, and Sadiqullah Atal, have been seen using Meerut-manufactured bats. This spike in popularity is also driving increased purchases ahead of the Indian Premier League (IPL). According to Mohd Rizwan, a senior official at SG, "The demand for cricket

equipment has multiplied post-pandemic. Orders have flooded in following the World Cup, with the Champions Trophy and IPL further fueling sales. Players often receive their gear either in their home countries or at training camps." The prominence of Meerut's sports equipment industry continues to grow, with companies such as SG, SS, PR, and Bhalla International strengthening the city's reputation in the global market. Anil Agarwal, Director at PR, highlighted this success, stating, "Meerut-made bats are dominating the Champions Trophy, demonstrating the craftsmanship and quality of our products. Organisations like the Indian Industries Association (IIA) are playing a crucial role in

supporting industry expansion." With surging demand, bat manufacturing in Meerut has become more technologically advanced. Traditionally, it took nearly two hours to craft a single bat, but modern machinery has reduced this to just 15 minutes. Factory operator Kshitij Agarwal explained, "Innovative machines now handle key tasks such as handle shaping, cleft cutting, pressing, rubbing, and threading. This automation has enhanced efficiency, increased production, and boosted overall profits." Inside the Craft of Bat Manufacturing Manoj Sharma, a bat factory manager, elaborated on the intricate process of bat-making. "We use wooden clefts, commonly known as 'bangar,'

as the primary material. The bat handle, an essential component, is typically made from Singaporean, Assam, or Andaman cane, with Singapore cane being the highest quality. Rubber inserts—usually two or three—are embedded within the handle to enhance grip and shock absorption. The standard bat dimensions include a height of 33.50 inches, a width of 4.25 inches, and a handle length of 11 inches, with a blade thickness between 35mm and 40mm." As Meerut's cricket bats continue to gain global recognition, their presence in the ICC Champions Trophy is a testament to the city's growing dominance in the sporting goods industry. With the IPL on the horizon, the demand for these expertly crafted bats is only expected to rise further.

He said revenue officers are protesting against certain officials who were caught in a corruption case by the vigilance bureau. "There is a zero tolerance against corruption," Mann asserted. He said the protesting revenue officers should not remain under an impression that they could blackmail the government by suspending the work. Speaking to reporters in Kharar tehsil office in Mohali, Mann said the government has authorised other officers for property registration work in the state. "If they do not join back their duties, we will appoint new officers," he said, adding that an approval for recruiting new revenue officers will be given in the next Cabinet meeting.

Mayawati ousts nephew Akash Anand from BSP amid party revamp

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), once a dominant force in Uttar Pradesh, is experiencing a significant shift in leadership as party chief Mayawati looks to rejuvenate her party's fortunes. Recently, Mayawati made the bold decision to oust her nephew, Akash Anand, from all positions within the BSP, culminating in his expulsion. This unexpected move has sent ripples through the political scene. In its aftermath, figures like Rajya Sabha MP Ramji Gautam and Mayawati's brother, Anand Kumar, have emerged as key players in the party's restructuring, both appointed as national coordinators. This realignment signals a fresh direction for the BSP as it prepares for the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. Ramji Gautam, a trusted and low-key leader, has long been a loyal aide to Mayawati. His decades-long association with the BSP has earned him a reputation as a steadfast party

worker. His elevation is widely seen as a move to strengthen the party's core Dalit support base, while distancing itself from controversial or inexperienced elements. Rajiv Ranjan, an analyst, points out that Gautam's rise could help counter the perception

that the BSP is losing its grip on Uttar Pradesh's complex caste dynamics. "The BSP has faced challenges since 2014, with its Dalit-Muslim vote base splintering. Gautam is seen as a disciplined leader who can help reconnect with the party's traditional voters," he says. Once a formidable force in Uttar Pradesh, the BSP has seen a sharp decline in its electoral success in recent years. In the 2022 Assembly elections, the party secured just one seat. Even the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, which saw a marginal improvement with 10 seats, were mainly the result of an alliance with the Samajwadi Party (SP)—an alliance that quickly fell apart, leaving the BSP politically isolated. In the current political environment, the BJP



Mayawati during meeting with party's senior office bearers and state presidents at the party office, in Lucknow PTI

dominates Uttar Pradesh, while the SP is positioned as the leading opposition. The BSP, which once presented itself as a strong alternative for Dalit and backward-caste voters, has struggled to retain this base, with many former supporters now aligning with the BJP or SP. Who Is Ramji Gautam? Ramji Gautam, born on June 1, 1976, in Lakhimpur Kheri, hails from the Jatav community. He has been a dedicated member of the BSP since his early days and became known for his organisational skills, particularly in Banda district, where he served as the party's coordinator. His steady rise culminated in his appointment as the BSP's national vice president in 2018.

Mayawati has referred to him publicly as her "brother," underscoring their close working relationship. Gautam's new role as national coordinator puts him in a crucial position to help rebuild the party's structure and improve its electoral prospects. One of Gautam's key tasks will be to strengthen the BSP's grassroots presence, which has dwindled over time. Following another disappointing performance in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, all eyes are now on the 2027 Assembly elections, where the BSP must recalibrate its strategy to regain relevance. Mayawati's decision to remove Akash Anand marks a clear message that she alone remains the unchallenged leader of the BSP.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Securing the skies

With adversaries rapidly upgrading to next-generation aircraft, India must prioritise air combat readiness

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is at a critical juncture, balancing the need for rapid modernisation with self-sufficiency under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative. A recent report by the Empowered Committee for Capability Enhancement of the IAF, has identified key thrust areas and provided recommendations to address shortfalls and enhance the force's capabilities. The IAF is currently operating at 31 fighter squadrons, significantly below the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons. The delays in the induction of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mk1A and the gradual phasing out of ageing Jaguar, MiG-29UPG, and Mirage-2000 present an urgent need for new acquisitions. The report underscores the necessity of accelerating the production of the LCA Mk1A, LCA Mk2, and the fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). Besides, the need for additional Airborne Early-Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft, mid-air refuelers, and advanced missile systems is crucial for operational capabilities. The committee has stressed the role of the private sector in complementing efforts by Defence PSUs and the DRDO to boost production capacity and efficiency in aerospace manufacturing. The slow pace of domestic fighter jet production has led to gaps in operational readiness, particularly when adversaries like China and Pakistan are rapidly modernising their air forces with fifth- and even sixth-generation aircraft.

The complex procurement process and lack of streamlined decision-making continue to delay critical acquisitions compromising the air strength. While progress has been made in indigenous defence production, there are still gaps in high-end technologies such as jet engine development, advanced avionics, and stealth capabilities. The financial allocation for defence needs to align with modernisation goals, ensuring adequate funding for both indigenous projects and immediate acquisitions. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has directed that the committee's recommendations be implemented in a structured and time-sensitive manner to prevent further delays. The government must ensure the timely execution of the AMCA program and increase HAL's production capacity to meet annual fighter jet requirements. Besides, a reformed procurement mechanism, reducing bureaucratic delays, is essential to fast-track approvals and acquisitions. Strengthening collaborations with global aerospace leaders to bring in advanced technology while setting up domestic manufacturing hubs will help accelerate modernisation. Encouraging private defence manufacturers through policy reforms, incentives, and infrastructure support will boost self-sufficiency in aerospace production. The recommendations underscore call for urgent action and need for addressing systemic challenges, and fostering innovation through private sector involvement. Indeed, India must achieve a combat-ready and self-sufficient air force capable of countering emerging threats. The need for a modern and highly efficient Air Force is more critical than ever.

PICTALK



Women participate in bike rally 'Queens on the Wheel', in Bhopal.

Russia China help Junta hold the fort

Myanmar's civil war sees resistance forces making major gains, yet the Junta retains key cities and economic hubs with China and Russia's backing

Last week, Home Minister Amit Shah held a review meeting of Manipur under the President's Rule and also discussed the trade routes to Myanmar with the border areas no longer under Junta's control. Myanmar's military has ruled the roost since 1962. Their fourth coup February 2021, is the longest but one which has met with the biggest resistance and for the first time, the Bmar (Burmese) joined the opposition which consists of Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO), People's Defence Force (PDF) under National United Government (NUG), local militias and rebel groups all united in defeating the Junta.

Under Junta's rule organized crime of which it is beneficiary has risen phenomenally to USD 2bn in cyber scams and other frauds. Many Indians have been unsuspecting participants and victims. Never before has Resistance been so organized in its fight against the military; success has come without any unified command and what at best is coordinated operations like Three Brotherhood Alliance which launched Operation 1027 by three EAOs - TNLA, MNDAA, and AA. The last of these - the Arakan Army - is militarily the strongest and operates in the Rakhine province in the south while the other two EAOs operate in the northern Shan state. Codename 1027 denotes the launch date of the massive offensive in the north on October 27, 2023.

China plays a double role: supporting the Junta as well as some of the EAOs. Lately, there has been a policy shift - full support to the Junta. But Chinese pronouncements are deceptive; best to go by Chinese deeds, not words. On the ground, in the fourth year of the war, the Junta has lost considerable ground but is nowhere near being defeated. On the scale of conflict measurement, Junta holds 21 per cent of the territory which consists of the precious Irrawaddy heartland of Bmars and includes the new capital Naypyidaw, Yangon and Mandalay, the two largest cities; and all sea ports and air bases. Only one seaport the India-operated Sittwe is under threat sur-



rounded by the Arakan Army. Two military command headquarters and two air bases in the north and south have been taken by Resistance forces. Some 145 of 350 townships are lost by Junta which has also lost all trade routes/posts on the borders with Bangladesh, India, China, and Thailand. Only one trade route Moosa, is with Junta. The Resistance controls 42 per cent territory with the remaining being No Man's Land. More importantly, 80 per cent of people especially Bmars support resistance while only 20 per cent are with Junta. During previous uprisings, Bmar always supported the Junta. Corruption is endemic, top down and has eroded Junta's military capabilities. It has led to defections and desertions with fighting battalions down to 100 men against the standard 600 soldiers. Some 167 battalions appear to have been lost, and weapons sold resulting in low morale and scant will to fight. Casualties are numerous on both sides but no figures have been released. Junta commanders have made false claims about facts on the ground. Some ghost units are on the Orbat. Most supply lines have been rendered unusable for reinforcements. All movement is by air and counter-attacks therefore also launched from air causing heavy casualties among the civilian population. The Resistance has been enriched



CHINA PLAYS A DOUBLE ROLE: SUPPORTING THE JUNTA AS WELL AS SOME OF THE EAOs. LATELY, THERE HAS BEEN A POLICY SHIFT-FULL SUPPORT TO THE JUNTA. BUT CHINESE PRONOUNCEMENTS ARE DECEPTIVE; BEST TO GO BY CHINESE DEEDS, NOT WORDS

by defectors who bring weapons and skills. Women now comprise 60 per cent of the force though they are mainly in support roles. In earlier uprisings, women constituted only 10 per cent. This time diaspora support is unprecedented and a significant factor. Recruitment to PDF has also risen with support being provided by external players. PDFs are called 'watermelons' green outside and red inside. While green is the colour of the uniform, red is the colour of the National League for Democracy flag. Despite the high morale and momentum of success, Resistance requires a new military strategy, another 1027. Resistance is expected to attack Junta's defence ordnance factories- their defence industrial base- near Mandalay and its loss will be a big blow to the military but still not enough to unhinge it. PDF has to reorganize into battalion/brigade formations under a command structure to be able to capture and hold ground and take strategic targets like airbases. China and Russia, two P5 members in the UNSC, are partners with No Limits but not military allies. Both support the Junta. Russia is now the key military supplier and since 2021, has provided equipment worth USD 406 mn. Junta supreme Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited Russia last year ostensibly for a medical check-

up. Russia supplied six Su30 aircraft while six Burmese elephants were sent to Moscow. The Sukhois will significantly enhance aerial capability and cause additional civilian casualties. China remains the key stakeholder in Myanmar and is supporting the Junta as it has made major military and economic investments in Myanmar. It eyes the rich minerals, oil, gas and hydropower. Its gas pipeline from Kyaukphu seaport on the Andaman Sea to Kunming in Yunnan provides Beijing access to the Indian Ocean. Gas pipelines are being supplemented by road and railway arteries. Along with Coco Island given on lease, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor constitutes an alternative route to China's Malacca dilemma. With 20,000 new recruits with Junta, Beijing has calculated that Resistance cannot defeat it. So Beijing-brokered cease-fires with EAOs in Kachin and Shan states and Kokang region in the north and also with MNDAA in January 2025. Beijing will also support Junta to hold elections in November 2025 giving it the fig-leaf of legitimacy. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)



ASHOK K MEHTA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Legacy of Sri Ramakrishna



The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, according to the Bengali lunar calendar, was celebrated on March 1 this year. Sri Ramakrishna urged us to liberate ourselves from religious dogma. He

famously said, "There are many doors to God's house... No matter which door you enter through, you get inside." He did not merely preach tolerance—he practiced it. Sri Ramakrishna followed the path of Islam for some time and adhered to its teachings. Later, he practiced Christianity for a brief period, demonstrating his belief in the idea that "Many opinions, many paths." Swami Vivekananda, his devoted disciple, once said, "Each human being embodies God. This is what I have learned from my Master, Sri Ramakrishna." His teachings serve as a powerful antidote to inhumanity, religious hatred, and untouchability—values that remain profoundly relevant today.

Sujit De | Kolkata

(ACB) to file FIR against the former SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Buch for alleged stock market fraud and regulatory violations, the case will likely have far-reaching implications for regulatory governance in India's financial markets. Whether this probe will uncover deeper systemic failures or simply remain a high-profile legal battle remains to be seen. However, the controversy surrounding SEBI's regulatory actions has already sparked enough concerns among investors and market participants. Analysts believe that such legal battles could impact investor confidence, especially among foreign institutional investors who rely on SEBI's oversight for market transparency. As the case unfolds, it remains to be seen how the investigation will impact SEBI's credibility and its approach to future regulatory enforcement. Importantly, the case as well raises serious questions about the central government's commitment to transparency and integrity on the functioning of the country's premier regulatory body for securities and commodity market.

Ranganathan | Chennai

REIN IN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS Madam — In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court emphasized that individuals engaged in social media influencing or podcasting must uphold morality and decency in their content before broadcasting it. The Court stressed that such influencers must recognize their responsibility towards society. Creating humor through vulgar slang and offensive language does not contribute positively to society. Instead, it fosters a negative mindset, particularly in the younger generation (Gen Z). Striving to appear as a "cool dude" in front of an audience does not absolve influencers of their responsibilities as citizens. In his defense, Ranbir Allahabadia argued that his controversial statement was made purely in jest. Humor should not come at the expense of emotions or sensitivity. Instead, influencers should focus on fostering a respectful and thoughtful environment that contributes to a united society.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

A GLIMMER OF HOPE IN MANIPUR

Madam — The editorial, "A Fresh Start..." (March 4, 2025), presents a positive outlook on the surrender of illegal arms in Manipur. However, as noted in the editorial, this is likely only a fraction of the weapons still in the possession of warring groups. Despite this development, nothing substantial has been done to bring lasting peace to the state—except for the resignation of the Chief Minister, who was widely seen as responsible for the unfortunate turn of events. The 60,000 displaced individuals forced into the forests must be allowed to return to their homes and lead normal lives. For this to happen, the government must establish an impartial administration that earns the trust of all sections of society. Symbolic gestures alone will not suffice; all looted and illegal arms must be surrendered to achieve real progress. If both the state and central governments had been genuinely committed to fostering peaceful coexistence among the groups, the situation would not have deteriorated so severely for so long. Even after major incidents—including the looting of arms, around 250 murders, women being paraded nude, and places of worship being ransacked—the government's inefficacy remained glaringly evident. Yet, it took an inordinate amount of time to secure the Chief Minister's resignation. President's Rule alone cannot bring about meaningful change, as it operates under directives from the Home Ministry, which itself has been exposed for its lack of a clear strategy. True peace will return only when an impartial and competent administration takes charge. Unfortunately, neither the state nor the nation has a charismatic leader capable of inspiring a positive response from the people.

A G Rajmohan | Chandigarh

FORMER SEBI CHIEF IN TROUBLE

Madam — Apropos the front page news item, "Buch Booked", published on Mar. 3, this is my response. With a special court directing the Anti-Corruption Bureau

RBI's Repo Rate cut: A golden opportunity for homebuyers

With the RBI lowering the repo rate by 25 basis points, home loan borrowers stand to benefit from reduced EMIs, making homeownership more affordable

Any time is a good time when it comes to buying a home. However, the recent repo rate cuts signal a lowering of interest rates in the future, thus, hinting at a possibly more stable economy and increased scope for real-estate investment. Home buyers in India are wondering whether they should consider purchasing a home following the recent repo rate cuts by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The country's central bank recently lowered the repo rates by 25 bps from 6.5 per cent to 6.25 per cent. This marks the first rate cut in five years by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), which can result in significant savings for home loan borrowers. **Small and steady savings on EMIs** Home loan applicants stand to benefit from RBI's recent decision, as it will help them service loans at a lower cost. This reduction in EMIs would also make homeownership more affordable



for potential buyers. Let's illustrate this with an example. Suppose that you took a 20-year home loan of Rs 20 lakhs at an 8.75% interest rate. Your current monthly EMI would be somewhere around Rs 17,674. With the new rate, your monthly EMI drops to Rs 17,356, resulting in a total savings of Rs. 76,259. If you maintain your current EMI payments, you could pay off your loan 5

months earlier than originally planned. For those who are hesitant to enter the housing market due to high property prices and interest rates, this may be a good opportunity to take advantage of reduced borrowing costs. However, it is imperative to consider other factors such as market trends, location, and personal financial stability before making a decision. **Way to loan refinancing options**

Borrowers might feel that the savings from reduced repo rates are minimal when it comes to monthly EMI outgoings. As the saying goes, "A penny saved is a penny earned," and even a small saving on EMIs could contribute to larger savings in the long term. Additionally, borrowers with strong credit scores can take advantage of competitive refinancing options. Since they are considered low-risk by lenders, they are most likely to secure lower interest rates on refinanced loans.

Win for the housing sector The RBI aims to stimulate the economy by making home financing more accessible. This can lead to increased demand in the housing sector, especially in areas where property prices have been sharply increasing due to infrastructure development and improved amenities. The reduction in the cost of borrowing can help mitigate some pressure from skyrocketing housing.

(The writer is CEO & Co-Founder, BASIC Home Loan; views are personal)



ATUL MONGA



FIRST COLUMN

PURIFYING THE MIND, RESTORING THE EARTH

If we truly wish to combat pollution, we must first cleanse our thoughts and correct spiritual imbalance



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Most of us are very much aware of the word 'Pollution', be it a child, a youngster or an old person. However one could not contemplate the reasons or source from which this dreadful monster called pollution occurs. Today, globally every country is facing consequences of pollution, contamination or abuse of air, water, food & even Space on a very large scale, but they are not able to find a foolproof solution to this dangerous threat to humanity. Although many institutions & regulatory bodies have been established.

Today a fast-developing country like India stands poised on a pinnacle of wealth and power, yet we Indians live in a land of vanishing beauty, increasing ugliness, shrinking open spaces, and an overall environment that is diminishing daily by pollution noise and blight. So where does this take us? Would there be a solution to control or tackle pollution problems & save humanity? Well!! The answer lies with the ones who are posing this question, i.e. we the humans, YES! Over the years, while discussing deeply about cause & effect of pollution, we smartly avoid looking at the actual problem that's deeply rooted in the mental sphere rather than the sphere of matter. If we look up the dictionary meaning of the word pollution, we may find something like 'to destroy purity of; to contaminate'. However, we humans are only aware of the material pollution in the branches of the polluted tree & we have disregarded the seed or root of 'thought pollution' which gave growth to that tree. So without destroying the root basis of pollution, the source can never be purified. It won't be an exaggeration to say that the problem of environmental pollution is actually due to the pollution of man's mind which is full of selfishness, jealousy, greed, anger, etc. The problem of ecological imbalance is due to our mental imbalance, and the disequilibrium in nature is due to disequilibrium in man's mind. Another fact that is generally



unknown or is little realised is that the vibrations from a polluted mind contaminate or corrupt the atmosphere; they make it tense and vicious. Most of us make a mistake by thinking that our thoughts are invisible & psychic and hence they can't do anything, but actually, thoughts have both hands and legs, because one can control one's hand to rob nothing, control one's legs to kick nobody, but one can scarcely control one's thought without thinking as thought is too deep to be expressed, too strong to be suppressed, too fast to be drawn back, hence he who will not command his thoughts, will soon lose command of his actions.

The wars struggles and quarrels of mankind are very often caused by this. Deep thinking would reveal that most of the present global problems are due to thought pollution, for this pollution destroys a person's sense of being impartial, considerate and cooperative and makes him callous, inimical, violent-prone and vicious. It influences economics, politics, commerce, business, even friendship and all relationships

The ultimate solution to this problem lies in realising the self and also our relationship with other human beings. Remember !! Great men are those who see that the spiritual force is much stronger than the material force. Hence without a spiritual orientation of the relationship between man and man, moral and spiritual values cannot be brought into play or be sustained, and, in the absence of these core values, no problem can be solved for a considerable length of time. It is, therefore, essential for all of us to understand the real and intrinsic nature behind the mask or the garment of the body to set the direction right. If this is not done, then possibly science without spirituality may dangerously lead mankind to a nuclear catastrophe population explosion or environmental upheaval. So, let us use the powerful weapon of spiritual wisdom to cleanse our souls from thought pollution & survive in harmony with nature & its elements without any kind of disturbance whatsoever.

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

Unlocking Punjab's export potential



A S MITTAL

With targeted policy support, infrastructure investment and global market integration, Punjab can play a transformative role in India's trade success story

India has vast industrial and agricultural capabilities across 800 districts, yet 40% of its merchandise exports originate from only 10 districts. Gujarat dominates this landscape with five key contributors: Jamnagar, Surat, Ahmedabad, Bharuch, and Kachchh. The other significant players include Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, Bengaluru in Karnataka, Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, and NOIDA in Uttar Pradesh. Alarming, Punjab—home to a robust industrial base in textiles, bicycles, sports goods, engineering goods, tractors, agricultural implements and food processing—is conspicuously absent from this export powerhouse. The 'One District-One Product' (ODOP) initiative was introduced to rectify this imbalance, but meaningful progress has yet to materialise. If India is serious about reaching its ambitious target of \$1 trillion in exports by 2030, it must expand its export landscape beyond this handful of districts.

The next wave of growth will undoubtedly come from unlocking the potential of industrial hubs like Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur and Mohali. These regions must receive robust, targeted policy support, a conducive environment and infrastructure development, and substantial financial support to enable Punjab's industries to compete with the country's top export-driven districts. India's Global Export Challenge India's share of global exports has stagnated for decades, hovering around 2% and currently at 1.8% as of 2024. Ranked 17th among the world's top exporters, India falls behind various developing nations like Mexico, which ranks 9th.

To achieve the goal of at least doubling India's merchandise export value from \$437 billion in FY 2023-24 to \$874 billion by FY 2030, a strategic overhaul is essential—one that prioritises the establishment of export hubs in underrepresented regions, particularly Punjab, entire of potential.

The Imperative for a Decentralised Export Strategy

Punjab accounts for a mere 2% of India's total exports, but this share holds immense growth potential. To unlock this potential, the 'Districts as Export Hubs' initiative must go beyond paper & policy discussions and be actively and aggressively pursued. The government should prioritise transforming Punjab into a significant export player, leveraging the state's industrial cities, which are primed for expansion.

Punjab's Key Districts with High Export Potential

Ludhiana: The Unrivaled Textile and Bicycle Powerhouse Ludhiana dominates India's bicycle exports with an astounding 80% market share. However, India's presence in the global \$33.3 billion bicycle market is alarmingly low, standing at less than 1%, while China effortlessly commands 60%. Similarly, in the textiles, apparel, and hosiery sector—valued at \$1.7 trillion—India's share languishes at a mere 5%, compared to China's commanding 37%. With strategic branding, robust trade facilitation, and decisive policy support, Ludhiana is poised to become a global leader in these vital sectors.

Jalandhar: The Untapped Giant in Sports Goods

Exports Jalandhar produces an impressive 45% of India's sports goods and con-



IF INDIA IS SERIOUS ABOUT REACHING ITS AMBITIOUS TARGET OF \$1 TRILLION IN EXPORTS BY 2030, IT MUST EXPAND ITS EXPORT LANDSCAPE BEYOND THIS HANDFUL OF DISTRICTS.

tributes 75% of the country's sports-related exports. Yet, India holds a mere 0.56% share in the global sports goods market, valued at \$220.57 billion, while China captures a staggering 42.2%. Jalandhar must actively integrate into international supply chains to aggressively penetrate markets in the USA, UK, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, and South Africa.

Hoshiarpur and Mohali: The Manufacturing Titans Hoshiarpur and Mohali are home to one-third of India's Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and are the undisputed leaders in tractor exports. The global tractor market, valued at \$62.7 billion, is dominated by Germany with a 16% share, while India barely scrapes by with 2.2%. Mohali is also emerging as a significant tech and pharmaceutical hub, which is crucial for high-value exports that will fuel economic growth.

Amritsar: The Strategic Gateway to Global Trade

Amritsar, a historic trade hub, can leverage its advantageous proximity to the Wagah-Attari border to significantly enhance cross-border trade with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. By expanding trade policies, Punjab and northern India can assertively access high-demand markets in the Gulf, Turkey, and Europe. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) will further solidify Amritsar's role as a pivotal player in global trade.

Basmati Export Zone:

A Major Global Opportunity Punjab leads the charge by contributing 40% of India's basmati rice exports, which account for 65% of the global market. Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Gurdaspur must be developed into a dedicated Basmati Export Zone under the One District, One Product (ODOP) scheme. With the correct branding

and compliance, Punjab has the potential to tap into previously unexplored markets.

Tackling Key Export Challenges Head-On

1. Infrastructure and Logistics: Access to ports is strategically essential to any state when engaging in international trade, as landlocked regions face the comparative disadvantage of high trade costs and hindrances in the freedom of transit from the seas. Punjab's landlocked status must not be a hindrance. The Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor (AKIC) needs to be expedited to enhance dry ports and logistics hubs under the Trade Infrastructure for Exports Scheme (TIES). Introducing state-owned wagons will be a game-changer for bolstering Punjab's exports and addressing the freight burdens associated with shipping.

2. Cost of Industrial Land: Land prices in Ludhiana and Mohali are prohibitively high, ranging from Rs. 5-7 crore per acre, stifling expansion. Authorities must prioritise the allocation of vacant industrial plots in focal points and Panchayati Raj-owned land for industrial use to establish a viable industrial land bank.

3. Global Market Compliance: With 18% of India's exports directed toward the European Union (EU), Punjab's industries require substantial support to meet evolving international regulations, including the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism and stringent deforestation laws.

4. Leveraging Free Trade Agreements: Many exporters in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are currently unaware of India's FTAs. Local chambers and business federations must launch aggressive awareness campaigns to maximise these agreements among entrepreneurs.

5. Boosting MSMEs: Punjab's micro, small, and medium enter-

prises (MSMEs) need targeted financial support and strong market linkages to thrive in global trade. District Export Promotion Councils (DEPCs) headed by respective deputy-commissioners (DCs) are underperforming as DCs are already overburdened with multiple administrative tasks, and dedicated senior officials to be assigned to formulate District Export Action Plans (DEAPs) to bolster MSMEs.

6. Promoting Geographical Indications (GIs):

Punjab's GI-tagged products, such as Basmati rice, Phulkari embroidery, Amritsari Papad, and Jalandhar sports goods, possess immense global potential. Establishing dedicated stalls at international airports and providing financial backing for branding will amplify their presence in international markets.

Visit Bharat Demands Viksit Districts:

India's ambitious export targets can only be realised through a decisive, decentralised approach centred around its more districts. With Punjab's rich industrial and agricultural heritage, it is positioned to emerge as a key export powerhouse. By fortifying district industries, enhancing trade infrastructure, and driving global market integration, Punjab will play a crucial role in India's export-led growth narrative. For India to achieve a truly 'Viksit Bharat', its districts must assume a more prominent role in export activities. This strategic shift will reshape India's global trade landscape and ignite widespread economic development and employment generation.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika ITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

Unmasking the financial networks threatening national security

Illicit financial flows drive disruptive activities by foreign-backed dubious NGOs, influencing policies and protests that impact India's growth and development

India is at a pivotal moment in its history, reclaiming its status as a global leader. Our economic resilience, democratic foundation, and cultural unity have driven our progress, but hidden forces seek to undermine this advancement. This battle is not fought with conventional weapons but through financial manipulation, foreign influence, and strategic disruptions disguised as humanitarian aid, social activism, and policy advocacy.

Foreign-funded networks have infiltrated India's socio-political fabric, threatening our sovereignty from within. One major threat is illicit financial flows fueling disruptive activities in India. Nepal's recent grey listing by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)



BINOD ANAND

highlights how money laundering networks in South Asia pose a significant security risk. Nepal has become a hub for financial irregularities, increasing the possibility of unregulated funds entering India through informal channels. This is not just an economic issue—it is a matter of national security, stability, and control over our developmental path. For years, foreign-backed

organizations such as USAID, DFID, Open Society Foundations, and the Ford Foundation have funneled substantial financial resources into India under the pretext of supporting human rights and social causes.

While genuine welfare efforts are welcome, evidence suggests that some of these funds have been strategically diverted to disrupt India's growth, create internal discord, and propagate anti-India narratives globally. A glaring example is the farmers' protests, which began as a movement for agrarian reforms but quickly escalated into a global propaganda campaign. Foreign lobbying groups, anti-India activists, and Khalistani supporters exploited the movement to mobilize protests, shape media

narratives, and turn a domestic issue into an international crisis. Financial audits have exposed a complex network of foreign funding behind this orchestration.

This raises the question—are these movements truly in India's interest, or are they calculated efforts to delay our growth? The infiltration of foreign narratives into India's civil society directly threatens our self-reliance and policy-making sovereignty. While India welcomes foreign investments aimed at development and genuine social progress, we cannot allow our policies, protests, or progress to be dictated by external forces with hidden agendas.

The FATF's decision to place Nepal on its grey list is a direct consequence of its weak finan-



cial regulations, unmonitored cross-border transactions, and insufficient anti-money laundering measures. These financial loopholes have created a shadow economy, facilitating illicit funding that could have serious implications for India's security. India shares a 1,751 km-long porous border with Nepal, allowing free movement of people and goods. While this has strengthened economic and cultural ties, it has also enabled smug-

gling, unaccounted money transfers, and potential terror financing. Intelligence agencies have flagged instances where hawala networks in Nepal were used to channel funds into India to support destabilizing activities.

One major concern is Nepal's financial exemption allowing investments in infrastructure without disclosing sources of funds, making it a conduit for dubious transactions. While FATF's grey listing does not impose sanctions, it signals global financial institutions that Nepal is vulnerable to illegal money transfers, potentially triggering reduced foreign investments and regional financial instability. Recognizing these threats, the Modi government has taken decisive action to curb foreign

interference.

Over 20,700 NGOs have lost their FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) licenses due to financial irregularities, undisclosed foreign funding sources, and misuse of contributions. The tightening of FEMA (Foreign Exchange Management Act) regulations ensures greater scrutiny of financial transactions linked to activism, political lobbying, and potential terror financing. Collaboration with FATF, INTERPOL, and global security agencies has enhanced India's ability to track cross-border fund flows and dismantle illegal financial networks fueling unrest.

Strengthening oversight on foreign-funded NGOs, think tanks, and advocacy groups to ensure full transparency and

accountability. Enhancing security measures along the Indo-Nepal border to curb illicit financial transactions and smuggling networks. Promoting domestic funding mechanisms to empower local organizations and grassroots initiatives, reducing reliance on external financial aid. Our civil society is strong enough to drive change through indigenous resources and a vision rooted in national interests. The need of the hour is self-reliance—strengthening grassroots organizations and building an Indian developmental model based on internal merit rather than foreign charity.

(The writer is Secretary General, Confederation of NGOs of Rural India; views are personal)

China retaliates to Trump's tariffs

Sanctions US firms, takes action in WTO

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Tuesday retaliated against US President Donald Trump's imposition of a second round of 10 per cent tariffs on its export by slapping an additional 15 per cent tariff on American goods and initiated legal action against Washington at the WTO. China stands ready to work with the US to address each other's concerns through dialogue and consultation. China will impose additional tariffs on some products imported from the United States, effective from March 10, the China's Customs Tariff Commission said Tuesday. An additional 15-per cent tariff will be imposed on imported chicken, wheat, corn and cotton originating from the US, it said in a statement. Sorghum, soybeans, pork, beef, aquatic products, fruits, vegetables and dairy products will be subject to an additional 10-per cent tariff. Additionally, China decided on Tuesday to add 10 US firms to the country's unreliable entity

list and take corresponding measures against them. They include a number of companies linked to defence and security besides AI, aviation, IT and "dual-use" items that carry both civilian and military applications.

Also, China has initiated legal action against the US under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute settlement mechanism regarding the latter's latest tariff increase on Chinese products, the Ministry of Commerce said Tuesday. China's retaliatory actions followed after the US imposition of an additional 10-per cent tariff on products imported from China, effective from March 4.

The unilateral imposition of tariffs by the US undermines the multilateral trading system, increases the burden on American businesses and consumers, and erodes the foundation of China-US economic and trade cooperation, the commission said. Trump's announcement of a second round of 10 per cent tariffs on Chinese exports to the US coincides with the opening of China's annual parliament session.

The twin sessions consisting of the Parliament, the National People's Congress and the advisory council, the China People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) were opened on Tuesday. While NPC began with the



Gen Zhang Youxia, vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission attends the opening of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, on Tuesday

customary press conference by its media spokesperson, the CPPCC held its opening session. The NPC will begin its session on Wednesday, during which Premier Li Qiang will submit the work report, which will include the annual budget. Trump's tariffs loomed large on

ed USD 427.2 billion of China's exports to the US and USD 147.8 billion of American exports to China. Trump said his 10 per cent new tariffs on goods from China will come into force on Tuesday, the day the NPC opens its session. Already, Chinese goods were hit by 10 per cent tariffs by Trump after he began his second tenure, demanding China to address US concerns over fentanyl, a potent opioid drug blamed for widespread drug addiction in the US. During his election campaign, he threatened to slap 60 per cent tariffs. While retaliating, China, however, urged the US to work with it to resolve trade disputes through equal-footed consultation. Commenting on Trump's tariffs in his press briefing, Lou Qinqian, spokesperson of the NPC, said the US unilateral tariff move violated the WTO and disrupted the security and stability of global industrial and supply chains.

China stands ready to work with the US to address each other's concerns through dialogue and consultation on the basis of mutual respect, equality, reciprocity and mutual benefit, but "will never accept any act of pressuring or threatening," Lou said. "We will firmly defend our national sovereignty, security and development interests," he said.

US tariffs on Canada, Mexico take effect

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump's long-threatened tariffs against Canada and Mexico went into effect Tuesday, putting global markets on edge and setting up costly retaliations by the United States' North American allies. Starting just past midnight, imports from Canada and Mexico are now to be taxed at 25 per cent, with Canadian energy products subject to 10 per cent import duties. The 10 per cent tariff that Trump placed on Chinese imports in February was doubled to 20 per cent, and Beijing retaliated Tuesday with tariffs of up to 15 per cent on a wide array of US farm exports. It also expanded the number of US companies subject to export controls and other restrictions by about two dozen. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his country would slap tariffs on more than USD 100 billion of American goods over the course of 21 days. Mexico didn't immediately detail any retaliatory measures.

The US president's moves raised fears of higher inflation and the prospect of a devastating trade war even as he promised the American public that taxes on imports are the easiest path to national prosperity. He has shown a willingness to buck the warnings of mainstream economists and put his own public approval on the line, believing that tariffs can fix what ails the country. "It's a very powerful weapon that politicians haven't used because they were either dishonest, stupid or paid off in some other form," Trump said Monday at the White House. "And now we're using them." The Canada and Mexico tariffs were supposed to begin in February, but Trump agreed to a 30-day suspension to negotiate further with the two largest US trading partners. The stated reason for the tariffs is to address drug trafficking and illegal immigration, and both countries say they've made progress on those issues. But Trump has also said the tariffs will only come down if the US trade imbalance closes,

a process unlikely to be settled on a political timeline. The tariffs may be short-lived if the US economy suffers. But Trump could also impose more tariffs on the European Union, India, computer chips, autos and pharmaceutical drugs. The American president has injected a disorienting volatility into the world economy, leaving it off balance as people wonder what he'll do next. "It's chaotic, especially compared to the way we saw tariffs rolled out in the first (Trump) administration," said Michael House, co-chair of the international trade practice at the Perkins Coie law firm. "It's unpredictable. We don't know, in fact, what the president will do." Democratic lawmakers were quick to criticize the tariffs, and even some Republican senators raised alarms. Sen Susan Collins, R-Maine, said she's "very concerned" about the tariffs going into effect because of her state's proximity to Canada. "Maine and Canada's economy are integrated," Collins said, explaining that much of the state's lobsters and blueberries are processed in Canada and then sent back to the US. The world economy is now caught in the fog of what appears to be a trade war. Even after Trump announced Monday that the tariffs were going forward, Canadian officials were still in touch with their US counterparts. "The dialogue will continue, but we are ready to respond," Canadian Defence Minister Bill Blair said in Ottawa as he went into a special Cabinet meeting on US-Canada relations. "There are still discussions taking place."

Shortly after Blair spoke, Trudeau said Canada would impose 25 per cent tariffs on USD 155 billion Canadian (USD 107 billion US) worth of American goods, starting with tariffs on USD 30 billion Canadian (USD 21 billion US) worth of goods immediately and on the remaining amount on American products in three weeks. "Our tariffs will remain in place until the US trade action is withdrawn, and should US tariffs not cease, we are in active

and ongoing discussions with provinces and territories to pursue several non-tariff measures," Trudeau said. The White House would like to see a drop in seizures of fentanyl inside the United States, not just on the northern and southern borders. Administration officials say that seizures of fentanyl last month in everywhere from Louisiana to New Jersey had ties to foreign cartels. Damon Pike, technical practice leader for customs and trade services at the tax and consulting firm BDO, suggested the responses of other countries could escalate trade tensions and possibly increase the economic pressure points. "Canada has their list ready," Pike said. "The EU has their list ready. It's going to be tit for tat." The Trump administration has suggested inflation will not be as bad as economists claim, saying tariffs can motivate foreign companies to open factories in the United States. On Monday, Trump announced that Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, the computer chip-maker, would be investing USD 100 billion in domestic production. Still, it can take time to relocate factories spread across the world and train workers with the skills they need. Greg Ahearn, president and CEO of The Toy Association, said the 20 per cent tariffs on Chinese goods will be "crippling" for the toy industry, as nearly 80 per cent of toys sold in the US are made in China. "There's a sophistication of manufacturing, of the tooling," he said. "There's a lot of handcrafting that is part of these toys that a lot of people don't understand ... the face painting, the face masks, the hair weaving, the hair braiding, the cut and sew for plush to get it to look just so. All of that are very high hands, skilled labour that has been passed through generations in the supply chain that exists with China."

For a president who has promised quick results, Ahearn added a note of caution about how quickly US factories could match their Chinese rivals. "That can't be replicated overnight," he said.

Japan's Prince Hisahito says he'll balance royal duties, univ studies

PTI ■ TOKYO

Japan's Prince Hisahito, the second in line to the throne, has held a debut news conference, telling reporters he would try to balance official duties and his university studies and research about the dragonfly. Hisahito turned 18 last September, becoming the first male royal family member to reach adulthood in almost four decades in Japan. It was a significant development for a family that has ruled for more than a millennium but faces the same existential problems as the rest of the nation — a fast-aging, shrinking population. The prince said he would follow the good examples of his uncle, Emperor Naruhito, and other elder members of the imperial family, while pursuing his university studies, beginning next month. Speaking to reporters at the Akasaka Estate residence in Tokyo on Monday, Hisahito said he believes the role of the emperor as a symbolic figure is someone who "always thinks of the people and stays close to them". Hisahito is second in line to Japan's Chrysanthemum Throne after his father, Crown Prince Akishino. The prince, who turned 18 on Sept 6, is the youngest of the 16-member imperial family and one of only five men, including former Emperor Akihito. The 1947 Imperial House Law only allows a male to succeed to the throne. Female royal members who marry commoners lose their royal status. Hisahito's older cousin, Princess Aiko — the only child of Naruhito and his wife Masako — is seen as the public's favourite, though the law for now bars her from becoming an empress, despite being in a direct line of descent. Japan's conservative government wants to keep the royal succession male-only, though it is looking for a way to allow women to keep royal status if they marry commoners. Hisahito plans to study biology at the Tsukuba University near Tokyo, starting in April. He hopes to focus his studies on dragonflies.

China seeks to scale up ties with EU

Beijing (PTI): China seeks to scale up its ties with the European Union following the deepening divide between the US and the EU over ending the Ukraine war, particularly after President Donald Trump's stormy meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy. China is willing to work with the 27-member EU against unilateralism, Lou Qinqian, the spokesperson of China's parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC), told a media briefing here on Tuesday. "Over the past 50 years, facts have proven again and again that there are no fundamental clashes of interest or geopolitical

conflicts between China and Europe; rather, they are partners that contribute to each other's success," Lou said. China wants to scale up its ties with the EU, which it regards as a lucrative market for Chinese products, particularly its AI-compatible e-vehicles and batteries. The EU has clamped hefty tariffs on Chinese e-vehicles to protect the indigenous models. China is also looking to cash in on the sharp turnaround in strategic alliances after the recent disastrous meeting between Zelenskyy and Trump, casting a shadow over the close US-EU ties. The EU leaders rallied behind

Zelenskyy after his tempestuous meeting with Trump, following which he was asked to leave the White House. The meeting videos were played up heavily by the state-run Chinese media outlets. "China-Europe relations are not targeted at, dependent on, nor subject to any third party," Lou said in a veiled reference to the US-EU ties. The Trump-Zelenskyy fallout was a tricky moment for China as while pressuring Ukraine to settle for ending the war, the US President is also warming up to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, a close ally of Chinese leader Xi Jinping. There is lingering concern in

Beijing over the emerging rapprochement between Trump and Putin over ending the Ukraine war. Xi and Putin share a close alliance built over the years to ward off threats from the US and its allies. On March 1, Putin dispatched his top security official Sergei Shoigu to Beijing to brief Xi about Moscow's current talks with Washington to end the Ukraine war. In his talk with Shoigu, Xi has underlined the need to carry on the core spirit of governing China-Russia relations in the new era featuring lasting good-neighbourliness, comprehensive strategic coordination, and mutually beneficial cooperation for win-win results.

Lebanon, S Arabia call for Israeli withdrawal

PTI ■ BEIRUT

Lebanon's president ended a visit to Saudi Arabia on Tuesday where he discussed regional affairs with the kingdom's crown prince after which both countries said Israeli troops should withdraw from south Lebanon and only the Lebanese state should have weapons. The visit by Joseph Aoun, the first by a Lebanese head of state to the oil-rich kingdom in eight years, improves ties between the two countries that have been cold for years over Iran's influence in Lebanon. Aoun visited Saudi Arabia several times when he was army commander, and many in Lebanon hope that his visit as president will open the way for lifting a ban on imports from Lebanon as well as allowing Saudi citizens to travel to Lebanon. Aoun was received Monday night by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at Yamama Palace in the capital, Riyadh, where they discussed the situation in Lebanon and boosting relations between the

two countries, according to the state-run Saudi Press Agency. Aoun's visit comes after the Iran-backed Hezbollah suffered severe blows during a 14-month war with Israel that left many of its top political and military officials dead and ended with a US-brokered ceasefire in late November. Israel withdrew many of its troops from Lebanon in mid-February but left five posts inside Lebanon, which Lebanese officials have described as a violation of the ceasefire deal. A joint statement issued after the summit said that only state institutions in Lebanon should have the right to have arms and that the Lebanese army should be supported. It added that Israel should withdraw from all parts of Lebanon. Aoun last week told Saudi Arabia's Asharq News that Riyadh would reactivate a USD 3 billion package for the Lebanese army. In 2016, Saudi Arabia announced it was halting deals aimed at equipping and supporting the Lebanese army and police forces in retaliation for

the tiny country's siding with Iran amid the Sunni kingdom's spat with the Shiite power. The statement added that both sides agreed to study the obstacles that are facing the resumption of Lebanese imports to Saudi Arabia and measures needed to allow Saudi citizens to visit Lebanon again. They also agreed that the Lebanese economy should come out of its historic crisis and that Beirut should implement reforms demanded by the international community. It said Aoun invited the Saudi crown prince to visit Lebanon, adding that Crown Prince Mohammed welcomed the invitation. Aoun was elected in January after more than two-year vacuum in the country's top post, while diplomat and former head of the International Criminal Court Nawaf Salam was named prime minister. Both Aoun and Salam have said they will work on improving relations with Arab countries and implementing reforms. The election of Aoun and Salam was seen as major blow to Hezbollah.

At least 3 Serbian lawmakers hurt as smoke bombs, flares thrown in parl

Belgrade (PTI): At least three lawmakers were injured on Tuesday, one of them seriously, after chaotic scenes in Serbia's parliament, during which smoke bombs and flares were thrown, further fuelling political tensions in the Balkan country. Lawmakers were scheduled to vote on a law that would increase funding for university education, but opposition parties said the ruling majority was also planning to approve dozens of other decisions. They said this was illegal and that lawmakers should first confirm the resignation of Prime Minister Milos Vucevic and his government. Chaos erupted about an hour after the parliamentary session started, with opposition lawmakers blowing whistles and holding up a banner reading "Serbia has risen so the regime would fall" Hundreds of opposition supporters rallied outside the parliament building during the session. Video footages from the assembly hall showed a clash first between lawmakers and later flares and smoke bombs being



Medics carry a lawmaker injured after chaos erupted during a Serbia's parliament session in Belgrade, Serbia, on Tuesday

thrown. Serbian media said eggs and water bottles also were thrown. Officials later said three persons were injured in the disturbance. Parliament speaker Ana Brnabic, who accused the opposition of being a "terrorist gang", said one of those injured was in a serious condition. The incident reflects a deep political crisis in Serbia where monthslong anti-corruption protests have rattled a populist government.

Vucevic resigned in January as the government faced protests over the collapse in November of a concrete train station canopy in the Serbia's north that killed 15 people and which critics blamed on rampant corruption. Parliament must confirm the prime minister's resignation for it to take effect. A rise in education funding has been one of the demands by Serbia's protesting students who have been a key driving force behind almost daily street

protests that started after the November 1 canopy collapse in Novi Sad. Opposition parties have insisted that the government has no authority to pass new laws. Leftist lawmaker Radomir Lazovic said the opposition was ready to support the passing of the student-requested education bill, but not the other decisions listed at the assembly agenda. Lazovic said "we can only discuss the fall of the government". He said the only way out of the current crisis would be a transitional government that would create conditions for a free a fair election, a demand that the ruling populists have repeatedly rejected. Serbia's increasingly authoritarian president Aleksandar Vucic and his ruling right-wing Serbian Progressive Party have imposed a firm grip on power in the past decades despite formally seeking European Union membership. Many in Serbia believe the fatal canopy collapse was the result of sloppy work and a disregard of safety regulations because of government corruption.

Pope Francis no longer requires mechanical ventilation

PTI ■ ROME

Pope Francis had stabilised enough on Tuesday after two respiratory crises to be taken off noninvasive mechanical ventilation and resume receiving just high flows of supplemental oxygen via a nasal tube to help him breathe, the Vatican said. Francis, 88, woke up and was resuming respiratory physiotherapy after sleeping through the night, the Vatican said. The Vatican said as of Tuesday morning, Francis no longer needed to wear the mechanical ventilation mask that covers his nose and mouth to pump oxygen into his lungs. He had to resume using the mask on Monday after suffering two respiratory crises that

required doctors to extract "copious" amounts of mucus from his lungs. Francis rested early Tuesday after he suffered further setbacks in his fight against double pneumonia: a new acute respiratory crises that required him to resume using noninvasive mechanical ventilation to breathe. In its early Tuesday update, the Vatican said: "The pope slept through the night, now rest continues." Francis suffered the two crises Monday. Doctors extracted "copious" amounts of mucus that had accumulated in his lungs, the Vatican said in a late update. They performed two bronchoscopies, in which a camera-tipped tube was sent into his airways with a sucker

at the tip to suction out fluid. The 88-year-old pope, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, was put back on noninvasive mechanical ventilation: a mask that covers his nose and mouth and pumps oxygen into the lungs. Francis remained alert, oriented and cooperated with medical personnel, the Vatican said. The prognosis remained guarded, meaning he was not out of danger. Doctors didn't say if he remained in stable condition, though they referred to the crises in the past tense, suggesting they were over. The crises were a new setback in what has become a more than two-week battle by the frail pope to overcome a com-

plex respiratory infection. The Vatican said the mucus that had accumulated in Francis' lungs was his body's reaction to the original pneumonia infection and not a new infection, given laboratory tests don't indicate any new bacteria. Dr John Coleman, a pulmonary critical care doctor at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago, said the episodes were more concerning than the last one on Friday, in which Francis had a coughing fit, inhaled some vomit that then was put on the noninvasive mechanical ventilation for a day and then didn't need it anymore. The use of bronchoscopies reflects a worrying level of mucus and phlegm in the lungs, Coleman said. "The fact

that they had to go in there and remove it manually is concerning, because it means that he is not clearing the secretions on his own," he said. "He's taking little steps forward and then steps back," said Coleman, who is not involved in Francis' care. Francis, who is not physically active, uses a wheelchair and is overweight, had been undergoing respiratory physiotherapy to try to improve his lung function. But the accumulation of the secretions in his lungs was a sign that he doesn't have the muscle tone to cough vigorously enough to expel the fluid. Doctors often use noninvasive ventilation to stave off an intubation, or the use of invasive mechanical ventilation. Francis has not been intubated

during this hospitalisation. It's not clear if he has provided any advance directives about the limits of his care if he declines or loses consciousness. Catholic teaching holds that life must be defended from conception until natural death. It insists that chronically ill patients, including those in vegetative states, must receive "ordinary" care such as hydration and nutrition, but "extraordinary" or disproportionate care can be suspended if it is no longer beneficial or is only prolonging a precarious and painful life. Francis articulated that in a 2017 speech to a meeting of the Vatican's bioethics think tank, the Pontifical Academy for Life. He said there was "no obligation to have recourse in

all circumstances to every possible remedy." He added: "It thus makes possible a decision that is morally qualified as withdrawal of overzealous treatment." Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, who heads the academy which helps articulate the Catholic Church's position on end-of-life care, said Francis is like any other Catholic and would follow low church teaching if it came to that. "Today the pope is giving us an extraordinary teaching on fragility," he told reporters Monday. "Today the pope, not through words but with his body, is reminding all of us, we elderly people to begin with, that we are all fragile and therefore we need to take care of each other."

EU ponders 800 bn euro plan to beef up defences

BID TO COUNTER POSSIBLE US DISENGAGEMENT

PTI ■ BRUSSELS

The chief of the European Union's executive on Tuesday proposed an 800 billion-euro (USD 841 billion) plan to beef up the defences of EU nations, aiming to lessen the impact of potential US disengagement and provide Ukraine with military muscle to negotiate with Russia following the freeze of US aid to the embattled nation.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the massive "REARM Europe" package will be put to the 27 EU leaders. They are holding an emergency meeting in Brussels on Thursday following a week of increasing political uncertainty from Washington, where President Donald Trump questioned both his alliance to the continent and the defence of Ukraine.

"I do not need to describe the grave nature of the threats that we face," von der Leyen said. Her plan had already been in the works before Trump's decision early Tuesday to pause military aid to Ukraine.

Key to the quandary of EU nations has been an unwillingness to spend much on defence over the past decades as they hid under the US nuclear umbrella and were hurt by a sluggish economy, which creates challenges for a quick ramp-up of such spending. It increasingly has left them on the world's diplomatic sidelines.

How it would work: Most of the money Von der Leyen is talking about, would come from loosening the fiscal constraints the EU puts on budgetary spending to "allow

member states to significantly increase their defence expenditures without triggering punishing rules aimed at keeping deficits from going too far into the red.

It would help member states to spend on defence without being forced to cut into social spending purely to keep within EU rules.

"So if member states would increase their defence spending by 1.5 per cent of GDP on average, this could create fiscal space of close to 650 billion euros (USD 683 billion) over a period of four years," von der Leyen said.

This would be topped up by a loans programme, controversially backed by the common EU budget, of 150 billion euros (USD 157 billion) to allow member states to invest in defence.

She said military equipment that needs to be improved includes air and missile defence, artillery systems, missiles and ammunition, drones and anti-drone systems and cyber preparedness.

Such a plan will force many EU member states to greatly increase their military spending, which is still below 2 per cent of gross domestic product.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has told the member states they need to move to more than 3 per cent as quickly as possible.

The plan will now be the blueprint for Thursday's summit, although immediate decisions beyond strong commitments were unlikely.

Von der Leyen hopes her plan will aid Ukraine: Von der Leyen said her plan would also help Ukraine as it struggles

now, especially with any joint purchase of military materiel. "With this equipment, member states can massively step up their support to Ukraine," she said.

Such measures are all the more essential since President Donald Trump directed a "pause" to US assistance to Ukraine as he seeks to pressure Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to engage in negotiations to end the war with Russia.

In sharp contrast, the EU has always said that it wants Zelenskyy to negotiate from a position of strength, necessitating more arms for Kyiv, rather than less.

Washington's move came just days after a disastrous Oval Office meeting in which Trump tore into Zelenskyy for what he perceived as insufficient gratitude for the more than USD 180 billion the US has appropriated for military aid and other assistance to Kyiv since the start of Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022.

In Europe, Trump's move was also seen as yet more proof it could no longer count on the trans-Atlantic alliance that has been the bedrock of geopolitics since World War II. "Some of our fundamental assumptions are being undermined by their very core," von der Leyen wrote to EU leaders ahead of Thursday's summit. "The pace of change is disconcerting and increasingly alarming."

Investigators to question driver who rammed car into crowd in Germany

Mannheim (PTI): Investigators on Tuesday will question a driver who allegedly rammed a car into a crowd in the southwestern German city of Mannheim, killing two people and injuring 11. Andreas Stenger, head of the State Criminal Police Office, told German news agency dpa that police hope the interview with the perpetrator will lead to information about a motive for Monday's attack.

Mourners, including Sara Stefini, left flowers in the city's center on Tuesday to honour the victims. "It's where I live, the centre of my life," a tearful Stefini told dpa at the impromptu memorial. The suspect is a 40-year-old German man from the nearby state of Rhineland-Palatinate who was detained and is in a hospital after being injured, State Interior Minister Thomas Strobl of Baden-Wuerttemberg, which includes Mannheim, told dpa on Monday.

Strobl later told reporters in Mannheim that "as far as the specific motivation of the crime is concerned, we have no indi-

Kim's sister threatens response to US carrier deployment in S Korea

PTI ■ SEOUL

The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Tuesday threatened to launch high-profile provocations in response to the arrival of a US aircraft carrier in South Korea and other US military activities, which she slammed as "confrontational hysteria of the US and its stooges".

The warning by Kim Yo Jong implies North Korea will likely ramp up weapons testing activities and maintain its confrontational posture against the US, though President Donald Trump has said he would reach out to Kim Jong Un to revive diplomacy.

In a statement carried by state media, Kim Yo Jong accused the US of clearly showing "its most hostile and confrontational will" to North Korea with the deployments of the USS Carl Vinson and other powerful US military assets and US-South Korean military drills this year.

"The DPRK is also planning to carefully examine the

option for increasing the actions threatening the security of the enemy at the strategic level to cope with the fact that the deployment of US strategic assets in the Korean Peninsula has become a vicious habit and adversely affects the security of the DPRK," she said, using the acronym of North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Her statement suggests North Korea may test-launch intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to strike the mainland US or other powerful missiles that would target US military bases in the region, observers say.

South Korea's Defence Ministry warned later it's ready to repel any provocations by North Korea based on a solid military alliance with the US. A ministry statement called Kim Yo Jong's statement "sophistry" meant to justify its nuclear development and future provocations.

On Sunday, the USS Carl Vinson and its strike group arrived in South Korea, the latest temporary deployment

of a US strategic asset aimed at displaying the firmness of the US-South Korean military alliance in the face of North Korean threats and boosting interoperability of the allies' combined assets. The US carrier's arrival came four days after North Korea conducted cruise missiles, its fourth missile test event this year.

North Korea views arrivals of such powerful US military assets in South Korea as major security threats and often responds with missile tests. North Korea hasn't directly responded to Trump's overture but alleged US-led hostilities against North Korea have intensified since the start of Trump's second term in January.

Experts say Kim Jong Un won't likely embrace Trump's outreach anytime soon as he is now focusing on his support of Russia's war against Ukraine with supply of weapons and troops. They say Kim could consider returning to diplomacy with Trump when he thinks he cannot maintain his country's current booming cooperation with Russia.

China has been an unwillingness to spend much on defence over the past decades as they hid under the US nuclear umbrella and were hurt by a sluggish economy, which creates challenges for a quick ramp-up of such spending. It increasingly has left them on the world's diplomatic sidelines.

How it would work: Most of the money Von der Leyen is talking about, would come from loosening the fiscal constraints the EU puts on budgetary spending to "allow

Boost in defence spending coming amid China threats: Taiwan

Taipei (PTI): Taiwan's defence minister says the island is planning to boost military spending in the face of the "rapidly changing international situation and the escalating threats from adversaries."

Wellington Koo gave no figures but said President William Lai Ching-te was working with the ministry in consideration of enemy threats and urgent readiness needs, a reference to China's threats to invade the island, which it considers its own territory. Those would "increase the proportion of the defence budget in relation to GDP," Koo said, in comments Monday that were embargoed until Tuesday. Taiwan currently spends about 2.45% of its gross domestic product on its military.

"At the same time, in coordination with national security and foreign policy, the military will continue to deepen cooperation with the United States and other allied nations, expanding multilateral military exchanges to jointly uphold regional peace and stability," Koo said.

Taiwan sees a growing threat from China, which regularly sends ships and aircraft into areas near Taiwan. China is expected to announce its annual defence budget on Wednesday.

Xinhua, China's state-run news agency, reported that senior Chinese official Wang Huning during an annual meeting about Taiwan had called for China to take the initiative in cross-strait relations and push toward the "reunification of the motherland."

The government in Taipei condemned China's military exercises on Thursday after Beijing designated an area to conduct shooting drills off the self-governed island's southwest coast. Along with the latest equipment, the military is seeking funds to increase retention of service people through higher pay, and will need additional funds to accommodate a lengthening of compulsory national service from four months to one year.

United States President Donald Trump has also demanded the self-governing island democracy that relies on the US for much of its cutting-edge weaponry, increase defence spending to up to 10 per cent of GDP, a proportion well above what the US or any of its major allies spend.

increase their military spending, which is still below 2 per cent of gross domestic product.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has told the member states they need to move to more than 3 per cent as quickly as possible.

The plan will now be the blueprint for Thursday's summit, although immediate decisions beyond strong commitments were unlikely.

Von der Leyen hopes her plan will aid Ukraine: Von der Leyen said her plan would also help Ukraine as it struggles

Washington's move came just days after a disastrous Oval Office meeting in which Trump tore into Zelenskyy for what he perceived as insufficient gratitude for the more than USD 180 billion the US has appropriated for military aid and other assistance to Kyiv since the start of Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022.

In Europe, Trump's move was also seen as yet more proof it could no longer count on the trans-Atlantic alliance that has been the bedrock of geopolitics since World War II. "Some of our fundamental assumptions are being undermined by their very core," von der Leyen wrote to EU leaders ahead of Thursday's summit. "The pace of change is disconcerting and increasingly alarming."

JAGSON INTERNATIONAL LIMITED
Corporate Office: 3rd Floor, Vandana Building,
11 Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi 110001.
CIN: U52110DL1988PLC032914

NOTICE
The Company has received Affidavit, Indemnity, alongwith Application for Transmission of Equity Shares of Late Shri Jagdish Pershad Gupta to Shri Pradeep Gupta. If any one has any objection to this Application, may submit their objection to the Company within next 15 days.

Date: 04.03.2025
Place: Delhi
For
Director

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-30, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile : 9899013918

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

◆ CHANGE OF NAME ◆

I, Ujjwala W/o- JC-356836H
Nb/Sub Dange Vitthal Eknath, R/o- At- Nele, PO- Kidagaon, Teh & Dist- Satara, Maharashtra- 415015, have changed my name from Ujjwala to Ujjwala Vitthal Dange, vide affidavit dated 04/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1619)C
I, Sharwan Kanwar, Mother of- No.16029630L R/n
Jitendra Singh, R/o- Dhani Palwali, PO- Bhagega, Teh- Neem Ka Thana Dist- Sikar, Rajasthan, have changed my name from Sharwan Kanwar to Shrvan Kanwar, vide affidavit dated 04/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1620)C
I, Saliman, Mother of- No.16012966P Hav Md.
Khalique Ansari, R/o- Vill & PO- Chakla, Teh- Ormanjhi, Dist- Ranchi, Jharkhand- 835219, have changed my name from Saliman to Saliman Nisha, vide affidavit dated 04/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1621)C
I, No.16012966P Hav Md.
Khalique Ansari, R/o- Vill & PO- Chakla, Teh- Ormanjhi, Dist- Ranchi, Jharkhand- 835219, have changed my name from Saliman to Nafiya Nashit to Mariya Anjum, vide affidavit dated 04/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1622)C
I, No.16012966P Hav Md.
Khalique Ansari, R/o- Vill & PO- Chakla, Teh- Ormanjhi, Dist- Ranchi, Jharkhand- 835219, have changed my name from Nafiya Nazir to Nazir, vide affidavit dated 04/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1623)C

PUBLIC NOTICE
Re: Half portion of Land area measuring 96.5 sq. yds referred to as the "said portion" out of area measuring 6 marlas i.e 193 sq. yds, falling in Kharsa No. 34/22, situated at Jaha Gaon, P. Arya Nagar, Tehsil Ballabhgarh, Dist. Faridabad, Haryana. [As per Property Tax Notice cum Bill issued by Municipal Corporation of Faridabad-15, Arya Nagar Extension-1, Milk Plant Road, 121004 with Property ID-1 BPB4H53] referred to as the "said property".

Notice is hereby given to the general public including Banks, Financial Institutions, etc. that as informed by our clientless Mrs. Mamta Devi (hereinafter called the "owner"), she is the sole owner of said portion of the said property vide sale deed registered as Document No. 856, in Book No. 1, Vol No. 1123, dated 11/09/40, on 26/04/2010 executed by Sh. Manoj Kumar Sharma, Smt. Monica Sharma and Smt. Priyanka Sharma. In this connection, she has informed us that the said portion including the said property the said portion of the said property, dated 10.05.1991 in her favour. After the demise of Smt. Rajni on 01/02/2010 and subsequently her husband Mr. Suresh also died, the said property devolved on his legal heirs viz. Sh. Manoj Kumar Sharma, Smt. Monica Sharma and Smt. Priyanka Sharma and thus they became joint owners of the said property. Now our clients intend to mortgage the said portion of the said property with DFC First Bank Limited for availing loan facility. We have been further informed by our clients that the said portion of the said property is not mortgaged anywhere and there is no charge or dispute or any litigation pending regarding the said portion of the said property.

Any person including Banks, Financial Institutions, relative's having any claim, right, title or any interest of any nature whatsoever into or upon the aforesaid portion of the said property is hereby called upon to make the same known, in writing, with documentary evidence, by Registered Ad Post, to the undersigned at the address mentioned herein below within 07 days of publication of this notice and in the event of no response having been received to the notice, the title of the owner to the said portion of the said property shall be deemed to be clear of any charge or encumbrance of any nature whatsoever and any subsequent claim shall not bind our client/owner, in any manner whatsoever.

Shivkant Arora, Advocate
M/s Intellectual Law Offices
A-74, LGF, Defence Colony,
New Delhi-110024

DELHI INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION CENTER (DIAC)
In case ref no DIAC/9816/11-24 between M/S Ganesha Ecosphere Ltd (Claimant) & M/s SVP Industries Ltd., (Respondent) Mansurpur, Tehsil Khatauli, Meerut Road.

The Sole Arbitrator has commenced Arbitration Proceedings. As physical service of notice has not been effected to Respondent, The Arbitrator has directed for service through publication in newspaper. Accordingly, this notice is published to inform M/S SVP Industries (Respondent) for further proceedings on 20.03.2025 at 4.30 PM.

Advocate for M/S Ganesha Ecosphere Ltd (Claimant)

PUBLIC NOTICE
Be it known to all that I, ANUPAM SHARMA S/O N.L. SHARMA R/O-FLAT NO. B-24, GHARONDA CHHS LTD, GHARONDA APPTS, SHRESTHA VIHAR, DELHI-92, am the legal owner of FLAT NO. B-24, GHARONDA CHHS LTD, GHARONDA APPTS, SHRESTHA VIHAR, DELHI-92, which is allotted by the DDA Original Share Certificate of the above Flat has been lost. An FIR/NCR to this effect has lodged in P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi vide LR No.2137834/2025, Dated-04-03-2025. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/ contact with above named person at above address/phone No.9810679650 with in 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. Any person claiming any right, interest, or having any objections with respect to this property can also personally inform/contact me.

Sd/-
Registrar

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot
Ph: 01638-256232-256236
ADVT. No.BFU-25/08

VACANCIES

Online applications are invited w.e.f. 07-03-2025 to 28-03-2025 from eligible candidates through University website i.e. www.bfufs.ac.in for the recruitment to the posts of Sub Dean (UR-08) on regular basis under Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot.

For Application form, fee, specially wise detail of posts, Category wise distribution and other terms & conditions, visit University website: www.bfufs.ac.in

Sd/-
Registrar

nil/2/266/2023/42189 Dated CHD :- 3/4/2025

SRF LIMITED

Regd. Office: The Galleria, DLF Mayur Vihar, Unit No. 236 & 237, 2nd Floor, Mayur Vihar Phase, Noida Link Road, Mayur Vihar Phase I, Extn. Delhi-110091
Corporate Office: Block-C, Sector 45, Gurgaon, Haryana-122 003
Tel. No (Regd office) : (+91-11) 49482870; Fax : (+91-11) 49482900
E-mail: cs@srf.com; Website: www.srf.com; CIN: L18101DL1970PLC005197

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Share Certificates pertaining to shares of the Company detailed below have been reported lost and request(s) for issue of duplicate Certificates in lieu thereof have been received by the Company :-

Sl. No.	Folio No.	Name of the Share Holder / Legal Heir (Claimant)	Cert-No.	Dist-No.	Lost Shares
1	SRF0130637	Vibha Malpani, Pratap Malpani (Joint Shareholder) : Deceased	612655-65	4300818-433	416
		Ashtosh Malpani : Claimant	1135807	296000198-1861	1664
		Arvind Narain : Deceased	48115-7	2650526-650	125
2	A 0002837	Ruchi Narain : Claimant	55468	2819099-9139	41
		95642-3	4095443-525	83	
		1123964	307771598-3265	1668	
		90011045-49	6147094-261	168	
		Brahm Dass Sharma: Deceased	1369	1160981-1000	20
3	B 0000057	Sanyukta Sharma: Claimant	56133	2833908-913	6
		97153	4142867-879	13	
		1135522	295936146-361	216	
4	SRF0049269	Abhay Chaturvedi: Shareholder	388464-68	17363456-541	86
		Heera Devi Chaturvedi (Joint Shareholder) Deceased	537464-68	25383248-333	86
		1133932	295622882-4169	1288	
		90102789-91	10053870-969	100	
5	SRF0111532	Chitra U desai : Deceased	407328-31	1779061-124	64
		Pramathesh Ushakant desai : Joint Shareholder	556328-31	25815853-916	64
		1136564	296145830-849	1020	
		90247916	8040810-859	50	
		90247917	2322276-323	48	
		90247917	8040860-861	2	
		90247918	2322324-325	2	
		90247918	6019761-785	25	
6	SRF0049250	Sada NAND Gorawar : Deceased	537442-43	25382906-3005	100
		Parveen Kumar Grover : Joint Shareholder	1139698	296777290-689	400
		60991	3289582-603	22	
		118600	5072099-334	36	
		1136038	29605328-3357	1000	
7	G0000826	Gurpur Ramanath Rao-Shareholder	90018316-18	640610-101	92
		90156537-8	11811015-114	100	

Public is hereby cautioned against dealing with the aforesaid share certificates.

for SRF LIMITED
Sd/-
RAJAT LAKHANPAL
Sr. VP (Corporate Compliance)
& Company Secretary

Place: Gurgaon
Date: 04.03.2025

PUNE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
CHIEF ENGINEER ROAD DEPARTMENT
NOTICE INVITING TENDERS (N.I.T) YEAR 2024-2025

Tender Sale Date 05/03/2025 to Date 01/04/2025 upto 2.30PM
Bid Submission Start & End Date 05/03/2025 to Date 01/04/2025 upto 2.30PM Technical Envelope Opening Date: 02/04/2025 3.00PM

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Name of Work	Estimate Cost(Cr.) put to Tender Excluding GST	NIT Mode	EMD Amount	Work Period	One Envelope/ Two Envelope	New Work/ Retender Work	Concern Contact Person
1.	PMC/ROAD/ 2024/448	Work Name (IN ENGLISH) APPOINTMENT OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT FOR PRE & POST TENDER ACTIVITIES FOR CONSTRUCTION & DEVELOPMENT OF 24M DP ROAD NEAR MULA RIVER (FROM NH 4 HIGHWAY TO DOCTOR BABASAHI AMBEDKAR BRIDGE NEAR JAJI HOSPITAL AGAINST "CREDIT NOTE "UNDER PUNE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION	Approx 76.50 CR	B-2	500/-	36 Month	Two Envelope (B-2)	New Work	Ms. Yogita Bhambare (744747206)

A) All details of Terms & Conditions of above works are incorporated in tender document which is available on website www.Mahatenders.gov.in sales & acceptance is available by online system only.
B) If sales or submission not been available on last day also & it is not been submitted will be sole responsible of tender.
C) Online tender process information will be available at Road Department, Pune Municipal Corporation.
D) As per Office order No. 32 dated 22/04/2016 EMD deposit amount will be acceptable through Online banking only.
Tender rate for above Pre & Post tender activity works & appointment of consultant for (PMC) Project Management Consultancy to be filled on Company letter-head as per financial bid in (Envelope 2) to be uploaded will be considered only.

(Ashit Jadhav)
Superintendent Engineer (Road)
Pune Municipal Corporation

Advt No.- 3/1589

New model bilateral investment treaty tailored for global investment trends: CEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran on Tuesday said the new model text for bilateral investment treaty (BIT) will be better aligned to the demands of a dynamic global investment environment, while safeguarding India's sovereign rights and regulatory space. Addressing a post Budget meeting 2025 on the theme of 'Making India Investment Friendly', he said the BIT framework is being revised to reflect modern challenges. Almost 10 years have passed since the last review of India's model BIT and since then, the global investment ecosystem and international jurisprudence have evolved significantly, he said. Nageswaran said investors now

seek stronger protection for their investments, especially in emerging economies, and this has necessitated an update of the model BIT to align it with international norms, while ensuring that the country remains an attractive investment destination, especially for medium enterprises. "The new model BIT therefore will be more attuned to the demands of a dynamic global investment environment. At the same time, we will reflect India's sovereign rights and the importance of regulatory space so that public policy priorities are not constrained by international legal obligations," Nageswaran said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her 2025-26 Budget speech said that to encourage sustained foreign

investment and in the spirit of 'first develop India', the current model BIT will be revamped and made more investor-friendly. The announcement assumes significance as only a few countries have accepted the existing model tax treaty, and most of the developed nations have expressed their reservations on the tax with regard to provisions like resolution of disputes. Nageswaran also said that foreign investment plays a crucial role in the economic growth and development, and "we are a current account deficit (CAD) country, so we need both portfolio and direct investments". The bilateral investment treaties provide a legal framework to protect foreign investments, especially for

small and medium enterprises, while offering safeguards like protection against expropriation and fair treatment. Last month, Sitharaman had said that going forward the bilateral investment treaties should capture national interest in relation to regulatory powers and strengthen the guidance for arbitrators in resolving disputes. She said the issues related to BIT are unique to the sovereign and hence BIT should be negotiated on a standalone basis rather than as a part of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) agreement. India signed its first BIT with the United Kingdom in 1994 and most recently, two more bilateral investment treaties in 2024 with UAE and

Uzbekistan. "Initially, the BITs were focused on investor protection. Over time, many countries, including India, have realised the importance of balancing investor protection with state sovereignty. The goal is to safeguard national interest while encouraging foreign investment," he said adding it is a balancing act". Presently, India is negotiating a BIT with the United Kingdom (UK), Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the European Union (EU). FDI inflows into India have crossed the \$1 Trillion milestone in the April 2000-September 2024 period, firmly establishing the country's reputation as a safe and key investment destination globally. Foreign investments are increasing in the country.

Jio, AMD, Cisco and Nokia unite for Open Telecom AI platform

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Jio Platforms has teamed up with proprietary technology companies AMD, Cisco, and Nokia to build an Open Telecom artificial intelligence (AI) Platform that is expected to enhance network security and efficiency, while reducing technology costs. The multi-domain intelligence framework will integrate artificial intelligence and automation into every layer of network operations, a joint statement said on Tuesday. "In collaboration with AMD, Cisco, and Nokia, Jio is advancing the Open Telecom AI Platform to transform networks into self-optimizing, customer-aware ecosystems. "This initiative goes beyond automation - it is about enabling AI-driven, autonomous networks that

adapt in real time, enhance user experiences, and create new service and revenue opportunities across the digital ecosystem," Reliance Jio, Group CEO, Mathew Oommen said in the statement. The AI platform will be a large language model (AI search engine) agnostic and utilise an open application interface to optimise its functionality and capabilities, the statement said. Nokia President and CEO, Pekka Lundmark said that the company possesses trusted technology leadership in multiple domains, including RAN, Core, fixed broadband, IP and optical transport. "The Telecom AI Platform will help Jio to optimise and monetise their network investments through enhanced performance, security, operational

efficiency, automation and greatly improved customer experience, all via the immense power of artificial intelligence," he said. The new Open Telecom AI Platform planned by Jio Platforms, AMD, Cisco, and Nokia will be built with Jio as the first customer, creating a replicable reference architecture and deployable solution for the broader global service provider industry. AMD chair and CEO Lisa Su said the company will leverage its portfolio of high-performance CPUs, GPUs, and adaptive computing solutions for the platform. Cisco, Chair and CEO, Chuck Robbins said that the collaboration with Jio Platforms Limited, AMD and Nokia harnesses the expertise of industry leaders to revolutionise networks with AI.

Centre penalises Reliance for missed battery cell plant deadline

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government has slapped a penalty on a unit of Reliance Industries Limited for failing to meet the deadline for setting up a battery cell plant for which it was granted production-linked incentives, the firm said on Tuesday. In a stock exchange filing, Reliance said its step-down subsidiary, Reliance New Energy Battery Storage Ltd on March 3 received "a letter from the Ministry of Heavy Industries levying liquidated damages at the rate of 0.1 per cent of the performance security (₹50 Crore) for each day of delay from January 1, 2025." The penalty was for the "delay in achievement of milestone one under the programme agreement executed with MHI in connection with five GWh manufacturing capacity awarded under the Performance-Linked Incentive Scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell," it said. The liquidated damages or penalty computed till March 3, 2025 was ₹3.1 Crore. "RNEBSL has requested for an extension of time for achievement of the said milestone one," it said. The firm, however, neither disclosed the reasons for the delay nor the new timelines for meeting the target. RNEBSL had in 2022 signed

an agreement to build 10 gigawatt-hour (GWh) battery capacity with production-linked incentives for an estimated \$400 Million. The contract was part of government initiatives to get domestic manufacturing for a new energy supply chain developed in India. Besides RNEBSL, Rajesh Exports and the unit of Ola Electric Mobility Ltd too had won bids to build the battery cell plants. Manufacturers were eligible for ₹181 Crore worth of production-linked incentives on meeting milestones for the project that sought to create a cumulative 30 GWh capacity of advanced chemistry cell battery storage. The firms winning the PLI were required to achieve a minimum 'committed capacity', along with local value addition of 25 per cent within two years of the agreement, and 50 per cent within five years. Reliance had previously indicated the second half of 2026 as the timeline to launch operations at its battery Gigafactory in Jamnagar, Gujarat. Initially, the plant is to concentrate on assembling Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) catering to utility-scale, residential, commercial, and mobility markets.

Government seeks \$2.81 billion from Reliance, BP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government has slapped a \$2.81 Billion (about ₹24,500 Crore) demand notice on Reliance Industries Limited and its partners, including BP Plc for gains made from producing and selling natural gas that may have migrated from neighbouring block of state-owned ONGC. This follows the Delhi High Court's decision on February 14, overturning an international arbitration tribunal ruling that held the duo not responsible for paying any compensation for the gas they produced and sold which had allegedly migrated from adjoining fields. "Consequent upon the Division Bench judgment, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has raised a demand of \$2.81 Billion on the PSC contractors namely Reliance Industries Ltd, BP Exploration (Alpha) Ltd and NIKO (NECO) Limited," Reliance said in a stock exchange filing. Originally, Reliance held 60 per cent interest in Krishna Godavari basin deep-sea block KG-DWN-98/3 or KG-D6 while BP had 30 per cent and Canadian firm Niko held the remaining 10 per cent. Subsequently, Reliance and BP took over Niko's interest in the production sharing contract (PSC) and now hold 66.66 per cent and 33.33 per cent,

respectively. The government had in 2016 sought \$1.55 Billion from Reliance and its partners for the quantum of gas that had migrated to its block KG-D6 from adjoining fields of ONGC. Reliance contested the claims before an arbitral tribunal which in July 2018 upheld that it was not obliged to pay any compensation. The government filed an appeal and in May 2023, a single judge of Delhi High Court upheld the arbitration award, dismissing the government's appeal. A division bench of the Delhi High Court last month set aside the single judge order, ruling against Reliance and its partners. Reliance said the letter of demand was received by the company on March 3, 2025. "The company is legally advised that the Division Bench judgment and this provisional demand are unsustainable. The company is taking steps to challenge the judgment of the Division Bench of Hon'ble Delhi High Court," it said. "The company does not expect any liability on this account," it added. Reliance had previously said that it would appeal the decision in the Supreme Court. The dispute dates back to July 2013 when Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC)

suspected reservoir connectivity of its KG-DWN-98/2 (KG-D5) and G-4 blocks with that of Reliance's KG-D6. It felt that at least four wells that Reliance drilled on the borderline with KG-D5 may have drained out its resources as well. ONGC in May 2013 filed a writ in the Delhi High Court seeking compensation for the loss. On September 10, 2014, the Delhi High Court disposed-off ONGC's petition and directed the government to take a decision, after it received a report from an independent panel set up by ONGC and RIL. Global consultant DeGolyer and Mac Naughton (D and M) was appointed to carry out a third-party study. In its final report dated November 19, 2015, D and M concluded inter-alia that "the integrated analyses indicated connectivity and continuity of the reservoirs across the blocks operated by ONGC and Reliance." The report quantified the volume of gas migrated from Godavari PML and KG-DWN-98/2 to KG-DWN-98/3 block and respective production of gas from migrated volumes till March 31, 2015. After submission of the D&M report, the government constituted a single member committee on December 15, 2015, composed of former Chief Justice of Delhi

High Court Ajit Prakash Shah "to quantify the unfair enrichment" by Reliance. The committee concluded that the Government of India, and not ONGC, is entitled to claim restitution from Reliance for the unjust benefit it received and unfairly retained. ONGC has no locus standi to bring a tortious claim against Reliance for trespass or conversion since it does not have any ownership rights or possessory interest in the natural gas. All mineral resources are the property of the government of India. Using Shah's report, the government asked ONGC to step aside and took over the matter. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) in a November 4, 2026 order sought disgorgement from Reliance and its partners, demanding \$1.47 Billion from the partners for producing in seven years ending March 31, 2016 about 338.332 million British thermal units of gas that had seeped or migrated from ONGC's blocks into their adjoining KG-D6 in the Bay of Bengal. After deducting \$71.71 Million royalty paid on the gas produced and adding an interest at the rate of LIBOR plus two per cent, totalling \$149.86 Million, a total demand of \$1.55 Billion was made on Reliance, BP and Niko. The government also pressed

Reliance to pay \$174.9 Million of additional profit petroleum after certain costs were disallowed because of KG-D6 output being lower than the target. Reliance and its partners on November 11, 2016, slapped an arbitration notice. In July 2018, the international arbitration tribunal rejected the government's claim. The three-member panel by a majority of 2-1 also awarded \$8.3 Million compensation to the three partners. The government challenged the arbitration award before a single bench of Delhi High Court, seeking it be set aside as it "strikes at the heart of the public policy and has given a premium to a contractor (Reliance) that has amassed vast wealth by committing an insidious fraud as well as criminal offence." Delhi High Court in May 2023 upheld the arbitration award saying "the view taken by the arbitral tribunal is most certainly a 'possible view', which calls for no interference." The government approached the division bench of the Delhi High Court against the single bench order. The division bench, comprising justices Rekha Palli and Saurabh Banerjee, on February 15 set aside a May 2023 single bench ruling that had upheld the 2018 arbitration award rejecting the government's claim.

Belrise Industries, Paramesu Biotech get SEBI's nod for IPOs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Belrise Industries and Paramesu Biotech have received market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) go ahead to raise funds totalling ₹2,750 Crore through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), an update with the markets regulator showed on Tuesday. Individually, Belrise Industries and Paramesu Biotech are looking to mop-up ₹2,150 Crore and ₹600 Crore, respectively, through initial share-sales. SEBI received preliminary IPO documents from these firms in November, and issued its observations during February 25 to 28, the update showed. In SEBI's parlance, obtaining the observations means it's go-ahead to float the public issue. Meanwhile, SFC Environmental Technologies and Advanced Sys-tec withdrew their draft IPO papers on February 27 without giving a reason. The preliminary documents were filed between December and February. The withdrawals came amid a meltdown in the stock market. As for automotive component maker Belrise Industries, its ₹2,150 Crore IPO is entirely a fresh issue of equity shares with no Offer For Sale (OFS) component, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP). The company intends to utilise proceeds worth ₹1,618 Crore for payment of debt. As of June 2024, the firm had a borrowing of ₹2,463 Crore in its books. Paramesu Biotech, a manufacturer of maize-based products, is looking to raise ₹520 Crore through fresh issue of shares and an OFS of shares to the tune of ₹80 Crore by promoter Unimark Business Solutions Private Ltd, the draft papers showed.

Coca-Cola to sell north Gujarat bottling plant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Beverage major Coca-Cola is selling its bottling plant in the North Gujarat region to Kandhari Global Beverages. Though the company has not shared financial details, industry insiders have pegged the deal to be around ₹2,000 Crore, where Coca-Cola will transfer business from HCCBL, its bottling arm in India, to its bottling partner Kandhari Global Beverages. The Atlanta-headquartered beverage major is divesting assets globally by franchising regional operations to local partners as part of its asset-light business model. "We have reached an agreement to transfer the North Gujarat bottling operations currently being operated by Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Private Limited (HCCBL). Subject to regulatory approvals, the North

Gujarat business will be owned and operated by Kandhari Global Beverages Private Ltd," said an HCCBL spokesperson. This transfer will ensure that the right level of investments can be undertaken in all parts of the business while bringing scale and contiguity to the business, he added. After this sale, HCCBL will be left with 15 operational plants in India, where it produces beverages like Coca-Cola, Thums Up, Sprite, Minute Maid, Maaza, SmartWater, Kinley, Limca, and Fanta, among others. In the December quarter, Coca-Cola divested a 40 per cent stake in HCCBL to the Bhartiya family. Though the company has not disclosed the amount, some media reports have pegged it to be around ₹10,000 Crore. Earlier, in the March quarter of last year, it had franchised its

bottling operations to its existing bottlers in three key markets - Rajasthan, Bihar, Northeast, and parts of West Bengal to its existing bottlers, earning \$290 Million (around ₹2,420 Crore). Kandhari Global Beverages was one of the three existing bottlers to whom HCCBL had transferred bottling operations of the Rajasthan market. It already operates in parts of Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. The two other existing partners were SLMG Beverages and Moon Beverages. India is the fifth largest market of the Atlanta-based cola company. HCCBL's revenue in FY24 was ₹14,021.54 Crore and recorded a net profit of ₹2,808.31 Crore, helped by the sale of bottling operations.

SC orders Ideaforge directors to appear in drone hacking trial

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court (SC) has refused to quash the criminal proceedings against M/s Ideaforge Technology Limited, a prominent drone manufacturing company, in connection with allegations of criminal breach of trust, cheating and unauthorised software disabling of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). The SC Bench led by Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice R Mahadevan dismissed the quash petition upholding the order passed by the Madras High Court earlier this year. SC observed that there is a prima facie criminal case of cheating and ordered Ideaforge to appear before the trial court. The Court further refused the plea to exempt the

directors of Ideaforge from appearing in the trial court clearly showing their involvement in this criminal offence of hacking drones. M/s Ideaforge Technology Limited, headquartered in Navi Mumbai, had supplied 15 UAVs to a Customer for a total amount of ₹2,20,67,050. As per the final report filed by the Cyber Crime Police, Ideaforge hacked and disabled the drones with the malicious intent to damage the customer's business and reputation as the drones were deployed in crucial government projects worth around ₹70 Crore. A Complaint was filed by the customer before the Commissioner of Police, Chennai and FIR No 235 of 2023 dated August 31, 2023 was registered by the Cyber Crime Police. Initially,

Ideaforge filed a quash petition before the Madras High Court to quash the FIR, which was earlier dismissed by the Court on in November 2023. After the Final Report was filed, Ideaforge filed this present quash petition against the proceedings held vide before the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) for CCB cases, Egmore. The final report was filed under sections 409 and 65 of IPC and Section 66 r/w 45 of IT Act, 2008 r/w 420 IPC against the Company Ideaforge Technology Limited, Directors, Ankit Mehta, Rahul Singh, Vipul Joshi and Executive Director Somil Gautam. On January 31, 2025, the Madras High Court further dismissed the quash petition on the chargesheet forcing

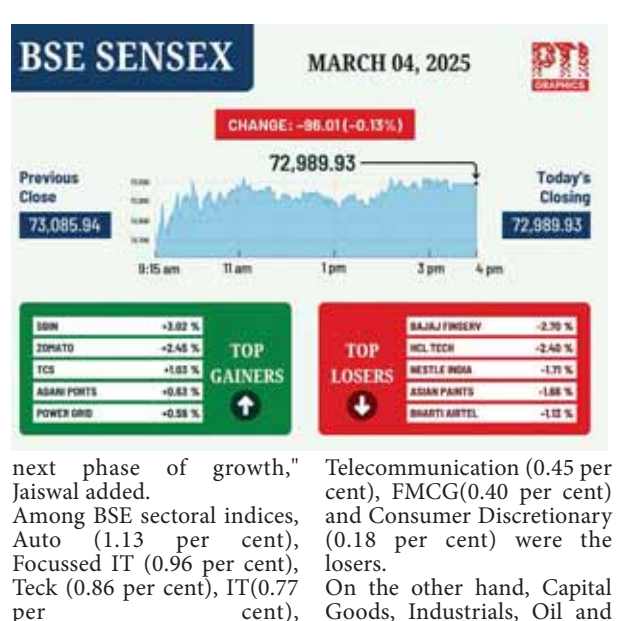
them to appear before the Supreme Court. A recent response from an agitated Ideaforge investor highlighted how the company fell after going for IPO in July 2023. Ideaforge reportedly received close to ₹240 Crore during the IPO and around ₹327 Crore were offered to the public. The shocking statistics pointed out by the investor show a meagre profit of ₹2 Crore in the third quarter followed by abundant losses of ₹12 Crore and ₹20 Crore in subsequent quarters. The Investors raised severe concerns over the unpredictability of the Ideaforge finances which could potentially lead to even bigger loss as per the trend followed by the Company subsequent to the IPO in 2023.

Sensex sinks below 73,000 as global equity rout continues

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Falling for the third straight day, benchmark BSE Sensex declined by 96 points to close below the 73,000 mark on Tuesday amid global equity rout on tariff war worries and persistent foreign fund outflows. The 30-share BSE barometer closed at 72,989.93, down by 96.01 points or 0.13 per cent, as 18 of its components declined and 12 settled with gains. During the day, it dropped 452.4 points or 0.62 per cent to a low of 72,633.54 but recovered some of the losses in the second half. Extending the losses for the 10th straight session, the 50-share Nifty of NSE fell by

36.65 points or 0.17 per cent to close at 22,082.65. The index opened below the 22,000 level at 21,974.45 but managed to recover some losses later. From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Nestle India, Asian Paints, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Infosys, Maruti Suzuki India, Titan, Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries were among the laggards. On the other hand, State Bank of India, Zomato, Tata Consultancy Services, Adani Ports, Power Grid, Tata Steel and HDFC Bank were the gainers. Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services, "The domestic market exhibited a recovery from

today's lows but remained in negative territory due to adverse global cues related to escalating global trade tensions." "Weak global cues continue to weigh on sentiment, but selective buying is limiting the downside," Ajit Mishra - SVP, research, Religare Broking Limited said. Despite the market ended in the red zone, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.28 per cent, and midcap index rose 0.08 per cent. Abhishek Jainwal, Fund Manager at Faisavenue, said that the recent correction has effectively removed excess froth from valuations. "With the upcoming Q4 results, we anticipate renewed momentum, positioning small caps for the



Gas, Services, Energy, Commodities, Healthcare and Power were among the gainers. As many as 2,221 stocks advanced while 1,737 declined and 128 remain unchanged on the BSE. Meanwhile, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms rose by ₹1,06,388.96 Crore to ₹3,85,07,568.89 (\$4.1 Trillion). "Indian benchmark indices opened lower and continued to fall during the day, ending in negative territory on Tuesday amid continued FII selling and ongoing geopolitical tensions between Russia and Ukraine. "The market sentiments were dented due to concerns over a global trade war arising from the United States (US)

president's confirmation of a 25 per cent Tariff on Canada and Mexico and a 20 per cent tariff on Chinese imports over fentanyl issues," Ameya Ranadive, chartered market technician, CFTe, senior technical analyst, StoxBox, said. Devarsh Vakil, Head of Prime Research, HDFC Securities said, "The Nifty index fell for the tenth consecutive session, the longest losing run in 29 years. Out of the last 19 trading sessions, only one session has ended in positive territory." The US Has officially implemented a 25 per cent tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico, while Chinese goods now face a cumulative 20 per cent duty following an additional

10 percent levy. In a further escalation, reciprocal tariffs will kick in from April 2, intensifying concerns over trade disruptions and financial market instability, he added. In Asian markets, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul were ended in red, while Shanghai in green territory. European markets were trading in the negative territory in the mid-session deals. The US markets ended lower on Monday. Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 1.37 per cent to \$70.64 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹4,788.29 Crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

India to host second Asian Yogasana Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
A total of 16 countries will participate in the second Asian Yogasana Championship, scheduled to be held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium here from March 29 to 31. The championship, being organised in collaboration with the Sports Ministry and Yogasana Bharat, aims to showcase Yogasana at the international level while embracing its rich heritage and deep-rooted cultural significance. The event, being supported by the Olympic Council of Asia, World Yogasana, Asian Yogasana and Yogasana Indraprastha, will also help create a roadmap towards inclusion of the discipline in the Olympic curriculum. "India, the birthplace of yoga, is honoured to host the second Asian Yogasana Championship. This event is more than just a competition; it is a celebration of our ancient wisdom evolving into



a modern competitive sport," Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said in a release. "We are committed to making Yogasana a global sporting discipline, and this championship is a significant step toward that goal. Through this event, we will showcase not just the athleticism of Yogasanas but also its power to transform lives, both physically and mentally." Asian Yogasana president Sanjay Malpani emphasised

Yogasanas' rightful place on the world stage." World Yogasana secretary-general Jaideep Arya added, "The championship in New Delhi marks a significant milestone in our mission to promote Yogasana as a global competitive sport. "This championship brings together exceptional athletes from across Asia, showcasing the strength, flexibility, and discipline that define this ancient practice. We are proud to witness the growing enthusiasm for Yogasana and remain committed to its development as a mainstream sporting discipline." Yogasana Bharat president Udit Sheth said India is committed to shaping the future of the ancient sport. "Our mission is to provide young athletes with a platform to shine, to elevate Yogasanas to premier sporting events, and to reinforce India's commitment to sharing this invaluable heritage with the world," he added.

Mental strength matters, not size: Gavaskar backs Rohit Sharma

PTI ■ DUBAI
Backing India captain Rohit Sharma, who was subjected to fat-shaming, cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar on Tuesday said that slim guys are for modelling and in cricket, mental strength is what matters, not physical size. Addressing the unnecessary criticisms directed at India skipper in the middle of Champions Trophy by a politician, Gavaskar reminded how Mumbai's big-hitting Sarfaraz Khan also faced body shaming, but it didn't affect his performance at all. "I have always said, if you want only slim guys, then you should go to a modelling competition and pick all the models. It's not about that," Gavaskar said. "It's about how well you can play cricket. We talked about Sarfaraz Khan, he was vilified for a long time because he was on the heavier side. But if he scores 150 for India in a Test match and follows it up with another two or three fifty-plus scores, then what's the



Rohit Sharma prays as he walks to open the innings during the ICC Champions Trophy semi-final cricket match between India and Australia in Dubai

issue?" "I don't think size has anything to do with it. It's your mental strength - whether you can last the distance-that's the most important thing. Bat well, bat for long, and score runs." Congress spokesperson Shama Mohamed called Rohit "fat for a sportsman" and described him as "the most unimpressive Captain India has ever had." However, she faced backlash on social media for her unwarranted comment and was forced to delete her post from the X'. Congress also distanced itself from Shama's comment and requested her to delete the post.

India honors Shivalkar with black armbands in Champions Trophy semifinal

PTI ■ DUBAI
The Indian team players on Tuesday wore black armbands during their Champions Trophy semifinal against Australia in the memory and honour of domestic cricket legend Padmakar Shivalkar, who passed away due to age-related illness. Shivalkar was one of the finest spinners who did not get to play for India as he played in the era of greats like Bishan Singh Bedi. He was 84 and breathed his last in Mumbai on Monday. In the 124 First Class matches he played for Mumbai, Shivalkar took 589 wickets with his left-arm spin. Shivalkar was conferred with the prestigious CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award by the BCCI. The current India skipper Rohit Sharma also hails from Mumbai.

Aaqib Javed to continue as Pakistan's head coach

PTI ■ LAHORE
The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has asked former pacer and national selector, Aaqib Javed, to continue as interim head coach of the white-ball tour of New Zealand. A PCB official said due to time constraints between the Champions Trophy and New Zealand tour, Aaqib will continue as interim head coach. "The PCB meanwhile has started the process of finding a new head coach for the national team and due process would be followed," he said. The official said Pakistan should have a new head coach when they begin their new cycle of the World Test Championship (WTC) in August. Last year, the PCB had appointed Jason Gillespie and Gary Kirsten as the red ball and white ball coaches respectively, but both resigned within six to eight months of their appointment citing issues with the Pakistan board. Aaqib, a senior selector, was then asked to take over as interim head coach of the white ball squad and then also the red ball team for the Test series in South Africa and against West Indies at home.



Pakistan interim head coach Aaqib Javed, left, speaks as Salman Ali Agha watches during a press conference in Lahore

He also continued in the post in the three-nation event in Pakistan and the Champions Trophy from which the team bowed out without registering a win. Former Pakistan captain, Mohammad Yousuf, will now work as batting coach of the national side. The PCB also said that it has appointed Salman Ali Agha as captain and Shadab Khan as vice-captain of the T20 squad keeping in mind the T20 World Cup next year. "The decision to appoint Salman and Shadab as T20I captain and vice-captain, respectively, has been made with an eye on two major upcoming tournaments - the ACC Men's T20 Asia Cup 2025 (September 2025) and the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 (February or March 2026)," the board said. Salman has previously led Pakistan in a T20I series against Zimbabwe, winning it 2-1. As part of preparations for the

Babar, Rizwan dropped from Pakistan's T20 squad

T20 World Cup, Pakistan are set to play a minimum of five T20Is in the Asia Cup 2025 and three T20Is each against West Indies (away in July), Afghanistan (home in August), Ireland (home in September), South Africa (home in September/October), Sri Lanka (home in November) and Australia (home in January 2026). The board said that Mohammad Rizwan will continue leading the ODI side as Pakistan build for the 2027 ODI World Cup, which will take place in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The board also confirmed that openers Fakhar Zaman and Saim Ayub were not considered for either format for the New Zealand tour on medical advice. "Fakhar suffered a left lower intercostal muscle sprain during Pakistan's ICC Champions Trophy opener against New Zealand, while Saim is recovering from a right ankle fracture sustained on the first day of the Cape Town Test against South Africa in January," the board said. It confirmed that both are expected to be fully fit for the Pakistan Super League 10, starting in Rawalpindi on 11 April.



Babar Azam plays a shot during the Champions Trophy 2025 cricket match

PTI ■ LAHORE
Captain Muhammad Rizwan and Babar Azam were on Tuesday dropped from the Pakistan squad for the five-match T20 series in New Zealand. Salman Ali Agha replaced Rizwan as captain of the T20 outfit with all-rounder Shadab Khan being recalled and named his vice-captain. Rizwan has been retained as captain of the ODI squad after the team's disappointing show in the Champions Trophy. The selectors have avoided an overhaul in the one-day squad and retained majority of the players who flopped in the ongoing ICC event. Babar is also retained in the ODI squad but batters Saud Shakil and Kamran Ghulam have been axed. The selectors have also sidelined fast bowlers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf from the one-day squad. Pakistan play five T20s and three ODIs in New Zealand starting March 16. Pakistan will still be without

dashing opener Saim Ayub, who is yet to recover from an ankle injury while opener, Fakhar Zaman has also been ruled out of the tour with an injury he sustained in the first match of the CT. His injury came after making a comeback to the Pakistan squad last month in the three-nation event while Saim got injured while fielding during the Test series in South Africa earlier this year. **Pakistan squads:** ODI: Muhammad Rizwan (captain), Salman Ali Agha (VC), Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Akif Javed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Imam ul Haq, Khushdil Shah, Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Wasim junior, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Naseem Shah, Sufyan Muqeem, Tayyab Tahir. T20: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Shadab Khan (VC), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Hasan Nawaz, Jahandad Khan, Khushdil Shah, Muhammad Abbas Afridi, Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Haris, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Omair Bin Yousuf, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Sufyan Muqeem, Usman Khan.



South Africa's Ryan Rickelton celebrates after scoring century during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match

South Africa has more class than NZ: Ponting

PTI ■ LAHORE
South Africa have a "bit more class and power" in their lineup, which makes them favourites in the Champions Trophy semifinal against New Zealand, feels Ricky Ponting, though the Australian great added that if someone like Kane Williamson comes to the party he could get the job done for the Black Caps. New Zealand are coming into the knockouts on the back of a big defeat against India in Dubai, while South Africa are on a roll following their massive seven-wicket win against England in the group stage. While momentum could play a big role in the contest, Ponting said with a deep batting line-up, just like India, South Africa enjoy an edge. "If I look at both the sides, I think there's that little bit more class in the South African lineup. They bat deep. I think they might have a little bit too much power for New

Zealand," Ponting opined on ICC Review on Tuesday. "I'm actually going with South Africa (to win the contest) as much as I've praised New Zealand," he added. The former Australian captain added that New Zealand top-order batter Williamson will have to play a leading role in the contest as every team relies on its big players to guide them in crunch games. "Williamson, I think, needs to make runs for them in this game. Every team needs their big players standing up in big moments. Big games mean big names. It doesn't get bigger than the Champions Trophy semifinals. And, Williamson is a big-game player, he will understand the enormity of his role going into the game and I won't be surprised if he gets the job done," Ponting said. Williamson, after hardly making any contribution against Pakistan (1) and Bangladesh (5), struck a 120-ball 81 against India in the final group game, which would have given him some confidence. However, Ponting feels the likes of opener Ryan Rickelton, skipper Temba Bavuma, Aiden Markram, David Miller and Heinrich Klaasen could make things difficult for the Kiwis. "He's (Klaasen) very important because he is such a dangerous player of spin bowling. He's such a great, clean hitter of spin. He is important to the middle order but South Africa bat deep like India. And, with a world-class all-rounder like Marco Jansen and obviously Aiden Markram, (Temba) Bavuma, David Miller. Their batting is really strong. That middle order. "I think Klaasen has been the No.1 T20 batter for long and if he brings that sort of stuff to the 50-over game. If he goes in around the 30-over mark and South Africa are 2-3 down, then he can be truly dangerous," he said.

NZ, SA aim to shed underachiever tag in Champions Trophy semifinal

PTI ■ LAHORE
Loaded with world-class talent but haunted by the underachievers' tag at ICC events, New Zealand and South Africa will square off in an evenly-matched second semifinal of the Champions Trophy here on Wednesday. South Africa and New Zealand have won the Champions Trophy once each in 1998 and 2000 respectively but the tournament was called the ICC Knockout Trophy at that time and didn't carry the significance which it has now. While South Africa would look to shed their big tournament "chokers" tag, the Kiwis will also be desperate to lay their hands on a title after having finished second best twice in the ODI World Cup (2015 and 2019) and once in the T20 World Cup (2021). Led by Mitchell Santner, New Zealand finished behind India in Group A, while South Africa topped Group B ahead of



New Zealand players celebrate the wicket of Virat Kohli during ODI match of the ICC Champions Trophy in Dubai

Australia. But there is little to separate the two sides. Both are evenly-matched in most departments but the Proteas look to be slightly ahead on the bowling front because of variety. The two teams have enough

firepower in their batting line-ups and have quality fielders but the contest is expected to be decided by the spinners. Although the pitches here are a bit on the slower side but they haven't spun as much as the surfaces in Dubai and it will be interesting to see how the spinners of both the teams fare. The 44-run loss to India in their last group match notwithstanding, New Zealand will take confidence from their win over South Africa in the tri-series here last month. Recently, New Zealand successfully chased 305 against South Africa here and then went on to win the tri-series, beating Pakistan in the final, and senior batter Tom Latham feels those experiences will hold them in good stead. "Yeah, the (South Africa) team that we played potentially will be slightly different, they had a lot of guys that weren't in that side. They were still playing in their SAT20 back in South Africa so will be slightly different. "But I guess from our point of view, we'll lean back on those experiences of Lahore in playing against South Africa," Latham had said. "We'll do everything that we do leading up to a game. It's obvious-

It has been a different Varun Chakravarthy since his comeback: Suryakumar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
India's T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav on Tuesday said mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy has been a different player since his comeback to international cricket, for he has become mentally tougher and plays with a smile on his face. Chakravarthy returned excellent figures of 5/42 in India's convincing victory over New Zealand in Dubai on Sunday, which helped the team to top their group on way to the semifinals of the tournament. "The way he left in 2021 and the way he has come back, there are

two different Varun Chakravarthys," Suryakumar, the brand ambassador of Moha, told the media here at an event. "He has become a little tough mentally, yet he is smiling a lot and taking everything in his stride irrespective of what happens on the field which is very good from a cricketer's point of view." The selection of Chakravarthy, who did not feature in the first two group matches, proved to be a masterstroke. "I am really happy for him. He deserves everything (for) what he has been doing and all the recognition for what has been happening with him,"

Suryakumar added. "He has been a really hard working athlete since 2021. I have been watching him and have spoken with him a lot of times since he made his comeback to international cricket." Suryakumar said it is important for teams to pick players with specific skill set even though the focus has primarily been on all-rounders in the shortest format. "At the end of the day it's all about your skill and what skills you offer to the team. If it's in the best interest of the team, then you have to pick those bowlers." Suryakumar also said that

Mumbai Indians will not face any leadership conundrum in the IPL given that they have each of the current Indian captains in their side. "As soon as we go to our house, it's like a family, so we don't think about that, that we have three captains or we have four captains. We think that we are one team," he said. "It's as good as an institution where we have learned a lot, grown over there, and gone on to play for India. We work as a unit when we get into that dressing room," he added. While Hardik Pandya is Mumbai Indians' captain, the five-time winners also boast of India's Test leader Rohit Sharma, T20I skipper Suryakumar and also Jasprit Bumrah, who had led India in two Tests on the Australia tour. "Yes, there are a lot of captains in the team, but (when) we sit together, (be it) five people, seven, (or) ten, we take a call. How do we want to take the ship forward?" The 34-year-old Suryakumar said he wants to continue focusing on all formats for now. "When I started playing my cricket, it was all red ball. Slowly, I came into white ball formats and then I was introduced to ODIs and then T20Is," he said.

Frimpong relishes 'intense' rivalry with Bayern Munich in Champions League

PTI ■ LEVERKUSEN (GERMANY)

Get ready for games four and five this season in one of the most dynamic rivalries in European soccer. Bayer Leverkusen heads to Bayern Munich in the Champions League round of 16 on Wednesday hoping to derail an otherwise successful first season for Bayern coach Vincent Kompany. "Of course this game's a big one, it's intense when we play each other," Leverkusen wing back Jeremie Frimpong told The Associated Press in a recent interview. Leverkusen and Bayern have already met three times this season. Leverkusen knocked Bayern out of the German Cup but two draws in the Bundesliga helped Bayern move closer to recovering the



Bundesliga title that Leverkusen won last season in a major upset. Less than three weeks have passed since their last encounter, a tense 0-0 draw in which Xabi Alonso's Leverkusen shut Bayern's forwards out of the game and

course it's nice that it's a German team again, Bayern Munich again. So everyone's excited," Frimpong said. Since he took over as Leverkusen coach two and a half years ago, Alonso has turned a struggling team into champions with a reputation for last-minute goals and being hard to beat. Alonso's personal record against Bayern is one that few coaches can boast — three wins and three draws for a total six games unbeaten in all competitions. Some of the coach's best moments in charge have come with tactical surprises against Bayern in big games. Still, Frimpong isn't putting much faith in that unbeaten streak. "It's nice to say, but for me personally, it's nothing," Frimpong said.

Praggnanandhaa to take on Shankland in Prague Masters

PTI ■ PRAGUE (CZECH REPUBLIC)

With a career-high world ranking of No 8 as per the latest published list, Grandmaster Praggnanandhaa will take on American Sam Shankland in the sixth round of the Prague Masters after a rest day on Tuesday. Tied at the top spot with compatriot and friend Aravindh Chithambaram, Praggnanandhaa tried to break the defences of his fellow countryman for a long time but only ended up with a draw. The two are now on 3.5 points each out of a possible five. Aravindh was surprised after his second win in the tournament. "I don't know what's happening to me here," said Aravindh, who has also beaten top seed Wei Yi of China in the tournament. The Indian, who has arrived big time in to the elite circles, now will have to tackle the experienced Quang Leim Le of Vietnam in the next round. The two Indians are followed by a pack of four players having 2.5 points each. The most dangerous of the lot is Wei Yi who started with two losses in the first three rounds and then won two in a row to send warning signals to his competitors. Anish Giri and Quang Leim hold the dubious distinction of drawing all the five games thus far while Vincent Keymer has lost two, drawn one and won two out of his five games. Aravindh has been the pick of the tournament so far, as not many had given him a chance.



The former national champion has been working very hard and this is the first time he has got a real platform to showcase his real skill-set against the top GMs. Praggnanandhaa has been exceptional in his two victories thus far, against Keymer and Nguyen Thai Dai Van. But his white pieces are not necessarily giving him any serious advantage. It is well known that he makes up for it with his superior calculation skills, and much will depend on it especially against Shankland who also leaves no stone unturned in trying to carve out a niche for himself. Following the contest against Shankland, Praggnanandhaa will have white pieces against Quang Leim and Wei Yi while in the last round he is pitted against the super-solid Giri. For Aravindh, the road could be slightly easier as he has only the bottom field to compete against. In the seventh round, the Indian will play Giri, followed by David Navara of the Czech Republic before finally taking on Gurel

Ediz of Turkey in his last round. In the Challengers section, the lone Indian, Divya Deshmukh has got 1.5 points. She will try to gain some important rating points in the last four rounds, which will help her regain some confidence after the losses in the Tata Steel tournament earlier this month. Pairings (Round 6): Sam Shankland (USA, 2) vs R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 3.5); Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 3.5) vs Quang Leim Le (Vie, 2.5); Wei Yi (Chn, 2.5) vs Gurel Ediz (Tur, 2); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2) vs David Navara (Cze, 2); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 2.5) vs Anish Giri (Ned, 2.5). Challengers: Finel Vaclav (Cze, 1.5) vs Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 1.5); Ivan Salgado Lopez (Esp, 3) vs Richard Stalmach (Cze, 2); Stamatis Kourkoulous-Arditis (Gre, 2) vs Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 4); Jonas Buhl Zander (Den, 3.5) vs Marc'andrie Maurizis (Fra, 3); Nemes Jychym (Cze, 2) vs Ma Qun (Chn, 2.5).

Uttarakhand, Chhatisgarh win in National Championship

PTI ■ PANCHKULA

Hockey Uttarakhand, Chhatisgarh and Hockey Chandigarh secured wins in their respective games of Division 'B' in the senior women national championship here on Tuesday. In the first match of the day, Hockey Uttarakhand defeated Telangana Hockey 1-0. Vartika Rawat (45') scored the only goal of the match for Hockey Uttarakhand to take the lead against Telangana Hockey. Chhatisgarh Hockey defeated Delhi Hockey 2-1 in a close game. Sonali (8') scored the first goal of the match for Delhi Hockey. In response, Leena Kosare (22') and Lahare Mamteshwari (43') scored two goals for Chhatisgarh Hockey to take the lead and secure their second win in the tournament. In the other matches, Hockey Chandigarh defeated Hockey Himachal 4-1. Sonu (30', 42') scored a brace whereas Raveena Rani (17') and Captain Rakhi (59') scored one goal each to take the total to four goals at the final whistle. On the other hand, Bhumika Chauhan (36') scored the consolation goal for Hockey Himachal. Later in the day, Hockey Andhra Pradesh will play against Le Puducherry Hockey and Hockey Arunachal will face off Hockey Jammu & Kashmir in Division 'C'.

Vani ready for challenge from Sneha in fifth leg of Hero WPGT

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Vani Kapoor, who grabbed the top honours in the fourth leg last month, will be looking to add another title as she tees up in the fifth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour at the Classic Golf & Country Club here on Wednesday. The field of 38 players includes five amateurs and carries a prize purse of Rs.16 lakhs. The experienced Vani will be challenged by other established stars like Sneha Singh, who has already won twice this season and leads the Hero Order of Merit, Amandeep Drall, who is trying to find the form that once made her a contender on the Ladies European Tour, Gaurika Bishnoi and Ridhima Dilawari. Sneha and Ridhima shot 66 and 67 respectively in the final round of the previous leg to finish in the top three and signalled that they are finding their form at the right time. Many of the professionals are also using the Tour to sharpen their game ahead of the international schedules they have planned. The Indian pros have in recent years been travelling to South Africa, Australia, Europe and South East Asia for more exposure and a good number have been playing on the Ladies European Tour (LET) also. A bunch of young professionals, who have hit the Tour in the last few years and who have begun making a mark, are also in the field. They include Jasmine Shekar, who won multiple times in 2024, and Anvitha Narender, who has also tasted success. Sneha, who has won two of the four events held this season so far, leads the Order of Merit with Vani and Jasmine Shekar right behind her. The Classic Golf and Country Club has been a regular venue on the Tour, and the fifth leg will be the first of the two events to be staged in Gurugram this month. The sixth leg is also slated to be held in Gurugram at the DLF Golf and Country Club.

Eyeing play-offs, Odisha FC meet Jamshedpur FC

PTI ■ JAMSHEDPUR

Odisha FC will play Jamshedpur FC in their Indian Super League match here on Wednesday, hoping to collect full points as the race for the last play-offs spot has gained steam. Jamshedpur FC have already qualified for the playoffs and are fourth in the table with 38 points from 22 games on the back of 12 wins and two draws. Odisha FC are preparing for their final league fixture, placed seventh with 30 points from 23 outings thus far. A win against Jamshedpur FC will see them reach 33 points.

If the sixth-placed Mumbai City FC lose both their remaining games, the Islanders will also be on 33 points at the end of the league phase. In that case, the equation will come down to goal difference, which still gives Odisha FC a lot to play for, with just one vacant playoff spot left now. Odisha FC's goal difference is six right now, better than Mumbai City FC (0). The Khalid Jamil-coached side will want form by their side going into the playoffs, since they have won and drawn twice each in their last five games. Odisha FC have failed to score in each of their last

two ISL matches, having gone on a longer goalless streak only twice before. Interestingly, they are the fourth-highest scoring team this season with 41 strikes to their name. Odisha FC have permitted opponents an average of 9.9 shots from inside the box per game since the start of 2025, with only Mohammedan SC (11.1) and Hyderabad FC (10.4) conceding more. They have kept the third-least clean sheets (4) in ISL 2024-25. Jamshedpur FC have played 46.1% of their passes forward in the current campaign, the second-highest share among all teams.

Mannat positive ahead of Asia Pacific Amateurs in Vietnam

PTI ■ Da Nang (Vietnam)

Brimming with confidence after her recent performances, Mannat Brar is hopeful of making an impact as she leads the six-member Indian team at the 2025 Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Golf Championships, the top-tier event for amateur golfers in the region. The 17-year-old Mannat, who is the reigning all India Ladies champion, hit the spotlight by becoming the first Indian to reach the semi-finals of the R&A Girls last year in Yorkshire. The other five players in the Indian Golf Union's squad are Zara Anand, Saanvi Somu, Heena Kang, Kashika Misra and Guntas Kaur Sandhu, all of whom have done well on the domestic IGU circuit. Of the six, Mannat with three previous starts at the

WAAP is the most experienced, while Saanvi Somu and Heena Kang were part of the Indian team last year in Thailand. Saanvi made the cut on her debut. Mannat, who finished third last week while playing in a pro event in India, said, "I have had a good year in 2024 and also in early 2025. Hopefully I can do better in the region. "I want to stay as an amateur and experience some of the best courses in the world, before turning pro. I have played pro events in India and done well, and I will turn pro, but maybe after a couple of years. "The WAAP is easily the best events we in Asia get to play and the incentives are fantastic with starts at some of the Majors." The Indian team also has three WAAP debutants, with Zara Anand, who was a semi-finalist at the 2024 All



India Ladies and a finalist the year before in 2023, as the best ranked. She is just outside 400th in the world and right behind Mannat Brar in world rankings. Of the other two, Kashika Misra achieved one of her best results, winning the Northern India ladies late last year, where she finished

ahead of Mannat. Guntas Kaur Sandhu won the Maharashtra Ladies in a strong field that had Zara, Heena and Mannat. The best Indian result at the WAAP was T-9 by Anika Varma in 2021 and last year Avani Prashanth was T-10. Avani has since turned professional. Interestingly most of the

Indian amateur girls have also had a taste of pro competitions at the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour in India. Saanvi has finished runner-up no less than four times, while Mannat, Zara and Heena have also produced good results. The WAAP, developed by The R&A and Asia-Pacific Golf Confederation, provides a pathway for Asia's elite female amateurs. The winner earns invitations to play in three major championships — the AIG Women's Open, the Amundi Evian Championship and The Chevron Championship — as well as elite championships such as the Hana Financial Group Championship, ISPS HANDA Women's Australian Open, the 122nd Women's Amateur Championship and the Augusta National Women's Amateur.

Serena joins ownership group of Toronto Tempo, WNBA's 1st Canadian franchise

AP ■ NEW YORK

Serena Williams is joining the ownership group of the WNBA's first Canadian franchise, the Toronto Tempo, the team announced Monday. She will partner with Larry Tanenbaum, Chairman of Kilmer Sports Ventures for the Tempo, who will begin play in the 2026 season. "I am thrilled to announce my ownership role in the first Canadian WNBA team, the Toronto Tempo," said Williams. "This moment is not just about basketball; it is about showcasing the true value and potential of female athletes — I have always said that women's sports are an incredible investment opportunity. I am excited to partner with Larry and all of Canada in creating this new WNBA franchise and legacy." Williams, one of the greatest tennis players in

history, will play an active role in future jersey designs. She made her professional tennis debut at age 14 at a tournament in Canada in 1995, and her last event was the 2022 US Open. Williams won 23 Grand Slam singles titles — the most by a woman in the sport's Open era — plus another 14 major trophies in women's doubles alongside her older sister, Venus. "Serena is a champion," said Tempo President Teresa Resch. "She's the greatest athlete of all time, and her impact on this team and this country is going to be incredible. She's set the bar for women in sport, business and the world — and her commitment to using that success to create opportunities for other women is inspiring — we're thrilled to be marking the lead-up to International Women's Day with this announcement."

Ad-hoc panel for boxing needed as BFI failed in 'fundamental' duties: Usha

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) chief P T Usha on Tuesday defended her decision to appoint an ad-hoc committee for boxing, saying the national federation failed to fulfil its "fundamental responsibilities" in the last one year and her action was necessary to "restore order and ensure proper governance". Her statement came in response to IOA vice president Gagan Narang's letter on February 28 in which the former Olympic bronze-

winner accused her of issuing "arbitrary" orders and undermining athletes' welfare. Usha's steadfast position is despite the Delhi High Court's stay on the IOA's order. The court issued notice, seeking IOA's response to a petition filed by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI). "...There is no truth in your (Narang) assertion that athletes are suffering due to this decision or any alleged arbitrary actions on my part. The decision to appoint an ad-hoc Committee was not

arbitrary but a necessary step to restore order, ensure proper governance, and prioritize athlete development," Usha said in her reply to Narang, who is also a member of the IOA's Executive Council. "The unfortunate reality is that BFI has failed in fulfilling its fundamental responsibilities, including conducting national championships in the last year. "With the 2026 Asian Games fast approaching, there has been little to no effort to identify fresh talent, select promising boxers, and

implement structured training programs to enhance India's medal prospects." Usha, who has been at loggerheads with the Executive Council members over several issues, accused them of showing "disproportionate preoccupation" with issues of "personal preferences" rather than the overall good of Indian sports. Narang wrote to her seeking a withdrawal of her "arbitrary" act of forming an ad-hoc committee to run the affairs of BFI. He had said that "due to such arbitrary order, our

athletes are suffering and we are getting a bad name domestically and internationally". On February 24, the IOA constituted a five-member ad-hoc committee to oversee the affairs of boxing in the country on the ground that the sport's national federation failed to hold elections on time. The BFI termed the IOA's decision as "illegal" and filed a petition in the Delhi High Court to quash the order. Narang also claimed that Usha's decision to form the ad-hoc committee to run BFI

was done "without consultation and/or approval of EC of IOA". He had urged Usha to recall the order and call an emergency meeting of EC to discuss various pressing matters. Hitting back at Narang, the IOA president said she has made several attempts over the past year to convene Executive Council meetings to discuss key issues. "Unfortunately, these efforts have been thwarted time and again by members — including yourself — who have consistently blocked

meaningful discussions," she alleged. "I struggle to recall any instance where the EC has actively engaged in discussions about improving athlete performance or implementing measures to enhance India's medal-winning potential. "The persistent reluctance to address these critical matters raises serious concerns about the priorities of some within the IOA," she said. The IOA has been a divided house ever since Usha appointed Raghuram Iyer as the CEO in January 2024.

Dutch legend Taekema to work with Indian women dragflickers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has roped in Dutch legend Taeke Taekema to work with the national women's hockey team dragflickers on a short-term basis till the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Taekema had conducted a seven-day camp from February 10 to 16 ahead of India's FIH Pro League campaign in Bhubaneswar last month, where the hosts competed against England, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain. The seven-day camp was attended by the likes of Deepika, Manisha Chauhan,

Sonam, and Annu, along with a few junior players. The focus of the camp was on honing technical skills and improving dragflick accuracy under Taekema's guidance. Indian women's team chief coach Harendra Singh said the camp has been very beneficial for the players and Taekema will continue to work with the side on a short-term basis till Los Angeles Games. "Taeke is one of the greatest legends in dragflicking, and I requested Hockey India to bring him in to help us improve in this area. He has been working with the team on refining technique and

ensuring a smoother dragflicking process. "Dragflicking is a highly-specialised skill, and Taeke will continue to work with us in future camps as well," Harendra said. Harendra also acknowledged the improvements in Deepika's performance. "We've seen definite progress with Deepika, particularly during the recent Pro League matches. However, successful penalty-corner conversions rely on three key components — the injector, stopper, and dragflicker. "Unfortunately, we faced some challenges with the injection and stopping during



some matches, which affected our conversion rate. But Deepika's tactical approach is improving with each game," he said. Outlining his vision, the coach said his aim is to develop Deepika and

Manisha into world-class flickers. "Our focus is to develop Deepika and Manisha into world-class dragflickers. Taeke's involvement will continue until the 2028 LA

Olympics, and he will provide guidance to both the senior team and junior players as and when needed. "In modern hockey, dragflicking and goalkeeping are crucial, so we're committed to preparing our players to compete at the highest level globally," Harendra concluded. Taekema, 45, was renowned for his penalty-corner precision during his playing days. Taekema, who netted 170 goals in 94 appearances for the Netherlands men's team over 11 years, is widely regarded as one of the world's most feared penalty corner specialists. He was the top

scorer in numerous major international tournaments, including the 2002 and 2006 Champions Trophy, 2006 World Cup, 2008 Olympic Games, and 2010 FIH World Cup. He also served as the assistant coach for the China women's team from 2022 to 2024. Deepika too said she benefitted a lot from the camp. "Although it was just a week-long camp, it proved to be highly beneficial for the home leg of the FIH Pro League. I focused on refining my footwork, shot release, and finishing, which gave me a clear understanding of the technical adjustments I

needed to make," said Deepika, who netted two out of her three goals from penalty corners in the Pro League. "We concentrated on key technical areas like body positioning and stepping based on the type of shot we wanted to execute. This focus made a significant difference. Overall, it was an enriching experience. "Taekema was excellent in guiding us, and we started noticing improvements under his mentorship. He also shared his own experiences as a player, which helped us build mental resilience," she added.