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## EU backs Ukraine after Trump debacle



President Donald Trumps meets Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington

**PTI ■ NEW YORK**  
Ukraine's European partners as well as other global leaders rallied behind President Volodymyr Zelenskyy while the White House touted support for President Donald Trump's 'American First strength' after a remarkable showdown in the Oval Office between the two leaders. Zelenskyy departed the White House on Friday after an unprecedented verbal clash in the Oval Office between him and Trump and Vice President JD Vance.

The heated exchange between Trump and Zelenskyy and the resulting outpouring of support for the Ukrainian leader highlighted the deep fissures that have emerged between America and Europe over Ukraine. Zelenskyy's timeline on X was filled with messages of support from European allies and other countries from across the world. His response to all the messages was "Thank you for your support." President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, who was in India on Friday for an

official visit, said in a post on X, "Your dignity honours the bravery of the Ukrainian people. Be strong, be brave, be fearless. You are never alone, dear President @ZelenskyyUa. We will continue working with you for a just and lasting peace." French President Emmanuel Macron, who met Trump just this past Monday, said in a post on X that there is an aggressor: Russia. "There is a victim: Ukraine. We were right to help Ukraine and sanction Russia three years ago-and to keep doing so. By 'we,' I mean the Americans, the Europeans, the Canadians, the

Japanese, and many others," Macron said. "Thank you to all who have helped and continue to do so. And respect to those who have been fighting since the beginning-because they are fighting for their dignity, their independence, their children, and the security of Europe," Macron said. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, a close Trump ally, she would call for an EU-US summit to get diplomacy back on track. "What is needed is an immediate summit between the United States, European states, and allies to talk frankly about how we intend to deal with the great challenges of today, starting with Ukraine, which together we have defended in recent years," she said in a statement. Friedrich Merz, Germany's likely next chancellor, wrote on X, "Dear Volodymyr @zelenskyyua, we stand with #Ukraine in good and in testing times. We must never confuse aggressor and victim in this terrible war." Prime Minister of Estonia Kristen Michal said his country stands united with Zelenskyy and Ukraine in its fight for freedom. "Always. Because it is right, not easy," Michal said. The White House put out a statement 'Support Pours in for President Trump, VP Vance's America First Strength' and added that Trump and Vance "made clear to the world that the United States will not be taken advantage of - a sentiment echoed by the cabinet and members of Congress from across the country." The statement carried quotes from several lawmakers, including Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem. "Thank you @POTUS for standing up for America in a way that no President has ever had the courage to do before. Thank you for putting America First. America is with you!", Rubio, who was seated next to Vance in the Oval Office during the bilateral meeting with Zelenskyy as the talks unravelled, said. **Continued on page 2**

## Avalanche rescue: 50 BRO workers saved, four dead

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN/NEW DELHI**  
War footing rescue operations helped the Indian Army rescue 50 workers out of snow brought in by an avalanche at a Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp in the high-altitude Mana village in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, but unfortunately four of them died on Saturday. Six helicopters, including three of the Indian Army Aviation, two of the Indian Air Force and one civil copter hired by the Army, were engaged in the rescue operations, an Army spokesperson said. Thirty-three were rescued by Friday night. Avalanche hit the BRO camp between Mana and Badrinath between 5:30 am and 6 am on Friday, burying 55 workers inside eight containers and a shed, according to the Army. "Fifty labourers have been rescued out of which, unfortunately, four injured have been confirmed as fatal casualties while the search for the remaining five is underway," the Army spokesperson said. The injured were being prioritised for evacuation, he said. Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami conducted an aerial survey of the affected area and directed officials to speed up the rescue operation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Dhami and assured him of full support. District Disaster Management Officer NK Joshi said Army and Indo-Tibetan Border



Rescue operation underway after several labourers got trapped under snow following an avalanche in Mana area of Chamoli district, Uttarakhand

**Avalanche strikes Jammu**  
**PNS ■ JAMMU**  
An avalanche struck the ABeighpura area of Kishtwar district on Thursday evening. Officials said that the situation remains normal. No loss of life or property has been reported. "There has been no loss of life or damage to property in the avalanche. Everyone has been accounted for and none is missing," a police official said. All the three top tourist destinations in Kashmir including the ski resort of Gulmarg, Sonamarg and Pahalgam are at present covered with a thick blanket of snow after the recent snowfall. The tourist destinations are presenting a view of winter wonderland, attracting a large number of tourists. **Continued on page 2**

### WEATHER

AQI	126
MAX	28.6°C
MIN	16.6°C

### India to remain fastest growing economy: IMF

**PTI ■ NEW YORK**  
Multilateral financing Agency International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said that India will retain its position as the fastest-growing major economy by clocking a GDP growth of 6.5 per cent in 2025-26, on the back of robust private investment and macroeconomic stability. India's strong economic performance, the IMF said, provides an opportunity for the country to advance critical and challenging structural reforms to realise the ambition of becoming an advanced economy by 2047. "Real GDP is expected to grow at 6.5 per cent in 2024-25 and 2025-26. According to the estimate released by the Indian government, the country's economy is expected to clock a growth rate of 6.5 per cent during 2024-25. "Headline inflation is expected to converge to target as food price shocks wane," the IMF said after Article IV consultations with India. The IMF statement also underlined the need for deeper implementation of structural reforms to boost private investment and employment, and push growth. "...Comprehensive structural reforms are crucial to create high-quality jobs, invigorate investment, and unleash higher potential growth. Efforts should focus on implementing labour market reforms, strengthening human capital, and supporting greater participation of women in the labour force," it added. Boosting private investment and FDI, the IMF statement said, was vital and would require stable policy frameworks, greater ease of doing business, governance reforms, and increased trade integration. **Continued on page 2**

## Delhi snaps fuel for aged vehicles

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**  
In a move to check vehicle pollution, the BJP-led Delhi government announced on Saturday that vehicles older than 15 years will no longer be allowed to refuel at petrol pumps in the Capital after March 31. Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa announced on Saturday the Delhi government will stop providing petrol to vehicles older than 15 years at fuel stations across the city after March 31. This comes after a high level meeting with officials of environment department to discuss measures to combat air pollution in the national Capital. Sirsa announced anti-pollution measures saying the government is taking stringent steps to curb vehicular emissions and pollution. Besides, he also announced that all high-rise buildings, hotels, and commercial complexes in the capital must install anti-smog guns to curb air pollution levels. "We are installing gadgets at petrol pumps which will identify vehicles older than 15 years, and no fuel will be provided to them," Sirsa said after the meeting. He added that the Delhi government would inform the Union Ministry of Petroleum about this decision. Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) already enforce a policy prohibiting diesel vehicles older than 10 years and petrol vehicles older than 15 years from operating on the roads. A 2021 directive reinforced this rule, mandating that violators found after January 1, 2022, would have their vehicles impounded and sent to scrap yards. The meeting, which went on for over three hours, was called to discuss only issues related to air pollution. Petrol vehicles over the age of 15 and diesel vehicles over the age of 10 years have not been allowed to run in the city for the past several years. These vehicles can be sold in other states after procuring No-Objection Certificates. The national Capital has more than 425 petrol-diesel stations. According to rough estimates, there are around 55 Lakh overage vehicles, 66 per cent of which are two-wheelers and 54 per cent four-wheelers, the officer said. The government also plans to phase out nearly 90 per cent of CNG-driven public transport buses in Delhi by December 2025, replacing them with electric buses to promote cleaner and more sustainable transport. Giving more details about the implementation of new rules, the officer said many fuel stations in Delhi have already installed AI-enabled cameras to check violations of pollution under control (PUC) certificate rules. "These cameras currently detect vehicles which do not have PUC certificate and the fuel pump staff deny fuel to such vehicles. We can also use these AI-enabled cameras to detect the age of particular vehicles. For this, we need to upgrade our system," the officer added. He said the fuel pumps which currently do not have such devices will have them installed soon. Moreover, the Delhi government will deploy teams to identify overage vehicles and ensure they are either prevented from entering the city or removed if already present. Delhi Petrol Dealers Association President Nischal Singhania welcomed the announcement on fuel restrictions. "Vehicles older than 15 years are already banned by the Supreme Court; they can't ply in Delhi. We already have systems where we capture the number plates of vehicles, and the system was used only to give alerts to customers who don't have a PUC setup. I think the same system can be used to capture the number of vehicles which are 15 years old," Singhania added. **Continued on page 2**

## HM for free access to citizens in Manipur



Union Home Minister Amit Shah chairs a meeting to review security situation in Manipur in New Delhi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday directed security forces to ensure free movement of people on all routes in Manipur from March 8 and surrender of arms from rebel outfits. He also called for strict action against those creating obstructions. Home Minister was chairing a meeting, first time after the imposition of President's rule to review the security situation of Manipur, which has been witnessing ethnic violence since May 2023. Over 250 people have lost their lives in the violence. The Home Minister directed that free movement of people should be ensured on all roads of Manipur from March 8,

Tenggol. Bhalla on Friday extended the deadline for the surrender of looted and illegal arms until 4 pm on March 6 following demands by people from both hill and valley areas for additional time. Several thousand arms were looted from police in different places in Manipur during the initial phase of the ethnic violence that began about 22 months ago. Since taking over the charge of Governor on January 3, Bhalla has been meeting cross sections of people, taking feedback from them on how to bring back normalcy in the northeastern state. He has also chaired several meetings in Manipur where law and order situation on the state was discussed and gave necessary directions to the security forces, officials said. Bhalla, a former Union Home Secretary, who had closely worked with Shah for five years till August 2024, was handpicked by the Union home minister himself and said to have given the mandate to bring back normalcy to the restive state. The violence in Manipur started after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status in May 2023.

## Delhi police's civil wings clipped

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**  
In a big relief to common man, the newly elected BJP led Delhi government has issued an order, making it clear that Delhi police has no role to stop or allow constructions in the national Capital. There is no provision under Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC) Act, 1957 by which a person is required to seek the permission from police for carrying out the construction. It has been informed that there is a misconception prevalent to the effect that a person needs to obtain permission from the police for carrying out construction of a building. Delhi's Additional Chief Secretary further directed the Delhi police to sensitise their field officials to prevent the misuse of the provision of law and to remove the misconception that there is any need of permission from police for carrying out any construction of building. This comes after a high level meeting chaired by the Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday. The meeting was attended by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Delhi Home Minister Ashish Sood and Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora and other senior officials of policing departments. During the meeting concerns were raised about police officers demanding bribes for allowing illegal construction activities. There were several instances in the past when police personnel caught taking bribe for allowing constructions. "Building construction activity is regulated by the MCD and other Local Bodies in their respective jurisdictions. Section 312 / 313 of the DMC Act, 1957 provides finalising of Layout Plan, Section 336 of the DMC Act, 1957 provides for sanction of building plan and Section 346 for occupancy / completion certificate. There is no provision under DMC Act, 1957 by which a person is required to seek the permission from police for carrying out the construction." "There are, however, certain provisions, in the DMC Act, 1957, related to giving information by police to the MCD wrt an offence under the DMC Act or any rule, regulation or by laws made there under or carrying out investigation of such offence and follow up action [for example - Section 474, 475 and 466 A of the DMC Act, 1957]. It has been informed that there is a misconception prevalent to the effect that a person needs to obtain permission from the police for carrying out construction of a building. It has also been brought to the notice that there is sometimes misuse of the provisions mentioned in the (para 2) above for the purpose of rent seeking," reads the circular. **Continued on page 2**

### HOLI-RAMZAN MONTH



Residents buy dry fruits from a shop ahead of the holy month of Ramadan in Srinagar

# Women's safety collective responsibility: HC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Calling for strict action against those who make public spaces unsafe for women, the Delhi High Court has said unless an environment free from harassment and fear was created, all discussions on women's progress were superficial. Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma said real empowerment began with women's right to live and move freely without fear. The court made the observations in a judgement passed on February 28 while refusing to interfere with the conviction of a man for

sexually harassing a woman on a public bus in 2015. In 2019, the trial court convicted the accused and sentenced him to undergo simple imprisonment for one year for offence punishable under Section 354 (Assault of criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) of the Indian Penal Code and six months under Section 509 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of the woman) IPC. The decision was also upheld by the sessions court in appeal. Refusing to show any leniency in the case, the court lamented the "deeply

concerning reality" of women continuing to face harassment in public spaces even after decades of independence, despite stringent laws. The court emphasised that public transport became a site of vulnerability for the victim in this case, and any undue leniency to the accused, who was caught on the spot, would embolden future perpetrators. "The facts of the case and the acts of the accused reflect that girls are not safe even in public spaces today. The facts of the case also reflect this being a harsh and unsettling reality," said the court.



Pioneer photo

"Judgments in such cases play an important role of sending a message to the society and

to the community... That if we truly aspire to uplift women, it is imperative that we first

create an environment where they are safe -- free from harassment, humiliation, and fear -- and those who make the public spaces unsafe will be dealt with strictly. Until that happens, all discussions on women's progress will remain superficial," it further said. The court noted that the case showed a "rare instance" where strangers demonstrated "commendable courage" as they freely deposited before the police as well as the trial court in support of the prosecution. Such instances, it added, reinforce the importance of collective responsibility in

ensuring women's safety and that every individual in society has to stand against harassment. "In this case, the presence of alert passengers who stood by the complainant, intervened, and apprehended the accused was crucial. Even in a crowded bus, the complainant had to defend herself, face public humiliation, and rely on the conscience of bystanders to secure justice," observed the court. The court also rejected the accused petitioner's contention that, being complete strangers, he could not have dared to outrage the survivor's modesty in a public

setting. The petitioner's counsel claimed he was a physically handicapped and mentally disabled person, and the prosecution failed to establish a motive or intent behind the alleged offence. The court said sexual offences were often opportunistic crimes, and the absence of prior acquaintance or an explicit motive did not negate the possibility of such an act being committed. The presence of public witnesses and their intervention supported the complainant's version rather than discrediting it, added the court.

## Whereabouts of four men located in tunnel collapse

PTI ■ NAGARKURNOOL (TELANGANA)

The rescue operations to pull out the eight persons trapped inside the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel here for a week saw a breakthrough on Saturday with the whereabouts of four of them being located, though a Telangana minister put the chances of their survival at "one per cent." State Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao, who attended a meeting with officials involved in the rescue operation along with Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy, said there was lot of progress during the last couple of days. "In my view, the whereabouts of four persons have been located through radar," he told reporters at the tunnel and expressed hope they would be extricated by Sunday evening. Asked about the condition of the four whose whereabouts have been found, the minister recalled he had said on the first day itself that the chances of survival of the trapped persons are remote. "I had said the chances (of survival) are very, very remote. I am not talking about it but waiting in view of one per cent possibility (for survival)," he said. Krishna Rao added desilting was being carried out



Rescue operation underway to trace workers trapped inside the partially collapsed Telangana's SLBC tunnel in Nagarkurnool, Telangana on Saturday

manually where the whereabouts of four persons has been identified which is expected to be completed by Sunday evening. Scientists from the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) used Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) and detected some "anomalies" inside the tunnel, providing a crucial lead in the operation. The other four appear to have been stuck beneath the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM), the minister said. It may take some time to get a breakthrough about them, he said. The 450 ft tall TBM was being cut, he said. The personnel of about 11 agencies, including Army, NDRF, rat miners, are involved in the operation. Referring to the criticism of opposition parties that the

operation is getting delayed, Krishna Rao said those involved in the endeavour are experts but the rescue work is complex in view of the conditions, including slush, inside the tunnel. The rescue personnel should not be put at risk, he said. The minister also said dewatering, repairing the damaged conveyor belt and other aspects of rescue work is going simultaneously. Krishna Rao also said the families of those trapped in the tunnel were waiting as the operation was underway. Eight persons — engineers and labourers have been trapped under the collapsed roof of the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel since February 22 and the rescue operations are on a full swing to pull them out to safety.

## Statewide anti-drugs operation launched in Punjab

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Police has launched a statewide operation against drugs, conducting raids at 750 locations as the Cabinet sub-committee on the drug menace held its first meeting on Saturday, officials said. Around 12,000 police personnel were involved in the operation being carried out as part of an anti-drug campaign. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday set a deadline of three months to make the state drug-free. As part of the state government's renewed push against the drug problem, action is being taken against drug peddlers and in some places, their properties were also demolished. Cabinet Minister Aman Arora on Saturday appealed to all political parties that instead of playing politics, they should extend their support to the state government's anti-drug campaign to save Punjab. The meeting of the cabinet sub-committee was also attended by Chief Secretary KAP Sinha and Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav. Addressing the media after the meeting, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, who is heading the cabinet sub-committee, said

the first meeting of the "Yudh Nashia Virudh" campaign was held to ensure strict action against drug peddlers and drug smugglers. "The Aam Aadmi Party has launched a big attack against drugs. (Chief Minister Bhagwant) Mann has issued strict instructions. As per directions of AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal's directions, we will take strict action. Soon, not even a single drug peddler will be found in Punjab," he claimed. Members of the cabinet sub-committee have been assigned different districts to monitor the police action against the drug menace, he said. Cheema said he will visit Pathankot, Gurdaspur, Nawanshahr, Hoshiarpur, Rupnagar and Tarn Taran districts while Arora will look after Ludhiana, Patiala, Kapurthala, Mohali, Amritsar and Jalandhar. Minister Taranpreet Singh Sond will visit Sangrur, Barnala, Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib, Moga and Malerkotla and Laljit Singh Bhullar will see Faridkot, Mukhtar, Fazilka, Mansa and Ferozepur. Health Minister Balbir Singh will supervise the drug de-addiction and rehabilitation programme in the state. Speaking to reporters, Arora lashed out at the previous governments for the drug

menace. "A 360-degree action is visible on the ground," said Arora, referring to the ongoing police action against drug peddlers at many places in the state. "Those who are drug addicts, the health department will not treat them as criminals. They will be treated as patients and they will be treated in hospitals," Arora said. He said that it was not 100 per cent possible to stop "the rivers of drugs", started by the previous governments, without the support of the 3 crore people of Punjab. Arora said it was his promise to all political parties, religious bodies and social organisations that the Punjab government, Kejriwal and Mann will uproot the "cancer of drugs from the state". "I want to urge them that it is not an issue of a party or a government but it is about saving Punjab, the youth and future generations... I want to urge all political parties that they should give their support over this (anti-drug campaign) issue instead of playing politics so that we save our next generation" said Arora. The state government has formed a committee, led by Finance Minister Cheema, to oversee the actions of the police and health departments in tackling the drug problem.

## BJP essential for Assam's security, prosperity: Himanta



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday asserted that a BJP government in Assam was essential for the security, prosperity and identity of the state. Setting the tone for the assembly elections in the state next year, Sarma addressed the newly appointed district and mandal presidents of the party. He called upon BJP workers to work tirelessly as dedicated "sentinels to help implement the party's mission". Alleging that during the Congress rule many communities were neglected, the CM said they were now getting benefits from various welfare schemes. It is only due to the BJP that Assamese has been recognised as a classical language and the historic Charaideo Maidam has gained international

prominence, he claimed. "The state's achievements and the gateway to a golden future have been unlocked through Advantage Assam 2.0, which has paved the way for an investment of approximately Rs 5.18 lakh crore," Sarma said. He said the youth have a pivotal role to play in strengthening the BJP, which encourages them by giving them leadership positions. Ports Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said that after the BJP came to power in the state in 2016, PM Narendra Modi ensured that a Union minister visited the region every fortnight. State BJP president Dilip Saikia called upon the newly appointed district and mandal presidents to take charge as "commanders" in the upcoming panchayat, autonomous council, BTR, and assembly elections, ensuring a decisive mandate for the party.

## India to remain fastest growing economy: IMF

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These would include both tariff and non-tariff reduction measures. It further said that despite recent moderation, India's economic growth has remained robust, with GDP growth of 6 per cent y-on-y in the first half of 2024-25. Inflation has broadly declined within the tolerance band of the Reserve Bank (of 2 to 6 per cent), though food price fluctuations have created some volatility, the statement said. The financial sector, it added, has remained resilient, with non-performing loans at multi-year lows. Fiscal consolidation has continued, and the current account deficit has remained well contained, supported by strong growth in service exports.

## Delhi police's civil...

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"Therefore, Delhi Police is directed to sensitise their field officials to prevent the misuse of the provision of law and to remove the misconception that there is any need of permission from Police for carrying out any construction of building. However, the police authority will continue to assist and provide full support to all municipal officers and other municipal employees in the exercise of their lawful authority [Section, 475 of the DMC Act, 1957]," it said. In 2014, then police commissioner BS Bassi had noted that the police did not have an inherent authority to stop any unauthorised construction on their own and had issued a circular that asked police officers to restrict their roles to being 'eyes and ears' and only inform municipal authorities about any illegality.

## 98.18 per cent of ₹2000 notes returned, says RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Saturday said 98.18 per cent of the ₹2000 banknotes have been returned to the banking system, and only ₹6,471 crore worth such notes are still with the public. On May 19, 2023, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the withdrawal of ₹2000 denomination banknotes from circulation. The total value of ₹2000 banknotes in circulation, which was ₹3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on May 19, 2023, declined to ₹6,471 crore at the close of business on February 28, 2025, RBI said. "Thus, 98.18 per cent of the ₹2000 banknotes in circulation as on May 19, 2023, has since been

returned," it said in a statement. The facility for deposit and/or exchange of the ₹2000 banknotes was available at all bank branches till October 7, 2023. However, this facility is still available at the 19 issue offices of the Reserve Bank of India. Since October 9, 2023, RBI issue offices are also accepting Rs 2000 banknotes from individuals and entities for deposit into their bank accounts. Further, members of the public can also send ₹2000 banknotes through India Post from any post office within the country to any of the Reserve Bank of India issue offices for credit to their bank accounts. The ₹2000 banknotes continue to be legal tender.

## Out of your scope: Law ministry on ONOE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The question of holding elections using ballot papers does not fall under the ambit of the joint committee of Parliament examining the two bills on simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, the Union law ministry is learnt to have said. Reverting to the ballot paper system was a "suggestion" made by some of the members of the joint committee and the law ministry was to respond to it in writing. While the ministry's Legislative Department gave elaborate responses to a variety of questions posed to it by the committee, it did not give a direct reply on the suggestion on the ballot paper system. The ministry is learnt to have said that the suggestion on the use of the ballot paper system was "out of scope" of the parliamentary panel.

Sources explained that the committee is mandated to examine the bills on simultaneous polls — the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill — and give its report on whether they are sound enough for the purpose or need changes. Using electronic voting machines (EVMs) or ballot paper for casting votes is not the subject the panel is examining, they underlined. While the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill lays down a legal framework to hold the Lok Sabha and assembly polls together, the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill seeks to align the terms of legislative assemblies of Delhi, Puducherry and Jammu and Kashmir for the purpose of holding joint elections. Delhi, Puducherry, and Jammu and Kashmir are the three union territories with

legislative assemblies. The government has on multiple occasions told Parliament that it does not favour returning to the ballot paper system and the Supreme Court too has weighed in favour of using EVMs. The top court recently rejected pleas for reviving paper

ballots, holding that suspicions regarding tampering of voting machines were "unfounded". The sources said that while the ministry answered some of the questions, some others were sent to the Election Commission for a calibrated response.

## Avalanche rescue: 50 BRO workers saved, four dead

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The fear of the natural phenomenon explains the centuries-old practice of people living in Mana and adjoining villages to shift to lower areas of the valley after the onset of winter each year. Environmentalist and Chipko movement leader Chandi Prasad Bhatt said that except the main temple of Badrinath, a large area of Badripuri is highly vulnerable to avalanches. "If we look at the previous incidents of avalanches in this area, then Badripuri keeps suffering damages due to avalanches

almost every decade. In 2014, there was heavy damage due to an avalanche in the Narayan Parvat area in Badrinath," the Gandhi Peace Prize winner said. In the past, avalanches have caused loss of life and property not only in Badripuri but also in Mana and the adjoining villages, he said. Bhatt said a few years ago, in a meeting, the DRDO scientists working in this area, especially the scientists of 'SASA' from Himachal Pradesh, were requested that the areas most sensitive to avalanches should be identified.

# EU backs Ukraine after Trump debacle

From page 1

Noem said, "I am so proud of our Commander-in-Chief. Thank you President @realDonaldTrump and @VP for standing up for America. We will not tolerate the political games and disrespect of America. America is back." Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth said, "Amen, Mr President" to a statement by Trump on X. Reacting to their spat, Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova wrote on Telegram on Friday that Zelenskyy's biggest lie of all his lies was his assertion in the White House that the Kyiv regime in 2022 was alone, without support. "How Trump and (Vice President JD) Vance held

back from hitting that scumbag is a miracle of restraint," she said. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Russia illegally and unjustifiably invaded Ukraine. "For three years now, Ukrainians have fought with courage and resilience. Their fight for democracy, freedom, and sovereignty is a fight that matters to us all. Canada will continue to stand with Ukraine and Ukrainians in achieving a just and lasting peace," Trudeau said. Prime Minister of Finland Petteri Orpo said he and the Finnish people stand firmly with Ukraine. "We will continue our unwavering support and work towards a just and lasting peace," he said. President of Latvia Edgars Rinkevics said Ukraine is a

victim of Russian aggression. "It fights the war with the help of many friends and partners. We need to spare no effort for just and lasting peace. Diplomacy sometimes is the art of the impossible in difficult circumstances. Latvia stands with Ukraine," he said. Prime Minister of Luxembourg Luc Frieden said his country stands with Ukraine. "You are fighting for your freedom and a rules-based international order," he added. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk sent a message to Zelenskyy insisting, "Dear Ukrainian friends, you are not alone," while the office of Sweden's prime minister said: "You are not only fighting for your freedom but also for all of Europe." Dutch Foreign Minister

Caspar Veldkamp underlined support for Ukraine would come in the form of "whatever it takes, for as long as it takes." US Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi also criticised President Trump and Vice President Vance, saying their "belittling treatment" of President Zelenskyy today was a disgrace. "The American people stand with the people of Ukraine, even if our president would rather curry favour with Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin, and echo Russian talking points," he said. In the verbal exchange in the Oval Office that played out in front of the global media, Trump said to Zelenskyy, "You're gambling with the lives of millions of people. You're gambling with World

War Three. You're gambling with World War Three, and what you're doing is very disrespectful to the country, this country that's backed you far more than a lot of people say they should." The bilateral meeting between the two leaders unravelled in the Oval Office. When Zelenskyy referred to Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Crimea in 2014, Vance hit back saying, "I think it's disrespectful for you to come to the Oval Office to try to litigate this in front of the American media. ... You should be thanking the president for trying to bring you into this conference." Minutes after the showdown in the Oval Office ended, Trump said in a statement, "We had a very meaningful meeting in the White House today. Much was learned that

could never be understood without conversation under such fire and pressure. "It's amazing what comes out through emotion, and I have determined that President Zelenskyy is not ready for peace if America is involved because he feels our involvement gives him a big advantage in negotiations. I don't want an advantage, I want PEACE. He disrespected the United States of America in its cherished Oval Office. He can come back when he is ready for peace," Trump said. After departing the Oval Office, Zelenskyy said in a post on X, "Thank you America, thank you for your support, thank you for this visit. Thank you @POTUS, Congress, and the American people. Ukraine needs just and lasting peace, and we are working exactly for that."

## Delhi snaps fuel for aged vehicles

From page 1

Severe air pollution in the national capital was one of several issues on which the ruling BJP and the Opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) targeted each other during the 2025 assembly election campaign. According to reports, vehicle emission is one of the biggest reasons of air pollution in Delhi. Explosive motorisation, choking congestion and inadequate public transport services are undercutting the emission gains from technology measures in the transport

sector of the city. This has emerged from the new analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) that has shown how even after implementing the largest ever CNG programme for the public transport and local commercial transport, phasing out of 10-year-old diesel and 15-year-old petrol vehicles, restrictions on trucks of non-designated trunks, introduction of Bharat Stage 6 emissions standards, and onset of the fleet electrification, vehicles are still the key polluter due to the growing mobility crisis.

# 'RAMP' launched to promote MSME

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Vishnu Deo Sai on Saturday launched the Centre Raising Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) scheme to promote Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the state.

He launched the scheme at an Industry Dialogue workshop held in Nava Raipur. On the occasion, commerce and industry minister, Lakhan Lal Dewangan and chief secretary, Amitabh Jain were also present.

Sai distributed letters proposing 'invitation to invest' to 16 investors. On auspices of this workshop, the state will receive investments amounting to Rs 11,733 crore and approximately 9,000 youths will get employment,



it is guessed.

On the occasion, Sai remarked that the state had received investment proposals of over Rs 1.23 lakh crore

since the implementation of the new industrial policy.

He also proposed special incentives for investment in the pharmaceutical and ready-

made garments industries along with new possibilities like AI, IT, data centres, and robotics.

During the workshop, he

highlighted, Chhattisgarh is an ideal place to invest as it is a power surplus and mineral-rich state located in central India with excellent connectivity.

Government has established seven new small industry areas, and at the same time development of four large industry areas are underway for the convenience of setting up industries, he said on the occasion.

He reiterated that his government was committed to providing maximum incentives, investment-friendly environments, and every possible support to entrepreneurs.

During workshop, commerce minister, Dewangan said that the government would soon pay Rs 489 crore to 1,049 industries which had not received grants in the last five years.

# Two Maoists gunned down in Sukma

STAFF REPORTER ■  
SUKMA

Security forces on Saturday gunned down two Maoists including a woman in a fierce firefight in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh.

The gun battle ensued around 9 am in a forest near Gundarajgudem in Kistaram area when the security personnel were out on an anti-Naxal operation, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan informed.

The District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Commando Battalion of Resolute Action (COBRA), an elite unit of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were involved in the operation launched on Friday based on the inputs about the presence



of Maoists in the area, Chavan added.

The bodies of two radicals have been recovered who were clad in Maoist uniform. Meanwhile, weapons were also recovered from the encounter

site, security officials said.

However, the slain Naxals are yet to be identified, Chavan said.

Searching in the area was still underway as security officials added.

# Gariaband farmer gets Innovative Farmer Award for betel cultivation



STAFF REPORTER ■  
GARIABAND

The Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) has bestowed Avnish Patra, a farmer from Gariaband district for cultivating betel in the shade of mango orchards, an official communique said on Saturday.

It may be noted that he is the only farmer from

Chhattisgarh, among 34 farmers from across the country, who have been honored at 'Pusa Krishi Vigyan Mela' in New Delhi.

Betel is cultivated by utilizing nets for shade, as it requires proper shade, high humidity, and regular irrigation to thrive. Patra utilised the shade from mango trees, significantly reducing costs, which led to more profitable yields.

# Engineers' innovation is needed to combat challenges of power sector : CSPGCL MD

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Managing Director, Chhattisgarh State Power Generation Company Limited (CSPGCL), S.K. Katiyar on Saturday stressed on the need for engineers to do something innovative for combating the challenges arising in the power sector.

He was addressing a state level convention of the Engineer's Association at the Senior Club of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Thermal Power Plant at Marwa in Janjgir-Champa.

"The Company cannot not achieve success without the team work and hence we all have to work together", Katiyar said.

On the occasion, MD (Transmission), Rakesh Kumar Shukla underlined the need of coordination between experienced senior engineers



and energy of young engineers to ensure progress of the Power Company.

Engineers' Association Rajesh Pandey raised the demands of enforcement of the old pension scheme, new recruitments and ban of inter-company transfers before the Power Company management, on the occasion.

Other than Pandey, General Secretary of association, Manoj Verma, Program Co-ordinator, H.N. Kosaria and Treasurer Shashank Shrivastava were also present at the function.

# Mayor's son booked for traffic disruption

## Bailed out

STAFF REPORTER ■  
RAIPUR

Just yesterday chief secretary of Chhattisgarh, Amitabh Jain had issued order to take strict action against traffic rule violators the Police have tightened the noose against traffic disruptors. Resultantly on Saturday it has arrested Raipur mayor Meenal Choubey's son and four others on the charge of traffic disruption as all were celebrating birthday of mayor's son Mrinal on the road.

The incident came to fore a day after the Chief Secretary Amitabh Jain had ordered the officials to take strict action against individuals



obstructing public roads for private purposes such as celebrations including birthday parties, community feasts, and unauthorized pandals following the Chhattisgarh High Court order.

Mayor's son Mrinal

Choubey, Chintu Chandel, Manoj Gautam and two others were taken into custody for celebrating birthday on February 27-28 night in Changorabhata area, Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police Lal Umed Singh said.

The case under section

126 (2) (wrongful restraint) of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS) and section 170 of Bharatiya Nyay Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) was lodged against eight persons following a complaint lodged with the police, the official said.

All the said violators were presented before the Sub-Divisional Magistrate who granted them bail on tendering a bond of Rs one lakh, the SSP said.

Efforts are on to nab other violators, he added.

Meanwhile, Raipur Mayor Meenal Choubey extended an apology after a video of his son's birthday celebration went viral on social media. She said, mistake has been committed and it will not be repeated.



A glimpse of the Central Reserve Police Force civic action program in Chhattisgarh tribal-dominated Bijapur district on Saturday. The CRPF personnel provide aid to villagers, educational materials to children and sports materials to the youth.

# Agriculture outreach program held by PNB



STAFF REPORTER ■  
MAHASAMUND

The Punjab National Bank (PNB) has organized agriculture outreach program on Saturday in Chhattisgarh's Mahasamund, Kukrel, Jaibel and Tillai for Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

On the occasion, PNB's Executive Director M. Paramasivam was present.

The purpose of this outreach was to provide credit linkage opportunities and information about the bank's agriculture-related schemes to SHGs to promote their business.

# A nasal spray may help treat traumatic brain injury



AGENCIES ■

A nasal spray being developed to target brain inflammation may also prove effective in treating traumatic brain injury (TBI)—a leading cause of death and disability—according to a study.

In a mouse model, researchers from Mass General Brigham in the US found that the spray could reduce damage to the central nervous system and behavioral deficits.

The research suggests a potential new therapeutic approach for TBI and other acute forms of brain injury.

Lead author Saef Izzy, neurologist and head of the Immunology of Brain Injury Programme at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH), said that TBI leads to cognitive decline, and "chronic inflammation is one of the key reasons."

"Currently, there is no treatment to prevent the long-term effects of traumatic brain injury," Izzy added.

The team examined the monoclonal antibody Foralumab, developed by UK-

based Tiziana Life Sciences, which has been tested in clinical trials for multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, and other conditions.

They identified how these modulate the immune response, leading to improved neurological outcomes, including reduced anxiety, slower cognitive decline, and better motor skills, Izzy said. The results are published in the journal Nature Neuroscience.

The findings suggest that Foralumab may also be effective for intracerebral hemorrhage and other stroke-related brain injuries, according to the researchers.

"Our patients with traumatic brain injury still don't have an effective therapeutic to improve their outcomes, so this is a very promising and exciting time to move forward with something that's backed up with solid science and get it to patients' bedsides," said Izzy.

The next step in the research is to translate the findings from preclinical models to human patients, the team added.

# Study explores how air pollution leads to memory loss in Alzheimer's

AGENCIES ■

Toxins found in air pollution, and wildfire smoke may trigger a chemical change in the brain that can lead to memory loss as seen in Alzheimer's disease, according to a study.

Scientists at Scripps Research, US, discovered a chemical change—known as S-nitrosylation—that prevents brain cells from making new connections and ultimately results in cellular death.

Blocking S-nitrosylation partially reversed signs of memory loss in Alzheimer's mouse models and nerve cells produced from human stem

cells. "We've revealed the molecular details of how pollutants can contribute to memory loss and neurodegenerative disease," said Stuart Lipton, Professor at Scripps Research.

"This could ultimately lead to new drugs that block these effects to better treat Alzheimer's disease," Lipton added.

The findings are published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Lipton's research group and colleagues have previously demonstrated that aberrant S-nitrosylation reactions contribute to some forms of cancer, autism,



Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and other conditions.

In the new study, Lipton and team investigated the effect of S-nitrosylation on the protein CRTCl, which helps regulate genes that are critical for forming and maintaining connections between brain cells.

Using cultured brain cells from mice and humans, the researchers first confirmed that excess nitric oxide (NO) leads to S-nitrosylation of CRTCl. They then discovered that this chemical modification prevented CRTCl from binding to another critical brain regulatory protein, CREB.

As a result, other genes necessary for forming connections between neurons failed to be stimulated. "This is a pathway that affects your memory and is directly implicated in human Alzheimer's disease," said Lipton.

In both the Alzheimer's mouse model and in human neurons derived from stem cells of patients with the neurodegenerative condition, the team observed high levels of S-nitrosylated CRTCl at an early stage of the disease.

The findings further support the idea that chemical change plays a key role in the development of disease symptoms.

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# Implement agriculture budget in speedy way: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday called for expeditious implementation of the budgetary proposals for agriculture and rural development, urging stakeholders to focus on "action" instead of deliberating on a new budget. Addressing a post-budget webinar on 'Agriculture and Rural Prosperity', the Prime Minister emphasised that the budget reflects the government's new expansion of the vision for a "Viksit Bharat" with a consistent policy approach in its third term.

"It is important to implement this year's budget in a speedy manner. The budget has been formed and our entire focus should be on the action," Modi said, adding that the stakeholders should identify "obstacles and shortcomings" in budget implementation. Modi said before the budget, inputs and suggestions from all stakeholders helped in framing it. "Now this budget needs to be implemented more effectively on the ground, and for a better outcome, the (stakeholders) role is even more crucial.

Agriculture is considered as the first engine of growth and the government is moving ahead with the twin target of achieving agricultural growth and rural prosperity, he said. Modi said the government is committed towards the goal of "Viksit Bharat" and the effort is to ensure no farmer is left behind and to advance every farmer. "We need to fully explore the country's agricultural potential and achieve more targets."

The Prime Minister highlighted record achievements in the agriculture sector, noting that foodgrain production has increased from 265 Million Tonnes a decade ago to over 330 Million Tonnes currently. Similarly, horticulture production has grown to exceed 350 Million Tonnes. Modi specifically mentioned the PM Dhan Dhanya Krishi Yojana, describing it as "a very important scheme" for him. The initiative will focus on 100 districts with low crop yields, following the successful model of aspirational districts. "We have announced the setting up of a Makhana Board in Bihar. I urge all



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses post-budget webinar on agriculture and rural prosperity in Delhi PTI

stakeholders to explore and promote diverse nutritional foods across the country and in the global market," he said. The Prime Minister highlighted ICAR's contributions, stating that between 2014 and 2024, more than 2,900 new varieties of foodgrains, pulses, and sugarcane and other crops were developed using modern tools and cutting-edge technology in the breeding programme. "You have to ensure these new varieties are available at affordable rates to farmers. We also need to ensure farmers'

produce is not affected by weather aberrations," Modi said. He mentioned that a central mission on high-yielding seeds has been announced in the budget. "I especially urge the private sector to become part of the seed chain to ensure high-yielding seeds reach small farmers." On pulses production, the Prime Minister acknowledged improvements but pointed out that India still imports 20 per cent of its domestic consumption needs. While the country has achieved self-sufficiency in

chickpeas (chana) and moong dal, Modi stressed increasing production of tur, urad and masoor through high-yielding varieties and hybrid seeds. The Prime Minister noted that approximately ₹3.75 Lakh Crore has been transferred directly to 11 crore farmers under the PM-KISAN scheme since its launch six years ago. The annual financial assistance of ₹6,000 is strengthening the rural economy.

He mentioned that a farmer-centric digital infrastructure has been created to ensure the benefits of this scheme reach farmers across the country, eliminating any scope for intermediaries or leakages. Referring to the fisheries sector, Modi said, "In 2019, we had launched PM Matsya Sampada Yojana. It was an important step towards strengthening the value chain, creating infrastructure and modernisation. It helped improve production, productivity and post-harvest management in the fishery sector." "The sector has seen higher investment and results are before us: fish production and export have increased two-fold. We are going to design a

framework for sustainable harnessing of fisheries from the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone and High Seas," he added. Modi urged stakeholders to explore ideas on ease of doing business in the fisheries sector while protecting the interests of traditional fishermen. "Our government is committed to enriching the rural economy", the Prime Minister said, adding that under the PM Awas Yojana-Gramin, crores of poor people are being provided with homes, and the Swamitva Yojana has given property owners Record of Rights.

He noted that the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana has benefited small farmers and businesses and also highlighted the progress in empowering self-help group. "We kept the target of 3 crore lakhpathi didis. With our efforts, more than 1.25 Crore women have become lakhpathi didis." The announcements in this budget for rural prosperity and development programs have created numerous new employment opportunities. Investments in skilling and technology are generating new opportunities, he added.

# Probe ordered into plastic sheets use for idli steaming

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has directed Karnataka's State Food Safety Department to investigate reports of plastic sheets being used in the steaming process of idlis in some local restaurants. The move comes in response to concerns over food safety and hygiene, with the FSSAI urging swift action against any establishments found violating regulations. The State Food Safety Department has been directed to take immediate necessary action on the issue and implement strict measures against Food Business Operators (FBOs) or hotels found using plastic in food preparation, the FSSAI said in a statement. FSSAI, which is closely monitoring the situation, further said the practice of using plastic sheets raises significant food safety concerns due to the potential leaching of harmful chemicals from plastic into the food. "The use of low-quality or

non-food-grade plastics in food preparation, particularly under high temperatures, poses a serious health risk," FSSAI CEO G Kamala Vardhana Rao said. These low-grade plastics can release toxic substances such as bisphenol. A (BPA), phthalates, and other chemicals when exposed to high heat and can leach into food items, potentially causing adverse health effects, he said. FSSAI is working closely with the state food safety officials to investigate the matter thoroughly and ensure that stringent actions are taken against those who violate food safety regulations. FSSAI emphasises that the use of food-grade materials and hygienic practices are crucial in food preparation. The process of steaming idlis should be done as per convention or approved food-grade materials that do not pose a risk of chemical contamination. Idli batter is traditionally spread out on fresh cotton cloths, which are then placed on idli pans and steam-cooked.

# Goyal to visit Washington for bilateral trade talks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will visit Washington next week, as India and the United States (US) are planning to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement, an official said. The visit will start from March 3 and the minister is expected to be in the US till Friday, the official added. During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced their commitment to more than double the two-way commerce to \$500 Billion by 2030 and negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025. Goyal is likely to hold talks with US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer and US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick during the visit. The Commerce Ministry has already started engagements with different departments on the India-US trade aspects and related developments. The proposed agreement is an opportunity to boost bilateral trade and investments between the two countries amid threat of US President Donald Trump to impose higher tariffs on Indian goods. Tariffs are import duties imposed and collected by government and paid by the companies to bring foreign goods into the country. The Commerce Ministry takes views of all ministries concerned on proposed trade agreements. The nature of the agreement would be decided by both sides.

Goyal has earlier stated that the two countries can offer concessions and duty reductions, as their economies complement each other. Normally in a free trade agreement, two trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. Besides, they ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments. During the first term of US President Donald Trump, the two countries had discussed a mini-trade deal, but it was shelved by the Joe Biden administration as they were not in favour of such pacts. In 2023, the US-India bilateral trade in goods and services stood at \$190.08 Billion (\$123.89 Billion in goods and \$66.19 Billion in services trade). That year, India's merchandise exports to the US stood at \$83.77 Billion, while imports were \$40.12 Billion, leaving a trade gap of \$43.65 Billion in favour of India. The country's services export to America was \$36.33 Billion in 2023, while imports were aggregated at \$29.86 Billion. The trade gap (difference between imports and exports) was \$6.47 Billion in favour of New Delhi. During 2021-24, America was the largest trading partner of India. The US is one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus. In 2023-24, the US was the largest trading partner of India with \$119.71 Billion bilateral trade in goods \$77.51 Billion worth of exports, \$42.19 Billion of imports, with \$35.31 Billion trade surplus).

# India, EU discuss efforts to accelerate FTA talks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With India and the European Union (EU) setting the year-end deadline to conclude a free trade agreement, teams from both sides held discussions on Saturday to accelerate efforts towards a balanced and mutually beneficial pact. The meeting was held between Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and EU Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maros Sefcovic in Mumbai along with officials from both sides. "Our discussions focused on accelerating efforts towards a balanced and mutually beneficial free trade agreement. Looking forward to deepening economic ties and fostering a prosperous India-EU partnership," Goyal said in a post on X. On February 28, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen agreed to seal a much-awaited free trade deal by this year amid rising concerns over Unites States President Donald Trump's policy on tariffs. The two sides are scheduled to hold the tenth round of negotiations for the FTA from March 10-14 in Brussels. Further strengthening of economic ties between the two is crucial in light of the threat from US President Donald Trump to impose higher tariffs. In the current uncertain global economic situation, India is the fastest-



Union Minister Piyush Goyal speaks during AMFI Mutual Fund Summit PTI

growing major economy. It is projected to grow at 6.4 per cent in 2024-25. In June 2022, India and the 27-nation EU bloc resumed the negotiations after a gap of over eight years. It stalled in 2013 due to differences over the level of opening up of the markets. Besides demanding significant duty cuts in automobiles, the EU wants tax reduction in wines, spirits and a strong intellectual property regime. Indian goods' exports to the EU, such as ready-made garments, pharmaceuticals, steel, petroleum products, and electrical machinery, will become more competitive if the pact is concluded successfully. India is also seeking data security status for the IT sector. The lack of this status has prevented the flow of sensitive information to India, a big deal for its IT industry. India's bilateral trade in goods with the EU

was \$137.41 Billion in 2023-24 (exports \$75.92 Billion, imports \$61.48 Billion), making it the largest trading partner of India for goods. The EU market accounts for about 17 per cent of India's total exports, while the EU's exports to India make up nine per cent of its total exports. In addition, the bilateral trade in services, in 2023, between India and the EU was estimated at \$51.45 Billion. The agreement is aimed at further boosting bilateral trade and investments between the two. The two sides are negotiating a free trade agreement, an investment protection agreement and an agreement on geographical indications (GIs). EU's investments in India are valued at over \$117 Billion with around 6,000 European companies present in India. India's investments in the EU are valued at around \$40 Billion.

# Bangladesh sends team to India for Ganga water treaty meeting

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/DHAKA

An 11-member Bangladeshi delegation will travel to India on Monday for a meeting regarding the Ganga Water Treaty, which is due for renewal in 2026. India and Bangladesh are set to hold the 86th meeting of the joint committee of technical experts next week regarding the renewal of the 30-year-old treaty for sharing the waters of the trans-boundary river. "The Bangladeshi delegation, led by Muhammad Abul Hossen, member of the Joint River Commission (JRC), will reach Kolkata on March 3 and immediately leave on a two-day visit to the joint observation site on the Ganges at Farakka until the morning of March 5," The Daily Star newspaper said here on Saturday. The delegation will return to Kolkata for a two-day meeting under the aegis of the India-Bangladesh Joint River Commission on March 6-7, according to a letter written by R R Sambharia, senior joint commissioner (FM). Abul Hossen said that the joint river commission sits once a year to discuss the cross-boundary river. The Ganga Water Treaty was signed on December 12, 1996 by the then Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina.

# Kuki-Zo groups from Manipur demand separate union territory



Kuki organisations protested against ongoing ethnic violence at Jantar Mantra PTI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Kuki Students' Organisation and the Kuki-Zo Women's Forum Delhi and NCR staged a demonstration here on Saturday, and raised the demand for a separate Union Territory with a legislature for the Kuki areas of Manipur. Scores of members of the Kuki-Zo tribe gathered at the Jantar Mantra and raised slogans, saying they cannot go back to Manipur unless the crisis in the north-eastern state has been resolved. The protesters carried placards with slogans that called Biren Singh's resignation from the chief minister's post a "smokescreen" and highlighted their demand for a separate Union Territory. The protesters blamed the former chief minister for the situation prevailing in Manipur. In a statement issued at the demonstration site, the protesters said the Kuki-Zo community has endured historical injustices. "The Kuki-Zo community has endured historical injustices and would like to reiterate the urgent need for a political solution for the community in

Manipur," the statement, copies of which would also be sent to the offices of the prime minister and home minister as a charter of demand, said. It said the community, an integral part of the Indian Union since its inception, has historically faced marginalisation, injustices and systemic exclusion from mainstream governance structures in Manipur, despite its significant contributions to the country. "The present administrative machinery in Manipur has utterly failed to protect our lives and address our grievances, aspirations and rights," it said. The demands of the Kuki-Zos include the creation of a separate administration — a Union Territory with a legislature — for them. "A separate administration is the only viable path to the emancipation of the Kuki-Zo people," the statement said. "This will demonstrate the commitment of the Government of India to resolving Manipur's complex problems and fostering a lasting atmosphere of mutual trust," they said.

# Finance Minister calls for user-friendly government annual accounts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday asked civil accounts services officials to work towards making the government's annual accounts more approachable and user-friendly. Addressing the 49th Civil Accounts Day event here, Sitharaman also said that "just-in-time" release of funds through the PFMS has helped to keep borrowings under check and saved interest cost. Sitharaman also lauded the Indian Civil Accounts Service (ICAS) officers, led by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) for the "silent technological revolution" in which states are finding a lot more ease of operation and ease of getting their government business done by adopting the Public Financial Management System (PFMS). "I would also like you to examine, in consultation with the CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General), whether it would be possible to make the annual accounts more approachable and user-friendly and allow citizens to analyse easily and generate customisable and simpler reports," Sitharaman said.

She said that since a lot of digital integration has already taken place with the states, more research can be carried out based on the data set available with the CGA. "If you're able to make the report a lot more user-friendly, that itself can generate a lot of interest in the work that you do," the minister said. Sitharaman also asked both the Department of Expenditure and the CGA to ensure that the SNA-SPARSH is smoothly rolled out for all schemes in the upcoming financial year. "CGA should handhold states in seamless onboarding and transition to SNA-SPARSH and convince them about the benefits of this reform for quick adoption," she said, while suggesting to CGA officers to engage more with your counterparts in the states, take their input and encourage them to adopt the system. PFMS, which is developed and implemented by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) under the Department of Expenditure, provides an IT platform and ensures end-to-end digital payments, collection of receipts, accounting.



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addresses 49th Civil Accounts Day celebrations in New Delhi PTI

It ensures effective cash management in the Central Government system through 'just in time' transfer of funds and complete tracking of realisation of funds from its release to its credit into the bank account of intended beneficiaries. The SNA module ensures better monitoring of availability and utilisation of funds released to states under Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). SNA SPARSH is a system which ensures quick release

of funds to states for CSS. The SNA module currently includes 141 CSS, 4,972 state-linked schemes, and more than 15 Lakh agencies. Over ₹13.60 Lakh Crore has been released by the Centre through the SNA module. Sitharaman also asked the Civil Accounts Officers to create more public awareness so that people appreciate that the taxpayers' money is being utilised efficiently. "Every rupee is taken seriously and therefore some

public engagements to make people understand that this is the most critical job for the finances of the country, not just for the government of India," the minister said. The SNA module introduced in 2021-22 fiscal has helped save more than ₹11,000 Crore in interest cost, while the Treasury Single Account System (TSA), a system in autonomous bodies, has saved over ₹15,000 in interest costs since 2017-18. "Just-in-Time fund releases have helped us to ensure that we don't borrow more than what we need. It has also given us an advantage in making sure that to lessen the burden on future generations," Sitharaman said.

Recalling her July 2024 Budget speech wherein the Minister had said, "For improving data governance, collection, processing and management of data and statistics, different sectoral databases, including those established under the Digital India mission, will be utilised with active use of technology tools". Controller General of Accounts has the potential to work in this regard, given that PFMS has a huge dataset, she added.

# NSDC to set up future skills centre at CCSU Meerut

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is setting up a state-of-the-art Centre of Future Skills, under NSDC Academy, at Chaudhary Charan Singh University (CCSU), Meerut to empower youth in new technology courses like artificial intelligence, machine learning, internet of things, healthcare or paramedical, and languages. In addition to this, the Sports Physical Education Fitness and Leisure Skills Council (SPEFL-SC) is also establishing a Manufacturing-cum-Training facility at CCSU, funded through CSR initiatives. On Saturday, two MoUs were signed in the presence of Jayant Chaudhary, Union Minister of State (I/C) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), and Minister of State for Education at the University premises. The first MoU was signed between NSDC CEO and MD NSDC International, Ved Mani Tiwari and Vice Chancellor of CCSU Professor Sangeeta Shukla which aims to integrate skill development into mainstream education.



Union Minister Jayant Chaudhary PTI

The second agreement was signed between Tahsin Zahid, CEO of the SPEFL-SC, and Prof. Sangeeta Shukla, aimed at empowering 600 women candidates from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the manufacturing-cum-training centre of badminton rackets and shuttlecocks. During the ceremony, Jayant Chaudhary said "This Centre of Future Skills in Meerut is a great initiative to facilitate various valuable training for students in new-age courses like Artificial Intelligence, healthcare, Machine Learning etc. There are continuous attempts being made to provide the students with opportunities and platforms for them to showcase their skills and talent. This partnership aims to provide hands-on training in high-demand sectors, integrating skill-based programmes with academic courses to enhance

employability. Ved Mani Tiwari, CEO, NSDC and MD, NSDC International, added, "With the rapid evolution of technology, the workforce of tomorrow must be equipped with skills that align with industry demands. The Centre of Future Skills will help facilitate futuristic skills in both tech and non-tech sectors, focusing on cutting-edge healthcare and paramedic technologies, and offering language courses to enhance international mobility. We will also be providing language or soft-skill courses through NSDC International to make this youth employable globally. NSDC International is enhancing youth employability by partnering with leading different governments across the world, positioning India as a global talent hub through strategic collaborations across sectors."

# Himachal Pradesh hit by heavy rains, snowfall

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA

Heavy rains and snowfall disrupted normal life in several parts of Himachal Pradesh triggering landslides, blocking roads and huge mounds of debris swept by gushing waters damaging vehicles in Kullu. A massive landslide triggered by incessant rains and cloudbursts at Rokaru (Multhan) in Kangra district damaged several vehicles and endangered 12 houses. The affected families have been relocated to safer places and restoration works are in progress, said Kangra Deputy Commissioner, Hem Raj. One person was reported missing near Shiva Hydropower project in Palampur and search operations have been launched to trace him, officials said on Saturday. Tribal Pangi valley in Chamba was cut off following heavy snowfall and electricity and



The Sarvari river flows in spate after heavy rains in Kullu on Friday

PTI

telecommunication services have been badly disrupted. Several houses along the banks of Nallahs and Khuds have been endangered in Kullu due to threats of landslides and electricity and water supply were still disrupted in some places. A landslide at Tohlu Nallah

blocked the Kiratpur - Manali national Highway and left tourists stranded. A total of 112 roads were closed in Kullu and work is in progress to power 1646 transformers. A total of 125 water supply schemes have been disrupted said Kullu DC, Tarul Ravesh.

Kullu- Manali road was also closed and traffic was being diverted via Naggar while the electricity supply was yet to be restored in Manikaran and Manali and tourists have been advised to stay at their places till the roads are cleared, she added. People are facing

inconvenience following huge mounds of debris from Gandhi Nagar Nallah splattered on roads and work to clear the roads is in progress. The region had respite from rains and snow but normal life was still affected at many places in Kullu, Kangra and Chamba districts. Meanwhile, the state received moderate to heavy snowfall and rains during the past 24 hours and Khadralla, Kothi, Nichar and Jot received 20 cm, 15 cm, 5 cm and 4 cm of snow respectively. Bhuntar was the wettest in the state with 112.2 mm rains, followed by Jot 108.8 mm, Jogindernagar 108 mm, Seobagh 106 mm, Banjar 92 mm, Dharamshala 85.2 mm, Baijnath 78 mm, Palampur 75.6 mm and Rampur 60 mm. The minimum temperatures stayed marginally below normal at most places and Keylong was coldest with a low of minus 6.9 degrees.

# Stalin pitches to protect interest of Tamil Nadu on 72nd birthday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday turned 72 and the DMK President underlined his commitment to state autonomy, two-language policy and opposition to Hindi imposition as his birthday message. Stalin, who cut a cake with his family members and party workers, administered to cadres an oath of "one goal" which is to protect the interests of Tamil Nadu and oppose Hindi imposition at all times to come. "Tamil Nadu poradum, Tamil Nadu Vellum," (Tamil Nadu will fight, Tamil Nadu will win) Stalin said, which was repeated by party workers. "Anna Arivalayam," the DMK headquarters here wore a festive look as party cadres and office-bearers turned up in large numbers to greet their party chief. "Dravida Nayagar," (Dravidian Hero) was among the phrases used by DMK workers and supporters to greet



DMK President, Chief Minister MK Stalin with INDIA block leaders during a public meeting organised on the eve of his birthday in Chennai

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Stalin on social media. The Dravidian party chief underscored the principles of state autonomy, opposition to Hindi imposition, and commitment to two-language policy as his birthday message and reiterated that he would protect mother Tamil and uphold the rights of Tamil Nadu. The CM said he opposed Hindi imposition with the very same vigour he showed against it in 1971 at a party conference when he was only 18-years old. Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, Governor RN Ravi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and top leader of the grand old party, Rahul Gandhi greeted Stalin. PM Modi, in a post on 'X' said: "Birthday greetings to Tamil Nadu CM Thiru MK Stalin. May he lead a long and healthy life." Governor Ravi sent his birthday greetings to Stalin in Tamil. Notably, Ravi, who had locked horns with Stalin over several issues including the NEP, signed his message in Tamil language.

# Kashi Vishwanath witnesses three crore devotees in 45 days



Devotees wait outside the Kashi Vishwanath temple

PTI

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ VARANASI

The Shri Kashi Vishwanath temple has witnessed an unprecedented surge in devotees amidst the ongoing Maha Kumbh, setting a new record in its history. According to data from the temple administration, an astounding three crore devotees have visited the revered temple in the past 45 days. On average, more than 6.5 Lakh devotees have thronged the shrine daily, surpassing all previous records. The highest footfall was recorded during the months of January and February, surpassing even the traditionally high influx seen in the month of Sawan. The Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust reported a significant surge in devotees on major religious occasions, with Mahashivratri and Mauni Amavasya witnessing extraordinary numbers. On Mauni Amavasya alone, over 11 Lakh devotees offered prayers at the temple, while Mahashivratri saw more than 17 Lakh pilgrims visiting Baba Vishwanath's tableau within a span of just 46 hours. A Temple official Vishal Singh, expressed his astonishment at the overwhelming response. "This is an extraordinary moment in the history of Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple. The devotion and faith of pilgrims have surpassed all expectations. We are committed to ensuring a seamless experience for all visitors," he said. The data further highlights that between January 13 and February 19, the footfall had already crossed two Crore. Within just eight days, from February 20 to February 27, an additional one Crore devotees

visited the temple, bringing the total to three crore. This marks a historic high in the temple's recorded history. "The increase in footfall is a reflection of people's unwavering faith and devotion to Baba Vishwanath. The continuous influx of pilgrims has been made possible due to the improved facilities and efficient crowd management," said a senior official from the Shri Kashi Vishwanath temple Trust. For context, in 2022, the temple saw its first-ever milestone of over one Crore devotees. The number continued to rise, with Sawan 2024 witnessing 53.84 Lakh devotees performing Jalabhishek of Baba Vishwanath. In 2023, another record was set as 1.63 Crore devotees visited the temple during the 60-day Sawan period, beginning July 4. The consistent rise in footfall underscores the growing spiritual significance of the temple and its attraction among devotees worldwide. Devotees have also shared their experiences of visiting the temple during this period. "Coming to Kashi and having darshan of Baba Vishwanath during Maha Kumbh is a divine blessing. The arrangements made for the pilgrims are commendable," said Anil Sharma, a devotee from Madhya Pradesh. The temple administration has attributed this remarkable increase to improved facilities, better crowd management, and the seamless execution of pilgrimage arrangements. With the Maha Kumbh still drawing large numbers, the footfall at Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple is expected to continue breaking records in the coming weeks.

# Vaishnav reviews Ahmedabad railway station redevelopment, bullet train projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Saturday reviewed the progress of Ahmedabad Railway Station redevelopment and the Bullet train project at Anand in Gujarat. During a day-long visit to Gujarat, the minister went to Ahmedabad Railway Station with senior officials of the Western Railway Zone and inspected the construction work in detail. "The design and appearance of the station will reflect the culture and heritage of Ahmedabad," Vaishnav said, adding that he expects the redevelopment work to be finished in three-and-a-half years. According to the Western Railway, the redevelopment work of Ahmedabad station was awarded in November 2023 and it is targeted to be completed by June 2027. Vaishnav said several innovations have been made for the Ahmedabad railway station redevelopment project, and special care is being taken to ensure that the facility's design reflects the city's rich heritage. Vaishnav, who reviewed the redevelopment project, said architectural elements inspired by the city's heritage, such as the 'Jhulta Minar' (swaying minaret), kite festival, etc, will be incorporated into the design. He said this approach was in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to preserve the cultural fabric of modern India. The redevelopment is a



Union Railways Minister with labourers working on a bullet train

PTI

part of the Indian Railways' ambitious Amrut Bharat station project, which aims to transform over 1,300 railway stations across the country. Vaishnav said the station's design was revised after considering representations from Ahmedabad residents to include aspects of the city's heritage. "The representations were discussed in detail, and the station design was completely revised according to the city's architecture. Union Home Minister Amit Shah had also reviewed this. The prime minister has given us one guidance, the station should be made according to the city culture," he said. Reiterating the Centre's commitment to the development of Gujarat, the minister said a record budget of ₹17,155 Crore was allocated to the state for the development of the railways, and an investment of ₹1.27 Lakh Crore is being made in

the sector. The Western Railway also said the architecture of the upcoming Ahmedabad station building has been inspired by the Modhera Sun Temple. According to it, a 15-acre concourse plaza and a seven-acre mezzanine plaza have been planned over the railway tracks. "This concourse shall have a waiting area for passengers which will be equipped with facilities like toilets, drinking water, food courts, retail shops, kiosks and baby feeding rooms, among others." After reviewing the station, Vaishnav visited a 200-m-long steel bridge for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project. It will be launched over National Highway 48 near Nadiad. Vaishnav said the girder of the bridge was made in India with its fabrication components successfully completed at the Salasar plant in Hapur.

# Yogi government intensifies action against land encroachments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The Yogi government has intensified its crackdown on land encroachments, ensuring that government land remains free from illegal occupation. Under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's zero-tolerance policy against land mafias, more than 68,000 hectares of encroached land have been reclaimed across Uttar Pradesh. To prevent re-encroachment, an innovative initiative has been launched in Shravasti, where the district administration is installing plaques on government land with complete ownership details. This step, aligned with CM Yogi's vision, will ensure transparency and protection of public land. The Shravasti model is set to become a benchmark for similar efforts across the state. Shravasti District Magistrate Ajay Kumar Dwivedi stated that continuous action is being taken to free government land from illegal encroachments. As part of this effort, plaques are now being installed on vacant government land, clearly marking them as government-owned. Strict action will be taken against anyone attempting illegal occupation. He further explained that in 397 Gram Panchayats, several such government lands exist only in official records, making them vulnerable to encroachment. The plaques will include details such as land type,



UP CM Yogi Adityanath

PTI

category, area, Gram Sabha and Gata number, eliminating any chances of false ownership claims. He informed that the total number of government ghats in the three tehsils of Shravasti, Ikouna, Jamunha and Bhinga is 1,49,239. The total area of these ghats is 26650.8177 hectares. Before 2017, due to the negligence of the previous government, illegal land encroachments had become a major challenge. In many cases, influential individuals and land mafias had occupied government land, causing revenue losses and obstructing development projects. Recognising this issue, the Yogi government took decisive steps to reclaim government land from encroachers, ensuring better governance and land security. DM Ajay Kumar Dwivedi further stated that any attempt to remove the plaques, tamper with government land, or illegally occupy it will lead to strict action under the Public Property Damage Prevention

Act. Offenders will face legal action and fines. He mentioned that the installation of these plaques will help in identifying and securing government land, while also raising public awareness that such land belongs to the government and encroachment is illegal. This move is expected to deter land mafias and illegal occupants. He said that the plaques will display detailed land information, making it easier for citizens to distinguish between government and privately owned land, thereby reducing disputes over land ownership. The Yogi government is considering expanding this initiative across Uttar Pradesh, ensuring better protection of government land and stricter action against encroachers. By improving land identification and transparency, this initiative will significantly reduce illegal occupations in the future. It marks a major step towards making Uttar Pradesh a law-abiding and well-governed state.

# No need of 'shadow cabinet': Omar Abdullah attacks BJP

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the month long crucial Budget session of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday reacted strongly to the media reports claiming that the saffron party is forming 'shadow cabinet' to build pressure on the government. Without mincing any words Omar told reporters in

Srinagar, "There is only one Cabinet. In our country, there is no provision of 'shadow cabinet'. BJP ruled in past and it is time for the elected government to serve people. So there is no need of 'shadow cabinet'. Whatever we have promised to our people, will be addressed and the government is firm on that. Omar was interacting with media persons after meeting Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and

Hasnain Masoodi to offer condolences with them. According to the media reports, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has formed a "shadow cabinet" to keep a close watch on the performance of the National Conference (NC)-led government in the Union Territory. According to sources, Leader of the Opposition Sunil Sharma has played a key role in the formation of

the "shadow cabinet". Party insiders claimed the BJP has created a group of senior MLAs to closely examine the performance of different departments and to question their functioning both inside and outside the Assembly. "The party has talked to the senior MLAs, who served as ministers in the previous PDP-BJP government, to closely audit the functioning of the

departments assigned to them for Assembly interventions and other issues". Referring to the holy month of Ramadan starting from March 2, Omar said that the departments have been directed to ensure better facilities to the people. He said that the government is trying to ensure adequate electricity and water supply, especially during Sehri and Iftari.

# Two Naxalites killed in encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RAIPUR

Two Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Saturday, police said. The gunfight took place in the morning in a forest under the Kistaram police station area, where a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said. He said personnel from the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action — an elite unit of the CRPF) are involved in the operation launched on Friday based on inputs about the presence of Maoists in the area. Bodies of two Naxalites have been recovered from the encounter site so far, and a search operation was still underway in the area, the official said. With this encounter, 83 Naxalites have been gunned down in separate skirmishes in the state so far this year. Of them, 67 were killed in the Bastar division comprising seven districts, including Sukma.

# TCS manager's suicide: Family seeks action against wife, in-laws

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The family of TCS manager Manav Sharma is in shock following his suicide, demanding strict action against his wife, Nikita and her family. After a case was registered against them, Nikita and her family have gone missing. However, she has released a video on social media, denying all allegations. Manav's sister, Akanksha, has dismissed Nikita's claims, stating that Manav was under severe stress due to repeated threats of police action. She revealed that on the day of the incident, Nikita called Manav at around 2:30 PM. Earlier, she had spoken to her brother until 12:40 PM, during which he had sent her some documents for

preparing a PPT. "Nikita insisted on speaking to him, saying that he was about to do something drastic," Akanksha said. Concerned, she immediately called Manav, but he didn't answer. Instead, he messaged, saying he was watching a video and that it would end soon. Akanksha inquired about his well-being, asking if he had a bad dream. Manav replied that he was fine and was going to sleep. Believing everything was alright, she informed Nikita, hoping to prevent any marital dispute. "I never imagined my brother would take such a drastic step," she added. According to Akanksha, Manav had learned about Nikita's past through an

Instagram account, which deeply disturbed him. In a previous incident, he had even attempted self-harm. Their parents traveled to Mumbai to counsel him. Later, he came to Agra with the intention of divorcing Nikita. However, upon arrival, he was allegedly threatened by Nikita and her family, which pushed him further into depression and led to his suicide. The grieving parents are demanding justice but remain too devastated to speak extensively. In response to the accusations, Nikita released a video defending herself. She claimed that Manav had attempted suicide twice before, and she had saved him both times. She said she had even informed Manav's father

and sister about his mental state shortly before his death. Nikita also shared WhatsApp chat records as evidence to support her claims. Nikita further stated that Manav had dropped her off at her parents' home in Barhan that evening, seemingly in good spirits. She admitted that he had been under stress for some time, but she had always supported him. She alleged that when she raised concerns about his mental health with her in-laws, they dismissed it as a personal matter between husband and wife. She also claimed that it was she who brought Manav from Mumbai to Agra to help him recover. Akanksha recalled how emotional Manav was even on his wedding day.

"When he was bringing Nikita home after their wedding, he was in tears, worried about how our parents would manage without him," she said. "He was always deeply moved by others' suffering." In a similar case, Atul Subhash Modi, an AI engineer in a Bengaluru-based company, had also died by suicide. Before taking the drastic step, he recorded a one hour 20-minute-long video and left a 24-page suicide note, accusing his wife and in-laws of harassment. The tragic case of Manav Sharma has once again raised concerns over marital disputes leading to extreme consequences, with both sides presenting conflicting narratives. The police investigation is ongoing.

# Bird flu: Mass culling in three districts of Karnataka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

In view of bird flu cases being detected in three districts of Karnataka, the administration is carrying out mass culling, while ramping up its surveillance across the state, especially in districts bordering Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, officials said on Saturday. Avian influenza (AI), also known as bird flu, is a zoonotic viral disease that primarily affects poultry and may occasionally spill over to mammals, including humans and swine, they said. Cases of bird flu among poultry birds have been reported in Manvi taluk of Raichur, Chikkaballapur taluk of Chikkaballapur and

Sandur taluk of Ballari districts, they said. However, no cases of bird flu in humans have been reported in the state so far, officials said. Ansar Ahmed, project director, integrated disease surveillance programme, told PTI that H5N1 was confirmed in the Regional Poultry Breeding and Training Centres of Kurekoppa, Ballari District and Chikkaballapur District at NIHSAD Lab, Bhopal on February 25. The matter was reported to the Department of Animal Husbandry and Health and Family Welfare, following which an area of radius 3 kms around the infected site was notified as "Infected Area."

# Kurdish militants declare ceasefire in 40-year insurgency in Turkiye

PTI ■ ISTANBUL

Kurdish militants who have waged a 40-year insurgency in Turkiye declared a ceasefire on Saturday in what could mark a significant boost to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, two days after their imprisoned leader called for the group to disarm. The announcement by the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, comes against the backdrop of fundamental changes in the region, including the reconfiguration of power in neighbouring Syria after the toppling of President Bashar Assad, the weakening of the Hezbollah militant movement in Lebanon and the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The PKK declaration was published by the Firat News Agency, a media outlet close to the group, on Saturday. It referred to the insurgents' leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned by Turkiye since 1999. "We declare a ceasefire effective today to pave the way for the implementation of Leader Apo's Call for Peace and Democratic Society. None of our forces will take armed action unless attacked," it said,

referring to Ocalan by his nickname. On Thursday, a delegation of Kurdish politicians announced Ocalan's call for the PKK to lay down its arms and disband after visiting him on his island prison earlier in the day. The conflict between Turkey and the PKK has led to tens of thousands of deaths since it began in 1984. The ceasefire is the first sign of a breakthrough since peace talks between the PKK and Ankara broke down in the summer of 2015. In its statement, the PKK's executive committee said Ocalan's call indicated that a "new historical process has begun in Kurdistan and the Middle East". Kurdistan refers to the parts of Turkiye, Iraq, Syria and Iran inhabited by Kurds. While stating that it would "comply with and implement the requirements of the call from our own side", the PKK emphasized that "democratic politics and legal grounds must also be suitable for success". Ocalan's call came as the main pro-Kurdish political party in Turkiye has faced pressure, with several of its mayors being removed from office in recent months and replaced by gov-

ernment appointees. The PKK also appealed for Ocalan to be released from Imrali prison, located in the Marmara Sea, to "personally direct and execute" a party congress that would lead to the militants laying down their arms. The peace initiative between the Turkish state and the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkiye and its Western allies, was started in October by Erdogan's coalition partner, Devlet Bahceli, a far-right politician who suggested that Ocalan could be granted parole if his group renounces violence and disbands. Erdogan said Ocalan's message was a "new phase" in peace efforts in Turkiye. "There is an opportunity to take a historic step toward tearing down the wall of terror that has stood between (Turkish and Kurdish peoples) thousand-year-old brotherhood," Erdogan said on Friday. Some believe the main aim of the reconciliation effort is for Erdogan's government to garner Kurdish support for a new constitution that would allow him to remain in power beyond 2028, when his term ends. Bahceli has openly called for a

new constitution, saying it was essential for Turkiye's future that Erdogan remain in power. Erdogan and Bahceli are reportedly seeking parliamentary support from the pro-Kurdish People's Equality and Democracy Party, or DEM. Ocalan, 75, wields significant influence in the Kurdish movement despite his 25-year imprisonment, during which the PKK has been led by top figures who have fled and found sanctuary in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. In Syria, Kurdish fighters — who have ties to the PKK — have been involved in intense fighting with Turkish-backed forces on the ground there. The leader of the US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces has said Ocalan's call for a ceasefire does not apply to his group in Syria. The Turkish government, however, says all Kurdish groups it claims are tied to the PKK — whether in Turkiye, Syria or Iraq — must disband. In recent years, the PKK has been limited to isolated attacks inside Turkiye as the Turkish military, backed by armed drones, has pushed PKK insurgents increasingly across the mountainous border into Iraq.

# Federal workers start to get new email demanding their accomplishments

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Federal employees are starting to receive another email requiring them to explain their recent accomplishments, a renewed attempt by President Donald Trump and billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk to demand answers from the government workforce. The plan was disclosed by a person with knowledge of the situation who requested anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it publicly. Originally expected to go out Saturday, the new request began landing in the inboxes of some employees late Friday. The first email, which was distributed a week ago, asked employees "what did you do last week?" and prompted them to list five tasks that they completed. Musk, who empowered by Trump is aiming to downsize agencies and eliminate thousands of federal jobs, said anyone who didn't respond would be fired. Many agencies, meanwhile, told their workforces not to respond or issued conflicting guidance. The second email was expected to be delivered in a differ-

ent way, according to the person with knowledge of the situation, potentially making it easier to discipline employees for noncompliance. Instead of being sent by the Office of Personnel Management, which functions as a human resources agency for the federal government but doesn't have the power to hire or fire, the email was to come from individual agencies that have direct oversight of career officials. But a version of the email received late Friday by some employees at two separate agencies - with the subject line, "What did you do last week? Part II" - came from "hr@opm.gov," the same OPM address that sent the first version. "Please reply to this email with approx. 5 bullets describing what you accomplished last week and cc your manager," the message read, adding that going forward, employees would be expect-

ed to submit a response each week by the following Monday at 11:59 p.m. Eastern. It's unclear how national security agencies will handle the second email. After the first one, they directed employees not to write back because much of the agencies' work is sensitive or classified. Less than half of federal workers responded, according to the White House. The version viewed late Friday by The Associated Press reads in part: "If all of your activities are classified or sensitive, please write, All of my activities are sensitive." That may not eliminate all security concerns given that sending an email creates a digital footprint regardless of the message's content. On Wednesday, at Trump's first Cabinet meeting of his second term, Musk argued that his request was a "pulse check" to ensure that those working for the government

have "a pulse and two neurons." Both Musk and Trump have claimed that some workers are either dead or fictional, and the president has publicly backed Musk's approach. Addressing people who didn't respond to the first email, Trump said "they are on the bubble," and he added that he wasn't "thrilled" about them not responding. "Now, maybe they don't exist," he said without providing evidence. "Maybe we're paying people that don't exist." In addition to recent firings of probationary employees, a memo distributed this week set the stage for large-scale layoffs and consolidation of programs. The Education Department offered employees a \$25,000 buyout and warned of looming layoffs. An email sent to all agency workers gave them until the end of Monday to decide on the offer, which was touted as coming "in advance of a very significant Reduction in Force." It was sent from the department's chief human capital officer. The agency did not immediately offer comment.



# No progress in talks on truce with Israel

PTI ■ CAIRO

The latest round of talks on the second phase of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has made no progress so far, and it was unclear whether the talks would resume on Saturday, a senior Hamas official said. The first phase of the ceasefire, which paused 15 months of fighting in the Gaza Strip, saw the release of 33 hostages, including eight bodies, in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Phase one expires on Saturday, but under the terms of the deal, fighting is not to resume while negotiations are underway on the second phase, which could end the war in Gaza and see the remaining living hostages returned home. Officials from Israel, Qatar, Egypt and the United States have been involved in negotiations on the second phase in Cairo, with the goal of bringing an end to the war with the return of all remaining living hostages and the withdrawal of Israeli troops. Hamas did not attend the talks,

but its position has been represented through Egyptian and Qatari mediators. Basem Naim, a member of Hamas' political bureau, told The Associated Press there had been "no progress" on finding a solution before Israeli negotiators returned home on Friday. It was unclear whether those mediators were going to return to Cairo to resume talks on Saturday as has been expected, and Naim said he had "no idea" when negotiations might start again. Hamas started the war with its October 7, 2023 attack that left 1,200 dead in Israel. Since then, Israel's military offensive has killed more than 48,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, who do not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths but say that more than half the dead have been women and children. The two sides agreed to three-phase ceasefire deal in January, with the aim of bringing an end to the war. On Friday, Hamas said that it "reaffirms its full commitment to implementing all terms of

the agreement in all its stages and details" and called on the international community to pressure Israel to "immediately proceed to the second phase without any delay or evasion." In addition to phase two of the ceasefire, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said last week that mediators in the talks were "also discussing ways to enhance the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, as part of efforts to alleviate the suffering of the population and support stability in the region." Hamas has rejected an Israeli proposal to extend the ceasefire's first phase by 42 days, saying it goes against the truce agreement, according to a member of the group who requested anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations. The Israeli proposal calls for extending the ceasefire through the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which started on Saturday, in return for an additional hostage exchange, the Hamas member said. The UN food agency, the World Food Programme, said

# Trump admin approves nearly USD 3 b arms sale to Israel

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The Trump administration has approved a major nearly USD 3 billion arms sale to Israel, bypassing a normal congressional review to provide the country with more of the 2,000-pound bombs that it has used in the war against Hamas in Gaza. In a series of notifications sent to Congress late Friday, the State Department said it had signed off on the sale of more than 35,500 MK 84 and BLU-117 bombs and 4,000 Predator warheads worth USD 2.04 billion. Secretary of State Marco Rubio "has determined and provided detailed justification that an

emergency exists that requires the immediate sale to the Government of Israel of the above defence articles and defense services in the national security interests of the United States, thereby waiving the Congressional review requirements," the department said. Deliveries are set to begin next year, it said. Using the same justification, the department also said Rubio had approved another munitions sale to Israel worth USD 675.7 million to be delivered starting in 2028. In addition, it said Rubio had approved the emergency sale of D9R and D9T Caterpillar bulldozers worth USD 295 million.

# China reopens Mt Everest area in Tibet after January earthquake

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Saturday reopened the scenic area of Mt Everest, known as Mount Qomolangma, in the Tibet Autonomous Region after it was closed to the public following the January earthquake. The area was closed on January 7 after a 6.8-magnitude quake struck Dingri, home to the northern base camp of the world's highest peak. The quake claimed 126 lives and left 188 others injured. The scenic area was closed on the same day for the safety of tourists and staff. In the Tibetan language, Mount Everest is known as Mount Qomolangma which forms the part of the border between China and Nepal. Both countries settled their border dispute in 1961 with the boundary line passing through the summit of Mount Everest. The Mt Everest area had not been affected by the quake, with no obvious ice falls, avalanches or geological changes being observed, said Ma Weiqiang, director of Mount Qomolangma Atmosphere and Environment Comprehensive Observation and Research Station under the Chinese Academy of Sciences. "This shows the scenic area has the safe conditions necessary for reopening," Ma told state-run Xinhua news agency. To prepare for the reopening, the local government formed a joint inspection working group



on January 22, which took 35 days to carry out comprehensive and meticulous inspections on important locations in the scenic area, he said. "Only through comprehensive inspections could we ensure the safety of tourists when the scenic area reopened," said Pasang, a maintenance worker at the scenic area. The local accommodation industry is also ready for the reopening. "All 35 rooms have been cleaned up and half of the rooms have already been booked," said Tsering Geden, a hotel owner in the county's Pasum Village. Last year, the scenic area of the world's tallest mountain received more than 547,600 domestic and overseas tourists — an increase of 18 per cent year on year, including 13,700 overseas tourists, mainly from Singapore, Malaysia, Germany and France, earning USD 15.3 million in revenue, the Xinhua report said.

# Trump expected to sign order making English official language of US

PTI ■ CAIRO

President Donald Trump is expected to sign an executive order designating English as the official language of the

United States, according to the White House. The order will allow government agencies and organizations that receive federal funding to choose whether to continue to offer documents and services in language other than English, according to a fact sheet about the impending order.

Friday night, the White House had not announced the order had been signed and did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment. The executive order will rescind a mandate from former President Bill Clinton that required the government and organisations that received federal funding to provide language assistance to non-English speakers. Designating English as the national language "promotes unity, establishes efficiency in government operations, and creates a pathway for civic engagement," according to the White House.

# Rishi Sunak, Akshata plan new math charity for children in England

PTI ■ LONDON

Former British prime minister Rishi Sunak and his wife Akshata Murty on Saturday revealed plans to set up a new charity focussed on improving the mathematics and numeracy skills among children and young people in England. The Richmond Project, named after the North Yorkshire home and constituency Sunak continues to represent as a backbench Conservative Party member of Parliament for Richmond and Northallerton, will be launched later this year as a registered charity. It marks the first major joint project by the couple, both 44, since Sunak left 10 Downing

Street last year and will be aimed at helping schoolchildren build confidence in tackling numbers. "Later this year, Akshata and I will launch The Richmond Project — a new charity focused on improving numeracy," Sunak announced on social media. "Confidence with numbers transforms lives. It unlocks opportunity, fuels social mobility, and helps people thrive. But right now, too many struggle. More to come soon," he said. Akshata Murty took to her Instagram to note that the charity signifies their shared passion around the power of education. "Maths anxiety is real, but opportunity starts with confidence! Later this year, we're

launching The Richmond Project, a new charity focused on helping more people build confidence with numbers — because we believe numeracy unlocks opportunity," she said. "Right now, half of the working-age adults in the UK have low numeracy skills. That impacts everything like getting a job, managing household bills, even navigating daily life. Both of us have seen firsthand the power of education to change lives. Now, we want to help more young people and adults build the confidence with numbers, ensuring a happier life." The daughter of Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy said it was "early days" for the project but asked her followers to "watch this space" for more

details. During her time at Downing Street, Murty held a regular "Lessons at 10" programme to provide children from across the UK an opportunity to see behind the scenes of the famous black door — the office and residence of the British PM in London. During his time as prime minister in 2023, Sunak had launched a review into how best to ensure all pupils in England study some form of mathematics up to the age of 18 as part of his strategy to change an "anti-maths mindset" that he said was holding the country back. The former investment banker had also committed to extending Maths Hubs — unique part-

nerships of schools and colleges coming together to support maths teaching. Earlier this week, Sunak took on another charity role as ambassador for the UK's Prostate Cancer Research. "Prostate cancer is now the UK's most common cancer — yet there's still no national screening programme for the most at-risk groups," he said, during an intervention in the House of Commons calling on Prime Minister Keir Starmer for a targeted screening programme for the disease. In January, the British Indian politician had taken on new academic roles at the University of Oxford in the UK and the University of Stanford in the US.

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Known to all that my client Sh. Ranjit Singh owner of the UPPER GROUND FLOOR, WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS, PLOT NO 93, AREA 125 SQ.YDS, KHASRA NO. 757, VILLAGE NAWADA, GM WIND PHASE-I, UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI-59 and Sh. Ranjit Singh purchase property from Sh. Suranjit Singh vide Notarized GPA, ATS and will dated 03.09.2013 New Sh. Ranjit Singh wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact, and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

# Change of Name

I, Krrish Bhati S/o Sh. Ravinder Bhati R/o H-44, Jagatpuri, Street No-14, Krishna Nagar, Preet Vihar, Delhi-110051 declare that mine and my father's name have been written in my passport as Krrish and Ravindra Bhati Instead of Krrish Bhati and Ravinder Bhati which will be amended accordingly. PD(1604)C

# Change of Name

I, Anil Kumar S/o Shri Ram Avadh R/o A-1175, Indira Marg Mandawali Fazalpur Delhi-110092 declare that I have Changed my name from Anil Kumar Singh to Anil Kumar for all future Purposes. PD(1606)C

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It is known to all men that the owner/allottee (1) Mr. Prabhat Nagar son of Mr. Prem Kumar Nagar, (2) Mrs. Nidhi Nagar wife of Mr. Prabhat Nagar, (3) Mr. Prem Kumar Nagar son of Mr. Gokul Chand Nagar and (4) Mrs. Shashi Nagar wife of Mr. Prem Kumar Nagar all residents of House No. 21, DDA Flats, Masjid Moth, Phase-I, Greater Kailash, South Delhi-110048 is transferring Flat No. G-1801, 18th Floor, "The Jewel of Noida, Plot No. GH-14, Eco City, Sector-75, Noida, District Gautam Buddha Nagar, U.P. through their General Power of Attorney Shri Dal Chand son of Shri Jayanti Prasad Sharma resident of Holiwala Chowk, Tehsil-Palwal, Bakhshera Mohalla, Pithla (42) Harayana-121102 in favour of Mr. Arojit Sharma S/o Shri Vishnu Dev Sharma and Mrs. Ameer Joshi W/o Shri Arpit Sharma both R/o E-103, 1st Floor, Tower-E, The Jewel of Noida, Sector-75, Noida, U.P. If anyone has any objection, he/she will submit his/her objection with documentary evidence in the Group Housing department of Noida Authority within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice. DAL CHAND

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# UK launches review to define Islamophobia

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK has launched a new review led by a former Opposition Conservative Party minister into anti-Muslim hate to provide the Labour Party government with a working definition of Islamophobia. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner said on Friday that former attorney general Dominic Grieve will bring his years of legal and government expertise to the role, which will also support a wider stream of work to tackle the "unacceptable incidents" of anti-Muslim hate crimes hitting the highest number on record in 2024. The new working group has been tasked to deliver a definition of anti-Muslim hatred, referred to as Islamophobia, within six months. "The rise in anti-Muslim hate crime is unacceptable and has no place in our society," said Rayner,

Secretary of State in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). "That's why we've committed to defining Anti-Muslim Hatred/Islamophobia, as a crucial step forward in tackling it and creating a society where everyone feels safe and welcome," she said. Her ministry said the new working group will advise the government on how to best understand, quantify and define prejudice, discrimination, and hate crime targeted against Muslims. "We know Islamophobia is as challenging to define as its existence is undoubted. We need to balance addressing the lived experience of those who are victims of it and the right of British Muslims to feel heard and protected as equal citizens of our country, with the unwavering requirement to maintain freedom of thought and expression under law for all," said Grieve.

"I welcome the government's decision to bring forward this needed work and I am hopeful that this commission will come up with principles in defining Islamophobia which are compatible with those requirements and can thus help support positive change in our country," he said. The MHCLG officials said that alongside drawing on their own expertise, members of the working group will engage widely to ensure the definition accounts for the variety of backgrounds and experiences of Muslim communities across the UK. The group's proposed definition will be "non-statutory", designed to provide the government and other relevant bodies with an understanding of unacceptable treatment and prejudice against Muslim communities. "The group's proposed definition must be compatible with the unchanging right of British citi-

zens to exercise freedom of speech and expression — which includes the right to criticise, express dislike of, or insult religions and/or the beliefs and practices of adherents," MHCLG said. Other religious groups in the UK had raised concerns over any such definition that could jeopardise the factual discussion of the history and persecution of religious minorities around the world. The Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) UK had written to Rayner last year cautioning against "serious implications on free speech, not least the ability to discuss historical truths". "The government is deliberately promoting a two-tier hierarchy when it comes to religions. Christians, Sikhs, Hindus or Buddhists don't have special hate crime definitions endorsed / adopted by the government," noted a social media post

endorsed by the organisation this week. British Hindu groups had also raised concerns over plans for such a focus on Islamophobia that would not be "comprehensive and inclusive". "The selective focus on protecting one religious group over others disregards the historical injustices, threats, and discrimination faced by Hindus and other communities," said Dipen Rajyaguru, Director of Diversity & Equality at the Hindu Council UK. Community organisation INSIGHT UK had called on the government to "formulate a better and inclusive plan to combat all religious hate including anti-Hindu hate". Back in 2019, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims had proposed a definition of Islamophobia but the then Tory government had shelved it for further consideration over a lack of agreement.

# Champions Trophy: India to sharpen spin play against NZ

PTI ■ DUBAI

Seemingly invincible India will be eager to sharpen their spin game and give a run to second-line players ahead of the semifinal when they take on New Zealand in their last group match of the Champions Trophy here on Sunday.

A win in their last league match will help India top the Group A. But that position of pride is of little value because they are set to face either Australia or most likely South Africa in the last four, and both of them have handy spin units at their disposal.

Indian batters have not been really comfortable against spin despite two victories thus far in the event, and New Zealand, which also qualified for the semifinals, could offer them a tough challenge.

The star Indian batters were focusing more on playing out Bangladesh spinners Mehidy Hasan Miraz (0/37) and Rishad Hossain (2/38) without taking risks, and they followed the same approach against Pakistan leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed (1/28). But they will come up against



Pakistan's former cricketer Shahid Afridi displays the Champions Trophy in Karachi PTI

more wily customers in Mitchell Santner and Michael Bracewell on Sunday, and it could be their harshest test against spin yet in this event.

Both the Kiwi spinners are in fine fettle here, and could be even more effective on the worn out surface at Dubai.

Indian batters have been clever enough to milk spinners for singles and twos, while reserving

the big shots against pacers when the ball came much more quickly and predictably at them.

But they will face 20 overs from Santner and Bracewell while a few more of Glenn Phillips' part-time off-spin.

India do not have very fond memories of facing Santner and Phillips in a Test series at home late last year, which they lost 0-3, and now they have Bracewell

too to tackle.

The off-spinner has been quite parsimonious so far, conceding just 3.2 runs per over across two matches.

So, the effectiveness of Shubman Gill, India's standout batter in ODIs of late, batting icon Virat Kohli, who made a morale-boosting 100 against Pakistan, Shreyas Iyer and KL Rahul against them will have a telling impact on the outcome of the game.

And even beyond this match, considering the slowing-down nature of the decks at the DICS.

**Spinners to the fore**  
But there is a pleasing side to spinners' dominance here.

The selection of five spinners - Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Varun Chakravarty, Washington Sundar - was not viewed with any conviction ahead of the marquee event because of the overwhelming success pacers had at this venue in the past.

But what India encountered at Dubai are tired pitches after the venue hosted the ILT20 recently, vindicating the selection call to a large extent.

# Praggnanandhaa scores first win in Prague Masters

PTI ■ PRAGUE

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa cruised to a smooth victory against Nguyen Thai Dai Van of Czech Republic, while Aravindh Chithambaram emerged as the sole leader, defeating top seed Wei Yi of China in the third round of the Prague Masters here.

It was a swift and commanding victory for Praggnanandhaa, widely regarded as the biggest favourite to win this tournament. It was a Nimzo-Indian defense and in Praggnanandhaa's words it was "just a position to play".

The middle game surfaced with Dai Van being on the defensive despite his extra pawn, a typical feature of the structure and the Indian navigated the complexities with ease.

The decisive moment came on the 14th move itself when Praggnanandhaa got an undeniable advantage and after that though the game took a few twists but the result was never in doubt.

Having played two draws in the first two rounds, it was an essential victory for Praggnanandhaa and he



achieved the final result in style. The Indian won a rook for a minor piece and when it comes to technicalities, no one can doubt the acumen of Praggnanandhaa.

"Yesterday (the second round) was nothing, in the first round I had a good position", was how the Indian reflected on his performance thus far.

While Praggnanandhaa scored his first win, compatriot Aravindh Chithambaram announced his arrival in the elite circles by entering the world top 20 in live ratings for the first

time. Aravindh showed deeper opening understanding in the Ragozin where the Chinese played as black.

The middle game approached with a dynamic balance but Aravindh out-calculated Yi and launched a king side attack, sacrificing two pawns on the other flank.

The game lasted 44 moves. The victory took Aravindh to 2.5 points out of a possible 3 on a day when American Sam Shankland, lost to Vincent Keymer of Germany.

# Gukesh attains career-best number three ranking

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's reigning world champion D Gukesh climbed to a career-high number three ranking, while compatriot R Praggnanandhaa broke back into the top 10 in the latest FIDE classical ratings released on Saturday.

The 18-year-old Gukesh, who has been in sublime form ever since he beat China's Ding Liren to clinch the world title in Singapore in December, has gained 10 points and now has a 2787 rating.

Gukesh, who lost the Tata Steel Masters in Wijk aan Zee to Praggnanandhaa on tiebreak, is behind second-placed Hikaru Nakamura (2802) while and Norway's Magnus Carlsen (2833) continues to be the top-ranked chess player in the world.

The Indian Grandmaster has overtaken compatriot Arjun Erigasi and USA's Fabiano Caruana.

Erigasi, who was the highest-ranked Indian for a long time, has moved down to fifth with a rating of 2777.

# Hard on Pant not playing: Doeschate

PTI ■ DUBAI

India assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate has acknowledged that it has been really hard for ace wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant to be watching the ongoing Champions Trophy matches from the sidelines but "that's the nature of sport at this level".

Pant has not been a part of the playing XI in the last two group games, with India handing over the wicket-keeping duties to KL Rahul, who has performed remarkably well behind the stumps and provided solidity to the middle order.

"It's been very hard on Rishabh not playing. But that's the nature of sport at this level. Doeschate told reporters on Friday, when asked if having two quality keepers has been a good dilemma.

"KL has been good. He didn't get many chances... We've got to keep Rishabh up and running. We never know when we're going to need him. But certainly to have two wicket-keepers of that calibre is a nice thing to have."

Doeschate admitted that Sunday's match against New Zealand could be a contest of spin between the two sides.

"They (New Zealand) have four spinners as well, so it could be a contest of spin. Coming into the competition, we weren't expecting such an over-reliance on spin.

"But the guys have bowled nicely and the pitch has helped a little bit, so I'm sure it's going to be the same for the next game here tomorrow."

The South Africa-born former Dutch cricketer hinted that the team might ring in some changes in the bowling attack for its last group match against New Zealand.

At the same time, Doeschate said the side would not compromise on the balance as it also wants to top the group with an all-win preliminary campaign.

New Zealand have also already qualified for the semifinals after two wins and Sunday's match will decide the Group A topper.

"We've had two pretty tough training sessions, so that's been the preparation. In terms of the bench strength, I think the priority is making sure that we have our best guys available and fully fit for the second game (semifinal on March 4)," Doeschate said.

"But we also don't want to rest

them for another two days. So to get that balance right, we might just try to share the bowling out a little bit. But we obviously want to win against New Zealand as well.

"It's important that we keep that momentum going. And obviously to top the group as well. So the balance of those two things I just mentioned for the selection to be thought about," he added.

Asked about captain Rohit Sharma's fitness after an injury scare in the game against Pakistan, he said, "He's all right. You can see he's batting a little bit further than earlier. It's an injury he's had before, so he knows how to manage it really well."

On whether scoring has been difficult on the pitch here, he said, "I won't say difficult. I think we've become used to a standard where you score 320 without thinking too much about it. So getting to 320 has been difficult."

"The pitch has played slightly differently, in my opinion, in those two games. But there are probably like 280-290 pitches if you batter really well. So in the bigger picture, yeah, it's not like playing in Pakistan, where you expect to get 320-330.

# Matthew Short likely to miss Champions Trophy semifinal

PTI ■ LAHORE

Australian opener Matthew Short will likely miss the Champions Trophy semifinal against either India or New Zealand after the in-form batter suffered a quad injury in the washed out match against Afghanistan here. Short had scored a 15-ball 20 on Friday but had looked in visible pain before he was dismissed by Azmatullah Omarzai as Australia advanced to the semifinals with four points.

The 29-year-old white-ball player had scored 63 as Steve Smith's Australia had chased down England's mammoth 351 in their opening match of the Champions Trophy. Smith said he didn't think the star opener would be fit to play in next week's semifinal.

"I think he'll be struggling. I think we saw tonight he wasn't moving very well. I think it's probably going to be too quick between games for him to recover," Smith said.

Australia could include in big-hitter Jake Fraser-McGurk as a like-for-like replacement in the

playing XI, though he suffered two failures in the recent one-day series in Sri Lanka. All-rounder Aaron Hardie too could be an option, while the team also has Cooper Connolly as a travelling reserve in case Short is completely ruled out from the tournament.

"We've got a few guys there to come in to fill a job," added Smith. Australia will either play the semifinal against India in Dubai on Tuesday or against New Zealand on Wednesday in Lahore, as their opponents will only be known after Sunday's group clash between Rohit Sharma's side and the Black Caps in Dubai. Australia are currently leading Group B with four points but that can change if South Africa, who are on three points, defeat England in Saturday's final group tie in Karachi.

There is also an extremely remote possibility of Afghanistan finishing second behind Australia in the group and qualifying, but only if Jos Buttler's England crush South Africa, which statistically, looks highly unlikely.

# South Africa qualifies for semifinals

PTI ■ KARACHI

South Africa and Australia on Saturday qualified for the Champions Trophy semifinals after the Proteas bowled out a struggling England for 179, the lowest total of the tournament, in their final Group B match here.

Already eliminated from the semifinal race, England needed a victory by at least 207 runs to give Afghanistan a chance of qualifying based on the run-rate.

However, Marco Jansen (3/39) stole the show with the new ball, taking three crucial wickets, and Wiaan Mulder (3/25) and Keshav Maharaj (2/35) applied the pressure in the middle overs as South Africa confirmed their knockout berth, irrespective of the match's result.

It remains to be seen who finishes on top of Group B and that will decide who India and New Zealand will play in the knockout stage.

In his final game as England's ODI captain, Jos Buttler won the toss and chose to bat, but the decision backfired as Jansen wreaked havoc early, reducing England to 37 for 3 by the



South Africa's Marco Jansen, center, celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of England's Ben Duckett during the ICC Champions Trophy match PTI

seventh over. Opener Phil Salt (8) top-edged a rising Jansen delivery, while Jamie Smith (0) failed to handle a short ball and followed Salt back to the pavilion. Ben Duckett (24) then perished to a caught-and-bowled effort by Jansen, as England's top-order collapsed.

Harry Brook (19) and Joe Root (37) attempted a recovery with a 62-run stand, but just when the partnership seemed to gain momentum, South Africa struck twice in quick succession. Brook fell to Maharaj as when Jansen took a superb catch in

the deep while Root's off-stump was sent cart-wheeling by Mulder.

England's woes continued as Liam Livingstone (9) and Jamie Overton (11) quickly followed, leaving the side in disarray at 129-7 in the 26th over.

Buttler (21) and Jofra Archer (25) added some respectability to the total with a partnership of 42, but Archer was dismissed by Mulder, and the England skipper was then removed by Lungi Ngidi with a slow ball.

# Shami likely to be rested against NZ

PTI ■ DUBAI

The presence of five left-handed batters in the New Zealand line-up and the slight calf trouble faced by Mohammed Shami during the Pakistan game may force the Indian team management to play left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh in the Sunday's Champions Trophy game.

If the Friday's practice session was an indication, then the Punjab pacer in all likelihood will replace Shami, who has recently returned to the national fold following a long injury lay-off.

Arshdeep trained under the watchful eyes of bowling coach Morne Morkel, bowling 13 overs with full run-up while Shami only bowled six-seven overs with a curtailed run-up. He was not bowling full steam.

During the game against Pakistan on February 23, Shami had received treatment in his right leg from the physios just after bowling his third over of the innings.

The body language of the players during the training session on Friday suggested that India are likely to give Shami a much-needed break before all important semi-finals. While KL Rahul in his interaction with media was not very sure if India would alter the winning combination despite the temptation, assistant coach Ryan Doeschate, later in the evening, hinted that the bowling line-up could be changed a bit.

Prior to India's important ICC Champions Trophy 2025 Group A match against New Zealand on Sunday, assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate confirmed that Rohit Sharma is effectively managing his injury.

# Afghanistan could win ICC tournament in next decade: Steyn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

South Africa pace legend Dale Steyn reckons the fast-rising Afghanistan can go on to win an International Cricket Council (ICC) limited-overs tournament in the next decade if their players learn how to play patiently.

Overcoming war and instability in their nation, the Afghanistan cricket team has evolved from an affiliate member to a formidable force in white-ball tournaments. They almost reached the knockouts in the 2023 ODI World Cup, defeating former champions England, Sri Lanka and Pakistan while they were the semifinalists at last year's T20 World Cup, where they knocked out Australia.

"We live in a time now where people are not patient enough. We can hardly watch two seconds on an Instagram story and it just feels like the Afghanistan players



are similar when they're playing their cricket," Steyn said on ESPNCricinfo.

"Patience is one of the biggest things that Afghanistan players need to learn, and once they get that down, honestly, in the next decade, they could win ICC tournaments, for sure."

"They want things to happen so quickly. This ball must be a wicket, there's no patience to building up and taking a wicket.

However, the loss to South Africa in their opener cost them dearly as the "virtual quarterfinal" against Australia was washed out 13 overs into the second innings with both teams splitting points.

Mathematically the Afghans can still qualify if England beat South Africa by a huge margin on Saturday, but the chances of that happening are minimal as the Proteas have a healthy 2.140 net run rate compared to Afghanistan's -0.990.

The South African feels playing four-day first-class cricket could teach the Afghanistan players how to build their innings, which will also help them improve their game in the 50-over format.

"Back in the day, a lot of players would go play county cricket. Or they would go play first-class cricket to improve their skills and improve their patience really," Steyn said.

# Knapp maintains lead in Cognizant Classic

PTI ■ PALM BEACH GARDENS

Jake Knapp was 11 shots worse than his opening round at the Cognizant Classic and still stayed in front, curling in a 15-foot birdie putt on his final hole Friday for a 1-under 70 and a one-shot lead over Matthieu Pavon.

Knapp, who made 12 birdies Thursday for the 15th round of 59 or lower on the PGA Tour, went 10 holes without a birdie. He had a double bogey when his tee shot found the water. One of his better shots hit a sprinkler cap and bounced 40 yards away. Knapp wasn't sure what to expect. It was close to perfect one day and a struggle the next.

"I've never had to follow up a 59 at a tournament before. It's all new to me," Knapp said. "Yesterday, everything was just clicking ball-striking wise, distance control felt really good,

was able to control flight and windows. All that was perfect." There was more wind at PGA National. Putts that found the center of the cup managed to burn the edge.

"A couple of wayward shots, but nothing too concerning," he said. One player had reason to celebrate, along with shedding a few tears. Florida State junior Luke Clanton easily made the cut with a 5-under 66 - he was just four shots behind - giving him enough points for the 21-year-old to get a PGA Tour card after the NCAA Championships at the end of May.

Clanton already has two runner-up finishes on the PGA Tour and a pair of other top 10s. He is used to the big stage, and he has another opportunity this weekend. The same holds true for so many others.

Knapp was at 13-under 129.

Pavon, the Frenchman who won at Torrey Pines last year, had a 64 and briefly had the lead until narrowly missing a birdie on his last hole to finish one behind.

Daniel Berger, who grew up near PGA National, went out in 31 to share the lead and didn't make another birdie the rest of the way. He fell back with a bogey in which he gouged one shot out of the muck and weeds on No. 11 and did well to limit the damage. Berger had a 68 and was at 11-under 131, along with Michael Kim (66), Doug Ghim (63) and Jesper Svensson (67), a rookie who earned his card through the European tour last year.

"I just kind of lost a little steam on the back nine," Berger said. "I don't know if I didn't eat enough food and started to feel a little bit off there. But hit a bad nine-iron, plugged it in the hazard, and I actually got away with one just to make a bogey there."

# Shreyas Iyer gifts net bowler Jaskiran a pair of shoes

PTI ■ DUBAI

It was a special moment for one of the net bowlers Jaskiran Singh at the ICC Cricket Academy here when India top-order batter Shreyas Iyer walked up to him and gifted him a pair of spikes during a Champions Trophy practice session.

Jaskiran, a chartered accountant by profession and an avid cricket lover, was fielding at long-off when Iyer came up to him and asked, "Paaji kya haal-chaal, sab badiya? (Brother how are you? Everything fine?)"

"Shreyas bhai came up to me and asked 'what's your show size?' I said 10, and then he said I've got something for you and I he gave me these spikes. It really means a lot," Jaskiran, who is one of the ICC net bowlers for the Champions Trophy, told PTI Videos.

Jaskiran bowled to the Pakistan and Bangladesh batters during their net sessions. He was disappointed when he was not chosen for the India nets as there were already enough off-spinners for Rohit Sharma's side.

But disappointment turned into delight when Iyer, probably sensing that the spinner looked dejected, approached Jaskiran and gifted him a pair of his shoes.

"I am a part of the ICC net bowling team for the Champions Trophy. Today was one such special moment of my life. Received these spikes from Shreyas Iyer."

"In this tournament, I've fielded for them (India) but was waiting for an opportunity to bowl to them. I've bowled to Pakistan and Bangladesh; that was a really good experience. And then this, coming from Shreyas Bhai means a lot," said

Jaskiran. "The team relies on him in the event of a top-order collapse. This really means a lot and the day was special today," he added.

Iyer scored a fine half-century in the marquee match against Pakistan, which India won by six wickets to seal a place in the Champions Trophy semifinal. Jaskiran added that he would love to bowl to Rishabh Pant, who is a left-handed batter.

"Every batter in Team India is special, but someone whom I look up to is Rishabh Pant because he is a lefty and due to the natural angle, the ball will go away from him. So, I would really love to bowl to him."

"We have been with Team India since the first session and today is the fourth. Shreyas bhai is really joyful around the field and every time the ball comes to me, he's like 'catch it,'" added Jaskiran.

# East Bengal needs two wins to keep playoff hopes alive

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Chasing a first-ever playoffs berth, East Bengal find themselves in a must-win situation when they face former champions Bengaluru FC in an Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Sunday. Currently eighth in the table with 27 points from 22 matches, the Red-and-Gold brigade have already won three consecutive games and now must win their remaining two to achieve a perfect five-out-of-five run and keep their playoff hopes alive.

The Blues have already confirmed their qualification, which puts additional pressure on East Bengal to produce an unblemished record in the remaining matches.

The Oscar Bruzon side recently registered their fourth home clean sheet in a 2-0 victory over Hyderabad FC, boosting



their season tally to six, a performance level they must build on in the upcoming fixtures.

In previous matches, East Bengal and Bengaluru have split their nine face-offs evenly, with four wins apiece and one draw. Sunday's clash offers East Bengal a crucial opportunity not only to extend their unbeaten run but also to finally secure a league double

over Bengaluru - a feat they are yet to achieve this season.

With four goals and three assists this season, East Bengal FC's Vishnu Puthiya has had a productive campaign, in addition to making 34 successful dribbles and 60 recoveries too.

Bruzon assured that his team will keep battling for a spot in the top-six right until the end. "If you ask me, no doubt, we

want to make it but it depends on other results. We are not going to stop fighting until our last breath," he said.

Like East Bengal, Bengaluru FC are on the back of winning three ISL matches while keeping clean sheets, and their form continues to make them a formidable opponent even as they rest on their playoffs qualification.

With key contributions from players like the talismanic Sunil Chhetri and Alberto Noguera, the Blues have also made a mark with strong domestic performances, further solidifying their standing in the league. Bengaluru FC head coach Gerard Zaragoza outlined his team's ambitions for the remaining matches.

"We are focused on finishing as high as possible. Our target right now is to win the next two games," he said.

# Living through Design

India Design ID 2025 shapes experiences, tradition creating meaningful, immersive and functional spaces, says SAKSHI PRIYA

**DESIGN AS AN EXPERIENCE**  
Each space, each installation and each curated object tells a story not only of creation but of intention. The event brings together over 150 leading Indian and international brands showcasing innovations in home décor and accessories. Its gist lies in its ability to humanise design.

**D**esign is a language that shapes the way people experience the world. At India Design ID 2025 this language speaks in bold forms, tactile surfaces and immersive spaces that challenge perception and celebrate ingenuity. The 13th edition of India's most definitive design fair, it is a living breathing conversation between heritage and modernity function and emotion material and memory.

This year's ID Exhibit is a sensory journey. The tactile richness of handwoven textiles, the raw honesty of sustainable materials and the sleek precision of contemporary craftsmanship all coalesce into a seamless experience. The pavilions Experience Editions Collectibles Installations and Art feel less like a trade fair and more like a series of curated worlds. The act of moving through space itself becomes an interaction with design.

Renowned names like KoKo by K2 India Atelier Ashiesh Shah VIYA OORJAA and Sansar by D'Décor present work that blur the lines between tradition and modernity. A handcrafted lamp is an object of illumination and a dialogue between maker and material between time-honoured techniques and contemporary sensibilities.

Beyond visual splendour India Design ID 2025 is a place for discourse. The ID Symposium is where design moves beyond the tangible becoming a space for ideas innovation and introspection. This year's speaker's global visionaries such as Kulapat Yantrasast Salma Samar Damluji and Tarun Tahiliani engage in conversations that reveal how design evolves in



response to global challenges. One of the most thought-provoking segments is ID Collectible which examines design at the intersection of art and architecture. These limited-edition pieces are functional and sculptural, questioning the essence of everyday objects. Each piece is a moment in time a reflection of the designer's philosophy and an invitation to the viewer to engage in a deeper dialogue with the object.

In a world of fast design where trends change as quickly as digital feeds refresh ID Special Projects provides a grounding force. TRANSITION curated by Misha Bains explores the humble chair

as a metaphor for change featuring 45 unique interpretations by 45 designers. From sculptural to functional restrained to avant-garde this exhibit becomes a meditation on the way people interact with everyday objects.

Equally compelling is INDIA BY DESIGN curated by Srila Chatterjee which takes visitors into the heart of India's artisanal heritage. Here centuries-old crafts meet contemporary perspectives proving that tradition is not static but constantly evolving. The human touch so often lost in mass production is appreciable in every handwoven textile, every intricately carved wooden piece, every stroke of natural dye on fabric.

India Design ID 2025 is about how people feel. It is a reminder that good design is functional, beautiful and meaningful. In an era where digital screens often mediate interactions with the world, events like this remind people of the irreplaceable value of the tangible, the handcrafted and the thoughtfully made.



# New Era of Corporate Cricket with ICBT20



BY TEAM VIVA

**I**n today's fast-paced corporate world, professionals are constantly battling stress and burnout. With endless meetings, deadlines, and high-pressure targets, the need for a balanced lifestyle has never been more critical. Recognising the need for relaxation and rejuvenation among corporate employees, a groundbreaking initiative has been launched in India that brings the thrill of T20 cricket right into the corporate arena.

The grand launch of the India Corporate T20 Bash (ICBT20), an innovative annual cricket league specifically designed for top-performing young corporate and private sector players. Conceptualised by Now & Eminence Netrasup India, the event marked its official inauguration with the unveiling of a dynamic new logo and sleek jersey.

Bridging the Gap Between Work and Play The ICBT20 Bash is not just a sporting event; it is a movement aimed at striking the perfect balance between work and life. By bringing together corporate professionals from across the country, the league emphasises the importance of health, fitness, and mental well-being—cornerstones of a productive and fulfilling career. As corporate employees step out of their boardrooms and onto the cricket pitch, they get a chance to channel their competitive spirit and relieve work-induced stress in the most exhilarating way possible.

The launch event in Delhi was graced by several eminent personalities from both the sports and corporate worlds. Herschelle Gibbs, the renowned former South African cricketer and current ICBT20 Brand Ambassador. Adding to the star power were notable figures such as actor Sonu



Sood and Vinod Kumar Tiwari, along with a roster of distinguished mentors including Tillakarathne Dilshan, Jesse Ryder, Kieth Ingram, Dhammika Prasad, and Jerome Chinia.

The inaugural season of the ICBT20 Bash will see six formidable franchise teams—Bengaluru Avengers, Delhi Kings, Gurugram Spartans, Gujarat Diamonds, Hyderabad Royals, and Mumbai Champions—competing over 18 thrilling matches in an 8-day marathon at the Yamuna Sports Complex in Delhi. The league promises to deliver over 64 hours of live cricket action, with matches broadcasted on prominent channels such as Reliance Entertainment Network, DD Sports, and OTT WAVES.

The India Corporate T20 Bash is a visionary platform that encourages corporate employees to step away from their hectic routines and embrace the therapeutic power buzz among corporate cricket.

# From Dolby Theatre to the World

The Oscars are more than just an awards show; it is a moment where the global cinematic community comes together to celebrate the power of storytelling, writes ABHI SINGHAL

**T**he Oscars, a stage that represents cinema and cinematic excellence on a global platform are steeped in rich history. Officially known as the Academy Awards, they were first presented in 1929, since then becoming a living example to the enduring power of films. Since then, the event has turned into a spectacle, a celebration of glamour, artistry and dedication that goes into creating memorable motion pictures.

This year, 2025 will be the 97th Academy Awards. Oscars will once again grace the iconic Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, Los Angeles. This venue has become synonymous with the Oscars, its grandeur perfectly complementing the prestige of the event.

This year's nominations promise a thrilling ceremony, with a diverse range of films vying for the coveted golden statuettes. From the captivating narratives of 'Emilia Pérez' and 'A Complete Unknown' to the visually stunning 'Dune: Part Two'



## INDIA AT OSCARS 2025

- 'Anuja', the shortfilm, backed by Guneet Monga and Priyanka Chopra, has secured an Oscar nomination in the Best Live Action Short Film category.
- 'Anuja' is among only five films selected from 180 eligible entries.

Guneet Monga has a strong Academy Awards connection, producing Oscar-winning films like 'Period. End of Sentence' and 'The Elephant Whisperers', and now, 'Anuja' is nominated.

## INDIAN BROADCAST TIMINGS

Time: Monday, March 3rd 2025 - 5:30 AM  
Platform: Live on Star Movies and JioHotstar

The movies we make, they matter. They remind us of who we are, where we've come from, and where we're going.' - TOM HANKS

and the whimsical world of 'Wicked,' the nominees reflect the breadth and depth of cinematic achievement. The acting categories are equally compelling, featuring stellar performances that have captivated audiences worldwide.

The Oscars 2025 nominations showcase a diverse and compelling slate of films, highlighting exceptional talent across various categories. Leading the pack, 'Emilia Pérez' garnered significant attention with nominations in multiple categories,

including Best Picture, International Feature Film, and several craft categories like Cinematography, Costume Design, Film Editing, Makeup and Hairstyling, Music (Original Score and Song), and Sound. Its unique blend of musical and narrative elements, coupled with strong performances, explains its widespread recognition.

'Wicked' received strong nominations in

Animated Feature Film, Actress in a Leading Role (Cynthia Erivo), Actress in a Supporting Role (Ariana Grande), Costume Design, Film Editing, Makeup and Hairstyling, Music (Original Score), Production Design, Sound, and Visual Effects. The film's impressive technical achievements and beloved source material contributed to its success. 'A Complete Unknown' also stands out, securing nominations for Best Picture, Directing (James Mangold), Actor in a Leading Role (Timothée Chalamet), Actor in a Supporting Role (Edward Norton), Actress in a Supporting Role (Monica Barbaro), Costume Design, Sound, and Writing (Adapted Screenplay). The film's compelling storytelling and strong ensemble cast have resonated with voters.

Animated features like 'Inside Out 2,' 'Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl,' and 'The Wild Robot' also earned nominations. Whether you're a seasoned cinephile or a casual moviegoer, the Oscars offer a glimpse into the magic of filmmaking, a reminder of the power of the screen.



## SUGGESTED BINGES

**Dabba Cartel**  
IMDB Rating - 7/10  
OTT - Netflix  
Cast - Shabana Azmi, Jyothika, Shalini Pandey, Shibani Akhtar, Gajraj Rao

**Running Point**  
IMDB Rating - 7.4/10  
OTT - Netflix  
Cast - Kate Hudson, Brenda Song, Drew Tarver, Scott MacArthur

**Suzhal - The Vortex Season 2**  
OTT - Amazon Prime Video  
Cast - Aishwarya Rajesh, Kathir

**Aashram Season 3 Part 2**  
OTT - Amazon MX Player  
Cast - Bobby Deol, Chandan Roy Sanyal, Aditi Sudhir Pohankar, Darshan Kumar

**Ziddi Girls**  
IMDB Rating - 7.4/10  
OTT - Amazon Prime Video  
Cast - Shivangi Vyas, Gaurangi Vyas, Niharika Kundu



# the pioneer agenda

"Life is too short to drive boring cars"  
— ELVIS PRESLEY



## VINTAGE CARS: THE ROYAL TOUCH

The erstwhile Maharajas of India had a deep fascination with luxury cars, particularly Rolls-Royce, which symbolised their opulence, status and power. During the early 20th century, Indian royalty became one of the biggest patrons of Rolls-Royce, commissioning custom-built models adorned with gold, ivory and exquisite embellishments. It is estimated that more than half of the Rolls-Royce cars produced in the world during that era were made for Indian Maharajas. These cars were not just transport; they showcased wealth, used in ceremonies, hunting, and even garbage collection.

## THE TIMELESS CHARM OF

# Vintage Cars



The passion for vintage cars in India is no longer limited to a select few; it has evolved into a nationwide obsession, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**, captured by **PANKAJ KUMAR**

**L**ove for Vintage cars is no less than a romance of a lifetime. The person who falls for the beauty and demeanour of these old ladies has a love of a lifetime. For the uninitiated, recall Farhan Akhtar of the iconic Bollywood movie Zindagi namelagidobara who goes nuts just seeing these old cars in bright colours of red and sky blue. From the stunning curves of a 1929 Rolls-Royce Phantom II to the bold presence of a 1954 Chevrolet Bel Air, these 'old ladies' have a charm that is unmatched. Over the past few decades, the passion for vintage cars has seen a remarkable surge in India, with collectors and enthusiasts taking this love to new heights. For many vintage car enthusiasts, the fascination goes beyond aesthetics. These cars represent a bygone era of luxury, precision engineering and hand-crafted beauty. Owning and restoring a vintage car is akin to preserving a piece of history, with each vehicle carrying a unique story. Be it the grandeur of a Buick Super Eight or the timeless appeal of a Hindustan Landmaster, vintage cars have a soul that resonates deeply with collectors.

**The Growth of Vintage Car Culture in India**  
In recent years, India has witnessed a rising trend in vintage car appreciation. What was once a niche hobby has now turned into a thriving community of collectors, restorers, and automobile historians. Vintage car rallies, exhibitions, and heritage drives have become a common sight in cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Hyderabad. Events such as the 21 Gun Salute International Vintage Car Rally and the Cartier Concours d'Elegance have provided a platform for enthusiasts to showcase their prized possessions. Moreover, social media has played a crucial role in connecting vintage car lovers across the country.

### Challenges and Triumphs of Restoration

Unlike modern vehicles with readily available spare parts, vintage cars often require extensive research and sourcing of original components. In India, restorers and mechanics specialising in vintage cars have become increasingly sought after. Cities like Chennai and Pune have seen the rise of skilled craftsmen who can meticulously rebuild engines, repair bodywork and replicate period-correct interiors. Interestingly enough the earlier cars were made of wood and a metal sheet was plastered over it to give a metallic look. Besides their spoke wheels and their carriage style gave them a majestic look. Many of these cars are painstakingly restored and are at display in Heritage Transport Museum in Delhi NCR. "Restoring old cars is like preserving a piece of history. It's a meticulous process to bring them back to their original glory," says Tarun Thakral, whose passion brought the Heritage Transport Museum to life. Despite the challenges, the joy of seeing a beautifully restored classic on the road is unparalleled.

### Preserving Automotive Heritage

With the growing interest in vintage cars, there is also a renewed focus on preserving India's automotive heritage. Museums and private collectors are working to document and showcase the evolution of automobiles in India. Efforts are being made to protect historically significant vehicles from being scrapped or lost to time. Vintage car clubs, restoration garages and automobile historians are ensuring that the legacy of these "old ladies" continues to thrive. Their dedication highlights that these cars are symbols of history, art and engineering excellence.



THE RIGOROUS JUDGING PROCESS WAS LED BY A DISTINGUISHED INTERNATIONAL PANEL FEATURING VINTAGE AUTOMOBILE EXPERTS SUCH AS CHRISTIAN KRAMER, WHITNEY OVEROCKER, SHINICHI EKKO, ALEX VON MOZER AND ALLAN WINN.

## THE CLASSIFICATION OF OLD CARS

Contrary to popular perception not all cars are vintage cars. Old cars are classified into different categories based on the era of their manufacture, reflecting historical and technological advancements in automobile design. Here's a rundown of the key classifications:

- VETERAN CARS (PRE-1905)**
  - Also known as the Brass Era or Pioneer Era cars.
  - Characterized by hand-built craftsmanship, steam, electric, and early gasoline engines.
  - Example: 1886 Benz Patent-Motorwagen, the first car by Karl Benz.
- EDWARDIAN CARS (1905-1918)**
  - Named after King Edward VII's reign in Britain.
  - Marked by improvements in internal combustion engines, the introduction of the steering wheel (replacing tillers), and mass production.
  - Example: Ford Model T (1908), which revolutionized the automobile industry with assembly line production.

- VINTAGE CARS (1919-1930)**
  - Cars produced between World War I and the Great Depression.
  - More advanced engineering, stronger steel chassis, and luxurious coachbuilding.
  - Example: Rolls-Royce Phantom I (1925), Bugatti Type 35.
- PRE-WAR CARS (1931-1945)**
  - Includes both Depression-Era Cars and World War II Vehicles.
  - Innovations like independent suspension, hydraulic brakes, and streamlined designs.
  - Example: Cadillac V16, Mercedes-Benz 540K, Volkswagen Beetle (designed in the late 1930s).

- POST-WAR CLASSIC CARS (1946-1959)**
  - The post-WWII era saw major automotive growth with more stylish designs, tailfins, and the introduction of muscle cars.
  - Examples: Chevrolet Bel Air, Jaguar XK120, Mercedes-Benz 300SL Gullwing.
- Classic Cars (1960-1979)**
  - Covers muscle cars, early supercars, and the transition to modern engineering.
  - Examples: Ford Mustang (1964), Porsche 911 (1964), Lamborghini Miura (1966).

- MODERN CLASSICS OR YOUNGTIMERS (1980-1999)**
  - These are not officially vintage yet but are recognized as emerging classics.
  - Includes early supercars, high-performance sedans, and experimental designs.
  - Examples: Ferrari F40 (1987), McLaren F1 (1992), BMW E30 M3.

Each of these categories reflects the evolving design, engineering, and cultural significance of automobiles throughout history.

### THE 21 GUN SALUTE: CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE

To honour vintage cars, numerous rallies are organised across the country throughout the year, with some gaining increasing popularity. One such event is the 21 Gun Salute. The heart of New Delhi witnessed an extraordinary spectacle as the 11th edition of the 21 Gun Salute Concours d'Elegance. A breathtaking parade of over 125 rare vintage cars and 50 vintage motorcycles, capturing the essence of India's rich motoring history.

The event featured an impressive lineup of iconic vehicles, including the 1939 Delahaye, the 1903 De Dion Bouton-one of the oldest cars in the concours-the 1917 Ford Model T Roadster and the regal 1935 Cadillac Fleetwood. The three day event concluded at the Leela Ambience, Gurugram. The coveted Best of Show award was claimed by the majestic 1922 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost of Mayurbhanj princely state, owned by Dhanraj Gidwani since 1992. Gidwani remarked, "All the cars in this event are special and priceless." The 1935 Buick 90L (ex-Ayodhya), owned by Diljit Titus, secured first prize in the Post-War American Coupe category.

Tarun Thakral, Founder and Managing Trustee of the Heritage Transport Museum.



### A GROWING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY

This event is a tribute to India's motoring legacy. Besides the sentimental value, vintage cars have also emerged as lucrative investments. As the demand for well-maintained classics rises, so does their market value. Collectors are willing to pay a premium for rare models, and auctions have seen skyrocketing prices for pristine examples. Owning a vintage car is now seen not only as a passion project but also as a valuable asset that appreciates over time.

### FROM THRONES TO TRIALS

Post-independence in 1947, the princely states were integrated into the Republic of India, and the economic realities shifted drastically. The newly independent nation imposed high taxes on princely wealth and the Privy Purse-financial allowances given to the former royals-was abolished in 1971 by the Indian government. Stripped of their vast fortunes, many Maharajas had no choice but to sell their prized possessions, including their magnificent Rolls-Royce collections, to collectors and museums worldwide. Today, these cars remain a testament to a bygone era of regal extravagance.





# Two Decades of Sizzling Success

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

Kylin reflects on a journey of gastronomic excellence and countless memories within its walls, writes ABHI SINGHAL

## DUMPLINGS

The Mixed Vegetable variety of Kylin's Signature Dumplings, dipped in Szechuan Chilli Oil, is just like an edible poem, a spicy ballet of flavours that lingers even after the final bite. Think of the delicate, silky wrappers that are individually expertly made to hold a variety of crisp, fresh veggies.

## FACT SHEET

**Outlets in Delhi/NCR:** Noida, Aerocity, Vasant Kunj  
**Cost for two:** 2500 + taxes (exclusive of drinks)  
**Operational time:** 12pm to 11:30 pm

Two decades. A score of years. However you phrase it, Kylin has marked a monumental milestone, an authentication to its reign as an Asian dining in India. From its humble beginnings as a single Delhi outlet, it's blossomed into a culinary empire, now boasting eight vibrant locations across six bustling cities. But beyond the numbers, beyond the expansion, lies a story woven with the threads of flavour, innovation, and cherished memories.

Stepping into a Kylin restaurant is an experience in itself. It's not just a meal, it's a journey. You're enveloped in an atmosphere that seamlessly blends the time-honoured traditions of Asian cuisine with a distinctly modern, sophisticated flair. Think sleek, contemporary design, inviting spaces, and a palpable buzz of excitement. Whether you're seeking a romantic dinner, a lively gathering with friends, or simply a moment of culinary indulgence, Kylin offers a sanctuary for every occasion.

And what a menu it is. From Signature Bowls from Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, India and so much more, Kylin is a place of flavours,

meticulously crafted to tempt the palate. You can always go for the Chilli Oil Dim Sums, a fiery dance of textures and tastes, or the comforting warmth of a Hot Stone Bowl. Their Veg Tempura Sushi, a delicate balance of crispy and fresh and is an example to their commitment to innovation. This constant evolution, this refusal to rest on laurels, is what has kept Kylin at the forefront of the dining scene for two decades.

It's not just the food that shines. Kylin was the first Asian brand in India to truly embrace the art of the cocktail. Their bar, a vibrant hub of creativity, offers a curated menu of concoctions that perfectly complement the culinary offerings. Each sip is a masterpiece, designed to elevate your dining experience to new heights.

So, if you're a seasoned foodie or seeking a memorable meal, Kylin welcomes you. It's a place where there is both sweet and savoury are offered and where every visit is a celebration. Twenty years on, and Kylin continues to set the standard, proving that culinary excellence, like a fine wine that only improves with age. You can visit anytime, and experience the legacy for yourself.

## THE PERFECT ENDING

Kylin's desserts are a sweet symphony. There are Fried Ice Cream Spring Rolls, Date Rolls with Ice Cream, and a unique Trio of homemade Basil, Star Anise, and Coconut Ice Cream. A warm Brownie with Vanilla and Crumble satisfies the soul. The Kylin Spl. Dessert Platter offers all in one delightful mix.

## SPECIAL RECOMMENDATION

Directly from China's heart, Kylin's Hot Stone Bowl deserves your undivided attention. Choose your canvas: silken tofu, tender chicken, or rich lamb. Then, select your grain: sticky rice, fun noodles, or healthy quinoa. Finally, paint it with your preferred sauce - the sharp bite of black pepper, the aromatic punch of hot basil, or the fiery allure of chilli garlic. Each bowl is cooked with a medley of mushrooms, peppers, and water chestnuts. For tofu lovers, edamame adds a delightful twist.

# Spiced to Perfection



BY TEAM AGENDA

Aromatic, rich and bursting with flavour, Hyderabadi Veg Biryani is a classic dish that brings together fragrant basmati rice, perfectly spiced vegetables and delicate layers of saffron and herbs. This traditional recipe ensures each grain of rice is infused with the essence of whole spices and slow-cooked for the perfect dum biryani experience. Serve it with raita or mirchi ka salan for a truly authentic meal.

By Executive Chef Sanjay Kumar, The Tivoli Hotel, Chattarpur

- |             |   |                |  |
|-------------|---|----------------|--|
| <b>RICE</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 2 cups basmati rice (soaked)</li> <li>● 6 cups water, 1 tsp salt, 1 tsp lemon juice</li> <li>● 2 bay leaves, 3 green cardamoms, 4 cloves, 1-inch cinnamon stick, 1 star anise, 1 black cardamom</li> </ul> | <b>VEGGIES</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ½ cup each: carrots, beans, peas, potatoes, cauliflower</li> <li>● ½ cup paneer (optional)</li> </ul> |
|-------------|---|----------------|--|



## MASALA:

- 3 tbsp oil, 2 tbsp ghee, 2 onions (sliced)
- 2 tbsp ginger-garlic paste, 2 green chillies (slit), 2 tomatoes (chopped)
- ½ cup curd, ½ tsp turmeric, 1 tsp red chilli powder, 1 tsp coriander powder
- 1 tsp biryani masala, ½ tsp garam masala, ½ cup mint and coriander leaves
- ¼ tsp saffron in ¼ cup warm milk

## Layering:

- ½ cup fried onions, 2 tsp ghee, and saffron milk
- ½ tsp rose water, ½ tsp kewra water

## METHOD

**Cook Rice:** Boil water with spices, salt, and lemon juice. Add rice, cook till 70% done, then drain.  
**Prepare Masala:** Sauté onions in oil and ghee. Set half aside. Add ginger-garlic paste, chillies, tomatoes, spices, curd, and vegetables. Cook until soft. Stir in mint and coriander.  
**Layer:** In a pan, layer rice, masala, fried onions, saffron milk, rose and kewra water, and ghee. Repeat.  
**Dum Cook:** Cover and cook on low heat for 20-25 minutes. Let it rest.  
**Serve:** Fluff and enjoy with raita or mirchi

## CHEF'S TIPS

- Maintain a rice-to-water ratio of 1:3 for perfect texture.
- Adding a few drops of ghee before serving enhances the aroma.
- Use a heavy-bottomed pan to prevent the biryani from burning at the base.
- For an extra smoky flavour, place a hot charcoal piece in a bowl, pour a few drops of ghee over it, and cover the pan for 5 minutes before serving.

This Hyderabadi Veg Biryani is a royal treat that captures the essence of authentic Mughlai cuisine. Enjoy it as a centrepiece for festive occasions or a comforting weekend meal.

# Exquisite Culinary & Artistic Haven

Arts Room offers an unparalleled gastronomic experience with its elegant Parisian-inspired ambiance, writes GYANESHWAR DAYAL

Situated in Malviya Nagar, New Delhi, Arts Room by Ambrosia Hospitality is a distinguished new gem in the city's thriving culinary landscape. This global cuisine restaurant, envisioned by Navneet and Randeep Bajaj, is a seamless blend of culinary artistry, sophisticated ambiance, and immersive sensory experiences. Arts Room offers a dining experience that is nothing short of extraordinary.

Stepping into the Arts Room is akin to entering a Parisian courtyard infused with the charm of a classical French living room. The thoughtfully curated decor, adorned with Indian artwork from Pristine Contemporary, sets the stage for an atmosphere that is

both luxurious and inviting.

The menu at Arts Room is a testament to culinary excellence, celebrating global flavours with an emphasis on locally sourced, high-quality ingredients. Diners are treated to a diverse selection of dishes, each reflecting a perfect balance of tradition and innovation. Signature offerings such as the Chicken Teeka Masala, prepared with Layla's roast chicken and velvety tomato cream sauce, and the indulgent Lobster and Caviar, featuring Andaman lobster paired with cognac and Osetra caviar, exemplify the restaurant's commitment to reimagining global classics with a contemporary Indian twist. The Crunchy Pork Belly with Shillong roast dip and Tajin seasoning, and the refreshing Yellowtail Ceviche with coconut and guava accents, further showcase the chef's creative ingenuity.

Arts Room also caters to a variety of dietary preferences with a well-curated selection of vegan-friendly

and gluten-free options. The breakfast menu adds another dimension to the dining experience, allowing guests to enjoy an elegant morning meal in a setting that is as serene as it is sophisticated.

Beyond its exceptional cuisine, Arts Room's cocktail program is a work of art in itself. Under the expert guidance of bar veteran Kamal Kohli, the beverage menu draws inspiration from iconic artists and their masterpieces. The Two Fridas, inspired by Frida Kahlo's celebrated painting, features hemp seed-infused tequila blended with watermelon and chili saccharum, delivering a drink as vibrant as its muse. The Goan Rains, a kokum-based tequila concoction, pays homage to F.N. Souza's depiction of monsoon-soaked Goa, while the La Guernica, a whisky-based cocktail with dark chocolate and Mexican chili,

honors Picasso's legendary anti-war mural. For those who prefer non-alcoholic options, the zero-proof cocktails are equally inventive and delightful.

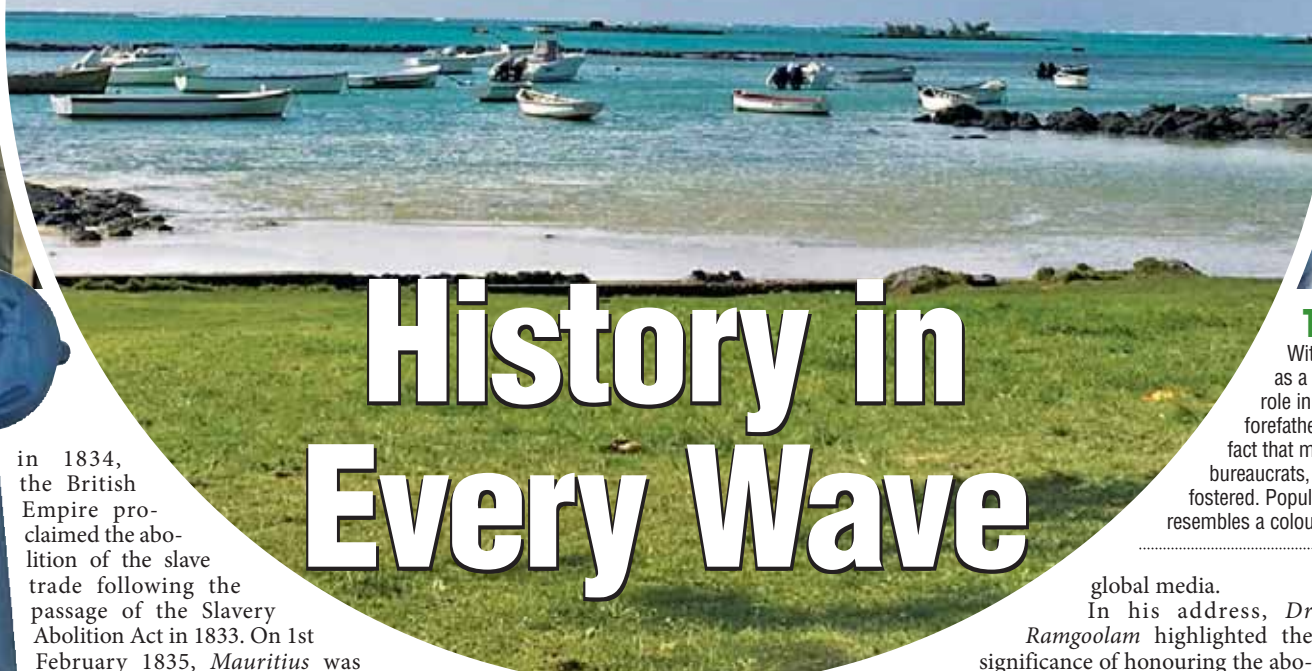
Arts Room's collaboration with Bahrisons bookstore further elevates the ambiance, inviting guests to immerse themselves in literature while savouring their meals.

Arts Room is a celebration of culinary mastery, artistic expression and impeccable service. Whether visiting for a leisurely breakfast, an intimate dinner, this establishment guarantees an unforgettable experience and making it a must-visit for food enthusiasts and art lovers alike.





Despite its beauty, Mauritius honours its painful history of slavery annually on Abolition Day



# History in Every Wave

## THE HEARTFELT HONOUR

With several misty eyes among the assembled guests, the event also served as a catharsis for the descendants of slaves, whose ancestors played a pivotal role in Mauritius' nation-building. As I mingled with them, listening to their forefathers' tales of remarkable fortitude, I could not help but be moved by the fact that many of them today occupy positions of power as ministers and top bureaucrats, a development only an inclusive nation like Mauritius could have fostered. Populated by Indians, Creoles, Africans and Dutch, the country today resembles a colourful mosaic of nationalities, forming a progressive nation.



As I dived into an ambitious itinerary on my fourth visit to Mauritius, checking into the breathtaking island's luxury hotels, savouring world-class gastronomy, and admiring its storied landscapes, lagoons and reefs, I also had a rare chance this time to reflect on the country's early beginnings, marked by suffering and social upheaval.

In fact, it is impossible to understand Mauritian history, dominated by the Arabs, Dutch, English and French, without delving into its past of slavery. Located on the east coast of Africa, 702 miles east of Madagascar, the island traces its provenance to its discovery by Arabs and Malays in 1507. The Portuguese arrived in 1510, bestowing upon it the moniker 'Cirné'. By 1598, the Dutch wrested control of the island, renaming it 'Maurice' after their head of state, the Prince of Orange and Count of Nassau.

Mauritius' magnetic draw among rapacious foreign invaders was hardly surprising, given its plentiful natural resources and breathtaking beauty. No wonder Mark Twain famously said that Mauritius was "created first and then Heaven copied after it!" However, slave trading marked its ugly presence on the island in the 1640s when the Dutch ushered in the first lot of slaves.

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, some 27 million Africans were forced onto ships and transported across the Atlantic to work on lush Mauritian sugarcane fields. By the 17th century, the country was teeming with slaves from Madagascar, Africa, India and Java, who worked in Dickensian conditions, abused and exploited.

However, after centuries of slavery and international resistance,

in 1834, the British Empire proclaimed the abolition of the slave trade following the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. On 1st February 1835, Mauritius was declared free of slavery. Planters were compensated with two million pounds for their slave loss, and eventually, Mauritius gained independence in 1968.

To commemorate the abolition of slavery, celebrated as 'Abolition Day', the island nation organises a series of activities each year. This year, which marked the 190th anniversary of the practice, was

both a poignant and joyous occasion, as dignitaries acknowledged the island's fraught past and the sacrifices made by its people.

At the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Le Morne Brabant, a towering mountain serving as a powerful symbol of the struggle against slavery and the enduring impact of this dark period on the island's societies, I watched a moving wreath-laying ceremony conducted by Mauritian Prime Minister Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, attended by international delegates, celebrities and

global media.

In his address, Dr Ramgoolam highlighted the significance of honouring the abolition of slavery, emphasising the need to remember history, promote social justice and strengthen national unity. "This commemoration is not just about remembering our history; it is a call to action to ensure that the values of freedom, dignity, solidarity and justice continue to guide our nation," he said. The island's legacy of slavery and its lasting impact, he added, remained one of the most painful chapters of history.

At Aapravasi Ghat, another UNESCO Heritage Site and an immigration depot in Port Louis, where thousands of Indian slaves landed in the nineteenth century, another poignant celebration took place. A symbol of Indo-Mauritian ties, the depot includes a rice store, a military hospital complex, a civil hospital and a museum. It also records Mahatma Gandhi's work on the abolition of slavery and his visit to Mauritius in 1901 on his way back to India from South Africa.

The ceremony at Aapravasi Ghat was marked by the presence of international dignitaries, top ministers, renowned human rights advocates, activists and international media. This offered me a deep dive into Mauritius' fraught past and what shapes it today.

Next, I attended a thought-provoking conference, *Routes of Enslaved Peoples: Resistance, Liberty and Heritage Project*, which acknowledged the com-

memoration of 190 years of slavery in Mauritius. Premised on the theme Resistance, Liberty, Heritage in the Western Indian Ocean, it was held at the University of Mauritius in Réduit, the island's first university. International delegates and authors listened in rapt attention to Mauritian President Dharambeer Gohul, who shared that the occasion "marks a pivotal moment in our ongoing journey to understand, reconcile and learn from shared histories of slavery and its enduring legacy".

At the Pamplemousses Slave Heritage Trail, another heritage site, descendants of indentured slaves gathered to pay tribute to their ancestors. Stephan Karghoo, Director at the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture in Mauritius, noted that Abolition Day celebrates the nation's ancestors in the most meaningful way.

- By Neeta Lal

# Couple Getaways for Adrenaline Junkies



For couples who want more than just a quiet dinner or a lazy beach day, adventure can be the perfect way to bond. Facing challenges together, feeling the thrill, and creating unforgettable memories make for a different kind of romance. Whether it's diving into the ocean, climbing mountains, or flying through the sky, adventure travel brings couples closer in the most exciting ways.

### Ride the Rapids Together

White-water rafting is a great way to test teamwork and have fun. Couples can brave the thrilling rapids of the Zambezi River in Africa or enjoy the stunning scenery of Costa Rica's Pacuare River. In India, Rishikesh offers an exciting rafting experience on the Ganges, where couples can paddle through the waves and admire the surrounding mountains.

### Dive into a New World

Scuba diving is a magical experience for couples who love the ocean. The Great Barrier Reef in Australia, Thailand's Similan Islands, and Mexico's cenotes offer incredible underwater adventures. In India, the Andaman Islands provide crystal-clear waters and colourful marine life, perfect for a diving trip together.

### Fly High with Paragliding

Few experiences match the thrill of paragliding over breathtaking landscapes. Couples can fly over the Swiss Alps, the beaches of Oludeniz in Turkey, or the hills of Nepal. In India, Bir Billing in Himachal Pradesh is a world-famous spot for paragliding, where couples can glide through the air and take in stunning views.

### Hike to Breathtaking Views

Hiking is a wonderful way for couples to bond while enjoying nature. Famous trails like the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, Mount Kilimanjaro, and Patagonia's Torres del Paine offer unforgettable experiences. In India, the Valley of Flowers trek in Uttarakhand is a beautiful and romantic hike filled with colourful blooms and fresh mountain air.

### TAKE A ROMANTIC ROAD TRIP

A road trip lets couples explore new places at their own pace. Iceland's Ring Road, New Zealand's South Island and the American Southwest have stunning scenic routes. In India, a road trip through Ladakh's mountains and high-altitude passes is a thrilling and romantic journey.

— By Jatinder Paul Singh, Co-founder and CEO, Viacation



# Dawn in the Mountains

In the sacred hours of a Mussoorie morning, tears of joy kissed my cheeks as consciousness gently returned after eight hours of profound sleep. The embrace of the "Queen of Hills" welcomed me back, not just to physical awareness, but to a deeper awakening that only these majestic mountains could inspire. Two thousand meters closer to heaven, I felt the weight of mundane existence lifting from my shoulders. My training hostel window framed a masterpiece that no artist could replicate. The ethereal blue light, nature's most delicate performer, danced across the vast canvas of sky. Each molecule of pristine mountain air seemed to carry fragments of ancient wisdom, painting the firmament in hues that deepened at the zenith and softened towards the horizon, like emotions that grow more profound as they reach the heart.

The sun, that eternal poet, orchestrated a magnificent performance through centuries-old branches. Delicate shadows strolled across my bedspread, each movement telling stories of time immemorial. My typically bustling mind discovered a stillness that mirrored the crystal-clear mountain air. Thoughts, usually racing like mountain streams, settled into a peaceful pool of clarity. Stepping out into the embrace of the morning, each

breath became a prayer of gratitude. The mountain path unfurled before me like a ribbon of possibilities, winding three kilometers through veils of mountain mist. In this morning theatre, a moment of divine Connection unfolded as several cows blessed me with their presence. Their eyes held the wisdom of ages, reflecting a gentleness that spoke of unconditional giving. When my empty pockets whispered regret, modern technology offered salvation through a simple QR code. Time surrendered its linear march in these precious moments of connection, allowing eternity to peek through the veil of ordinary existence.

The morning's gifts continued to unfold as two langurs graced the scene, their regal presence demanding to be captured through my phone's lens. As I shared offerings with them, more emerged from the misty shadows like spirits of the forest.

This morning in Mussoorie was more than a series of moments; it was a reunion with a forgotten part of myself. In the embrace of the Himalayas, where heaven touches earth, I rediscovered the profound Truth that We are Connected - humans, animals, mountains, and sky - in an eternal dance of being.

- By Dr Tanu Jain



### Go on a Wild Safari

Seeing wild animals in their natural habitat is an exciting and romantic experience. Couples can go on safari in Tanzania's Serengeti or camp under the stars in Botswana. In India, Ranthambore National Park is great for spotting tigers, while Jim Corbett National Park offers wildlife experiences.

### Experience the Magic of Snow

Snowmobiling in Lapland, dog sledding in Alaska, or watching the Northern Lights in Finland are great options. In India, Gulmarg in Jammu & Kashmir offers skiing and snowboarding.



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

Resourceful and hardworking, you are good at designing and executing real-world plans. You will have a lot of responsibility to ensure that everything is done correctly and on time. When confronting laborious tasks, one should appreciate the challenge and dominion as a reward for one's hard work. Looking forward to the week, look for changes which could increase profits, but it will be important to try and build some stability among personal relationships. You should be preparing for higher volumes of business activity, as well as the possibility of a new job, project, or business opportunity. Some will let you down, but most will come to your aid. A family member might be considering taking a trip. Having set multiple activities in motion, you have to exercise some patience while the results of your effort come to be. Time like this also builds good bonds with friends.

**Lucky number** 6 | **Lucky colour** Peach  
**Lucky day** Monday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week's start feels productive, as though it is prompting you to begin a journey, in both a physical and metaphorical sense. One's journey and aspirations are spent so that they receive recognition and rewards in return. Midway through the week, you will feel more celebratory as a consequence of receiving recognition and motivation to keep achieving great results. You will feel more determined and your way forward will become less bumpy. Come the week's end, you will notice a change in your self-image which has the power, both negative and positive, to influence your creative self. Keeping this in mind will help you to maintain a stable self-image while enabling you to stay motivated. To ensure you are meeting your goals, take an opportunity to reflect and reset your creative self.

**Lucky number** 13 | **Lucky colour** Tangerine  
**Lucky day** Saturday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

If you are an adventurous and fun loving person, you might find yourself seeking love this week. This period could signify the initiation of significant relationships which if pursued correctly, can flourish gracefully with time. At this stage of new relationships, the bond of affection has the potential to develop into an everlasting connection, greatly enriching your life. Tackle life with a smile, embrace new challenges, and take bold actions – give yourself a chance. This time is also favorable for traveling, but remember to pay extra attention to your belongings while on the go. Accept the new opportunities that come your way and make the most of the fresh chance.

**Lucky number** 15 | **Lucky colour** Cream  
**Lucky day** Monday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

You seem to be approaching a time in your life where your finances are likely to improve. You may come across unexpected financial benefits that come to you in different forms. Romance can motivate you towards the hope of receiving romantic gestures that could result in long term commitments. But some people may go through intense emotional struggles, including severe regrets along with stress which disrupts sleep while heightening anxiety. These feelings could alter life in a different and overwhelming manner which in turn creates a sense of worry. When the week ends, a change in confidence will allow you to utilize your skills as best as you can to achieve your goals.

**Lucky number** 2 | **Lucky colour** Rose  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

You may find lots of difficulties this week, but there is also plenty of room for success. Your telescopic goals will motivate you and, as a result, you will pursue your goals with astonishing strength. During the specific challenges stratified, your internal motivation and bravery will become your strongest allies. You are ready to overcome all challenges which you meet and therefore, you are a warrior. This is an intense achieving period which you have worked towards and will, most likely, give you positive results. The amount of effort you input in your work is the outcome you will get. Your psychological and physical determination is what will help you in achieving all the success that you are aiming for. Self-belief and self-motivation is what will enable you to successfully counter the hurdles in the way.

**Lucky number** 8 | **Lucky colour** Silvert  
**Lucky day** Monday



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

A sense of restlessness and disappointment, particularly in terms of rewards, will be felt this week. You are close to a significant milestone which is similar to the last step taken before a goal is reached. A period of celebration begins towards the end of the week which ushering in feelings of joy and fulfillment, perhaps celebrating a new family member or achieving personal goals. This phase provides a blend of complete experience satisfaction and relief. Now is the time to surrender worries, allowing oneself to breathe and truly bask in the efforts made. Your determination combined with creative energy and boldness will guide you towards the successful outcomes you desire, which isn't far from grasp. An end to a set of challenges will erupt into a new stage marked by stability and security.

**Lucky number** 19 | **Lucky colour** Burgundy  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

You are free and unrestrained with feeling and imaginary sprawling. Deep down, you're a romantic who showers relationships with tenderness and care while craving for peace and tranquility. There are times when you seem moody, but there's always the chance to uplift and provide insight. Engaging in practices like yoga and meditation deepens the connection to the spiritual world where one draws true strength. Emotion and imagination are unparalleled, and you seem to embrace newer perspectives as opposed to the outdated and uncreative ones. You seem to strike this balance of mind and spirit in life. By the end of the week, you enjoy social celebrations while appreciating the success and companionship of people around you and the shared golden moments with family and friends.

**Lucky number** 12 | **Lucky colour** Rose  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

There are numerous aspects one can get delight from. Joyful events like social gatherings will surely be worthy for friends and family members alike. It will be the most enlightening and inspiring, full of precious reflections. While cherishing all the festivities, exquisite food must also be relished which will embrace their inner feeling of bliss and satisfaction. Tell your cherished ones not to waste their precious time as this will be the most memorable time of their life. Indulge in the festivities of life and celebrate every bit with those you love. Festivity has an energy of its own, do embrace this wonderful time. Try wearing pastel colors this week to bring balance in life.

**Lucky number** 2 | **Lucky colour** Teal  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

Pause and recall the relationships and milestones attained in your life. Consider your accomplishments and appreciate the achievements. You have always tended to channel your happiness towards other people which is the reason you often find yourself in the middle of "happily together" parties like weddings, anniversaries, and community celebrations. These special times enable you to not only leave your daily pressures behind, but also enjoy the warmth and happiness of Togetherness. Life at times needs you to pause and enjoy the joy it shares. Appreciate the time, reflection on the relationships you nurture makes the journey worthwhile. Use these times to inspire you to reflect on and strengthen community bonds, and to appreciate the fulfillment that comes from something greater than an individual

**Lucky number** 12 | **Lucky colour** Olive  
**Lucky day** Tuesday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

At the beginning of the week, relationships can feel a bit turbulent, leading to unexpected feelings of sadness. This emotional rollercoaster can sometimes cloud your mind. As the week progresses, however, your mind will gradually clear, granting you a better understanding of how strong your feelings have grown since which will enhance your ability to love. Along with renewed strength will come a desire to shed any remaining negativity. This will allow for a greater ability to communicate and put plans into motion. Many take advantage of this period for professional advancement which can lead to important personal development for many. Besides, this can also encourage deep spiritual changes allowing you to tackle big issues with fatigue.

**Lucky number** 5 | **Lucky colour** Saffron  
**Lucky day** Friday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

This week horoscopes point to excessive emotional engagement where focusing on sentimental choices may define decision-making. Creativity will reach new heights, although detaching from emotion could become increasingly difficult as goals begin to appear impossible to achieve. For users who have been thrown out of equilibrium, this phase feels particularly difficult, but it can be very satisfying in terms of creative and spiritual pursuits which can offer balance. Beware of misinterpretation as not all people surrounding you will be well-meaning and opportunistic behavior may surface looking to exploit your susceptibility. Keep assessing the fog of suspicion around uncertainty. Remember positive thinking can change the energies around you bringing positive people in life.

**Lucky number** 10 | **Lucky colour** Lavender  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

The individuals who resonate with energetic concepts most often linked to late winter and early spring are likely to be enjoying a phase of self appreciation and success. Had there previously been competing issues with life? They are not a worry now, at least you can take a break and bask in the sunshine of your hardwork. Most of the people around you have accepted your success and are appreciating you for your efforts. This length of time can be used as proof to show you that you are, in fact, progressing toward your destination, although it still may be a while away. Keep your self esteem and optimism at high levels. Although proper care of your money needs to be taken to avoid uncalculated waste.

**Lucky number** 12 | **Lucky colour** Lilac  
**Lucky day** Saturday

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Healing Power of Mantras: Transforming Health with Sound

THE LIFE GUIDANCE



Seerat Kaur Marwaha

If a person believes they are healthy and holds a positive mindset, their body adapts to align with that reality

Mantras have a certain sound frequency that is deeply healing, resonating with the body's energy fields and promoting wellness. Some mantras, such as the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, are known for their powerful vibrations that can aid in recovery and longevity. Similarly, Bajrang Baan is chanted to invoke Lord Hanuman's unwavering devotion and strength to assist in times of dire need. Beyond the sound itself, the intention and faith behind these prayers play a pivotal role in their effectiveness.

A fascinating story demonstrates the profound impact of sound and intention on healing. Imagine being told that a cancerous tumor could disappear within three minutes-without medication, surgery, or medical intervention. It might sound impossible, but this is precisely what was observed in China, where a man diagnosed with a bladder tumor experienced spontaneous healing through an ancient practice. Several Qigong practitioners, experts in Chinese alternative medicine, surrounded the patient. Without administering any medicine or performing any surgical procedure, they began chanting high-vibrational words in their native language, which loosely translated to "already gone" and "healed." Their voices carried unwavering conviction, and their collective focus was on the complete eradication of the tumor and the total



healing of the patient. As they chanted, a live ultrasound sonogram was attached to the patient, displaying the tumor in real time. Miraculously, the sonogram showed the tumor gradually decreasing in size as the chanting continued. Within minutes, the tumor had completely vanished. What had just occurred? Could the power of words and intention have rewritten the body's physical state? If our emotions and intentions can alter the very fabric of our physical reality-dissolving a tumor within minutes-what impact do our daily emotions, thoughts, and words have on our lives? Every thought, whether conscious or subconscious, sends signals to our body, influencing our well-being. Negative self-talk, fear, and stress can manifest as illness, while positive affirmations, gratitude,

and high vibrations foster healing and prosperity. Science, too, provides compelling evidence supporting this phenomenon. Dr. Masaru Emoto, a Japanese scientist, conducted groundbreaking research on the effect of words, intentions, and emotions on water molecules. In his experiments, he exposed water to different words, sounds, and intentions. Water that was blessed with loving and affirming words formed beautifully symmetrical, intricate crystals when frozen, while water exposed to hateful words and negative energy formed chaotic, distorted structures. Given that the human body is composed of nearly 60% water, his research suggests that our words and emotions have a direct impact on our physical health. Another example comes from epigenet-

ics, a field of science that explores how gene expression is influenced by environmental factors, including emotions and thoughts. Dr. Bruce Lipton, a renowned biologist, has shown that our beliefs and perceptions can directly influence our genes. Conversely, chronic stress and negative emotions can activate harmful genetic expressions, leading to illness. Mantra chanting is a practice that bridges spirituality and science. The vibrations created by chanting mantras stimulate the vagus nerve, which plays a crucial role in the parasympathetic nervous system-the body's natural healing and relaxation response. This leads to reduced stress, lower blood pressure, and improved immune function. Studies have shown that chanting 'Om' or other sacred syllables induces a state of deep relaxation and harmony, which is essential for the body's natural healing mechanisms. The story of the bladder tumor disappearing within minutes is not an isolated case. Many ancient traditions, including Ayurveda, Tibetan Buddhism, and indigenous healing practices, have long recognized the power of sound and intention in healing. In the Hindu tradition, Vedic chants and Sanskrit mantras are used for their precise vibrational frequencies, designed to bring balance and restoration to the body and mind. Similarly, Gregorian chants in Christianity and Sufi whirling meditations use sound and movement to con-

nect with higher consciousness and promote healing. If a tumor can dissolve through focused intention and sound, consider what your everyday emotions, intentions, and words are doing to your body and your life. Every time you engage in self-criticism, worry, or anger, you send disharmonious vibrations through your system. Conversely, when you speak words of love, gratitude, and healing, you create an environment conducive to well-being and success. This is why it is essential to practice mindful speech and positive affirmations. Mantras such as "I am healthy, I am whole" or "I am blessed with abundance" are not just empty words-they carry a frequency that can shift your reality. Whether through prayer, chanting, or daily affirmations, aligning your words with healing intentions can reshape your life in ways you never imagined. In the end, the power of healing lies within us. Science is beginning to catch up with ancient wisdom, proving that our thoughts, words, and intentions play a vital role in our well-being. Let us use this knowledge wisely-eliminating negative self-talk and embracing words of health, prosperity, love, and blessings. When we do, we don't just change our mindset; we transform our reality.

—She is a Life Coach and Founder of Soulful Wellness

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