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**CHHATTISGARH'S SILVER JUBILEE YEAR BUDGET**

**BUDGET OF GATI**

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## OP impresses Chhattisgarhians with GATI

### Chhattisgarh govt presents 1.65 lakh crore budget

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Aiming to give an impetus to the 'progress of a welfare state', and with a tagline 'GATI', the Chhattisgarh Finance Minister O P Choudhary on Monday presented Rs 1,65,000 crore budget for the financial year 2025-26.

In his lengthy budget speech, Choudhary said that no new taxes have been introduced and even though it aims a hike on revenue receipts by 11 per cent.

This is the second budget of the Vishnu Deo Sai government in Chhattisgarh. The budget of the previous year was focused on the theme of GYAN (Gareeb, Yuva, Annadata & Nari) and this year's budget GATI aims to fulfill the dream of the theme of GYAN, the Finance Minister remarked in the assembly amid clapping by the treasury benches members.

In GATI, G stands for good governance, A for accelerating infrastructure, T



for technology and I for industrial growth, he explained. The GATI is for the short term goal for one fiscal year and the state government under 'Nava Anjor' has set a target of year 2030 for midterm goal and target year 2047 for making the state

completely developed, the Minister said.

The previous year's budget laid a foundation for inclusive development and the present year's budget aims at the next step in that developmental journey, he added.

The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at current price, is projected to increase from Rs 5,67,880 crores in 2024-25 to Rs 6,35,918 crores in 2025-26, with 12% growth.

Capital expenditure of state for FY 2025-26 is Rs. 26,341 Crores, which is 16% of total budget and 4.14% of state GSDP.

The Net Fiscal Deficit of the state for FY 2025-26 is Rs. 18,900 crores which is 2.97 % of GSDP, well within the 3% limit of reserve bank norms, the Minister said.

Recognizing the challenges faced by small traders and the need to reduce the compliance burden, the State Government has decided to increase the limit for e-Way Bills from Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 Lakh. In other major decisions the state government is going to remove Cess on Stamp Duty on immovable property transactions and Cess on petrol slashing down the rates of it by Rs 1, he said.

The major budgetary provisions in the state budget include Rs. 10,000 Crore for Krishak Unnati Yojana, Rs. 8,500 Crore under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin), Rs. 5,500 Crore for Mahtari Vandan Yojana, Rs. 4,500 Crores for the Mukhyamantri Khadyan Sahayata Yojana, Rs. 3,500 Crores for Free Electricity Supply for up to 5 H Agricultural Pumps, Rs. 1,500 Crores for Ayushman Yojana, Rs. 875 Crore for construction of houses in Urban Areas under Sabke Liye Awas Yojana.

For the first time Rs. 2,000 Crore allocation for construction of new roads by Public Works Department (PWD). To facilitate traffic in small towns, a provision of Rs. 100 Crore has been made for Ring Roads in Nagar Panchayats & Nagar Palikas.

## Wheels of justice arrive after death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An Indian woman on a death row in Abu Dhabi for the alleged murder of a four-month-old child has already been executed on February 15, the Delhi High Court hearing her father's plea about her well-being was informed on Monday. On being informed about the development, Justice Sachin Datta termed it "very unfortunate".

"It is over. She was executed on February 15. Her last rites will be held on March 5," Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma told the court. The submission was made in a hearing on a petition by the 33-year-old woman's father seeking to know her well-being.

Shahzadi Khan was handed over to the Abu Dhabi police on February 10, 2023 and she was sentenced to death on July 31, 2023. She was lodged in the Al Wathba jail. Shabbir Khan, a resident of Uttar Pradesh's Banda, said there was "profound uncertainty" regarding his daughter Shahzadi's situation and his repeated applications to the Ministry



Shahzadi Khan (L) pictured here when she was alive; her father Shabbir Khan (R) speaks to press after her execution X/PTI

of External Affairs (MEA) for clarification were fruitless.

The plea further alleged that Shahzadi was inadequately represented before the local courts in the case over the alleged murder of her employer's four-month-old child and she was pressured into confessing, leading to the imposition of the death penalty on her.

During the hearing, the petitioner's counsel said his limited prayer was to know whether his daughter was alive or she had been hanged. He said on February 14, Shahzadi had called the family from the prison saying that she would be executed in a day or two and this would be her last call. Since then, they were unaware of her well-being, he said. The Centre's counsel told the court that the Embassy officials and the petitioner were in touch and arrangements were being made so that the family could attend their daughter's last rites in Abu Dhabi.

"We did our best. We hired a law firm there to represent her in court. But the laws there deal with the murder of an infant very severely," he submitted.



Indian cricket captain Rohit Sharma; Congress spokesperson Shama Mohamed PTI

## Congress in pickle over fat shaming

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress was left re-faced after its national spokesperson Shama Mohamed stirred controversy with her remarks on Indian cricket captain Rohit Sharma, calling him "fat for a sportsman" and the "most unimpressive" captain in India's history.

As the post triggered widespread backlash, the party quickly intervened, asking her to delete it but till then the remarks drew backlash from many, including BJP leaders. Her remarks came amid the Indian cricket team's undefeated run at the ongoing Champions Trophy.

While Congress asserted that Shama Mohamed's remarks about the cricketing legend do not reflect the party's position, BJP leader and Delhi minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa said it was shameful that an official spokesperson of the leading national party gave such a statement. "This is Congress statement. They feel that only one person is fit for everything and that is former party chief Rahul Gandhi," Sirsa said.

"They are so against the country that today they are using abusive language against our country's cricket captain. I don't know what they mean by this. It is really shameful and I condemn this. The entire nation is seeing the mentality of the Congress," he said.

## No ban on smartphones in schools: HC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant ruling, the Delhi High Court refused to ban children from bringing smartphones to school saying that such an approach is neither practical nor desirable. The court clarified in its decision that the use of smartphones does not negatively impact teaching, discipline, or the overall educational environment in the classroom. The ruling came on a writ petition (W.P.(C) 15191/2023) filed by a minor student through legal representatives, against Kendriya Vidyalaya, Sector-05, Dwarka, New Delhi and other respondents.

Justice Anup Jairam Bhambhani pointed out that technology has become an essential part of education, making a total ban on smartphones unrealistic. The court also noted that smartphones help students stay connected with their parents, adding to their safety and security. At the same time, the court acknowledged the risks of excessive screen time, social media exposure, and misuse of smartphones. Instead of banning them outright, the focus should be on

responsible usage, it said. The petitioner challenged certain actions taken by the school due to alleged misuse of a smartphone on school premises. The petition filed this petition seeking directions to Kendriya Vidyalaya on permitting use of smartphones. During the course of hearing, Kendriya Vidyalaya requested the Court to frame guidelines on use of smartphones in schools.

To ensure classroom teaching discipline, the court has recommended that the "use of cameras and recording facility on smartphones should also be barred in the common areas of the school as well as in school vehicles."

The court order prescribes that "schools must educate students on responsible online behaviour, digital manners, and the ethical use of smartphones" and that students must be counselled that high levels of screen-time and social media engagement can lead to anxiety, diminished attention spans, and cyber-bullying. In its guiding principles for framing a policy, the court has outlined that such a policy "should permit the use of smartphones for connectivity for purposes of safety and coordination but disallow the use of smartphones for entertainment/recreational use."

The guidelines issued by the Court include: Smartphones must not disrupt classroom teaching, discipline, or the overall educational atmosphere. To this end, the use of smartphones in class must be prohibited; Use of cameras and recording facility on smartphones should also be barred in the common areas of the school as well as in school vehicles; Schools must educate students on responsible online behaviour, digital manners, and the ethical use of smartphones. Students must be counselled that high levels of screen-time and social media engagement can lead to anxiety, diminished attention spans, and cyber-bullying; The policy should permit use of smartphones for connectivity for purposes of safety and coordination but disallow the use of smartphones for entertainment/recreational use;

## Omar dismiss BJP alliance

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU



J and K CM Omar Abdullah during the first day of the Budget session of the state Assembly PTI

Dispelling political grapevine centered around fresh political realignment in Jammu and Kashmir, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Monday clarified that there are currently no plans for an alliance with the ruling party in the Centre.

"We are not talking about any alliance (with the BJP); neither is there any scope nor the need. Our thoughts also do not align", Omar said on day one of the Budget session of J and K Assembly.

If we talk about J and K, our thoughts are vastly different... We will hold discussions on everything

(during the session)," he asserted.

On the other hand, unsparing Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Chief Mehbooba Mufti Monday accused the Omar Abdullah-led National Conference (NC) government of acting as an extension of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state.

The former chief minister suggested that the NC was attempting to legitimise the BJP's actions over the past six years, including the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019.

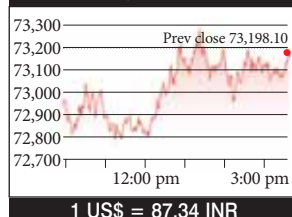
Addressing media persons in Srinagar, Mufti said Omar says how he will get it (Article 370) from the BJP. When BJP could talk on abrogating Article 370 for 70 years, at least you (Omar) can speak on this and say this was done illegally," she said.

She said that people voted for Omar Abdullah hoping the government would address issues of disempowerment, as well as concerns over property, minerals, and jobs.

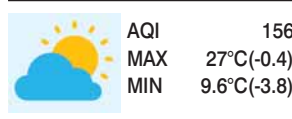
"I did not expect miracles from the NC in four months, but at least they should have raised their voice on such issues," she said.

Mufti said that besides Article 370 and statehood restoration, several issues were being faced by the public.

## MARKETS



## WEATHER



## Mayawati expels nephew, after clipping his wings

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a major political development, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supreme Mayawati expelled Akash Anand from the party, days after stripping him of all key responsibilities, including the post of National Coordinator. Announcing her decision, Mayawati stated that during BSP's All-India meeting yesterday, Akash Anand was relieved of his responsibilities due to prioritising personal interests over the party. She alleged that he remained heavily influenced by his father-in-law Ashok Siddharth, which led to his removal from the post of National Coordinator and other key roles.

Mayawati emphasised that Akash had the opportunity to demonstrate maturity and remorse over this decision. However, she accused him of reacting in a manner that reflected arrogance, selfishness, and a non-missionary mindset, heavily influenced by his father-in-law.

"I have always advised and punished such individuals in the party who allow personal influences to overshadow the BSP's ideology. Therefore, in the interest of Dr BR Ambedkar's self-respect movement and to uphold the discipline established by Kanshi Ram, Akash Anand is being expelled from the party, just like his father-in-law," Mayawati stated.

## Indian dolphins thrive away from humans in Ganga

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The first population estimation of riverine dolphins in India has revealed the presence of 6,324 dolphins in the Ganga, Brahmaputra and Indus River systems, according to a government report published on Monday.

The Ganges River dolphin, known for its unique features, is found in the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river system and its tributaries across India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan.

A small population of the Indus river dolphin, a close relative of the Ganges river dolphin, is found in the Indus River system in India.

As part of "Project Dolphin", a comprehensive survey was conducted for the first time to estimate the population of river dolphins across eight states — Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam and Punjab. It is one of the world's largest freshwater surveys, covering the entire range of the Ganges river dolphin in the Ganga and Brahmaputra, as well as the Indus river dolphin in the

Beas river, according to the report "Population Status of River Dolphin in India". The survey estimated 6,324 Ganges river dolphins (range: 5,977-6,688) and three Indus river dolphins. The findings suggest that dolphins thrive in areas with adequate water depth and minimal human disturbances, it said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Project Dolphin on August 15, 2020, to conserve dolphins and other aquatic ecosystems. Monitoring dolphin populations is crucial for conservation, especially for river dolphins, which have a slow growth rate and live in some of the world's most threatened habitats.

The survey covering over 8,000 km was conducted from 2021 to 2023. It included eight states -- along the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers and their tributaries, as well as the Beas river.

During the survey, 58 rivers were assessed. Of these, 28 rivers were actively surveyed by boat, while 30 were studied through road surveys, focusing on locations where the Ganges river dolphin had been historically reported.

## A WILD ENCOUNTER



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a lion safari at the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary on the occasion of the World Wildlife Day in Gujarat's Junagadh district PTI



# Delhi budget in last week of March: CM

# Suspended MLAs barred from legislature premises



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Monday ruled that any MLA who is suspended or marshalled out must vacate the Vidhan Sabha premises entirely.

The ruling comes in response to a dispute over whether the suspended AAP MLAs could remain in certain areas of the Assembly complex, such as the lawns and the office of the Leader of Opposition. Leader of the Opposition Atishi contended that according to the rule book, these areas were not covered under the suspension rules, allowing the MLAs to protest inside the premises.

Atishi criticised the barring of suspended AAP MLAs from the Assembly premises, calling it entirely illegal and a violation of established rules. He argued that, as per the rule book, suspended members are not prohibited from entering the Assembly complex, including the Gandhi statue area and the Leader of Opposition's office. Despite this, AAP MLAs were unlawfully stopped from entering.

However, the Speaker cited Rule 277 to clarify that a suspension meant complete removal from the Assembly premises. "From now on, any MLA who is suspended or marshalled out will have to leave the premises altogether," he ruled, reinforcing the authority of the Speaker's office in such matters.

Speaker Gupta, while addressing the Assembly, emphasized the crucial role of maintaining peace and order within the House. He highlighted the Speaker's authority to take necessary measures to ensure decorum and uninterrupted legislative proceedings. He elaborated on the Speaker's power to direct the withdrawal of any member whose conduct is disorderly or defiant. In such cases, the concerned member must immediately withdraw from the House and remain absent for the remainder of the day's sitting.

Furthermore, the Speaker may name a member under specific circumstances, including: Non-compliance with the



Delhi Vidhan Sabha

Ranjan Dimri

Speaker's order to withdraw; Inadequacy of prior disciplinary measures; Wilful and persistent obstruction of proceedings; Repeated disorderly conduct within the same session.

Once a member is named, a motion for suspension may be moved by the Leader of the House, the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, or any other member in their absence. The suspension period varies: First occasion - Three sittings; Second occasion - Seven sittings and Subsequent occasions - Remainder of the session (unless the House decides otherwise).

The suspended member must immediately withdraw from the precincts of the House. Failure to comply may result in an extended suspension for the remainder of the session without further action. Additionally, a suspended member is barred from entering the House premises or participating in any legislative or committee proceedings.

Speaker Gupta underscored that these provisions are essential to uphold the dignity of the House and ensure smooth legislative functioning. He urged all members to adhere to decorum and engage in constructive discussions in the interest of governance and public welfare.

The AAP leader explained that the suspension of a member from the Assembly extends to the Assembly chamber, galleries, control rooms of the Secretariat, Speaker and Deputy Speaker's chambers, committee rooms, library,

reading hall, party rooms, and all areas under the Assembly Secretariat's jurisdiction. She further said, "However, the rule book does not include the Assembly lawns, the area around the Gandhi statue, or the Leader of Opposition's office. AAP MLAs protested near Babasaheb Dr BR Ambedkar's statue, which, as per the rule book, does not fall under the Assembly premises." The Delhi LoP asserted, "You unlawfully and unconstitutionally stopped us from entering through the gate. There is no provision in the rule book that bars our entry, nor was any order issued to restrict us."

AAP MLA Kuldeep Kumar strongly opposed being forced out of the Assembly premises after his expulsion from the House on Monday.

A controversy erupted after 21 Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs, who were recently suspended over their protest against the alleged removal of B R Ambedkar's portrait from the Chief Minister's Office, were barred from entering the Assembly premises on February 27 and 28.

The suspended MLAs had staged a protest inside the Assembly complex, holding Ambedkar's portraits and raising slogans. The situation escalated when they were barred from demonstrating at the Mahatma Gandhi statue on the premises, prompting Atishi to call the move "unprecedented" and an attack on democratic traditions.

The BJP-led government, which recently won the Delhi Assembly elections with 48 out of 70 seats, has defended the suspensions.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with Cabinet Ministers Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, Ashish Sood during a press conference about the Budget

Ranjan Dimri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The newly elected BJP led Delhi government will present 'Viksit Delhi' Budget between March 24 and 26. Announcing this, Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta said on Monday that the 'Viksit Delhi' Budget will be presented in the Assembly between March 24 and 26, with her government seeking input from all societal segments. The Chief Minister gave an email ID (viksitdelhibudget-25@delhi.gov.in) and a phone number (9999962025) and invited people to submit their suggestions for the budget. She said there is a website for the people's suggestions. Addressing a press conference, Gupta said, "The budget session will take place from March 24 to 26." "The people of Delhi gave the BJP an opportunity with a majority of seats. Under the leadership of Modi-ji, all the promises made to the people will be fulfilled," she said, adding that "public welfare and development will be our top priority." "The government will strive to take all sections of society along for the development of Delhi, incorporating their suggestions," the chief minister said. All her Cabinet

ministers including Parvesh Sahib Singh, Ashish Sood, Manjinder Singh Sirsa and Dr Pankaj Singh were present at the press conference. Gupta outlined that "financial assistance for women, expansion of health services, promoting public transport, reducing pollution, cleaning the Yamuna, employment, welfare of senior citizens, and other important issues were part of our manifesto. Our aim now is to take into account the priorities of the people of Delhi and prepare the budget outline accordingly." "Instructions have been given to officials of all departments to include the suggestions of all stakeholders to increase public participation and incorporate them into the budget. To facilitate this, an email address (ViksitDelhiBudget\_25@delhi.gov.in) and WhatsApp number (9999962025) have been launched, allowing any citizen of Delhi to submit their suggestions," the Delhi chief minister said. The Chief Minister said she would hold a series of meetings in the run-up to the beginning March 5 when she will meet with women's

organisations. Gupta said they have invited over 5,000 women from different associations to the Delhi Assembly to take their inputs for the budget. "We have also invited several others from sectors like education, rural development as well as farmers, and youths from across the city to the Delhi Vidhan Sabha on March 6 to submit written suggestions. Also, Delhi government MLAs and cabinet ministers are directed to consult with farmers, slum dwellers, young people, and working people before incorporating their recommendations into the budget. The government aims to prepare a budget that brings major benefits to the people of Delhi and enhances their overall well-being," she said. "On March 6, we are inviting business and industrial organisations to present their suggestions. In this series, we will meet with all concerned citizens of Delhi to gather their suggestions. Our collective effort will be to ensure that this is a people's budget," the Delhi Chief Minister said. "Viksit Delhi Budget 2025-26 will be a significant milestone in the city's development. The

government's objective is to ensure that this budget delivers major benefits to the people of Delhi and brings greater prosperity and happiness to their lives", she further added. The Chief Minister also thanked the people of Delhi for electing her government with a historic mandate and emphasised that this budget will be a crucial step towards fulfilling the vision of a developed Delhi. She assured that her government will not rest until every promise made in the Sankalp Patra is fulfilled. Further, Gupta said that only two Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports have been tabled in the assembly so far and they have already exposed multiple corruption charges against the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government. "The AAP has already been exposed before the people of Delhi. They came to Delhi wearing the cloak of honesty, but crossed every limit of dishonesty. 12 more CAG reports are yet to be tabled and more irregularities are likely to surface," she said. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva speaking on the upcoming Budget Session of

the Assembly, praised Chief Minister Rekha Gupta's initiative to make the budgeting process more inclusive, stating that it will reflect the voice of the people. Sachdeva said, Sachdeva stated that since Delhi has a "government of the common people," the budget will be presented only after considering the views of the public, and it will reflect the vision of holistic development for Delhi. "The Delhi Chief Minister has announced that the Budget Session will begin on March 24. I believe this initiative to invite people from various sections of society to the office for discussions and suggestions is commendable." Whether it is women, traders, or other groups, this approach ensures that the budget will be for the people, by the people. The Prime Minister has clearly stated that developing Delhi into a modern capital is a priority, and this will be the first step in that direction," he added. Sachdeva criticised Aam Aadmi Party leaders for disrupting proceedings and discussions in the assembly, noting that everyone has seen what has been happening in the assembly for the past 12 years.

## LG unveils restored heritage structures at Sanjay Van

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Monday unveiled restored heritage structures at Sanjay Van, developed by Delhi Development Authority (DDA), as part of his sustained efforts to restore and preserve Delhi's rich heritage. Two historic structures and a well have been restored at its original glory. In one of the historic structures, a water cascade has been installed. The restoration work has been done without disturbing the natural setting, DDA said. MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, area MLA Gajinder Singh Yadav and Vice Chairman DDA Vijay Kumar Singh were also present. When Saxena first visited Sanjay Van in May 2023, this site was a decrepit and deplorable location of crumbling heritage structures surrounded by overgrowth of vegetation, dirt and garbage. Years of neglect had hidden the jewels here, threatening them to be forgotten from the pages of history. He ensured that conservation of historic structures, environmental upgradation works and restoration of the site were initiated in a mission mode. Various decayed heritage structures have been restored to their pristine historic glory and the site has been transformed into a remarkable public green space under his direct supervision. Speaking at the occasion, Saxena said, "We are making all efforts to revive and restore heritage sites and handing them over to the people of Delhi so that they become their stakeholder guardians." He further said holistic development is being undertaken for the people of Delhi as part of government's vision to provide ease of living to the residents.

## Speaker reads out LG letter in Assembly

Staff Reporter n New Delhi

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Monday read out a letter from Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena addressing the House, emphasising the need for a mission-mode strategy to achieve developmental goals. "I am deeply grateful to the esteemed House and all the Honorable Members for this honor. A meaningful and positive discussion took place on my address, which serves as

the vision document of the government for the welfare of the people. To implement the development-related initiatives outlined in my address, we must adopt a mission-mode strategy. I am delighted to learn that the government has already begun taking action in this direction," the Lieutenant Governor said in his letter. "I received a letter from the Honorable Speaker of the Delhi Assembly dated February 28, 2025. In this letter, I was informed that the House had

passed a motion of thanks for my address delivered during the Assembly session held on February 25, 2025. Once again, I congratulate the Honorable Members and extend my heartfelt best wishes for their efforts toward the holistic development of Delhi and its people," he wrote in his letter. Expressing his gratitude to the members, he also acknowledged the Delhi Assembly for passing a motion thanking him for his inaugural address.

## Atishi questions BJP's intention amidst slugfest

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Atishi on Monday accused the ruling BJP of hurling abuses at Arvind Kejriwal and her in the House and asked if it intended to spend its five-year term attacking AAP instead of working for the people. "With the ruling party upping the ante on the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) findings against the previous AAP government, Atishi said she was glad that the BJP was at least discussing CAG reports after showing no faith in them in the states ruled by it. "I am happy that the BJP is finally talking about the CAG report. In the last 15 to 20 years, I have never seen them show such faith in the CAG's findings. When the CAG report in Uttarakhand highlighted irregularities in the forest department's spending on iPhones, the BJP did not discuss it. "Similarly, when the CAG report on the Dwarka Expressway revealed that a road approved at ₹ 19 Crore per km was built at ₹ 250 Crore per km, the BJP did not debate it either. But now, at least because of us, they are discussing it," Atishi said. Recalling how a BJP MLA had referred to her as "Shurpanakha" (a derogatory reference), she said that while the people of Delhi elected their representatives to work for them, BJP leaders were instead focused on insulting



LoP in the Delhi Assembly Atishi arrives at the Vidhan Sabha

Ranjan Dimri

and abusing the Aam Aadmi Party, Arvind Kejriwal and herself. "Will they spend the next five years just abusing us?" she asked. After walking out of the Assembly while Chief Minister Rekha Gupta was speaking, Atishi told reporters, "The Assembly has been in session for four days, and at least 55 leaders have presented their views. Running the Assembly costs lakhs of rupees, yet the BJP is only using it to abuse AAP. "I want to say--abuse us as much as you want, but the people of Delhi did not elect you to hurl insults. In these four days, not a single

constructive discussion has taken place." She also accused the BJP of failing to fulfill its poll promises. "PM Modi and the BJP had promised that the first cabinet meeting would approve the ₹2,500 financial assistance for women. But today is March 3, and in five days, March 8 will arrive -- yet there is no sign of that ₹2,500. As soon as we raised this issue, the BJP panicked and cut off our microphones. "The BJP has no intention of providing financial assistance to the women of Delhi, and on March 8, there will be no money for them either," she claimed.

## Sparks fly in Assembly over CAG reports

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling BJP and AAP slugged it out over a discussion on the CAG report on public health infra in the city, on the last day of the first session of the newly constituted Delhi Assembly, with Speaker Vijender Gupta marshalling out three opposition MLAs. The AAP MLA Jarnail Singh was marshalled out by the Speaker as he raised slogans over BJP's promise to pay ₹ 2,500 to women of Delhi after coming to power when Chief Minister Rekha Gupta was speaking. The remaining AAP MLAs including Leader of Opposition Atishi walked out after that. Earlier, the Speaker marshalled out AAP MLAs Anil Jha and Kuldeep Kumar over using "unparliamentary" language during the discussion. Gupta later said that any

member marshalled out or suspended from the House would be required to leave the Assembly premises immediately. If such a member does not leave the Assembly premises, then he or she will be automatically suspended for the rest of the time period of the session. As the tensions flared during the discussion, the Speaker directed marshals to take out AAP MLA Anil Jha for using "unparliamentary" language. Jha made comments while BJP MLA Ashok Goel was slamming the previous AAP government over the condition of health services under its rule. BJP MLA Karnail Singh accused Jha of hurting Hindu sentiments by comparing the discussion in the House by saying "Ramleela is going on". Speaker Vijender Gupta asked Jha to apologise to the House. As the din continued in the House with members on both

sides simultaneously, Gupta asked the marshals to take out Jha. AAP MLA from Kondli, Kuldeep Kumar was also marshalled out by the Speaker for using "unparliamentary" language. The Chief Minister slammed the AAP over the condition of health services in Delhi under the 10-year rule of the party. "They are asking when will we give ₹ 2,500 to the women. They have left the Delhi government drowned in debts of crores of rupees. "Inki Aukat Nahi Hai Hame Poochen, ₹ 2,500 kab doge" (they have no status to question us about ₹ 2,500)" an infuriated Gupta said. She asserted it's our promise and we will definitely give the money to the women but the AAP is in no position to tell us when the BJP government will do it. The AAP MLAs defended the previous government of their

party, saying Delhi topped the country in the health services index. Senior AAP leader Gopal Rai in a spirited defence said that the CAG report itself mentioned that Delhi was in the number one spot in health services in the country. Rai stopped speaking when the Speaker rang the bell alerting him that the time allotted to him was over, and refused to continue further even when Gupta allowed him to continue. AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha also criticised the BJP saying the ruling party should tell the people what are they going to do to improve health services in Delhi, instead of levelling allegations at his party. During this, Deputy Speaker and BJP MLA Mohan Singh Bisht lost his temper. He said, "If I sit on the chair, I will immediately throw you out. We will show you how the House runs.

## Speaker warns breach of privileges over Assembly photo



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an unprecedented move, AAP MLA from Tilak Nagar, Jarnail Singh used his mobile phone to take a photo from the ongoing proceedings of the Delhi Assembly on Monday and posted it on X (formerly Twitter). The action prompted Speaker Vijender Gupta to warn him of a possible breach of privilege. The post caused an uproar in the assembly, with the BJP MLAs seeking action against the AAP MLA from Tilak Nagar. The issue was raised in

the House by BJP members who demanded action by the Speaker against Singh. Speaker Gupta on Monday warned AAP MLA of breach of privilege action for posting a picture of the ongoing House session on X and asked him to remove the image. Singh, later expressed regret for his action. In his now-deleted post, the AAP MLA claimed that discussions were underway in the absence of ministers. "Who will answer on behalf of the government?" he wrote on X.

Public Works Department (PWD) minister Parvesh Verma said that it was "a serious matter" as clicking photos during the session is prohibited. BJP MLA Ajay Mahawar demanded Mr Singh's phone "be confiscated", adding that the matter "should be referred to the committee for further action". "It is being seen for the first time in Delhi Assembly that House discussion was going on without the (presence of) ministers. "I asked why the cabinet was not present here. We got no answer. I objected to it and tweeted it. I raised my objection. Who will give a reply on behalf of the government," Singh said in his post while sharing a photo of the House sitting. He defended his action, saying when videos of the Assembly session can be posted on social media, why can't he share a photo of the House proceedings.

The Speaker interjected, asking him, "Tell us, will you delete your tweet?" He then issued a warning to Jarnail Singh: "We are issuing a warning to you. And the House urges you to delete the tweet". The Speaker, citing rules, said that the live broadcast of proceedings was done with his permission, while Singh posted pictures without his nod or bringing the matter to his attention. He asked Singh if he would apologise for his action, following which the AAP MLA expressed regret. Gupta also said that the House wished that he should delete the photo on social media, but Singh did not do so immediately. The Speaker tried to pacify the BJP MLAs, saying Singh had expressed regret and agreed to delete the photo. The AAP MLA, however, did not delete the post immediately.



# Provisions for complete Naxal eradication made in budget

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

For the complete eradication of Naxal in Chhattisgarh, some important provisions have been made in the state budget.

As many as 3,200 additional posts of Bastar Fighters will be created to eradicate the menace.

To play a crucial role in the anti-Naxal operations, a dedicated Special Operations Group (SOG) similar to National Security Guard (NSG) will also be set up in the state.

Also, new police stations will be established in Elmagunda and Dabbakonta, two highly naxal affected villages in Sukma district.



Meanwhile, Rs 25 crore has been allocated under the "Niyad Nellanar" (My Beautiful Village) initiative to

ensure the reach of government schemes in villages of Bastar division. To safeguard mineral

resources, a State Industrial Security Force (SISF) like Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), will be created.

# Chhattisgarh budget will accelerate development: CM



STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Monday said the budget for the fiscal 2025-26 would accelerate the development of the state at a higher speed.

Apart from measures to improve the "agricultural economy", a foundation has been laid to develop Chhattisgarh as an industrial

"Apart from measures to improve the "agricultural economy", a foundation has been laid to develop Chhattisgarh as an industrial and IT hub"

and IT hub in the state budget, the Chief Minister added.

Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma said that the budget will take the state on a new path of development in accordance with 'Atal Nirman Year'. Sizeable financial provisions have been made for the welfare of farmers, youth, women and all sections of society in the state budget, he added.



Description	Budget Estimates 2024-25	Budget Estimates 2025-26	Growth %
1 Revenue Receipts	1,25,900	1,41,000	12%
2 State Own Revenue	68,400	76,000	11%
3 Grants from Centre	57,500	65,000	13%
4 Capital Receipts	21,600	24,100	12%
5 Total Receipts	1,47,500	1,68,100	12%
6 Revenue Expenditure	1,34,840	1,38,196	11%
7 Capital Expenditure	22,300	26,341	18%
8 Loans and Advances	300	463	52%
9 Total Expenditure	1,47,444	1,68,000	12%
10 Revenue Surplus/Deficit	+1,060	+2,804	
11 Fiscal Deficit	-15,696	-22,300	
12 Fiscal Deficit as % of GDP	2.90%	2.97%	

# Bhupesh dubs C'garh budget 'extremely disappointing'

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Monday dubbed the state budget for the fiscal 2025-26 as 'extremely disappointing'.

Criticising the budget, Baghel said, there is no new initiative for farmers, no plan for the unemployed and no innovative move to reduce inflation.

He also pointed out the failure of the state budget to fulfill Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise to provide LPG cylinders at the rate of Rs 500 per cylinder is



pathetic. Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) Chief Deepak Baj said that the state failed to fulfill the expectations of the



public. Baj also alleged, there is nothing in the budget for the tribal community besides lack of provision to increase the income of the poor.

# Handwritten budget presented for first time in Chhattisgarh

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

For the first time in the history of Chhattisgarh, a handwritten budget was presented in the Assembly initiating a new tradition, the government said on Monday.

Finance Minister O.P. Choudhary presented a 100-page budget of Rs 1.65 lakh crore.

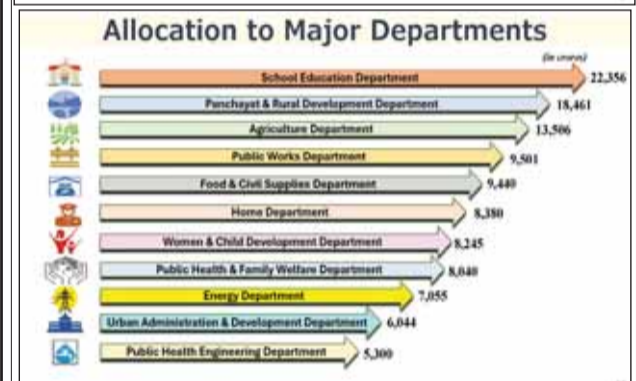
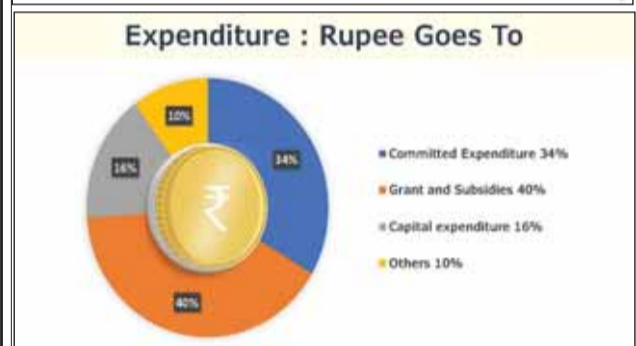
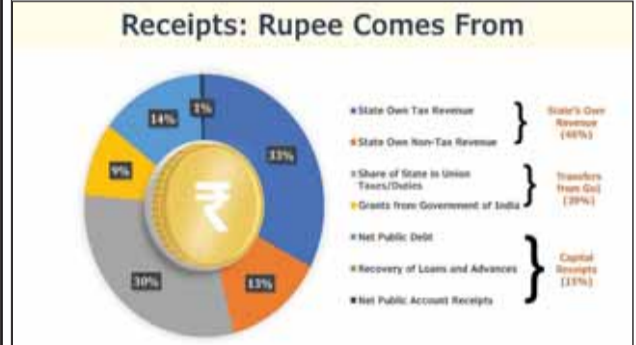
Choudhary called it a return to traditions promoting originality.

He said that presenting a handwritten budget in this digital age carried a distinct identity and historical



importance. He claimed it would

promote authenticity and transparency in the system.



# Trade bodies welcome budget



STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Trade bodies in Chhattisgarh have welcomed and heaped praises on the state budget 2025-26 passed on Monday.

Finance Minister O.P. Choudhary presented a massive budget of Rs 1.65 lakh crore at the Assembly—Rs 17,554 crore more than the previous year presented. Chhattisgarh Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCCI) President Amar Parwani said, the budget will accelerate the economic development of the state.

He praised the provisions for women's empowerment, upliftment of the poor and infrastructural development. He thanked the

government for the decision to provide land to CCCI at concessional rates for the establishment of a state office of this unit.

At the same time, Chhattisgarh President of the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) Jitendra Doshi termed it a 'Development related Budget' that will take the state's business community, start-ups and farmers to new heights.

The decision to give priority to local traders will further strengthen the business scenario, he said.

Some of the key highlights for the business sector include logistics and infrastructure improvement, establishment of agriculture-based industries and food parks.

# Mahasamund declared arid district



STAFF REPORTER MAHASAMUND

Ahead of the summer season, authorities of Mahasamund district declared it as arid area on Monday.

This move of the government is to ensure availability of adequate amounts of drinking water and to curb activities involving wastage of water.

Collector and District Magistrate Vinay Kumar Langhe issued an order under Section 03 of the Chhattisgarh Drinking Water Protection Act 1986, that will be effective till further notice.

During this summer season, excavation activities seeking water sources will only be allowed for drinking water. They too will have to be pre-permitted.

**खतीसगढ़ शासन जल संसाधन विभाग**  
कार्यालय कार्यपालन अभियंता,  
जल प्रबंध संभाग क्र. 02 बलौदाबाजार (छ.ग.)  
ई-प्रोक्च्यूरमेंट निविदा सूचना  
Main Portal: <http://cgprocurement.gov.in>  
WRD Portal: <http://wrdd.cgprocurement.gov.in>  
निरस्तीकरण सूचना

इस कार्यलय द्वारा आमंत्रित सिस्टम क्रमांक 162739 (प्रथम आमंत्रण) निविदा सूचना क्रमांक 06/व.ले.लि./ ई-प्रोक्च्यूरमेंट/2024-25 दिनांक 13/12/2024, जिसका जी नंबर 242504595/6 दिनांक 17/12/2024 में प्रतिभागी निविदाकार की संख्या निरस्त होने के कारण निविदा निरस्त की जाती है।

कार्यपालन अभियंता  
जल प्रबंध संभाग क्र. 02 बलौदाबाजार  
कुत्ते मुख्य अभियंता महानदी परियोजना  
जल संसाधन विभाग, रायपुर (छ.ग.)  
G-242505644/4

# State budget is a boastful document: NSUI

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Raipur President of the National Students' Union of India Shantanu Jha on Monday called the Chhattisgarh Budget a boastful document. He said there were no concrete plans for the youth, nor any real relief for

students. Students have not received digital learning facilities, free coaching or any concrete help for competitive exams, he claimed.

The BJP government is only engaged in making speeches while no work is being done at the ground level, he quipped.

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH, WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER  
KHARUNG WATER RESOURCES DIVISION BILASPUR,  
DISTT. BILASPUR (C.G.)

**e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE**  
eProcurement Portal: <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>  
NT No.: 24.25&26/SAC/2024-25 Dated: 28.02.2025  
Online Tenders are invited for the following works:-

NT No.	Tender System No.	Name of work	Probable Amount
24/SAC/24-25 Dt. 28.02.25	164752 (Second call)	CONSTRUCTION OF SCAPE AT RD 2310 M.RD 3960 M.RD 5730 M.&RD 8340 M. AND SILT CLEARANCE FORM RD 2400 M. TO 12000 M. OF MAIN CANAL OF BHARARI DIVERSION SCHEME.	101.05 Lakhs
25/SAC/24-25 Dt. 28.02.25	164755 First call	RENOVATION WORK OF BANIYADH TANK WITH REPAIR OF BUND CONSTRUCTION OF SPILL CHANNEL. SHUT FALL, CANAL REPAIR AND LINING WORK UNDER BLOCK MASTURI, DISTT-BILASPUR	224.37 Lakhs
26/SAC/24-25 Dt. 28.02.25	164758 First call	IMPROVEMENT WORK OF PANBHARIYA TANK AT VILLAGE- SEEPAT BLOCK MASTURI, DISTT- BILASPUR	Lakhs 267.01

(Probable Amount of Contract based on SOR 22.08.2022)  
The details can be viewed and downloaded online directly from the Government of Chhattisgarh Integrated e-Procurement Portal (<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>) from Date 07.03.2025, at 17.31 Hours (IST) onwards.  
NOTE: 1- All eligible/intrested contractors/bidders are mandated to get enrolled on the Integrated e-procurement portal (<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>) and get approval on specific vendor class from PWD under Centralized Contractor/Supplier Registration in order to download the tender documents and participate in the subsequent bidding process.  
2- It is mandatory for the tenderer to use the certificate issued for Pre Bid Qualification (Valid up to 30.09.2025) in the year 2024 in this tender.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER  
KHARUNG W.R. DIVISION  
BILASPUR  
G-242505677/5

**कार्यालय कार्यपालन अभियंता**  
**लोक स्वास्थ्य यात्रिकी विभाग, खाण्ड बलरामपुर (छ.ग.)**  
E-mail: [ecbairam-phe-cg@nic.in](mailto:ecbairam-phe-cg@nic.in)  
नि.सू.क्र./40/ले.सा./न.जी.नि./ का.अ./ ले.एच. या.वि./21025 बलरामपुर, दिनांक 27.02.2025

**ऑन लाईन द्वितीय निविदा आमंत्रण**

खतीसगढ़ के राज्यपाल की ओर से जल जीवन मिशन अंतर्गत नलकूप खनन कार्य के लिए में निम्नानुसार निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है :-

सि. नि. क्र.	कार्य की अनुमानित लागत (रु.लाख में)
165234	265.98
165235	44.64
165236	230.64

निविदा एवं कार्य का विस्तृत विवरण यथा परहेर राशि, बिड वेधता की तिथि कार्य की अविधि, निविदाकार की श्रेणी, एवं कार्यो तथा स्थल संबंधी जानकारी ऑन लाईन ई-प्रोक्च्यूरमेंट <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> पर दिनांक 05.03.2025 से देखी जा सकती है तथा निविदा दिनांक 19.03.2025 तक बिड जाली जा सकती है। निविदा में आगामी संशोधन पृथक से समाचार पत्रों में प्रकाशित नहीं किए जावेंगे। अतः निविदाकार ऑन लाईन निविदा प्रक्रिया में सतत संवाद में रहें। अन्य विवरण कार्यपालन विभाग पर लोक स्वास्थ्य यात्रिकी विभाग, खाण्ड बलरामपुर में देखे जा सकते हैं।

कार्यपालन अभियंता  
लोक स्वास्थ्य यात्रिकी विभाग  
खाण्ड बलरामपुर (छ.ग.)  
G-242505662/4

**CHHATTISGARH STATE POWER TRANSMISSION CO. LTD.**  
(A Government of Chhattisgarh Undertaking) CIN- U40108CT2003SGC0158200 GSTIN-22AADC5773E1ZXX  
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (SUB-STATION) Quarter No. 04-01, Old CSEB Colony, Tifra, Bilaspur (C.G.) 495223  
Website- [www.cspc.co.in](http://www.cspc.co.in) e-mail- [cessonm.bilaspur@cspc.co.in](mailto:cessonm.bilaspur@cspc.co.in) Ph. No. 07752-493537 Fax No. 07752-493537  
No. 02-17/Pur/T-476/2538/2561 Bilaspur, Date: 25.02.2025

**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

Sealed tenders are invited from eligible experienced contractor on labour contract basis for the following works:-

SN	Tender No.	Particulars	E.M.D
01.	02-17/Pur/TR-476/2538 Dtd.25/02/25 (RFx No. 8100041805)	Job work for carrying out on-site calibration/testing of CT & PT for dedicated 132 KV EHV consumers (CPP/IPP) under EE (MRT-cum:S/s) Dn. CSPCTL, Korba.	8,600.00

**Cost of Tender Documents (Non-refundable) incl. GST@18%** 2,000.00  
Last Date & Time of Sale of Tender: - 26/03/2025 15:00 Hrs  
Last Date & Time of Submission of Tender:- 27/03/2025 15:00 Hrs  
Date & Time of Opening of Tender: - 27/03/2025 15:30 Hrs

**NOTE:-**  
(1) In case any of the above date is declared as holiday, then the particular date will automatically get shifted to next working day.(ii) Any notice for extension of due date of tender opening shall not be published in newspapers. It will be displayed only on official website of the company.(iii) The tender will be processed through e-bidding module of SAP-SRM. Bidders are advised to visit our web site [www.cspc.co.in/cspctl](http://www.cspc.co.in/cspctl) for viewing detailed instructions regarding submission of offer through SAP-SRM.

Chief Engineer (Sub-Station)  
CSPCTL Bilaspur  
SAVE ELECTRICITY | Samvad-43079/2

**IDFC FIRST Bank Limited**  
(erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited)

APPENDIX- IV-A [See proviso to rule 8 (6) & 9 (1)]  
**SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES**  
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) & 9 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s), Co-Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) as per column (iii) that the below described immovable properties as per column (iv) mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" as described hereunder, for the recovery of amount due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd) from Borrower (s) and Co-Borrower (s) as per column (i). For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on IDFC FIRST Bank website i.e. [www.idfcfirstbank.com](http://www.idfcfirstbank.com).

S. No.	(i) Demand Notice Amount	(ii) Agreement Id	(iii) Name of Borrower (s), Co-Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s)	(iv) Mortgage Property Address	(v) Reserve Price Amount	(vi) EMD Amount	(vii) Date and Time of Auction	(viii) Date and Time EMD of Auction	(ix) Date and Time of Inspection	(x) Authorized Officer Name & Contact Number	(xi) Property Images QR Code
1.	INR 14134123.54/- Demand Notice dated: 30-Sep-2019	13599057	Dynamic Hair Solution, Arogya Da Physiofit, Shatrughan Sondhi & Sujata Sondhi	All That Piece And Parcel Of Property Bearing Of Khasara No. 149/36, Potiyakala, Ward No. 52, Ric Durg-1, Tehsil And District- Durg, Chattisgarh, 491001	INR 18181800.00/-	INR 1818180.00/-	20-Mar-2025 11.00 AM to 1.00 PM	19-Mar-2025 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	13-Mar-2025 10:00 AM To 4:00 PM	Name- Vinay Soni Contact Number- 8319378592 Name- Sandesh Jain Contact Number- 8839140796	

Disclaimer: Please note that the said notice is issued for sale of immovable property only and IDFC FIRST Bank Limited has no right to sale of the movable assets, if any, present at the immovable property.

Date: 03.03.2025  
Place: Raipur

Authorised Officer  
IDFC FIRST Bank Limited  
(Formerly known as IDFC Bank Ltd)

**SOUTH EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY**  
**E-TENDER NOTICE**

Tender Notice No.: WRS-R-24-25-CASNUB Dated: 26.02.2025  
Description of Work: Works Contract for Stripping and Fitting of Bogie Components at WRS-R. Apprx. Tender Value: ₹ 46,70,019.84 (Rs. Forty Six Lakhs Seventy Thousand Nineteen and Eighty Four Paise only) including GST @ 18%, Earnest Money: ₹ 93,400.00 (Rs. Ninety Three Thousand Four Hundred only). Quantity and Contractual Period: As per Annexure for a period of 12 (Twelve) Months. Tender Document Cost: ₹ 0.00 (Rs. Nil).  
Bidding Start Date: 06.03.2025. Tender Closing Date and Time: On 20.03.2025 at 15:00 Hrs. Eligibility Criteria: Can be seen on the website Manual Tenders shall not be accepted. The details of tender are available on website [www.irops.gov.in](http://www.irops.gov.in)  
Dy. Chief Mechanical Engineer, WRS, South East Central Railway, PR/WRS/PC/256 Raipur



# PM Modi takes lion safari at Gir wildlife sanctuary on Wildlife Day

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SASAN**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi went on a lion safari at Gir Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat's Junagadh district on Monday morning, on the occasion of the World Wildlife Day.

On World Wildlife Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated the commitment to protect and preserve the incredible biodiversity of the planet.

On December 20, 2013, the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly decided to proclaim March 3 as World Wildlife Day to celebrate and raise awareness about the world's wild fauna and flora.

"Today, on #WorldWildlifeDay, let's

reiterate our commitment to protect and preserve the incredible biodiversity of our planet," Modi said. "Every species plays a vital role - let's safeguard their future for generations to come! We also take pride in India's contributions towards preserving and protecting wildlife," the prime minister said.

In a social media, Modi said the population of Asiatic lions has seen a steady rise due to collective efforts, and commended the contribution of tribals and women living in surrounding areas in preserving the Asiatic lion habitat.

"This morning, on #WorldWildlifeDay, I went on a Safari in Gir, which, as we all know, is home to the



PM Narendra Modi during lion safari at Gir Wildlife Sanctuary PTI

tribal communities and women from surrounding areas in preserving the habitat of the Asiatic Lion," Modi added.

"Over the last decade, the population of tigers, leopards, rhinos have risen too, indicating how deeply we cherish wildlife and are working to build sustainable habitats for animals," he said in another tweet. The prime minister also posted pictures of lions that he came across during the safari.

Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Patel, other ministers and senior forest department officials accompanied Modi during the safari.

The Prime Minister later went to chair the seventh meeting of the National

Board for Wildlife at Sasan Gir, the headquarters of the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary.

The central government has approved more than ₹2,900 Crore for Project Lion, meant for the conservation of Asiatic lions for which Gujarat is the only abode, stated a government release.

Currently, the Asiatic lions inhabit nearly 30,000 square kilometres across 53 talukas in 9 districts of Gujarat, it said.

Additionally, as part of a national project, a National Referral Centre for Wildlife is being established on over 20.24 hectares of land at New Pipalya in Junagadh district, it said.

A high-tech monitoring centre for wildlife tracking and a state-of-the-art hospital have also been set

up in Sasan to strengthen conservation efforts, the release said.

Earlier, Modi had a night halt at Sinh Sadan, a forest guest house managed by the state forest department, in Sasan after his arrival from Somnath where he offered prayers at the Lord Shiv temple, the first among 12 jyotirlingas, on Sunday evening.

On Sunday, Modi also visited Vantara, an animal rescue, conservation and rehabilitation centre located at the Reliance Jamnagar refinery complex. It is a rescue centre dedicated to the welfare of captive elephants and wildlife, providing sanctuary, rehabilitation and medical care to animals rescued from abuse and exploitation.

## HC seeks response on bail of Parliament attack accused

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Delhi High Court on Monday asked the Delhi Police to file its reply on a bail plea filed by Neelam Azad, the sole woman accused arrested in the December 13, 2023 Parliament security breach case.

A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Rajneesh Kumar Gupta also issued notice to the prosecution on Neelam Azad's application seeking condonation of delay in filing the appeal challenging a trial court's September 11, 2024 order dismissing her bail plea.

The court noted there was a delay of 142 days in filing the appeal while the law stipulates a maximum of 90 days for doing the same.

The high court, which initially said the delay was not condonable under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the appeal could not be entertained, was apprised of a Supreme Court order which stated that such appeals cannot be dismissed.

The High Court was informed that recently the apex court has passed an order directing that appeals preferred by the accused will not be dismissed on account of non-condonation of delay beyond 90 days.

The prosecution contended

that the appeal was not maintainable as it was barred by limitation and that Neelam Azad was allegedly part of a deep-rooted conspiracy with other co-accused and there was sufficient evidence that she was in contact with them over the phone.

The bench orally observed, "What was she (Azad) trying to do? In Parliament, she was throwing smoke canisters? What is this?"

Neelam Azad's counsel said she was not carrying any explosives in the Parliament and was standing outside.

The court listed the matter for further hearing on April 16 and called for the electronic record of the trial court in the case.

During the arguments, the counsel appearing for Neelam Azad submitted before the high court that she was not involved in the breach of Parliament security and she had not entered the House. She was standing outside Parliament, the court was also told.

On the issue of delay in filing the appeal, the counsel said Azad belonged to a poor family and they had no money to come to Delhi.

However, the bench said the appeal was filed almost six months after the trial court passed the order.

The trial court had rejected Neelam Azad's bail plea, saying there was sufficient evidence to believe that

allegations against her were "prima facie" true.

It noted that all the accused persons - Neelam Azad, Manoranjan D, Sagar Sharma, Amol Dhanraj Shinde, Lalit Jha and Mahesh Kumawat - already had the knowledge about the threat given by designated terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannu for targeting Parliament on December 13, 2023.

Despite the threat perception, the accused persons being aware of the same carried out the alleged offence in Parliament on the same day, it observed.

In a major security breach on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament terror attack, Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan D jumped into the Lok Sabha chamber from the public gallery during Zero Hour, released yellow gas from canisters and shouted slogans before they were overpowered by some MPs.

Around the same time, two other accused - Amol Shinde and Neelam Azad - sprayed coloured gas from canisters while shouting "tanashahi nahi chalegi" outside Parliament premises.

These four were taken into custody from the spot, while Lalit Jha and Mahesh Kumawat were arrested later.

The prosecution had opposed the bail application, calling the offence "grave".

## Brij Bhushan sexual harassment case: Delhi court records witness statement

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Delhi court on Monday recorded the statement of the kin of one of the women wrestlers who accused ex-WFI chief Brij Bhushan Singh of sexual harassment.

Additional chief metropolitan magistrate Vaibhav Chaurasiya recorded the statement of the witness, the wrestler's husband, during the in-chamber proceeding.

The examination of the witness remained inconclusive and the court posted the hearing on March 25.

On May 21, 2024, the court framed charges of sexual harassment and using force to outrage women's modesty against Singh in the case.

Singh has pleaded not guilty before and claimed trial.

The judge had also framed the charge of criminal intimidation against Singh in the case.

The court further framed criminal intimidation charge against co-accused and former WFI assistant secretary Vinod Tomar in the case.

Delhi Police filed a chargesheet in the case against Singh on June 15 under Sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354A (sexual harassment), 354D (stalking) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC.

During the in-chamber proceedings on an earlier occasion, a minor wrestler said she was satisfied with the Delhi Police's investigation in the case and was not opposed to the closure report it had

submitted.

On June 15, 2023, Delhi Police filed a report before the court seeking cancellation of the case involving the girl after her father made a claim midway through the probe that he levelled false allegations of sexual harassment against Singh to get back at him for perceived injustice to his daughter.

Police recommended dropping the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act case against Singh, but charged him with sexual harassment and stalking in a separate case lodged on the basis of a complaint by six women wrestlers.

Police recommended cancellation of the complaint involving the minor wrestler, saying "no corroborative evidence" was found.

## CDS General begins four-day visit to Australia

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Monday embarked on a four-day visit to Australia to hold talks with the top Australian military brass to explore ways to boost bilateral strategic ties, including in the Indo-Pacific.

He is scheduled to visit a number of military installations of the Australian armed forces during his official engagements from March 4 to 7.

"This visit underscores the growing engagement between the two nations which share a commitment towards strengthening diplomatic and military collaboration under comprehensive strategic partnership," the defence ministry said.

It said the trip reflects the deepening ties between India and Australia in the realm of defence cooperation.

The CDS is scheduled to hold wide-ranging discussions with senior Australian defence officials, including Australia's Chief of Defence Force Gen Admiral David Johnston, Secretary of Defence Greg Moriarty and the Chiefs of the three services.

"The CDS will visit the Force Command Headquarters to gain insights into Australia's operational command structure and discuss potential avenues for joint operations," the ministry said in a statement.

It said General Chauhan will also interact with the Australian Fleet Commander and the Joint Operations Commander.

## Law minister urges safer digital environment for women

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Monday stressed on the need to create a safer digital environment for women, ensuring their dignity and participation in nation-building.

Women must continue to contribute to the country's progress without fear. Cyber crimes should not deter them from moving forward," he said.

Meghwal also unveiled a book titled 'Cyber Saheli', aimed at educating families about cyber safety.

"There is no need to fear cyber threats. 'Cyber Saheli' will act as a guide and support system for everyone," he added.

Highlighting the growing role of women in the IT sector, Meghwal noted that women are leading the way in technology.

"If anyone is leading in the IT sector, it is women. With the advent of AI, new challenges have emerged, but women are equipped to tackle them. Whether it is cyberstalking or other forms of online harassment, women will not only overcome these challenges but also guide the nation forward," Meghwal said.

The minister also praised the recent legislative measures, including the 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures, calling it a game-changer for gender equality.

As Babasaheb Ambedkar said, the progress of a society can be judged by the degree of progress its women have achieved. When women secure their rightful place and representation, no technological challenge, be it cyberstalking or cyber harassment, will be insurmountable.

Women will lead the nation and society forward," Meghwal said.

participation in nation-building.

"Cyber security is a critical issue and it is essential to understand its relationship with women.

Women must continue to contribute to the country's progress without fear. Cyber crimes should not deter them from moving forward," he said.

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## India, Belgium explore defence cooperation in Indo-Pacific

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

India and Belgium on Monday here discussed the possibility of bilateral maritime security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and looked at ways to enhance defence industrial ties.

Ways to bolster India-Belgium defence engagement figured prominently at a meeting between Belgium's Princess Astrid and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

The two sides also agreed to explore the setting up of an institutionalised defence cooperation mechanism between the two nations.

Belgian Defence Minister Theo Francken was also part of the Belgian delegation.

Princess Astrid is leading an Economic Mission to India that comprises top ministers and business leaders.

"Both sides discussed the possibility of defence engagements in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in maritime domain," the defence ministry said.

It said there were discussions on ways and means to enhance bilateral defence industrial cooperation and that Rajnath



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during a meeting with Princess Astrid of Belgium in New Delhi PTI

Singh welcomed Belgian investments in the defence sector.

"He suggested that the Belgian companies could play an important role by expanding their footprint in India and integrating the Indian vendors in their supply chains," the ministry said in a statement.

"Further, both countries agreed to explore an institutionalised defence

cooperation mechanism," it said.

The overall trajectory of India-Belgium ties has witnessed steady expansion in the last few years. The focus of the relations has traditionally been on trade and investment.

India is Belgium's 14th largest export destination and the 16th largest importer to Belgium.

India is Belgium's seventh

largest export destination outside the EU and the sixth largest trade partner outside the EU.

Trade in diamonds dominates the bilateral trade. In 2021, the bilateral trade between Belgium and India totalled Euro 12.22 Billion.

Belgian imports from India in 2021 totalled Euro 6.07 Billion, while Belgian exports to India were Euro 6.15 Billion.

## ED raids Bhutani and WTC

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Monday said it has identified assets worth thousands of crores of rupees following searches in Delhi-NCR against realty firm WTC Group and Bhutani Group. The raids were conducted on February 27 at a dozen locations in Delhi, Noida (Uttar Pradesh) and Faridabad and Gurugram (both in Haryana) against WTC Group and its promoter Ashish Bhalla, and Bhutani Group and its promoter Ashish Bhutani under the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the federal agency said in a statement.

The ED said the case stems from dozens of FIRs filed by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Delhi Police and the Faridabad Police against WTC Group and its promoters Ashish Bhalla, Suparna Bhalla, Abhijeet Bhalla, and Bhutani Infra and others for alleged cheating, criminal breach of trust and committing fraud on hundreds of homebuyers.

These police cases were registered on the basis of complaints from "hundreds" of homebuyers and investors.

The Bhutani Infra said in a statement last week that it severed all ties with the WTC Group recently and "is now fully cooperating with the ED in its investigation."

No comment was immediately available from the WTC Group. The ED said the police FIRs allege that WTC Faridabad Infrastructure Private Limited and its promoters "lured" the general public to invest in their project at Sector 111-114 of the city for residential plots.

The promoters or directors hatched a "criminal conspiracy" and "siphoned off" the plot buyers' hardearned money by not completing the project within the stipulated time and "non-delivery" of the plots for more than 10 years, it said.

It was also alleged in FIRs that the Bhutani Infra group has

acquired the WTC Group and has re-launched the project at Sector 111-114 Faridabad keeping the plot buyers in "disarray" and committing fraud on investors and luring them to "surrender" their units, according to the ED.

During the searches, the agency said, documents related to collection of more than ₹3,500 Crore from various investors were found against 15 projects in Delhi-NCR. It was not stated by the ED where these documents were recovered from.

Out of the 15 major projects being undertaken by the group (WTC), very few deliveries have been given "indicating a well-orchestrated Ponzi scheme" and creation of assets in the name of other entities and siphoning off the funds abroad, it said.

"It was also unearthed during search action that more than ₹200 Crore has been siphoned to Singapore and the US indicating investments overseas for acquiring of overseas assets."

"Additionally, incriminating documents related to the WTC Group and Bhutani Group were seized wherein assets worth thousands of crores in market value have been transferred to the Bhutani Group at a nominal value, thus transferring the proceeds of crime (POC) at a nominal price," the agency alleged.

Documents related to "cash" transactions were also found, it said.

"The agency said it seized several "incriminating" documents related to diversion, layering of funds apart from property documents like sale and registration deeds and laptops, hard drives etc were also seized."

"Additionally, assets to the tune of thousands of crores have been identified in the name of WTC group," it said.

Fixed deposits of WTC Group of companies have also been frozen and seized along with jewellery and bullion worth ₹1.5 Crore, the ED said.

## SC seeks Delhi government's response on remission of murder convict

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court (SC) on Monday asked the Delhi government to decide in two weeks over remission to Sukhdev Yadav alias Pehalwan, serving a 20-year jail term without remission in the 2002 Nitish Katara murder case.

A bench comprising Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan asked the government how the convict, whose 20 years jail term was ending on March 10, 2025, would continue to remain in prison.

"After all, the issue pertains to liberty of a person," the bench

said.

Justice Oka added, "You should have started the process of granting the remission a long time back. How can he be kept in jail after the period of sentence is over."

The bench observed the submissions of solicitor general Tushar Mehta and said, "The case (for remission) of the petitioner shall be considered in two weeks. We accept the assurance and direct that the case (of Pehalwan) be listed for hearing on March 27."

On February 24, the bench questioned Delhi government's submission that it would not

release Pehalwan even after the completion of his actual 20 years jail term in the case.

The bench perused its judgement, which said, "Life imprisonment which shall be 20 years of actual imprisonment without consideration of remission, and fine of ₹10,000."

The Delhi government had said even after the completion of 20 years of actual imprisonment, it wouldn't be releasing the convict.

The top court then ordered the Delhi government home department secretary to file a statement on oath on whether

after completing 20 years of actual sentence, the petitioner should be released and asked its counsel if the state was reading court verdicts this way.

Yadav's plea challenged a November 2024 order of the Delhi High Court, which dismissed his petition for releasing him on furlough for three weeks.

On October 3, 2016, the Supreme Court awarded a 25-year jail term without the benefit of remission to Vikas Yadav and his cousin Vishal for their role in the sensational kidnapping and killing of Katara.

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# BJP MLAs, Hindu groups demand ban on Muslim participation in Braj Holi

**BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW**

A fresh political controversy has erupted in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the Braj Holi celebrations in Mathura-Vrindavan, as BJP lawmakers and Hindu religious groups push for a ban on the participation of Muslims in the festival. The demand has reignited debates on religious inclusion and the growing communal divide in the state's politics. BJP MLA Rajesh Chaudhary openly backed the proposal, alleging that Muslim participation in Hindu festivals leads to

social discord. "By participating in our festival, they carry out incidents like love jihad and harassment," he claimed, echoing a narrative often used by right-wing groups to accuse Muslim men of targeting Hindu women. Adding weight to the demand, the All India Sant Samiti, a prominent Hindu religious organisation, has urged the Yogi Adityanath-led government to impose restrictions on non-Hindu participation. Swami Jitendranand Saraswati, the organisation's national general secretary, accused Muslims of attempting to disrupt Hindu festivals.

"They want to spoil the colour of our celebrations. They want bread from Kumbh and fun from our Holi. We demand a complete ban on the entry of non-Hindus into Mathura-Vrindavan's Holi festivities," he said. The push for restrictions has also extended to economic activities near Hindu religious sites. Dinesh Falahari, an advocate involved in the legal battle over the Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura, has written a letter in blood to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, calling for a ban on Muslim vendors near temples. He claimed that members

of the Muslim community could "defile" food and colors used during the Holi celebrations and accused them of disrespecting Hindu scriptures. The demands have sparked sharp reactions from opposition parties and minority leaders, who see them as part of the BJP's larger electoral strategy to consolidate its Hindu vote bank ahead of upcoming elections. While the Uttar Pradesh government has not issued an official response, critics argue that such statements are in line with the BJP's broader push to reinforce religious divides in politically significant regions

like Mathura. Meanwhile, Muslim religious leader Chaudhary Ibrahlim Hussain dismissed the controversy, stating that Muslim participation in Holi is already minimal. "Colours are used in Holi, which is not acceptable in Islamic beliefs. The Muslim community should not have any objections," he said. With the festival days away, the issue has further deepened the fault lines in Uttar Pradesh's political landscape, raising concerns over whether communal rhetoric is being used as a tool to polarise voters in the state.

# Mahakumbh 2025 unlocks new horizons for religious tourism in UP

**PMS ■ PRAYAGRAJ**

Mahakumbh 2025 has paved the way for new possibilities in religious tourism in Uttar Pradesh. The temple corridors developed by the state government are set to play a crucial role in this transformation. With five major spiritual corridors connecting Prayagraj, they have begun scripting a new chapter in the state's religious and cultural landscape. Mahakumbh was a confluence of faith and a grand cultural spectacle. Various states showcased their unique traditions and heritage through dedicated pavilions, attracting millions of visitors. Among them, the UP Darshan Mandapam emerged as the most visited pavilion, displaying the diverse cultural and tourism aspects of Uttar Pradesh.

According to Aparajita Singh, Regional Tourism Officer of Prayagraj, more than one lakh people visited the Mandapam daily during regular days of the Mahakumbh, while this number surged beyond two lakhs during major bathing festivals. Throughout the 45-day event, more than 65 lakh visitors explored the UP Darshan Mandapam, making it the most frequented pavilion of Mahakumbh 2025. The significance of Mahakumbh extends beyond the event itself, as it has laid the groundwork for a well-connected religious tourism circuit in Uttar Pradesh. Recognising the immense potential of this sector, the state government has developed five major spiritual corridors that seamlessly link Prayagraj with other prominent religious sites. The Prayag-Vindhya-Kashi Corridor connects



A devotee prays after taking holy dip in Maha Kumbh Mela 2025. PTI

Prayagraj to the revered temples of Vindhya Devi Dham and Kashi. At the same time, the Prayagraj-Ayodhya-Gorakhpur Corridor links Prayagraj to the sacred cities of Ayodhya and Gorakhpur. Another key development, the Prayagraj-Lucknow-Naimisharanya Corridor, establishes a direct connection between Prayagraj, the state capital of Lucknow, and the spiritual hub of Naimisharanya. The Prayagraj-Rajapur-Chitrakoot Corridor extends religious tourism to the legendary site of Chitrakoot, and the Prayagraj-Mathura-Vrindavan-Shukirtha Corridor connects Prayagraj with the Krishna circuit, including Mathura, Vrindavan, and the holy site of Shukirtha. These corridors are expected to provide devotees with a structured and convenient experience while boosting local economies through increased tourism activity. In addition to developing these corridors, the UP government

has focused on rejuvenating key religious sites in Prayagraj. The construction of temple corridors and the revitalisation of historic temples are set to have a lasting impact on religious tourism. Among the significant projects, the Hanuman Temple Corridor near the Sangam has been developed to accommodate the growing number of devotees. The Akshayvat Temple and Saraswati Koop Corridor, as well as the Nagvasuki and Alop Shankari Devi Corridor in Daraganj, have further enhanced the accessibility and spiritual significance of these revered sites. Other notable developments include the Bhardwaj Ashram Corridor and the revitalisation of Shringverpur Dham, both offering devotees an enriched religious experience. Additionally, the creation of Shivalaya Park and Triveni Pushp Parmarth Niketan adds a serene and spiritual dimension to the city's tourism landscape.

# NDPP taking steps for peaceful resolution of Naga issue: Governor

**PTI ■ KOHIMA**

Nagaland Governor La Ganesan on Monday asserted that the state's NDPP-led Opposition-less government has collectively taken steps to ensure peaceful resolution of the Naga Political Issue. Addressing the 60-member Nagaland Assembly on the first day of the week-long budget session, Ganesan said the state has been working to fulfil its commitment to the people of the northeastern state. "This House has collectively taken steps to ensure peaceful resolution of the Naga Political Issue. As assured on the floor of this House by the Chief Minister, my Government held a consultative meeting with the apex and influential tribal bodies and civil society organisations on September 12 last year to

deliberate on the Naga Political Issue," he said. The governor also thanked the members for their wholehearted cooperation on this. Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, accompanied by his Cabinet colleagues, on November 21 also met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and apprised him of the desire of the people for an early solution of the Naga Political Issue. Supporting the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) demand for a certain level of autonomy in six districts, the governor said that the state government has submitted its comments on the third draft of the Memorandum of Settlement in this regard. "Substantial progress has been made and we are hopeful that any remaining concerns of the ENPO will be addressed," Ganesan said.

The governor said the narcotic drugs worth more than ₹44 Crore was seized by the police last year, he said. The governor also said the Excise and Prohibition Department made seizures valued at more than ₹1.18 Crore and arrested more than 1,770 people. He said that with agriculture being a key economic driver, the state launched several initiatives under the Digital Agriculture Mission, benefiting 2,21,931 lakh farmers through direct financial support and technological innovations. In addition, 30,500 hectares in the state are now under organic cultivation and a large portion of the produce are marketed outside the state, he said. The National Livestock Mission has also made strides with the establishment of 26 pig breeding farms, helping to

increase meat production, Ganesan said. The government identified 16 Horticulture Model Villages in each district across the state, the Governor said, adding that with a total area coverage of 340 hectares, this initiative has been taken under the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture. The Department of Water Resources, under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), is expecting to complete 270 Surface Minor Irrigation Schemes at an estimated cost of ₹206 Crore within this month, he said. The governor said the government is working to upgrade its power infrastructure, with the construction of new substations and the installation of smart prepaid meters.

grammes aimed at improving the socio-economic condition of the people, including successful implementation of the Public Distribution System (PDS) optimisation, rural development projects, and skill development initiatives. The state government has been proactive in promoting industrialisation, with over 32,000 MSME units now registered and numerous startups, he said. The discussion on the governor's speech will be taken up on Tuesday. Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio made an obituary reference to former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, while Nagaland assembly Speaker Shringain Longkumer remembered late state legislators T A Ngullie, K Zungkum, Bendangangshi Ao, Mhavi Khieya and Kejong Chang.

# TMC's 24-hour ultimatum to ECI SFI, TMCP clash over academic strike

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA**

A day after the Election Commission of India (ECI) offered clarifications regarding duplication of Votes ID card numbers, saying duplication did not necessarily mean fake ID cards. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) mounted fresh attack on the ECI asking it to accept its mistake and take corrective measures or face more embarrassments. TMC leaders Derek O' Brien, said that the ECI should accept the alleged "EPIC scam" related to Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) within 24 hours or face more embarrassment on Tuesday when the TMC would release certain documents. He was accompanied by Kirti Azad and Sagarika Ghose too. The TMC leaders rolled out a list showing about 128 instances of two voters in Bengal and Haryana having the same EPIC number. They showed a third instance where three voters had the same EPIC number. All the 129 instances were allegedly from

Raninagar constituency in Bengal and Barwala in Haryana. Saying that most of the instances shown were from the States ruled by the BJP, Derek said "we want only residents of a state to vote in that state. Only voters of Bengal vote in Bengal. People will be sneaked in from other states to vote." Referring to the 'Epic Scam' the TMC leader said that the ECI had only admitted to the error in the electoral rolls but not accepted them. "Limited appreciation of the EC. I say limited because EC is admitting the error but not accepting the error," he said, warning, "in the next 24 hours, we humbly ask the EC to also accept the error. If not, we will share a document at 9 am on Tuesday morning." He also asked Commission to start and inquiry into the "scam" and find out "who in the BJP is the mastermind," behind. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had earlier slammed the BJP Government for manipulating the ECI and influencing the Chief Election Commissioners in inserting fake names in the electoral

rolls to influence the elections. Claiming success in catching the "fraud" where the "other leaders from Haryana or Delhi failed" she said how, "there are several people who are complaining that duplicate names from Haryana or UP are appearing in their EPIC card numbers," adding this was a ploy to rig elections. "They did this in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Maharashtra and Delhi. The leaders there could not catch the trick of inserting the names of fake voters, but we have been able to catch their trick and we have directed the officials from the DMs and BDOs to the party workers and local leaders to start scrutinizing the electoral rolls and catch the fake voters so that the BJP cannot bring in voters from Bihar, UP and Haryana to vote in Bengal," Banerjee said instituting a committee led by senior party leaders to start door-to-door scrutiny of the electoral rolls. The TMC leadership have been conducting door to door scrutiny of voters' lists in the State for the past several days.

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA**

The activists Students' Federation of India and Trinamool Congress Chatra Parishad clashed at various places of Bengal even as the former tried to enforce strike in university and college campuses demanding the resignation of State Education Minister Bratya Basu holding him responsible for the Saturday's rumpus at Jadavpur University (JU) where several students were injured. The two groups clashed at various places including North Bengal University, Medinipur College, Durgapur, Barurpur and other areas, sources said adding several students were injured in the clashes as one side tried to enforce the strike whereas the other side prevented it. At Barurpur a band of TMC workers entered a district party office of the CPI(M) and put party's central committee member and former MP Sujun Chakrabarty under lock and key. While Jadavpur and Presidency University campuses were deserted look atten-



Members of AIDS during a strike at Jadavpur University in Kolkata. PTI

dance were partially affected in other educational institutions like Calcutta University, Vidya Sagar University, Rabindra Bharati University, North Bengal University and Burdwan University etc. SFI is the students' arm of CPI(M) whereas the TMC is the students' wing of the Trinamool Congress. At least four students were

injured when a Basu's vehicle allegedly knocked them down while they were on Saturday trying to prevent him from leaving the JU campus where he had gone to attend a meeting of the West Bengal University and College Professors' Association a wing of the TMCP. The students had on Saturday noon gheraoed Minister Basu and were asking

for a statement from him regarding a deadline by which the college and university students' elections would be held in the State. Elections to students' bodies had been held up for the past seven-eight years in the state. Regarding the Saturday's commotion contradictory versions emanated from both sides as the Minister said he was ready to talk to the agitating students and in fact received a deputation from the SFI the protesters, whereas the other side he would not listen to them and his car tried to speed away without caring for the students who had formed a human chain in front of his vehicle. "To add insult to injury the police at the instigation of the Minister lodged false non-bailable cases against the students including Indranuj Roy the first year student who is lying in hospital bed with 10 stitches around his right eye. No one knows whether he has lost the vision of that eye. The police brought snatching, molestation and other charges which is obnoxious," said CPI(M) leader Meenakshi Mukherjee.

The Monday's strike however would not affect vehicular movement or business as the protestors did not cause any disruption to road traffic. Though class XII Board exams started from Monday the candidates would not find any difficulty to proceed to their examination centres, sources said. "Tolabaj (extortionists) goons of the TMC had instigated the violence and vandalism on the Jadavpur University campus on Saturday during the AGM of WBCUPA in the presence of the Minister, and he would not control them, it was they who damaged university properties. They were rank outsiders, but the Police were harassing the students," SFI state committee member Shuvajit Sarkar alleged. The TMC leadership however said that the bandh had little impact on the State's academic institutions. "Some Leftist goons who had disrupted the State for three decades tried to interrupt but have been chased away," said TMC leader Kunal Ghosh adding "the Government will not allow any indiscipline."

# Telangana tunnel collapse: Rescue teams focus on scientist-identified locations

**PTI ■ NAGARKURNOOL**

Rescue teams involved in the Telangana tunnel collapse operation are inspecting locations identified by scientists for possible human presence, following a radar survey, as they only detected metals at other spots, officials said on Monday. Scientists from the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) in Hyderabad conducted a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey inside the tunnel to look for signs of human presence. They (are) trying at the other locations (given by scientists). The scientists are ready to conduct GPR survey again at any other points," they said. The challenging conditions inside the tunnel, including slush and water, complicated the efforts of both rescue personnel and scientists. However, officials noted that with improving conditions the scientists are ready to carry out the survey again. Drilling was also carried out at locations where NGRI scientists had detected "anomalies" inside the tunnel. However, only metallic objects were found.



Emergency teams prepare for rescue operation to trace workers trapped inside Telangana's Srisaillam Left Bank Canal tunnel. PTI

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, who visited the tunnel site and held discussions with rescue officials on Sunday, said the exact location of eight trapped persons remains unknown and his government is taking all necessary steps to expedite the rescue efforts. He had also said the rescue operations would gain momentum once the damaged conveyor belt is repaired. The belt, which plays a crucial role in clearing silt is expect-

ed to be restored by Monday. The government is determined to resolve the crisis and is also willing to extend support to the families who suffered due to the accident, the CM added. Eight persons-engineers and labourers have been trapped under the collapsed roof of the Srisaillam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel since February 22 and the rescue operations are on full swing to pull them out to safety.

# Haryana police arrest 'friend' of Himani Narwal for strangling

**PTI ■ CHANDIGARH**

Haryana Police on Monday arrested a "friend" of Congress worker Himani Narwal for allegedly strangling her after a fight at her home and later dumping her body in a suitcase. Narwal's body was found stuffed in a suitcase in Rohtak on Saturday, leading to the formation of a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the murder. Speaking to reporters in Rohtak, Additional DGP K K Rao said the accused, Sachin, hails from Hajaraj, where he runs a mobile phone shop, and was arrested in Delhi. Rao said it was a murder with few clues. "When the body was found, we set up eight teams, including an SIT. Our priority was to identify the victim when her body was found. When the police identified her, the family conducted swift investigations to trace out the accused. "For the past one-and-half years, the accused was in contact with the woman through social media and also used to visit her home.

"The woman used to live alone in Vijay Nagar. On February 27, the accused visited her home, and they had an argument," Rao said. According to police, Sachin strangled Himani with a wired mobile phone charger, killing her on the spot. Rao said that after strangling Himani, Sachin took her jewellery, laptop, ring and rode her scooter to Hajaraj to hide these items in his shop there. The same night, he stuffed her body in a black suitcase and got into an autorickshaw with the bag, as well as a quilt that had blood stains on it. He got down near Sampla bus stand to waylay the investigation, Rao said. Once the autorickshaw left, he dumped the suitcase and left. Rao said the reason why the fight occurred between the two will come out during the police remand. Some Congress party members said Himani was a dedicated party worker and also took part in the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra. Pictures of her with Gandhi making rounds on social media bear this out. Earlier, Himani's family

refused to cremate her body until the killers were arrested, with her mother, Savita, demanding capital punishment for the guilty. "I want capital punishment for killers of my daughter," Savita said in Rohtak. Her mother had alleged on Sunday that some of her colleagues envied her swift rise in the party. "I spoke to her last on February 27. She said she would be busy with a party programme the next day, but later her phone was found switched off. Till the time my daughter does not get justice, we won't cremate her," Savita said. A Haryana Congress leader said Himani was pursuing a law degree. Former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Sunday said he spoke to the Rohtak superintendent of police on the murder case. Congress MLA from Rohtak B B Batra said Himani was a "very good and active" worker and used to attend party programmes. "Those who have committed the crime should be severely punished," Batra said.

# Meghalaya CM warns of water crisis

**PTI ■ SHILLONG**

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Monday raised concerns over the state's escalating water crisis, stating that a recent study identified 792 critical water sources, some beyond rejuvenation, despite projects worth ₹8,000 Crore being implemented in the state. The CM said the state government has set up a climate council, with him at the helm, alongside other water-related departments, to hold dialogues and address the crisis. "Over 70,000 springsheds have been identified, of which more than 55,000 have been mapped across Meghalaya. Steps are being taken on a war footing to rejuvenate the 792 critical water bodies," Sangma informed the Assembly during the question hour. "After conducting a study, we found that 792 out of the 55,000 mapped springsheds, which serve as water sources for the Jal Jeevan Mission, are in a critical condition, with many completely dried up," he added. He said the soil and water conservation department has come up with ₹32 Crore pro-

ject and 67 springsheds will be rejuvenated to bring back life to these water sources. According to the Chief Minister, 1,601 springsheds have been constructed in the last five years at a cost of ₹46.62 Crore under the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). "Each of the 1,601 springsheds are success stories in itself," Sangma said while informing that the village employment councils (VECs), people and the community are monitoring and looking after these assets that have been created. Sangma informed that with the availability of gadgets, we are able to monitor the level of water in the springs and almost 13,000 volunteers (VCFs) have been trained for the purpose. He also informed that a \$62 Million project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is underway to rejuvenate springsheds, which includes the construction of 532 structures such as check dams. Sangma added that Meghalaya is one of the few states to have a water policy in place, with over ₹4,000 Crore worth of projects.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## A fresh start or fleeting relief?

With N Biren Singh's exit and AT's surrender of arms, Manipur shows signs of normalcy—but is the peace lasting?

The conflict in Manipur, marked by ethnic tensions between the Meitei and Kuki-Zomi communities has shown some positive development in the recent weeks. The surrender of arms by Arambai Tenggol (AT), Home Minister Amit Shah's firm stance on opening all roads and the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh have created new possibilities for peace in the violence-stricken state. However, the underlying tensions and the continued presence of weapons in the region, mean that true reconciliation remains a complex challenge. One of the most notable recent events was the voluntary surrender of 246 weapons by the AT group on February 27, following the appeal made by Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla. This move is being seen as a crucial step towards de-escalation, as it marks the largest voluntary surrender of arms in the state since the ethnic conflict began in May 2023. However, security officials and observers caution that the surrender may not indicate a complete loss of AT's firepower. Reports suggest that only a fraction of the looted sophisticated weapons has been returned, with country-made firearms making up a large portion of surrendered arms. Furthermore, AT's insistence on conditions such as full security guarantees and amnesty for its members indicates that the group still holds significant leverage.

The Union Home Minister's directive to ensure free movement on Manipur's highways from March 8 represents a decisive move to restore normalcy. Road blockades have been a persistent problem in the state, significantly affecting trade, movement of essential goods and the overall economic stability of the region.

The government's resolve to dismantle illegal bunkers and target drug trafficking further aligns with the broader goal of restoring law and order. However, concerns remain over the implementation of these directives. Ensuring that all roads remain open requires a sustained security presence, as groups with vested interests may attempt to impose fresh blockades. Additionally, the crackdown on drugs—while crucial—must be executed without further alienating communities that already feel marginalised. The resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh and the imposition of President's Rule in Manipur have led to a shifting power dynamic. Singh was widely seen as a key backer of AT and other Meitei groups, which played a role in the ethnic conflict. But the major issue has been the divide between the Meitei and Kuki-Zomi communities, which remains unaddressed. Both sides continue to view each other with suspicion, and without a long-term reconciliation plan, tensions may resurface. Despite the surrender of arms, thousands of sophisticated weapons remain unaccounted for, posing a major security risk. The demand for a separate administration by the Kuki-Zomi groups remains a contentious issue. Without addressing the political aspirations of all communities, peace efforts may prove temporary but a beginning has been made.

## PICTALK



Painted storks at Keoladeo National Park, in Bharatpur

## Mahakumbh 2025: Vikas bhi, virasat bhi

From the large-scale eco-friendly practices to the timeless wisdom of Bharatiya traditions, Mahakumbh offered a new model for development in harmony with nature



ANURAG SAXENA

The Valeriperis Circle is a fascinating concept. Imagine a circle on the world map. The circle is centered around the Beibu Gulf, off the east coast of Vietnam, has a radius of 4,000 kilometers, and includes Southern China, Southeast Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Now this is where it gets stupefying. This circle covers just about 9 per cent of the world's land-mass, but over 50 per cent of the world's population. This simple reality, clubbed with colonial impoverishment, explains why many people in this circle lived in filth and squalor. Most "progressive" thoughts therefore, be it sustainability, development, environment, innovation, or education, came from the "developed west". We, the unwashed and the uncouth plebs, lapped these ideas up.

These imported ideas however, played out terribly. Not just for people, but for the planet. So much so, that escaping this planet seems to be the primary focus of the biggest billionaires from the west. Talk about a fence eating its own crop!

Kumbh on the other hand is a metaphor for the alternate model. A moksha, if you will, from the destruction-premised development models from the west. Prayagraj, a city with a population of 1.4 million saw over 500 million visiting it over a month. To put that in context, imagine a flat typical urban flat that houses a family of four, suddenly visited by 1,400 people. This is indeed Valeriperis Circle on steroids, and any other city would have crumbled a 1,400x overload. Not just did the city manage, but actually offered solutions for how humanity could manage an explosion of demand quite sustainably.

Those of us that experienced the Kumbh personally will tell you the level of cleanliness that has been maintained. We have noticed the extensive use of bamboo instead of plastic, of jute rugs instead of astroturf, of manual boats instead of diesel motors, of e-rickshaws instead of fossil-fueled vehicles, of free refillable RO purified water instead of disposable mineral water bottles. Half a bil-



lion people used donas (cups made of dried leaves) in contrast to small birthday parties in "developed" countries serving single-use plastic.

What you didn't see perhaps was India's largest plastic buy-back program aimed at recycling, or leftover prasad being shared with animals as fodder, or compactor trucks working round the clock, or solar-powered sewage treatment plants.

The invisible sustainability efforts of the Kumbh were perhaps the silent hero that emerged naturally from a culture that values interdependence with nature at its core. The recently concluded Kumbh Global Summit on Sustainability explained the phenomenon and drew lessons from our rich history and culture. Ministers from a dozen Giritiya nations shared their learnings around sustainability, most of it rooted in ancient Bharatiya wisdom.

The Minister of Tourism and Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat brought in simple, rooted wisdom from something as intrinsic as sustainability inbuilt into language itself. The word "dohan" (to milk a cow) comes from

"do+han" the norm to milk just two teats of a cow, leaving the rest for the calf. Contrast that to industrial-grade milk production from hormone-ridden cows that has been normalised in the "developed" west. Ram Madhav proposed a sangam (confluence) of ancient Indic wisdom with modern practices, without which the world's sustainability crisis can never be avoided.

He highlighted that environment and sustainability are challenges that cannot be solved at COP summits along, but actually need a convergence of the richest ideas globally. The urgency of the summit was encapsulated most eloquently by Suresh Prabhhu who framed an enquiry - with thousands of years of history and knowledge across the world, can we even be sure that we will last another hundred years?

Gas-guzzling economies of the West will continue to posture around sustainability as a virtue-signaling badge. They will postulate, make loud visible pledges, and fly into sustainability summits on their private jets. The minerals-filching economies east of us will ignore calls to action and

give you the silent treatment. They will continue to live the delusion that they are communist nations, while going out their way to display toxic capitalism, much to the peril of their people and our earth.

As Bharat, we have to accept a simple reality - What broke it, can't fix it. Period! Bharat has the unique civilisational advantage of leveraging our ancient wisdom to actually demonstrate that you can actually develop infrastructure at scale (like at the Kumbh) without bludgeoning mother nature with a hammer. As we attain maturity on the world stage, we neither need to twirl our moustache, nor cover up our acne. We would rather focus on the purity of our soul as the thought model we export. We would rather focus on our civilisational value of attaining balance.

As PM Narendra Modi's statement for the summit said, the only way to achieve global sustainability is to follow a simple, yet powerful principle, "Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi".

(The writer is a nominated Member of the National Tourism Advisory Council and the co-founder of India Pride Project; views are personal)



THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND CULTURE GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT BROUGHT IN SIMPLE, ROOTED WISDOM FROM SOMETHING AS INTRINSIC AS SUSTAINABILITY INBUILT INTO LANGUAGE ITSELF

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## UKRAINE-US TENSIONS ESCALATE

Madam — The clash of diplomacy and dignity (March 3) in the case of Ukraine-US is taking an ugly turn. Trump is not losing any opportunity to project himself as the ultimate global authority. Ukraine had political issues with Russia, which gained serious turns after the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia. This incident had instilled a sense of apprehension and made Ukraine seek membership in NATO. As Russia was against Ukraine joining NATO due to various crucial concerns, it had to act tough with Ukraine, leading to war. As everyone knows, Ukraine cannot even think of war against Russia but for the lavish help it could receive from the US and European nations in terms of funds, weapons, political and moral support. The change of guard in the US with Trump as its head took the entire issue in a different direction. The mediator Trump dictates and decides the course without offering even scope for the aggrieved Ukraine to spell out its terms. Instead of mediation, Trump is giving dictation to Ukraine. The President of Ukraine feels let down by the US. His open shouting at the US president makes it easy for everyone to understand the seriousness of the situation. In the melee, Russia is allowed to retain the territories it captured, and the US gets a favourable agreement to exploit the precious natural mineral resources of Ukraine. But Ukraine stands repenting for having ventured a big war against a big giant for nothing but a huge loss of men, material, peace and dignity. Who should be blamed?

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

## TAMIL NADU OPPOSES NEP

Madam — I refer to your editorial on "Simmering linguistic tension" (February 28). The Centre insists on implementing the NEP, whereas the state objects to it, fearing the imposition of the Hindi language leading to the destruction of Tamil. The state is committed to a two-language formula, says the incumbent state government. There is a total misconception in this regard. According to the new NEP, the first

## India beats New Zealand



The match against New Zealand is yet another thrilling game by the men in blue, Team India. The back to back success for Team India has made our team stand stronger in the ICC Champions Trophy. Despite New Zealand winning the toss and deciding to bowl first, India successfully managed to give a 250-run target to the opposing team. Although the short innings by Virat Kohli jerked everyone, our bowling order

managed it well. At 45.3, India made New Zealand all out, clinching victory by 44 runs. Varun Chakravarthy stole all attention as he took five crucial wickets for India, presenting spectacular bowling prowess, before he was crowned as the Player of the Match.

Our player deserves heartiest congratulations for their exuberant efforts, showcased in the match against New Zealand. Now that India moves ahead to the next round, where it will strike a semifinals clash against Australia in the ICC Champions Trophy, we hope that the enthusiasm of our players for knocking all opponents dead will continue ahead with full positivity. And India will surely bring the ICC Champions Trophy home this season.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

language will be a local language, the second one English, and a third one any language of the student's choice. It is not prescribed that the third language must be Hindi. It is also not compulsory to learn Hindi nor the language forced down the throats of non-Hindi-speaking people. It is left to the discretion of the wards. NEP is aimed at improving knowledge, skill and language learning. There is nothing wrong in learning an additional language.

It is an advantage for the students to seek better prospects. Playing politics for votes sake is highly reprehensible. Politicians should not play with the future of the students. In the name of imposition of Hindi, students are denied quality education. The establishment of Navodaya schools has not been permitted in the state for decades. This is highly a retrograde step. Tamil Nadu should adopt the new NEP in the welfare of the students, for the quality of education has come down heavily. All other states in India had adopted the NEP. The status of their mother language has not declined but rather improved. Also, the schools run by these politicians follow the CBSE syl-

labus. Their wards study Hindi. As such, victimising the poor government school students is unfair and unjust.

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

## AVALANCHE WARNING IGNORED

Madam — It is a matter of crying shame that in spite of snowfall and avalanche alerts since February 24, labourers working on a stretch of the road to Badrinath Dham had not been evacuated in time. Four days went by, but no action was taken to bring those labourers to a safer place.

They were kept in the danger zone till avalanches hit the area on February 28. As a result, some labourers were killed, and some went missing. This indicates a total apathy towards the safety of labourers. Now, who will be accountable for playing with the lives of so many labourers? India needs stringent labour laws and their strict implementation. Otherwise, such a tragedy will become a routine affair.

Sujit De | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## MIGA: Can India overcome economic challenges

Despite its economic size, India's developing status reveals challenges like inequality, youth unemployment and a vast informal sector

Prime Minister Modi recently visited the US to strengthen bilateral ties and committed to Making India Great Again (MIGA), in consonance with Donald Trump's dream of making America greater again (MAGA).

Although India is the world's fifth-largest economy with a GDP of approximately US\$ 4.27 trillion, it is still classified as a developing nation. A developing country is technically a country where the Gross National Income per capita is \$11,905 or less, with India's per capita being nearly half of it at \$6,951. We rank 134 out of 193 countries in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI), below our neighbouring countries China at 75, Sri Lanka at 78, and even Bhutan and Bangladesh at 125 and 128 respectively (UN Development Report 2022-23).

With an HDI score of 0.644, India is categorised as 'medium human development'. However, there has been improvement across all HDI indicators—life expectancy, education, and Gross National Income (GNI) per



capita from last year. Nevertheless, we cannot conceit the improvement in the HDI alone, as Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2024, places India at the top of the 5 countries with the most people in poverty with 234 million people in the bracket. In sharp contrast to this, it ranks 3rd in the number of billionaires (Forbes, 2023), indicating glaring disparities in income inequalities. Another morbid aspect is high youth unemployment which accounts for almost 83 per cent of the total unemployment in India. Even worrisome is the share of youngsters with secondary or higher education

in the total unemployed, which has almost doubled from 35.2 per cent in 2000 to 65.7 per cent in 2022 (Indian Employment Report, 2024). The unemployment problem is further aggravated as about 90 per cent of the labour force works in the unorganised sector grappling with the issues of irregular work, income, social security benefits and working conditions. The policymakers are profoundly designing policies to boost the economy. Recently the monetary policy was eased, the repo rate dropped to push investment, and the government announced tax concessions to encourage consumption, both expected to accelerate output and income with a multiplier effect.

This will probably counter the Blume Venture report, that nearly 100 crore Indians, 90 per cent of the country's population, lack discretionary spending power to purchase goods or services. With a desired GDP growth rate of at least 7 per cent, these measures will likely create a transitional optimistic mood for the econo-

my, but cannot sustain growth forever. The World Development Report, 2024, found the developing economies in the "middle-income trap", and emphasised the 3 I's, Investment, Infusion (of global technologies) and Innovation as three drivers of economic growth and expanding the production frontier.

The government thereby needs to adopt a multifaceted approach to overcome challenges in covering potential gaps in production. It needs to work pragmatically towards education reforms, higher investment for skill development, human capital and creating regular employment opportunities. Moreover, efforts to promote medium and small enterprises, labour-intensive industries, start-ups, Make India Better (MIB) before MIGA.

(The writer is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi University. Views are personal)



KAJLEEN KAUR





**FIRST COLUMN**

**DREAM BIG AND STAY HUMBLE**

Success isn't a mere stroke of luck—it's the result of daring to dream, backed by discipline and humility



RAVI VALLURI

Success is the accomplishment of an aim or purpose. What is the secret of the success of achievers? Dream the impossible, be extremely disciplined, remain dedicated and determined, take appropriate decisions all the time, even in adverse situations, and finally maintain humility while toasting success. To be successful, a human being necessarily dreams of the impossible. Dreams should be audacious. One has to think big and be bold in the actions taken. Ratan Tata emphasised leading from the front and not being a mere follower. Be a leader and not a follower. A quintessential leader takes up responsibility. The 'mind' of the leader needs to be confronted and challenged. The human mind loves challenges. Faced with challenging situations, it delivers the impossible. Mind is not motivated by rote, but is inspired to script something unusual. Maintaining mental and physical discipline are essential ingredients of successful leaders.

Physical fitness increases both our physical and mental stamina. Exercise releases endorphins in the human body which trigger positive thoughts. It helps immensely in smart decision-making. Along with exercise, an individual is also required to maintain a healthy and balanced diet which staves off disease and enhances alacrity and sharpness. Achievers may be from any field — sports, politics, administration or entrepreneurs. However, the cardinal principle is to maintain physical fitness, and punctuality and avoid procrastination by maintaining timely schedules. If a leader is lethargic, the organisation becomes flabby, sluggish and phlegmatic.

The mantra for attaining success is to be extremely disciplined. Such a trait inspires employees to increase their productivity levels too. In the spiritual path, a seeker needs to maintain a spirited tenacity and pursue his Sadhana relentlessly. Regular Sadhana inspires the mind to expand



its vistas and thereby attempt to embrace the ultimate reality. This, in the final analysis, is the underlying objective and the seeker unflinchingly needs to relentlessly practice the tenets laid down by the Guru. Smart, quick and efficient decision-making assists people in achieving success. This provides a person with the cushion and a cutting edge over others. There is no substitute for hard work. Working hard produces quick and efficient results. This is followed by the quality of determination. A Sadhak, a sportsperson, or an entrepreneur has necessarily to be determined. Determined minds are strong and developed minds. These are innovative minds and conjure a variety of ideas and positive thoughts. To achieve excellence in any field, such minds and individuals are determined at all points in time. The minds of such individuals are highly fertile and produce magic with regularity. An unbearable situation gets converted into an unbelievable one. This is their inherent strength. They do not live in the past or future, they live in the Present Moment to confront all challenges. However, the ultimate hallmark of all successful individuals, teams, companies or organisations is HUMILITY. There is no or very little trace of arrogance. They are insulated by the feeling of doer ship and become hubristic. In a competitive and cutthroat environment, a huge helping of humility is essential for staying ahead of the game. Humility enhances curiosity and thus accelerates learning. Without humility, you can never be a good listener and understand the voices around you — of customers, colleagues and stakeholders. "Humility is the true key to success. Successful people lose their way at times. Humility halts their arrogance and self-indulging trap. Humble people share the credit and wealth, remaining focused and hungry to continue the journey of success," writes Rick Pitino.

*(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)*

**Tripura innovates cityscapes for sustainability and tourism**



V K BAHUGUNA

Tripura's innovative projects are revitalising city life by enhancing public spaces, managing waste and tackling challenges like air pollution



About 35 per cent of India's population lives in urban areas and is still growing rapidly. As the population of cities is ever increasing with a lot of garbage and waste found all around in most cities, the sustainable management of urban area landscapes is very crucial for better civic amenities, ambience and dealing with adapting to environmental issues like air pollution, heat waves and flooding, while also improving quality of life through green spaces, better public areas for entertainment and relaxation and promoting physical activity and mental wellbeing among residents; all while managing waste disposal and addressing the challenges of a densely populated urban environment; the situation is exacerbated during extreme temperatures in summer. Tourist attractions are essential elements of progress these days and the aesthetics of the urban environment plays a key role in attracting tourists on the one hand and improving the economic activities of the people. During 2023-24 more than 5,45,000 tourists including 75,000 from abroad visited Tripura compared to around 3 lakh tourists in the year 2015. Agartala is the only modern yet densely populated city in Tripura and is full of tourist attractions in and around its 50 to 60-kilometre radius. The flow of tourists has been steadily increasing in the state as the infrastructure of hotels, roads and transport has been picking up very fast thanks to the proactive initiation taken by the government during the last few years. I have recently visited Tripura in the second week of February 2025 to study a few innovative steps taken by the Tripura administration. A three-dimensional approach has been adopted in beautifying the urban architecture of Agartala and other cities.



**THE FOREST DEPARTMENT ALONG WITH OTHER STATE DEPARTMENTS HAS CREATED PYRAMIDS OF FLOWERS, CROTONS AND INDIGENOUS TREE SPECIES ALONG WITH FOUNTAINS AND RASHI AND NAKSHATRA FORESTS**

Tripura forest department has a rich tradition of embellishment of Tripura's natural beauty through a series of parks, gardens and beautification of pavements in different parts of the state. The state government had created an agency for this purpose to further beautify the state's already beautiful landscape to attract tourists as well as create employment opportunities for the people. For this purpose, the state government had created an entity in the forest department "Tripura Park and Garden Society". In this direction the government of India's 'Nagarvan- city forests' scheme is giving a big impetus to this project not only in Tripura but also in other parts of the country. However, the innovative ways the city's Capital Complex, state secretariat and airport roads have been aesthetically laid out is a rare example of urban landscape management. Most of the pavements covered by cement and bricks during summer months create heat waves in most of the cities. The forest department along with other state departments has created pyramids of flowers, crotons and indigenous tree species along with fountains and Rashi and Nakshatra forests. Most of the empty side lands along buildings and pavements were cleared of debris and planted in a pyramid shape hierarchy giving the most beautiful look in between fountain gardens were created along with plantations of medicinal plants for ex-situ conservation of these valuable plants. The top level was occupied by the tree species and special tree

grooves were also created for public awareness. For the benefit of people biodiversity and butterfly parks were created on Airport Road giving the inciting look to the tourists visiting the state. Such projects if undertaken in all cities in the country will be an excellent attempt to combat climate change, especially the heat waves engulfing most of the urban cities and landscape in recent years. Such a project of beautification cannot be completed by a single department therefore, in this scheme public work and urban development departments also fully participated. Such innovation needs the full support of senior government functionaries. The proposal of young officers of the forest department was fully supported by the state Chief Secretary and other senior officers. The scheme is implemented through the Nagarvan scheme outside Tripura and shows cases of the unique vegetation and other cultural trends of the state. The rich floral and other biodiversity of the state is one of the reasons for success as well as the favourable agro-climatic conditions. Similar attempts need to be made in other states of the country and focus should be on local species and with conservation value of other endangered plants. The Rashi and Nakshatra Van were created by planting species like Chandan, Neem, Akanda, Peepal, Haritiki, Ashwagandha, Khair, Palash and Orange for Nakshatra Van. For Rashi van Jackfruit, Peepal, Ber, Bel, Jamun, Amla, Nageswar, Arjun,

Mahogany, Mango, Bakul and Guava are all very useful Trees. For the long-term sustainability of landscape beautification, the constant supervision, maintenance and involvement of people is a must. These types of innovations though started in administration all over the country need to be nurtured beyond the shadow of officers involved in it once they are not in the saddle. For this, standard operating procedures must be developed along with creating a scope for public-private partnerships like in Zoos in many other states where the people adopt certain animals and fund their food and other needs so that such activities can become financially viable in the long term and also involve the public in their management. The entry fee should be such that these endeavours become sustainable and people are willing to pay if quality service is offered as such things cannot be relied only on government funding. All such creations must be linked to environmental management for climate change as well as it is becoming a critical factor in large landscape management in the country. The need of the hour is the holistic and integrated management of urban areas of the country. *(The author is former director general, Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, and former Principal Secretary, Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Resources and Forest Department, Government of Tripura; views are personal)*

**Beyond social media regulation: The call for a national moral code**

Amid debates over social media regulation sparked by Ranveer Allahbadia's remarks, a deeper question arises: should society adopt a clearly defined moral code?

While the nation discusses the desirability of regulating content on social media given the controversy that erupted from the statement made by YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia, there is a larger issue of defining morality and enacting moral patterns of conduct for people that requires prior consideration. While it remains open whether Allahbadia's statement violated any provision of law, however, it is obvious that his statement hurt the moral sentiments of a majority of the population. Notwithstanding, the undesirability of his statement, how advisable it is to expect people to behave in a way that is morally acceptable to society when no particular pattern of ethically correct



SIDDHARTHA MISHRA

behaviour is prescribed for them by the state. It implies that society expects or presumes everyone to know morally accurate conduct in all situations. As morality is an abstract concept that varies from place to place and from person to person, it is necessary that, like law, morality is clearly defined as well. Usually, an act or statement acquires a righteous or

erroneous character on the personal sense of judgement of individuals, thus, people must know clearly what is permissible moral and what is proscribed immoral. In such a situation, it requires consideration whether society needs a code that prescribes a pattern of morally upright conduct for its people. Ideally, each society must aim to be free from immoral conduct or behaviour and, for this, the state should establish a pattern or standard of behaviour that is expected of all the citizens and is followed by all alike whether individuals or organisations. Ironically, in India, the state has made little attempt to establish such a society where people follow a certain advised pattern of behaviour that is

acceptable to all. The impression that laws would serve this purpose is completely contrary to the practical realities. Laws as they exist in this country are mostly proscriptive which means they largely prohibit particular or specific behaviour(s) rather than laying down in detail the desirable pattern(s) of conduct. In India, laws are hardly prescriptive and they do not necessarily prescribe a particular pattern of behaviour for people. Generally, laws do not provide in brief or detail what manner, pattern of conduct or behaviour should people observe or practice. They mainly proscribe or prohibit particular conduct(s) and make doing such conduct culpable or punishable and the



doer of it liable for certain consequences. Given such a situation, does it not sound farcical to expect all the people, all over, to know, in every situation, in minute details, what is legally and morally permissible conduct and behaviour? The lack of efforts on the part of the society or the state to

formulate a code of morally desirable conduct in India may be ascribed to the thought that this work be better left to the educational, religious or cultural institutions. But if so, have such institutions fulfilled their responsibility in this regard? India, being a

multi-religious and multi-cultural country, a variety of factors seem to hamper this purpose. Diversity of faiths and religions results in a lack of a common behavioural pattern as well as a lack of a mechanism to ensure that the moral instructions being imparted are being uniformly learnt and practised. Even the educational institutions seem to flounder here, as not all educational institutions seem to insist on teaching moral or ethical values uniformly at all levels. They lay immense emphasis on scientific and technical education but not in the same way on imparting moral education, which is more or equally necessary. Most of the problems in society are caused by a lack of strong values, morals and

integrity of character in people, hence, a civilised state must work sincerely on developing a strong value system in its population. Though the Indian constitution prescribes fundamental duties for citizens that are non-enforceable, they remain, merely, empty slogans. Given the massive onslaught of undesirable content on social media and its penetration among, and influence on, vulnerable youth, it is highly incumbent on the state, simultaneously, to regulate social media as well as draft a moral/ethical code of conduct for building a nation of people with strong morals and character. *(The writer is Associate Professor, Faculty of Law University of Delhi; views are personal)*



# Israel gets flak after it stops Gaza aid to pressure Hamas

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Israel faced sharp criticism as it stopped the entry of all food and other supplies into Gaza on Sunday and warned of "additional consequences" for Hamas if a fragile ceasefire isn't extended. Mediators Egypt and Qatar accused Israel of violating humanitarian law by using starvation as a weapon. The ceasefire's first phase saw a surge in humanitarian aid after months of growing hunger. Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the next phase Sunday hours after its first phase had ended and called Israel's decision to cut off aid "a war crime and a blatant attack" on a truce that took a year of negotiations

before taking hold in January. In the second phase, Hamas would release dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout from Gaza and a lasting ceasefire. Negotiations on the second phase were meant to start a month ago but haven't begun. **Israel backs a new proposal to speed up the release of hostages:** Israel said on Sunday that a new US proposal calls for extending the ceasefire through Ramadan — the Muslim holy month that began over the weekend — and the Jewish Passover holiday, which ends April 20. Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached

on a permanent ceasefire, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said. The militants currently hold 59 hostages, 35 of them believed to be dead. National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said the United States would support whatever decision Israel makes, without commenting on the new proposal. Netanyahu said Israel is fully coordinated with the Trump administration and the ceasefire will only continue as long as Hamas keeps releasing hostages. **The UN and others warn against aid cutoff:** Saying the ceasefire has saved countless lives, the International Committee of the Red Cross

said that "any unravelling of the forward momentum created over the last six weeks risks plunging people back into despair". UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher called Israel's decision "alarming", noting that international humanitarian law makes clear that aid access must be allowed. UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged all parties to make every effort to prevent a return to hostilities in Gaza, and called for humanitarian aid to flow back into Gaza immediately and for the release of all hostages, said spokesman Stéphane Dujarric. Five non-governmental groups asked Israel's Supreme Court for an interim order barring the

state from preventing aid from entering Gaza, claiming the move violates Israel's obligations under international law: "These obligations cannot be condition on political considerations." The war has left most of Gaza's population of over 2 million dependent on international aid. About 600 aid trucks had entered daily since the ceasefire began on January 19, easing fears of famine raised by international experts. But residents said prices shot up as word of the closure spread. From the heavily destroyed Jabaliya urban refugee camp, Fayza Nassar said the closure would worsen dire conditions. "There will be famine and chaos," she said. Hamas warned that any

attempt to delay or cancel the ceasefire agreement would have "humanitarian consequences" for the hostages. The only way to free them is through the existing deal, the group said. Families of hostages again pressed Israel's government. "Postponing the negotiation on the deal for everyone's (release) can't happen," Lishay Miran-Lavi, wife of hostage Omri Miran, said in Tel Aviv. "Hostages don't have time to wait for an ideal deal." **Israel was accused of blocking aid throughout the war:** Israel imposed a siege on Gaza in the war's opening days and only eased it under US pressure. UN agencies and aid groups accused Israel of not facilitating enough aid during 15

months of war. The International Criminal Court said there was reason to believe Israel had used "starvation as a method of warfare" when it issued an arrest warrant for Netanyahu last year. The allegation is also central to South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide. Israel has denied the accusations. It says it has allowed in enough aid and blamed shortages on what it called the UN's inability to distribute it. It also accused Hamas of siphoning off aid — an allegation that Netanyahu repeated Sunday. Kenneth Roth, former head of Human Rights Watch, said Israel as an occupying power has an "absolute duty" to facil-

itate humanitarian aid under the Geneva Conventions, and called Israel's decision "a resumption of the war-crime starvation strategy" that led to the ICC warrant. The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostage. Israel's offensive has killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It says more than half of those killed were women and children. It does not specify how many of the dead were combatants. Israeli bombardment pounded large areas of Gaza to rubble and displaced some 90 per cent of the population.

# Europe at crossroads in history: Starmer

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer rallied his European counterparts Sunday to shore up their borders and throw their full weight behind Ukraine as he announced outlines of a plan to end Russia's war. "Every nation must contribute to that in the best way that it can, bringing different capabilities and support to the table, but all taking responsibility to act, all stepping up their own share of the burden," he said. Starmer's exhortation to 18 fellow leaders that they need to do the heavy lifting for their own security comes two days after US backing of Ukraine appeared in jeopardy when President Donald Trump lashed out at Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and said he wasn't grateful enough for America's support. The meeting had been overshadowed by the extraordinary scolding that took place on live television at the White House. Starmer used the

opportunity as part of his broader effort to bridge the gap between Europe and the US and also salvage what had seemed like the start of a peace process before Friday's spat. Starmer said he had worked with France and Ukraine on a plan to end the war and that the group of leaders — mostly from Europe — had agreed on four things. The steps toward peace would: keep aid flowing to Kyiv and maintain economic pressure on Russia to strengthen Ukraine's hand; make sure Ukraine is at the bargaining table and any peace deal must ensure its sovereignty and security; and continue to arm Ukraine to deter future invasion. **A coalition of the willing:** Finally, Starmer said they would develop a "coalition of the willing" to defend Ukraine and guarantee the peace. "Not every nation will feel able to contribute but that can't mean that we sit back," he said. "Instead, those willing will intensify planning now with real urgency. The UK is prepared to back this with boots

on the ground and planes in the air, together with others." It is far from certain whether Russian President Vladimir Putin will accept any such plan, which Starmer said would require strong US backing. He did not specify what that meant, though he told the BBC before the summit that there were "intense discussions" to get a security guarantee from the US. "If there is to be a deal, if there is to be a stopping of the fighting, then that agreement has to be defended, because the worst of all outcomes is that there is a temporary pause and then Putin comes again," Starmer said. Starmer said he will later bring a more formal plan to the US and work with Trump. Before arriving in London, French president Emmanuel Macron suggested in an interview with a French newspaper that he and Starmer are proposing a "truce in the air, on the seas and energy infrastructures" that would last a month. There would be no European troops in the coming weeks and troops would only be

deployed on the ground at a later stage, he said. **Two diplomatic steps forward, one back:** Europe has been anxious since Trump initiated direct peace talks with Putin, who had been isolated by most Western leaders since invading Ukraine three years ago. The scramble to remain relevant and protect European interests as their once stalwart ally appeared to be cozying up to Putin was even more troubling when Trump called Zelenskyy a dictator and falsely said Ukraine started the war. Meetings last week had provided some hope — until Zelenskyy's trip to the White House on Friday. Visits to the Oval Office by Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron, who had declared his visit a "turning point", were seen as steps in the right direction. The meetings were cordial and Trump even took a gentler tone toward Ukraine, though he would not commit to providing US security guarantees and maintained that Europe would need to provide peacekeeping troops.

Within 12 hours of Starmer's return from Washington, the talk of peace seemed to collapse as Trump and Vice President JD Vance berated Zelenskyy for challenging Trump's assertions that Putin could be trusted. During his Sunday press conference, Starmer rejected the suggestion that the US was no longer a reliable ally. "There are no two countries as closely aligned as our two countries and our defence, our security and intelligence is intertwined in a way no two other countries are, so it's an important and reliable ally for us," he said. **Starmer does not trust Putin:** Starmer told the BBC before the summit that he does not trust Russian President Vladimir Putin but does trust Trump. Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni said she was sorry for what happened with Zelenskyy in Washington. Meloni is both a strong Ukraine supporter and — as head of a far-right party — she is a natural ally of Trump. She was the only European leader to attend his inauguration.



Britain's King Charles III and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, right, pose for a picture during their meeting at the Sandringham Estate in Norfolk, England, on Sunday. AP/PTI

## Driver rams car into crowd in Germany; one person dead

PTI ■ BERLIN

One person was killed and others injured when a car rammed into a crowd Monday in the western German city of Mannheim, police said as they asked the public to stay away from the downtown area and remain in their homes. A suspect is in custody. Police spokesperson Stefan Wilhelm said that a driver drove into a group of people in Paradeplatz, a pedestrianized street in Mannheim, killing one person. Several people were injured, he said, but police can't yet specify how many or how badly. "We can confirm that one perpetrator was arrested," he said. "We can't yet give information on whether there were further perpetrators." Images from the scene showed parts of the downtown area were cordoned off, with a heavy police presence and helicopters hovering above. Police gathered round a badly damaged black car as ambulances lined up outside the cordon. Earlier, Wilhelm said the incident had been reported as "a life-threatening deployment situation." Paradeplatz, a major square in the downtown area, lies at the end of a pedestrianised street in Mannheim, which has a population of 326,000 and lies 85 kilometers (52 miles) south of Frankfurt. Mannheim University Hospital says it has prepared everything for a possible mass casualty incident, German news agency dpa reported. The hospital has implemented its disaster and emergency plan to prepare for the care of the injured. Across Germany, lots of people took a long weekend off to celebrate carnival, including Rose Monday, when many cities hold parades. Mannheim's street parade already took place, on Sunday. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser canceled her participation in the carnival street parade in Cologne due to the events in Mannheim. "The focus is now on saving lives, treating the injured and the initial investigations by the authorities in Mannheim," an interior ministry spokesperson told dpa. While police would not immediately characterize Monday's incident as an attack, cars have been used as deadly weapons in several acts of violence in recent months.

# Trump allies lash out at Zelenskyy

PTI ■ PHOENIX (US)

President Donald Trump's senior aides and allies lashed out at Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy from Washington as he attended a European summit Sunday in London to rally international support for his military's fight against the Russian invasion. Following Trump's lead, White House officials and Republicans in Congress used news show appearances to demand that Zelenskyy display more gratitude for US support and an openness to potential war-ending concessions to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Some suggested Zelenskyy should consider resigning even as Ukrainians rally around him. But they offered little clarity as to what Zelenskyy and Ukraine could do after Friday's Oval Office meeting in which Trump and Vice President JD Vance berated him before canceling the signature of an economic agreement between Washington and Kyiv. The dispute leaves the future of that relationship in question, as well as the prospects for ending a conflict that began when the Kremlin invaded in

February 2022. White House national security adviser Mike Waltz, who while in Congress went to Ukraine during the first year of the war to meet Zelenskyy and once compared him to wartime British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, said Zelenskyy's behavior at the White House was "incredibly disrespectful". Asked about that Churchill-Zelenskyy comparison, Waltz noted that Churchill was voted out of office in the final months of World War II. Churchill "was a man for a moment, but he did not then transition England into the next phase," Waltz said. "And it's unclear whether President Zelenskyy, particularly after what we saw Friday, is ready to transition to Ukraine to an end to this war and to negotiate and have to compromise." Waltz said a negotiated end to the war would involve territorial concessions from Ukraine as well as "Russian concessions on security guarantees," but he did not offer any more details about what Moscow would have to do. House Speaker Mike Johnson echoed the suggestion that Zelenskyy may need to step aside. "Either he needs to come to his

senses and come back to the table in gratitude, or someone else needs to lead the country to do that," Johnson said. "I mean, it's up to the Ukrainians to figure that out. But I can tell you that we are re-exerting peace through strength." Trump's director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, said the contentious meeting has led to "a huge rift in the relationship" and she took issue with Zelenskyy telling Fox News afterward that he did not think he did anything wrong. "There's going to have to be a rebuilding of any kind of interest in good faith negotiations, I think, before President Trump is going to be willing to re-engage on this," she said. The coordinated campaign of pressure from Washington played out as Zelenskyy and European leaders came to terms with Trump's overhaul of US foreign policy. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the United Kingdom would use 1.6 billion pounds (\$2 billion) in export financing to supply 5,000 air defense missiles for Ukraine. Support for Zelenskyy among congressional Republicans has been scant after the Oval Office meeting. But Alaska Senator

Lisa Murkowski, one of the few GOP lawmakers willing to break with Trump publicly, criticised the Republican president's stance toward the Ukrainians. "I know foreign policy is not for the faint of heart, but right now, I am sick to my stomach as the administration appears to be walking away from our allies and embracing Putin, a threat to democracy and US values around the world," Murkowski wrote on X on Saturday. Senator James Lankford said it was inappropriate for senators to call for Zelenskyy to leave office and predicted that such a move would "spiral Ukraine into chaos right now". Others were more vocal in support of Zelenskyy. Millions of Americans "are embarrassed, are ashamed," said Senator Bernie Sanders. "Our job is to defend the 250-year tradition that we have of being the democratic leader of the world, not turn our backs on a struggling country that is trying to do the right thing," Sanders said. Waltz appeared on CNN's "State of the Union," Johnson, Sanders and Lankford were on NBC's "Meet the Press," and Gabbard spoke on "Fox News Sunday".

# 'End of war with Russia very, very far away'

PTI ■ KYIV

A deal to end the war between Ukraine and Russia "is still very, very far away," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, adding that he expects to keep receiving American support despite his recent fraught relations with US President Donald Trump. "I think our relationship (with the US) will continue, because it's more than an occasional relationship," Zelenskyy said late Sunday, referring to Washington's support for the past three years of war. "I believe that Ukraine has a strong enough partnership with the United States of America" to keep aid flowing, he said at a briefing in Ukrainian before leaving London. Zelenskyy publicly was upbeat

despite recent diplomatic upheaval between Western countries that have been helping Ukraine with military hardware and financial aid. The turn of events is unwelcome for Ukraine, whose understrength army is having a hard time keep bigger Russian forces at bay. The Ukrainian leader was in London to attend UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's effort to rally his European counterparts around continuing — and likely much increased — support for Ukraine from the continent amid political uncertainty in the US, and Trump's overtures toward Russian President Vladimir Putin. Europe is suspicious of Trump's motives and strategy. Friedrich Merz, Germany's likely next leader after the recent election, said Monday that he didn't think last Friday's Oval Office

blow-up was spontaneous. He said that he had watched the scene repeatedly. "My assessment is that it wasn't a spontaneous reaction to interventions by Zelenskyy, but apparently an induced escalation in this meeting in the Oval Office," Merz said. He said that he was "somewhat astonished by the mutual tone," but there has been "a certain continuity to what we are seeing from Washington at the moment" in recent weeks. "I would advocate for us preparing to have to do a great, great deal more for our own security in the coming years and decades," he said. Even so, Merz said that he wanted to keep the trans-Atlantic relationship alive. "I would also advocate doing everything to keep the Americans in Europe," he said.

# Pope has good night's rest after overcoming possible risks from respiratory crisis

PTI ■ ROME

Pope Francis had a good night's rest early Monday after apparently overcoming a setback in his recovery from pneumonia: He is stable, off mechanical ventilation and shows no sign of new infection following a respiratory crisis late last week. "The pope rested well all night," the Vatican said in its update from Gemelli hospital, where Francis has been hospitalized since February 14. Doctors reported the 88-year-old pope spent all day Sunday without using the noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask that pumps oxygen into his lungs that he had to use following Friday's coughing episode. Francis did continue to receive high flow supplemental oxygen through a nasal tube. Friday's respiratory crisis sparked fears of a new lung infection because Francis inhaled some vomit. Doctors aspirated it and said they needed 24 to 48 hours to determine if any new infection took hold. On Sunday evening, they said Francis remained stable, with no fever or signs of an infection, indicating he had overcome the crisis. His prognosis remained guarded, however, meaning he wasn't out of danger. Francis on Sunday also received a visit



from the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and his chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra. The content of their talks wasn't known, but even when at the Vatican, Francis meets at least weekly with them. He again skipped his weekly noon blessing to avoid even a brief public appearance from the hospital. Instead, the Vatican distributed a message written by the pope from the 10th floor in which he thanked his doctors for their care and well-wish-

ers for their prayers, and prayed again for peace in Ukraine and elsewhere. "From here, war appears even more absurd," Francis said in the message, which he drafted in recent days. Francis said he was living his hospitalisation as an experience of profound solidarity with people who are sick and suffering everywhere. "I feel in my heart the blessing that is hidden within frailty, because it is precisely in these moments that we learn even more to trust in the Lord," Francis said in the text. "At the same time, I thank God for giving me the opportunity to share in body and spirit the condition of so many sick and suffering people." The Argentine pope, who had part of one lung removed as a young man, was admitted to Gemelli on February 14 after his bronchitis worsened and turned into a complex pneumonia in both lungs. On Sunday night at the Vatican, Cardinal Konrad Krajewski presided over the evening Rosary prayer in St. Peter's Square. "Let us pray together with the entire church for the health of the Holy Father Francis," said Krajewski, who is the pope's personal Almoner, a centuries-old job of handing out alms. Francis has elevated the job to make it an extension of his own personal charity.

# Japan won't join UN meet on nuclear weapons ban

Tokyo (PTI): Japan will not attend a UN conference on the treaty banning nuclear weapons, a top government official in Tokyo said Monday, noting US nuclear deterrence is crucial to the country's security and that its participation would send the "wrong message". Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said Japan's national security is the primary reason it will not participate as an observer at the conference, which starts Monday in New York. "Under the severe security environment, nuclear deterrence is indispensable to defend the people's lives and assets, as well as Japan's sovereignty and peace," Hayashi told reporters. Japan's participation as an observer at the conference would "send a wrong message about the Japanese policy (supporting) nuclear deterrence and interfering with our effort in security, peace and safety". The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was approved in 2017 and went into force in 2021 following a decades-long campaign aimed at preventing a repeat of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II. Japan, despite being the only victim of the nuclear attacks, has

refused to sign the treaty, saying its goal is not feasible without the participation of any of the nuclear weapons states. Hayashi said participating as an observer would also interfere with Japan's ongoing effort to gain support for strengthening the non-proliferation treaty and hinder nuclear disarmament. He did not give further details about Japan's next steps. Japanese officials have said they share the ultimate goal of achieving a nuclear-free world, but that Japan needs to be realistic amid growing global conflicts. Atomic bombing survivors and their supporters have criticized Japan's government for making a hollow promise while clinging to the US nuclear umbrella. The survivors and their supporters have urged the Japanese government to participate in the conference as an observer amid growing global attention after Nihon Hidankyo, the atomic bombing survivors' grassroots organisation, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba is a defence expert and vocal supporter of nuclear deterrence who has called for a more open debate about the role of US extended deterrence in the region.

# Myanmar's head of military govt travels to ally Russia for talks with Putin

Bangkok (PTI): The head of Myanmar's military government travelled to Russia on Monday on an official visit to a major ally of the Southeast Asian nation that has been shunned by much of the West for overthrowing a democratically elected government and subsequent brutal repression. Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing, who departed from the military airport in the capital, Naypyitaw, will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The general is accompanied by fellow members of the ruling military council and Cabinet, as well as military officials, state television MRTV reported. The report said Min Aung Hlaing will also meet with other top Russian officials and discuss bilateral ties, economic affairs and security with the aim to strengthen strategic cooperation. Russia, along with China, is a major supporter and arms supplier of Myanmar's military government. Russian-made fighter jets are used in attacks on territory under the control of ethnic minority groups, many of which are allies with pro-democracy resistance forces.







# ED issues ₹611 Crore notice to Paytm's parent company

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday said it has issued ₹611 Crore show cause notice to Paytm's parent company and linked entities for "contravention" of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) on various counts. The notice has been issued by a special director of the federal agency before the initiation of adjudication proceedings. The show cause notice has been issued to Paytm's flagship company One 97 Communication limited (OCL), its managing director and other Paytm subsidiary companies like Little Internet Private Limited and Nearbuy India Private Limited for contraventions of the provisions of the FEMA to the

tune of around ₹611 Crore, the ED said in a statement. Investigation found that OCL made foreign investment in Singapore and "did not" file necessary reporting to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for the creation of an overseas step-down subsidiary, it said. The OCL had also received foreign direct investment (FDI) from overseas investors "without following" proper pricing guidelines stipulated by the RBI, it alleged. The ED said OCL's subsidiary company in India - Little Internet Private Limited - had also received FDI from overseas investors "without following" the pricing guidelines stipulated by the RBI. The other subsidiary company - Nearbuy India Private Limited - "did not" report the FDI

received by the company within the time frame prescribed by the RBI, it said. In a regulatory filing made last Saturday, Paytm said it received a notice from the ED for alleged violation of certain FEMA rules by the company and its two subsidiaries - Little Internet and Nearbuy - with respect to certain investment transactions. Later, Paytm clarified that the alleged breach pertains to the period when the two companies were not its subsidiaries. It acquired the two companies in 2017. According to the breakup shared by the company, OCL transactions amounting to over ₹245 Crore, LIPL's about ₹345 Crore, and NIPL's about ₹21 Crore have been listed in the alleged breach.

# Explore all dairy sector avenues: Amit Shah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the National Dairy Development Board's (NDDB) three models of cowdung biogas generation need to be scaled up in at least 250 district dairy cooperatives in the next two years, as India works towards achieving a second White Revolution. Addressing a workshop on sustainability and circularity in the dairy sector, Shah said, "Dairy sector is important for farmers to earn additional income apart from agriculture. It is important to focus on sustainability and circularity at the start of the second White Revolution." The minister emphasised that circularity in the dairy sector should not be limited to cowdung biogas generation but should encompass making use of

every aspect of the whole dairy sector economy. "There is no better alternative than the dairy sector to address farm migration and ensure better returns to farmers," Shah said, adding that exploring the full potential of this sector will contribute towards achieving the target of \$5 Trillion economy and Vksit Bharat. Shah released comprehensive guidelines aimed at promoting environmentally responsible practices in dairy farming and new financing initiatives under NDDB and NABARD's large scale biogas or compressed biogas projects and the Sustain Plus Project. On the occasion, dairy cooperative unions from 15 states signed an agreement with NDDB for the establishment of biogas plants. "The MoUs have been signed

to scale up cowdung biogas generation based on three models of NDDB. However, we need to successfully implement these models in 250 district cooperative dairy units in next two years," the minister said. Shah identified the three models as: "Zakariyapura Model (the household level biogas-based manure value chain model), the Banaskantha Model (dung-based large capacity biogas plant to produce bio CBG and organic fertilizer) and the Varanasi Model (dung-based large capacity biogas plant to suffice steam and power needs of dairy plant)." The minister urged NDDB to collect cowdung from farmers outside the dairy cooperative network. "Many farmers supply milk to private sector which does not have a facility to process cowdung for biogas. Collecting cowdung from

such farmers will not only address the problem of minimum viability issue but also attract them to cooperative sector," he said. "About 16 Crore tonne cowdung is available in the country. Factor in both farmers from cooperative and non-cooperatives sectors for supply of cowdung while making a plan for setting up of a biogas plant," Shah said, stressing the need to enhance capacity of these plants going forward. On livestock feed and fodder, the minister said, "It should be promoted through cooperatives and a full-fledged network needs to be set up as this will not only enhance milk production but also strengthen cooperatives." To harness the circular economy in dairy sector, Shah emphasised the need to expand marketing of organic manure, increasing dairy

cooperative unions, setting up of dairy processing units and even making dairy machines domestically. "Our target should be not a single machine is imported from abroad," he said, and asked NDDB to rope in a district cooperative in this endeavour. "Circularity means not only making use of cowdung for biogas but also bones and leather. Explore all possibilities in this sector," he added, stating that this concept should be made part of the Constitution of multi-purpose cooperative units that are being set up. Union Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh, Ministers of State S P Singh Baghel and George Kurian, Dairy and Animal Husbandry Department Secretary Alka Upadhyaya, and senior officials were present at the event.

# WCOOPEF partners with I-SEED, IIT Hyderabad to transform cooperative agriculture

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The World Cooperation Economic Forum (WCOOPEF), in collaboration with I-SEED Incubator for Social Enterprises and Entrepreneurs for Development at the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) and IIT Hyderabad's Technology Innovation Hub on Autonomous Navigation (TiHAN), has announced a strategic partnership to revolutionise cooperative-led agriculture through IoT-enabled digital crop surveys and geospatial intelligence. This initiative aligns with the International Year of Cooperatives, reinforcing cooperative-led economic growth, sustainability, and rural empowerment. With the vision of 'Sahkar Se Samridhi' (Prosperity through Cooperation), the effort aims to equip farmer cooperatives, dairy unions, fisheries collectives, and rural self-help groups (SHGs) with cutting-edge digital technologies to enhance agricultural productivity and resilience. The move will integrate AI-powered geospatial intelligence, real-time IoT data collection, and digital mapping technologies to drive data-driven decision-making in cooperative-led farming and rural enterprises.



Pioneer Photo

Speaking on the occasion, Dileep Shanghani, Chairman of WCOOPEF, said the cooperative model has long been the backbone of India's agricultural economy. By integrating geospatial innovation and IoT-enabled digital crop surveys, we are modernizing cooperatives to become data-driven, efficient, and globally competitive. This initiative aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sahkar Se Samridhi' and Vksit Bharat, ensuring that every farmer - especially small and marginal farmers - benefits from precision agriculture, real-time market access, and financial inclusion." Binod Anand, Member of

PM's High-Power Committee on MSP, founder President of WCOOPEF, and a leading advocate for farmer-centric value chains, emphasised the need for cooperatives to embrace digital transformation. "Cooperatives must evolve into technology-driven enterprises to uplift small farmers and rural communities. This initiative will establish a tech-enabled cooperative economic zone, leveraging IoT-enabled digital crop surveys, AI-powered geospatial intelligence, and real-time market linkages to create a more resilient and self-sustaining cooperative ecosystem," he added.

# Chhattisgarh budget focuses on development in Naxal-affected Bastar

PTI ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government on Monday presented a ₹1.65 Lakh Crore budget with special focus on development of Naxal-affected Bastar by giving boost to tourism, security and infrastructure. The 2025-26 budget, presented by Finance Minister OP Choudhary, aims to establish Bastar as a new development model, prioritising the transformation of Naxal-affected areas, an official statement said. The Chhattisgarh government plans to establish a Special Operations Group (SOG), similar to the Centre's National Security Guard (NSG), to play a crucial role in anti-Naxal operations. Additionally, anti-narcotics task forces in 10 districts and cyber police stations in five districts will be set up. To safeguard mineral resources, a State Industrial Security Force (SISF), modelled on Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), will be created. The plan include a mega vision for complete eradication of Naxals, creation of 3,200 additional posts for 'Bastar Fighters', a specialised police unit established by the Chhattisgarh government to combat Maoists, the statement said. Due to the intense operations by the security forces, the

Naxal network has crumbled in Bastar with the killing of 305 extremists, surrender of 1,000 others in just 15 months, since the taking over of charge Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, it said. According to the budget, the government's revenue is projected to grow by 11 per cent without imposing any new taxes. This year, the government has allocated ₹26,341 Crore for capital expenditure, an 18 per cent increase from the previous year. This means more roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals will be built across the state, improving lives and accelerating development. Sai said the budget will further strengthen the foundation of a developed Chhattisgarh. Emphasising that special attention is being given to Bastar with substantial investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment, he said, "This is a crucial step toward ensuring lasting peace and progress in Naxal-affected regions". The Chhattisgarh government said it has achieved remarkable success in dismantling the Naxal network in Bastar and 305 Naxals have been eliminated, and 1,000 have surrendered in just over a year. Recognising the contribution of 'Bastar Fighters' in eliminating Naxalism, the budget includes provisions for 3,200 additional positions.

New police stations will be established in Elmagunda and Dabbakonta, two highly affected villages. ₹5 Crore allocation has been made for the annual Bastar Olympics, celebrating tribal sports and traditions. Additionally, ₹2 Crore has been earmarked for yoga camps and ₹10 Crore for biodiversity tourism zones. Under the 'Niyad Nellanar' (My Beautiful Village) initiative, ₹25 Crore has been allocated to ensure the reach of government schemes to villages. The budget also includes ₹2 Crore for Bastar Madai and Bastar Marathon celebrations. The Chhattisgarh government has also announced a major push for road networks, bridges, schools, and digital infrastructure across Bastar and other regions. ₹221 Crore fund has been allocated for infrastructure development in tribal areas. The PM Janman scheme include ₹30 Crore for school education, ₹12 Crore for tribal welfare, and ₹300 Crore for housing projects. The state government has launched 'Chhattisgarh Anjor Vision 2047', an initiative outlining 10 major missions focusing on healthcare, tourism, agriculture, education, IT, and infrastructure. These missions aim to transform Chhattisgarh into a developed state by 2047. "The government anticipates

₹2,804 Crore additional revenue, making Chhattisgarh one of India's financially robust states. The state's total revenue is expected to be ₹1.41 Lakh Crore, mainly sourced from tax collections and central government allocations. Chhattisgarh's GDP growth rate is projected at 7.51 per cent, surpassing the national average of 6.5 per cent," the statement said. Among other highlights of the budget are relief for citizens and businesses, petrol price reduced by Rs 1 per litre by slashing the VAT. A sum of ₹2,000 Crore has been allocated for new road projects in a single financial year under the CM Urban Development Scheme while ₹500 Crore allocated for improving city infrastructure. The UPI payment system will be rolled out in rural panchayats and new pension fund will be created to ensure long-term financial security for employees and a three per cent increase in DA for state employees. The state government has also introduced a Homestay Policy for Bastar and Sarguja. Now, tourists visiting these regions can stay in villages and experience the rich local culture and traditional cuisine. Additionally, adventure tourism and a dedicated tourism circuit will be developed in Jashpur, offering visitors an exciting travel experience, the statement said.

# FDI drops 5.6 per cent in October-December

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in India dipped by 5.6 per cent year-on-year to \$10.9 Billion in October-December quarter of this fiscal due to global economic uncertainties, according to the government data. FDI inflows during October-December 2023-24 stood at \$11.55 Billion. According to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) data, in the July-September quarter of the current fiscal, the inflows were up by about 43 per cent year-on-year to \$13.6 billion and had increased 47.8 per cent annually to \$16.17 billion in the preceding April-June quarter. Cumulatively, during the April-December 2024-25, the inflows registered a growth of 27 per cent to \$40.67 billion as against \$32 billion in the same period of 2023-24. Total FDI, which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital, grew by 21.3 per cent to \$62.48 billion during the first nine months of this fiscal from \$51.5 billion in April-December 2023-24.

# Sensex falls for ninth day on selling in HDFC Bank

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex declined by 112 points while Nifty fell for the ninth straight session on Monday following selling in blue-chips HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries. In a see-saw trade, the 30-share BSE benchmark declined by 112.16 points or 0.15 per cent to close at 73,085.94 as 18 of its components advanced and 12 declined. The index opened higher but soon fell to the day's low of 72,784.54 due to intense selling in large caps. The barometer staged a rebound in the second half amid positive Asian markets and hit a high of 73,649.72 before paring gains to close down. Extending losses to the ninth session, the NSE Nifty slipped 5.40 points or 0.02 per cent to settle at 22,119.30. The index slumped 120 points or 0.54 per cent to hit a low of 22,004.70 but later recovered most of the losses. From the Sensex pack, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, Adani Ports, Maruti Suzuki India, Axis Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharmaceuticals and Asian Paints were among the laggards. Reliance Industries fell the most by 2.38 per cent to close at ₹1,171.10 apiece. During the day, it went down by 3.63 per cent to hit a 52-week low of Rs 1,156 per piece. UltraTech Cement, Bharti Airtel, NTPC, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra and Mahindra, Larsen and Toubro and State Bank of India were the gainers. "The market experienced a

gradual recovery from its intraday low, driven by improving economic growth, a rebound in consumption expenditure, and healthy expansion in the agricultural sector, which influenced investor sentiment. With valuations approaching oversold levels, domestic indicators suggest the potential for a rebound," Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Financial Services. Global uncertainties and sustained foreign fund outflows continue to keep market participants cautious, Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd. The BSE smallcap gauge dipped 0.70 per cent, however, midcap index went up 0.25 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, Energy (1.11 per cent), Financial Services (0.54 per cent), Bankex (0.28 per cent), Oil & Gas (0.50 per cent), and Services (0.49 per cent) were the losers. On the other hand, Capital Goods, Power, Consumer Durables, Realty, Commodities, Tech, Focussed IT, Utilities and Metal were among the gainers. As many as 2,852 stocks declined while 1,235 advanced and 147 remained unchanged on the BSE. A monthly survey showed that India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a 14-month low in February amid softer increase in new orders and production. "Although output growth slowed to the weakest level since December 2023, overall momentum in India's manufacturing sector remained broadly positive in February," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

# Bihar government tables ₹3.17 Lakh Crore budget

PTI ■ PATNA

The Nitish Kumar government in Bihar on Monday tabled a ₹3.17 Lakh Crore budget in the assembly, the last before the state goes to polls later this year. Presenting the budget on the floor of the assembly, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, who holds the finance portfolio, told the House that the budget, the total size of which was ₹38,169 Crore more than the last fiscal, is inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "margdarshan" (guidance) and the CM's "netritva" (leadership). "The government has received enormous support from the people of the state in its bid to achieve the goal of a 'samridhi Bihar', which is essential to achieve the prime minister's goal of a 'vksit Bihar'.



Bihar CM Nitish Kumar during Budget session of the Assembly in Patna PTI

"Modi's vision of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas aur sabka prayas' and the CM's motto of 'naya ke saath vikas' have been the twin guiding principles behind the budget. We are making progress, leaving behind years of anarchy," said the senior BJP leader, in an apparent dig at the opposition RJD-Congress combine.

Speaking about the budgetary allocations for different sectors, Choudhary said ₹60,964 Crore has been set aside for education, which is of crucial importance in the densely populated state that has a relatively young demography. He said ₹20,335 Crore has been allocated for the health sector, while ₹17,831 Crore will be

given to the home department, which is responsible for law and order, improvement in which has been the most talked about achievement of the NDA government. In keeping with the government's push for women's empowerment, the budget has proposed setting up of a 'mahila haat' (women's marketplace) in Patna, besides "pink toilets" in all districts and "pink buses" in major cities. "We also propose the establishment of 'Kanya Vivah Mandaps' in all panchayats, which will serve the needs of poor rural families with girls of marriageable age," Choudhary said. He said Bihar will be building "greenfield airports" at Sultanganj and Raxaul, in Bhagalpur and East Champaran districts, respectively, and "the airport at Purnea will become operational in three months from now".

# Gold as asset class to rise in coming years: Nageswaran

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold will remain relevant for investors as a portfolio diversification mechanism with a "likely ascending importance" as an asset class in the coming years, Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran said on Monday. Speaking at the IGCPC-IIMA annual gold and gold markets conference 2025, he said that gold will remain relevant not only as a store of value, as an ornament for cultural and religious purposes, but also as an important portfolio diversification mechanism "until such a time the world is able to arrive at an international monetary system from the current international monetary non-system". "That day of reckoning is

very difficult for any one of us to prophesy at this stage," Nageswaran said. The value of gold has increased by over \$200 per ounce or eight per cent in the last three months to \$2,860 per ounce. At the same time, the Indian stock markets have fallen over eight per cent over the last three months. Since 2002, the value of the precious yellow metal is up 10 times when it was about \$250-290/ounce. In the Indian market, the price of gold rose 10 gms stood at around ₹85,000. India is a net importer of gold. He said it is very important to remember the relevance and the importance of gold for a portfolio, a store of value etc, more so in the

backdrop of the likely ascending importance of gold in the coming years. Nageswaran also hoped that India will find ways to productively deploy the gold assets that it has without diluting its role as a symbol of store of value as well as cultural and religious significance. "That is where the policy challenge lies," he said. Nageswaran said India needs to reflect upon its past gold monetisation efforts to pay back the owners who deposited gold in currency form. "But probably people attach different significance to gold and sometimes we tend to forget that in policy deliberation," he added. To win away people from physical gold, the government had announced Gold Monetisation Scheme in

2015, which allowed people to deposit their gold with banks to earn interest. The scheme aimed to reduce India's reliance on gold imports. He said that gold not only symbolises solidity but also policy discipline and, in a way, it also should have symbolised investor discipline. "Today is what is happening is that, not only policymakers think, that they can print their way out of any trouble, investors also think that they are entitled to rising prices of assets of all types and therefore clamour for reliefs, forgetting the fact that the financial markets are a two-way street, the clamour for policy relief increases with every passing day when the market declines," Nageswaran said.

# INBRIEF

## REC LTS SIGNS MOU WITH MADHYA PRADESH GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT POWER SECTOR



**BHOPAL:** REC Limited, a Maharatna CPSE and a leading NBFC under the Ministry of Power, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Madhya Pradesh at the Global Investors Summit 2025 in Bhopal.

## TECHNOVISTA 2.0 ORGANISED AT GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY



**AMRITSAR:** An inter-departmental event 'TECHNOVISTA 2.0 2025' was organised by Department of Mechanical Engineering of Guru Nanak Dev University under the guidance of Vice Chancellor Prof. (Dr) Karamjeet Singh.

## GNDU HOSTS INTER-DEPARTMENT CRICKET COMPETITIONS UNDER FIT INDIA PROGRAM



**AMRITSAR:** Under the able leadership of Vice Chancellor Dr Karamjeet Singh, Guru Nanak Dev University organised an Inter-Department Cricket Competition for boys in which 21 teams participated.

## ALUMNI MEET OF CHEMISTRY DEPARTMENT OF GNDU



**AMRITSAR:** The Chemistry Department of Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) host a Alumni Meet, fostering connections between past and present students as well as industry professionals.

## GNDU STUDENTS VISITED MEDIA OFFICES



**AMRITSAR:** With the support of Vice Chancellor Dr Karamjeet Singh Guru Nanak Dev University and under the guidance of the Head of the Mass Communication Department, an educational trip was organised. During this trip, students of MA second and fourth semester had the opportunity to visit News18 and The Tribune at Chandigarh.



# Manchester United crashes out of FA Cup

**PTI ■ MANCHESTER**

Manchester United crashed out of the FA Cup on Sunday after losing on penalties to Fulham. Rather than bemoan the latest blow in a miserable season, though, United coach Ruben Amorim insisted his sights were set on a bigger trophy.

"The goal is to win the Premier League. So I know that we are losing games and losing trophies during this season, but the goal is to win the Premier League again," Amorim said after the 4-3 shootout loss at Old Trafford.

"I don't know how long it's going to take. But that is our goal.

"If you think like that, we can suffer a little bit in these defeats — a lot sometimes — but we have a goal, so we continue, no matter what, we continue forward."

Cup holder United was sent spinning out in the fifth round as Victor Lindelof and Joshua Zirkzee saw spot kicks saved after the game ended 1-1 following extra time.

Fulham goalkeeper Bernd Leno was



the hero with the crucial stops that set up a quarterfinal match against Crystal Palace.

It took a second-half equalizer from Bruno Fernandes to send the game to extra time after Calvin Bassey headed Fulham in front just before the break. But it proved a temporary reprieve for United, which now has just one trophy to aim for this season — the Europa League.

**Knockout blow**

United last won the Premier League in the 2012-13 season and, despite Amorim's ambition, the next league title feels a long way off. His team is languishing in 14th place in the standings and seems unlikely to finish in the top half this season. It has been a torrid start for the

Portuguese coach, who only took charge in November.

Knockout competitions had provided a rare source of optimism, and with Liverpool, Arsenal and Chelsea all eliminated from the FA Cup, the path was opening up for United to successfully defend the trophy it lifted last May.

But the 13-time winner posed little threat in a first half that ended with sections of the home support jeering after Bassey headed Fulham in front from close range.

United captain Fernandes sparked the home team into life with a low, first time finish from inside the box in the 71st minute.

United then had chances to win. Alejandro Garnacho was denied by Leno when through on goal in added time and the keeper blocked another effort from Kido Obi in extra time before his shootout heroics.

"I know they had chances but I think we were the best team on the pitch," Fulham coach Marco Silva said.

"Our team was on the ball, dominating the ball. We deserve to be in the next stage."

# Assam defeats Bihar 2-1 in National hockey championship

**PTI ■ PANCHKULA**

Assam defeated Bihar 2-1 in a Division B match of the 15th Hockey India Senior Women National Championship at the Tau Devi Lal stadium here on Monday.

After a tightly contested first quarter, Assam broke the deadlock right before half-time with captain Munmuni Das (29th minute) successfully converting a penalty corner and then Khushboo Prajapati (59th) converted another set piece to double their lead.

Bihar scored a consolation goal in the 60th minute through Nusrat Khatoon.

In a Division C match on Sunday, Andhra Pradesh recorded a 4-2 win against Jammu and Kashmir.

Revathi Thalari (3th, 17th)



scored a brace for her side while Harathi Lomada (36th) and Madugula Bhavani (45th) also contributed with the goals for Andhra Pradesh. Rajni (10th) and Anju Kumari (57th) were the scorers for Jammu and Kashmir.

In the last Division C match on Sunday, Puducherry enjoyed a dominant 6-1 win over Arunachal in Pool B. Jayaprtha S (13th, 39th, 41st) scored a hat-trick for Puducherry while B Deepika (4th, 22nd) and S Subasri (40th) also found the net for the winners. Hema Navait (5th) was the lone goal getter for Arunachal.

# Barcelona thrash Real Sociedad 4-0

**PTI ■ MADRID**

Barcelona cruised to a 4-0 rout of 10-man Real Sociedad to regain the lead in Spain.

Gerard Martin, Marc Casadó, Ronald Araujo and Robert Lewandowski scored a goal each on Sunday to put Barcelona one point ahead of second-placed Atletico Madrid at the top of the Spanish league.

"There is still a long way to go and everything can change very quickly," Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said.

"We have to keep fighting until the end because we want to win everything we can."

Barcelona is three points ahead of third-placed Real Madrid, which lost 2-1 at Real Betis on Saturday, when Atletico beat Athletic Bilbao 1-0 at home.

"Very happy with the match we played," Araujo said. "It was important to win and become leaders again. It was a great effort by the team."

Sociedad played a man down from the 17th minute after Aritz Elustondo was sent off with a straight red card for grabbing Barcelona forward Dani Olmo to stop a



breakaway.

"The early red card for Real Sociedad changed everything, it's true, but we forced them into it. They are a very good team but today we deserved the win," Flick said.

It was the sixth win in a row for Barcelona in the league, and the second loss in three matches for Sociedad, which stayed in ninth place.

"It was a clear red card," Sociedad coach Imanol Alguacil said.

"After that there was no game. It's already hard 11 against 11 against them, you can imagine with a man down."

Flick rested some regular starters ahead of the team's Champions League match at

season with the Catalan club in 2022-23. He is the league's top scorer with 21 goals, four more than Madrid's Kylian Mbappé, who is second on the list.

Sociedad, which along with Barcelona, Madrid and Atletico is playing in the Copa del Rey semifinals, struggled from the start and had no attempts on goal.

Barcelona had 33 total attempts.

Sociedad defender Hamari Traoré entered the match in the second half to mark his return to action nearly six months after having to undergo knee surgery.

Earlier on Sunday, striker Diego García scored two minutes into second-half stoppage time to give 16th-placed Leganes a 1-0 win over 14th-placed Getafe in a match between teams from the Madrid area.

Other results

Valencia missed a chance to move out of the relegation zone after a 3-3 draw at midtable Osasuna.

Winless in three matches, Valencia earned a point with a neat backheel flick by Umar Sadiq in the 87th.

Osasuna hasn't won in five consecutive games in all competitions.

# Lionel Messi leads Argentina against Uruguay, Brazil in World Cup qualifiers

**PTI ■ BUENOS AIRES**

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni has selected a preliminary list of 33 players led by Lionel Messi for South American qualifying matches against Uruguay and Brazil.

One of the bright young talents in a revamped squad is striker Claudio Echeverri, who has just joined Manchester City after having played in the South American Under-20 championships.

Other players who are not yet 21 — Nicolás Paz, Benjamín Domínguez and Santiago Castro — were included in the squad announced on Sunday.

Argentina leads the standings with 25 points after 12 matches. Uruguay has 20 and will host Messi's team at the Centenario Stadium in Montevideo on March 21. Four days later, the World Cup winners will play Brazil at Buenos Aires' Monumental Stadium.

Squad:

Goalkeepers: Emiliano Martínez (Aston Villa), Gerónimo Rulli (Olympique



Marseille), Walter Benítez (PSV Eindhoven)

Defenders: Nahuel Molina (Atletico Madrid), Gonzalo Montiel (River Plate), Cristian Romero (Tottenham), Germán Pezzella (River Plate), Leonardo Balerdi (Olympique Marseille), Juan Foyth (Villarreal), Nicolás Otamendi (Benfica), Facundo Medina, (Lens), Nicolás Tagliafico (Olympique Lyon), Francisco Ortega (Olympiakos).

Midfielders: Leandro Paredes (Roma), Enzo Fernández (Chelsea), Rodrigo de Paul (Atletico Madrid), Exequiel Palacios

(Bayer Leverkusen), Alexis Mac Allister (Liverpool), Giovanni Lo Celso (Real Betis), Máximo Perrone (Como), Giuliano Simeone (Atletico Madrid), Benjamín Domínguez (Bologna), Thiago Almada (Olympique Lyon).

Forwards: Alejandro Garnacho (Manchester United), Nicolás González (Juventus), Lionel Messi (Inter Miami), Nicolás Paz (Como), Claudio Echeverri (Manchester City), Paulo Dybala (Roma), Julián Álvarez (Manchester City), Lautaro Martínez (Inter Milan), Santiago Castro (Bologna), Ángel Correa (Atletico Madrid).

# India's Iniyar wins Cannes Open chess

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Indian Grandmaster Pa Iniyar won the Cannes International Open, defeating compatriot V Pranesh in the ninth and final round in Cannes, France.

Iniyar ended the tournament on 7.5 points, a half point more than Delhi-based International Master Aradhya Garg, who finished second.

Matching Garg on seven points was reigning World junior champion Kazymbek Noderbek of Kazakhstan, who had to be content with the third place following a tiebreak.

Iniyar remained undefeated through the course of the tournament scoring six wins and three draws.

The Indian picked up the necessary steam in the last three rounds winning one game after another and his most crucial victory was over Garg in the penultimate round.

The result helped Iniyar gain 12 rating points and is now closing in on the 2600 Elo barrier, taking his rating to 2579.

# Cricket will open up new Olympic markets: Coe

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Hailing cricket's inclusion in the 2028 Los Angeles Games, International Olympic Committee (IOC) president's post frontrunner Sebastian Coe says the move will open up new markets, which will be critical for the growth of the Olympic movement.

Cricket returned to the Olympics in the T20 format for the first time after the 1900 edition, as it was named among the five additional sports for the 2028 LA Games. The decision was taken in 2023.

Coe, who is currently the head of World Athletics, stressed that cricket's support base goes far beyond South Asia, which has a population of more than two billion.

"Well, from everything I've said (during November 2024 visit to India), you would recognise that cricket is in for the Olympic movement, particularly with the support that it will have not only in South Asia, but people from



South Asia living in all our big cities," Coe told PTI in an exclusive virtual interview.

"We have a very big Indian or South Asian community in London, in New York. This audience, this support goes way beyond just India, Pakistan or South Asia. It's very important for the (Olympic) movement. And it will open up new Olympic markets, which is critical."

It is not known whether cricket will be in the roster for the 2032 Olympics in Brisbane, Australia, but the game will certainly make the cut if India bags the hosting rights for the 2036 edition, for which the country has already submitted a Letter of Intent.

The 68-year-old Coe, whose maternal grandfather is an Indian from Punjab, is considered the frontrunner among the seven candidates contesting in the election to succeed Thomas Bach as IOC president.

More than 100 members of the IOC will vote on March 20 in the Greek resort of Costa Navarino, where the 144th IOC Session will be held from March 18 to 21.

Coe, a double Olympic 1500m gold medallist, does

not see anything wrong with countries like India willing to host big-ticket events such as the Olympics, though some would argue that the huge cost involved could better be used for nurturing talent and building other sports infrastructure.

"You have to do both. I've always said that if you have a really well stocked shop window, that will have an impact on the ability to attract people into the shop. Having performing athletes like Neeraj Chopra also has a massive impact. So, you can't have one without the other.

"Ideally, you have pathways and programmes that have been created for participation, but that participation is turbo-charged if you have top athletes and you have world-class events."

He advocated the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in talent identification.

"Talent identification can be really turbo-charged by AI and is a lot cheaper than the traditional ways of identifying that talent. There are lots of

things that AI and cutting edge technology can allow us to almost level up the difference between small member federations and National Olympic committees and the big and the well-healed ones. This (AI) can really equalise opportunities.

"Accessibility is also absolutely critical. AI can really help in this area also. AI allows us to optimise, particularly around some smaller National Olympic Committees that may have less economic ability to do some of the things the larger NOCs do, particularly around talent identification."

Recently Coe had suggested that Russia could be brought back to the Olympic fold if there is an agreement to end the war with Ukraine.

Asked if such a decision could be a smooth one to arrive at if he becomes the IOC president, he said, "It will be entirely dependent on the circumstances on the progress we've made when we were dealing with the doping challenges.

# FC Goa to face Mohammedan SC in ISL

**PTI ■ MARGAO**

Having confirmed a second-placed finish, FC Goa will take on visiting Mohammedan SC in their Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Tuesday.

The Gaurs have been assured of a second-placed finish after the fourth-placed Jamshedpur FC dropped points with a 1-1 draw with Kerala Blasters.

With two games in hand, the Red Miners can only get to a maximum of 44 points now, which would still fall short of FC Goa's current tally of 45 points from 22 matches.

The third-positioned Bengaluru FC have 38 points from 23 matches. This means that the Gaurs are set to directly play the semi-finals and would not have to engage in the one-legged eliminator in the playoffs.

Mohammedan Sporting have lost four times and drawn once in their previous five games, having 12 points from 22 games.

The previous fixture between



these two sides ended in a 1-1 draw on September 21, 2024.

Another draw here would make Mohammedan Sporting only the third team that FC Goa have drawn against in their first two ISL meetings, after Mumbai City FC (2014) and East Bengal FC (2020-21).

FC Goa have won each of their last four home games in the ISL. A victory in this game would make it the third time in their history that they register five or more straight home wins in a single season, after seven triumphs on this bounce in 2019-20 and five in 2023-24.

FC Goa have been lethal from distance this season, as Carl McHugh's strike against Punjab FC was their ninth goal from outside the box this season. Another such strike will see them become only the fifth team in the ISL to hammer 10+ goals away from the 18-yard box in a single campaign.

Mohammedan Sporting kept a clean sheet in their last away game against Odisha FC (0-0 on February 28). The only time they managed consecutive shutouts this season was in January.

# AC Milan fall into crisis after third straight Serie A loss

**PTI ■ MILAN**

AC Milan fell further into crisis as a stoppage-time penalty condemned it to a 2-1 defeat at home to Lazio in the Italian league.

Despite being reduced to 10 men, Milan managed to level in the 84th minute on Sunday but Pedro converted a penalty in the eighth minute of stoppages.

This was Milan's third straight Serie A loss amid a disastrous run that also saw the Rossoneri crash out of the Champions League.

Milan dropped to ninth in the standings and was leapfrogged by Roma after Claudio Ranieri's team fought back to beat 10-man Como 2-1.

Lazio climbed back into

fourth place — a point above Juventus, which hosts Hellas Verona on Monday.

Sixth-placed Bologna rallied to beat relegation-threatened Cagliari 2-1.

Late (and even later) drama Lazio was also looking to get back to winning ways following two Serie A draws and being knocked out of the Italian Cup midweek by Inter Milan, also at San Siro.

Mattia Zaccagni gave Lazio the lead in the 28th minute. His initial attempt was saved by Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan but Zaccagni tapped in the rebound.

Milan's chances of getting something from the match diminished in the 67th when defender Strahinja Pavlovic was shown a straight red card for a dangerous tackle on



Lazio midfielder Mattéo Guendouzi

Milan nevertheless managed to find an equalizer Rafael Leão whipped in a cross from the left for an unmarked Samuel Chukwueze to head in at the far post.

But there was even later

drama when Lazio was awarded a penalty on video review after Maignan brought down visiting forward Gustav Isaksen. Pedro struck the spot kick into the bottom right corner.

Bologna boosts top 4 hopes

Riccardo Orsolini scored twice to help Bologna boost its chances of qualifying for the Champions League again.

Cagliari surprisingly reached the break ahead in Bologna after Roberto Piccoli's 22nd-minute header.

But Bologna coach Vincenzo Italiano made three changes at halftime and his team leveled almost immediately as Orsolini converted a penalty after Cagliari midfielder Mattia Felici fouled Nicolò Cambiaghi — one of those substitutes.

Cambiaghi also rolled the ball across for Orsolini to tap in and complete the turnaround eight minutes later.

Cagliari is three points above the relegation zone.

Impact subs

Substitute Alexis Saelemaekers took just 120 seconds to help Roma turn its match round.

Roma was trailing at home to Como following Lucas Da Cunha's goal on the stroke of halftime.

But the match changed in the 61st minute. Saelemaekers, who had only just come off the bench, played a one-two with Zeki Çelik and then a stroke of luck saw his effort deflected by Como defender Edoardo Galdaniga, going in off the underside of the crossbar.

It quickly got worse for Como as it almost immediately went down to 10 men when defender Marc-Oliver Kempf was sent off following a second yellow card.

Half-time substitute Artem Dovbyk scored the winner in the 76th, volleying in a cross from Devyne Rensch — who had been on the field for less than two minutes.

It was Roma's 11th league match unbeaten since a loss at Como on December 15 and sent Ranieri's team up to eighth, six points below Juventus.

Empoli, which surprisingly knocked defending champion Juventus out of the Italian Cup midweek, drew 1-1 at Genoa to remain in the bottom three, one point from safety.



# Four spinners a tempting combination after Varun's effort: Rohit

PTI ■ DUBAI

India captain Rohit Sharma did not commit to following the four-spinner template in the Champions Trophy (CT) semifinal against Australia, but said Varun Chakravarthy's splendid effort against New Zealand has made that option very "tempting."

India played with Chakravarthy, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel and the quartet wrecked the Kiwis, sharing nine wickets among them in their team's 44-run win here on Sunday. "We really need to think, even if we want to play four spinners, how we can squeeze four spinners. The reason I say it is because we are very much aware of the conditions here and we know exactly what works and what doesn't work," Rohit said in his pre-match press conference. "So, we will think about it, what is the right combination to go with, but it is tempting," he added. Chakravarthy, who came in as a replacement for rested pacer Harshit Rana, was excellent while returning with the figures of 5/42, and Rohit said the spinner is certainly in the team management's thoughts. "He just showed what he is

capable of. Now, it is up to us to think and see how we can get that combination right. He got a game, and he did everything that was asked for.

"He has got something different about him and when he gets it right, he knocks people over and he takes 5-5. So, it is very tempting to think about what to do, which is a good headache to have. We will also assess the Australian batting lineup to see what kind of bowling options will work against them," he detailed.

**Rohit lauds Chakravarthy**  
During the course of his match-winning effort against the Kiwis, the Tamil Nadu spinner had also rinsed away the memories of his modest outing against Pakistan in the 2021 T20 WC at this stadium. Rohit explained the improvements Chakravarthy has made in the interim. "He has become more accurate now from the last time he played for India in 2021. There was a little bit of inexperience in him as well because he hadn't played a lot of cricket."

"But right now in the last two or three years he has played a lot of cricket whether it's domestic cricket, IPL and now for India in T20s and now the ODIs as well. So, he understands his bowling



really well," he said. The Mumbai man said Chakravarthy has put in a lot of hard yards into his craft of late, which is now reflecting in his wicket column. "You know, some of our batters also could not figure that (variations) out, which is always

nice. His pace variation now is superb. When you have a little bit of mystery, you do not want to be a one-dimensional bowler and bowl with the same speed. "You need something different, the pace variation and the accuracy as well. So, he has worked on both and now you see

that he is getting a lot of wickets which is a good sign for us as a team," he added. Drafting Chakravarthy into India's CT squad ahead of players like Yashasvi Jaiswal and Mohammed Siraj had raised some questions. Rohit explained the rationale. "It is just the talent. If there is

something really special about that particular player, you want to fast track him. Certain formats require a certain skill set and whenever we look at these kinds of players, if the talent is there, then you don't want to shy away from bleeding them."

Rohit did not read too much into the criticism of stacking the side with spinners.

"There will be questions asked, there will be few eyebrows raised but as a team you want to do certain things which can help you win games. So, it's important to understand that talent and I have been here long enough to understand what kind of players are talented.

"With Varun especially, we had to sacrifice a batsman which we thought it's only five games in this tournament and it's very unlikely that batter is going to play at any stage unless there is an injury."

**'Middle-order did well'**  
India's top three — Rohit, Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill — had an off-game against New Zealand, leaving the side reeling at 30 for three. But Shreyas Iyer, Axar Patel and Hardik Pandya batted well to take India to a defensible total. Rohit said middle-order batters getting runs was important for the team during the business end of

the tournament. "The middle-order is very experienced but to just get some batting time in the middle and to get those runs and get that fighting total was very very important from our standpoint. "Shreyas, KL, Hardik and Axar, they batted brilliantly which is a good sign for us going into the semis because we wanted to have these kind of situations where we are slightly under pressure and then the middle-order takes us through to that target which they did," he said.

**'Axar's improvement is superb'**  
Rohit also praised Axar for repaying the think tanks' faith in him while promoting to No. 5 ahead of KL Rahul.

"The clear message was given to him when we started the ODI series against England. That no matter what, you will bat at No. 5. The kind of improvement he has shown with the bat over the last year or so is superb and that is where we felt that we can utilise him in the middle.

"He likes to take the game on, likes to play his shots. And sometimes when you aren't trouble, you want to always take that positive route. He showed it in the T20 World Cup final (2024) which was a very, very crucial knock," he added.



## Champions Trophy: New Zealand to face South Africa in semifinal

PTI ■ DUBAI

Senior batter Tom Latham said New Zealand will take confidence from their recent win over South Africa in the tri-series when they face the same opponents in the semifinal of the Champions Trophy (CT) in Lahore on Wednesday. New Zealand lost to India by 44 runs in their final Group A match here on Sunday but Latham said it would have no bearing on the semifinal. Recently, New Zealand successfully chased 305 against South Africa in Lahore and then went on to win the tri-series, beating Pakistan in the final, and Latham feels those experiences will hold them in good stead on Wednesday. "Yeah, the (South Africa) team that we played potentially will be slightly different, they had a lot of guys that that weren't in that side. They were still playing in their SAT20 back in South Africa so will be slightly different. "But I guess from our point of view, we'll lean back on those experiences of Lahore in playing against South Africa," Latham said after the loss to India. "So yeah, we'll look to prep as best we can. We'll do everything that we do leading up to a game. It's obviously going to be a

reasonably quick turnaround, but it is what it is. And, we'll be looking forward to the challenge of a semifinal."

Latham said what matters for the Kiwis is their attitude towards the game and preparation.

"As we go into every game, we prepare as best we can. Individuals have slightly different preparation. And, yeah, we obviously fielded fantastically well today (Sunday), which was fantastic. And I think that's something we like to do."

"Especially from a fielding point of view is to I guess have a presence in the field and keep taking every I guess attacking option that we can and I think we've seen throughout the tournament some of the catches that the guys have been taking. For us we believe that I guess from a fielding point of view, it's an attitude thing," he said.

"Our attitude is always the same. We turn up trying to play our brand of cricket as best we can. And if we stick to that, then hopefully that will give us a good chance at the back end of the game."

Latham added that they are in no mood to take the Proteas lightly. New Zealand had sealed their semifinal spot ahead of Sunday's loss to India in Dubai. The Kiwis also had prior knowledge that they

would have to return to Pakistan for their last four games.

"That's something that's out of our control. We don't decide the schedule, for us it is about turning up at each game regardless of where it is and trying to play our best brand of cricket as best we can," Latham said. "So, whether it be here, whether it be in Pakistan, our focus will obviously be on South Africa. We're fortunate enough we had a tri-series in Pakistan and against South Africa."

"So, we've got a chance to look back on those experiences and give it our best in a semifinal, which is pretty cool."

Latham said though the surfaces in Pakistan were on the slower side, they have not spun as much as the pitches in Dubai.

"I think if you look at the surfaces that we've played in Pakistan, they've obviously been on the slower side, potentially haven't spun as much as we've seen here in Dubai, but things or conditions can change a little bit from the daytime to the nighttime," he said. "We've seen throughout the games in Pakistan that towards the back end of the game - a little bit of juice settles in and sometimes can be a little bit easier. A little bit nicer to bat on potentially."

## Connolly replaces injured Short in Australian squad

PTI ■ DUBAI

Young spin-bowling all-rounder Cooper Connolly on Monday replaced injured Matthew Short in the Australian squad for the knock-out stage of the ongoing Champions Trophy (CT).

Top order batter Short was ruled out of the ICC event, being held in Pakistan and Dubai, due to a calf injury sustained during the match against Afghanistan on Friday. The 21-year-old Connolly, who made his ODI debut in England last year, was initially named as a travelling reserve for the tournament.

The ICC's Event Technical Committee has approved his inclusion in the Australian squad early on Monday. Connolly has thus far featured in six internationals for Australia, of which three have been ODIs. He's a left-handed



batter, who bowls left-arm spin as well. Short injured his calf on Friday while fielding and appeared hinkered when making a quickfire 20 at the top of the order before the match was abandoned due to rain in Lahore. "I think he'll be struggling," Australia captain Steve Smith had said of Short's injury status. "I think we saw tonight he wasn't moving very well and I think it's probably going to be

too quick between games for him to recover." Australia will face India in the first semifinal of the Champions Trophy here on Tuesday. **Australia squad:** Steve Smith (c), Sean Abbott, Alex Carey, Cooper Connolly, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Aaron Hardie, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Spencer Johnson, Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell, Tanveer Sangha, Adam Zampa.



## Praggnanandhaa draws with Aravindh in Prague Masters

PTI ■ PRAGUE

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with fellow Indian Aravindh Chithambaram as the two stayed a full point ahead of nearest challengers after the fifth round of Prague Masters chess tournament here.

With 3.5 points in their kitty, Aravindh and Praggnanandhaa are now followed by top seed Wei Yi of China, Anish Giri of Holland, Quang Leim Le of Vietnam and Vincent Keymer of Germany, who all have 2.5 points apiece.

Sharing the sixth spot are the remaining four contestants, Czech duo of David Navara and Nguyen Thai Dai Van, Sam Shankland of United States and Gurel Ediz of Turkey.

There are four more rounds remaining in the 10-players round-robin tournament. The day provided just one decisive game with Wei Yi cashing in on his new-found form to beat Shankland. Anish played out a draw with Dai Van, David Navara came back from a much worse position to hold Keymer, while Le signed the peace with Gurel Ediz.

This was the third Classical game between Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh but the result did not change. Aravindh, playing black, decided not to push Prag in to complexities and his Berlin defense was simply an easy guess to get a level position right through.

The opening that was popularised by Russian Vladimir Kramnik quarter of a century ago in his match against compatriot Garry Kasparov, held Aravindh in good stead right through the course of the game as Praggnanandhaa exchanged pieces at regular intervals. The players soon reached a rook and pawns endgame where Aravindh was a pawn less but had enough counter-play. The position petered out to be a theoretically drawn when Aravindh gave up a second pawn leaving no shelter for the white king to hide behind.

Wei Yi capitalized on a tactical oversight by Shankland who played white. After a rather shaky start that cost him two losses out of first three games, the Chinese came back roaring with his second victory in a row after beating Navara in the previous round.

Shankland allowed a dangerous passed pawn on the queen side and it was all over in a mere 27 moves as black crashed through in the base rank with his heavy pieces.

In the challengers section, Divya Deshmukh succumbed to her third loss in the event at the hands of Marc'Andria Maurizzi of France and remained on 1.5 points. After attaining a nearly balanced position, Divya was outplayed by the French Grandmaster in the ensuing endgame.

Nnodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan emerged as the sole leader here taking down Jachym Nemeec of Czech Republic. The Uzbek has four points from his five games.

## KKR appoints Rahane as captain

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India batter Ajinkya Rahane was on Monday assigned captaincy of defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in the Indian Premier League (IPL) after a remarkable run in the domestic T20 competition.

The 36-year-old Rahane, who has played majority of his international cricket in whites, has reinvented himself in the shortest format which was evident in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy wherein he emerged as the leading run getter with 469 runs at a strike rate of 164.56. In the IPL, the right-handed batter had also given a good account of his transformation while playing for Chennai Super Kings.

Rahane replaces Shreyas Iyer as KKR skipper, with the latter set to lead Punjab Kings this season. Iyer and KKR had surprisingly parted ways after a triumphant campaign in the last edition. Venkatesh Iyer, who was also in the reckoning to lead KKR, has been made Rahane's deputy.

Rahane has played for KKR in the past and the franchise bought him for his base price of Rs 1.5 crore at the mega auction. "It's an honour to be asked to lead KKR, which has been one of the most successful franchises in the IPL. I think we have an excellent and balanced squad. I look forward to working



with everyone and taking up the challenge of defending our title," said Rahane in a statement.

Rahane, who captained India to a historic Test series in Australia in 2020-21, led Mumbai to the semifinals in the recently-concluded Ranji Trophy. In IPL, he has previously captained Rajasthan Royals where he was replaced by Steve Smith in the middle of the 2019 season. KKR did not have too many captaincy options in the squad. Among the Indian players, they had to choose between Rahane, Venkatesh and Rinku Singh.

KKR will face Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL season-opener at the Eden Gardens on March 22.

# India will rely on spin battery to break knockout jinx against Australia

PTI ■ DUBAI

History weighs heavily against them but India would rely on a potent spin battery and familiarity with the conditions to break the knockout jinx against an undermanned Australia when the two formidable cricket forces clash in the Champions Trophy (CT) semifinal here on Tuesday. It will not be a straightforward task, though, as the Aussies are a resilient beast in global tournaments even without their lead cast of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc. Their stunning chase of 352 against England at Lahore a few days back validates the thought. The last time India triumphed against Australia in the knockout stage of an ICC event was way back in 2011 World Cup quarterfinal. India lost to Australia in the semifinals of the 2015 ODI World Cup and in the title clash of the

2023 ODI World Cup before succumbing to them in the World Test Championship final in 2023. This Indian side will realistically hope to rewrite that largely melancholic script over the last 14 years and the primary reason for that optimism is the presence of some top of the line spinners in their ranks.

Their pre-tournament decision to fill the squad with five spinners drew a lot of flak from all corners, but it is now proving to be a masterstroke on the slow pitches in Dubai.

The easiest explanation of their dominance is the knowledge of the conditions having had the luxury of playing all their matches in Dubai. But that is only partially true. They have made an effort to tweak their craft as per the needs of the surfaces here.

Since there was no fast or spitting turn on offer here like in a dustbowl, the Indian spinners were made to play the waiting



game. Patience rather than magic is the key in bowling on these decks, as revealed by Varun Chakravarthy. "The pitch here is not a rank turner as such, which people were projecting it to be, But definitely it

was holding on a bit, and it was deviating a little bit to create the doubt. So basically, you had to play around it," said Chakravarthy. The Indian spin quartet of Chakravarthy, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel

walked away with nine New Zealand wickets, but they applied the pressure consistently to earn their rewards.

They delivered 128 dot balls in the 39 overs bowled between them as the Kiwis struggled to break free, a sequence eventuating in a flurry of wickets.

Even the dismissal of an otherwise stoic Kane Williamson had a touch of desperation as his shimmy against Axar ended in a stumping by KL Rahul.

On the other hand, Australia have only one genuine spinner in Adam Zampa, while hoping for part-timers Glenn Maxwell and Travis Head to deliver the goods. Matthew Short has been ruled out of the tournament with a calf injury and it has also robbed the already creaking Australian bowling unit of a handy spin option.

The absence of premier names was felt in the previous matches as the Aussie bowlers conceded 352 and

273 against England and Afghanistan respectively, albeit in better batting conditions.

Hence, the likes of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Shreyas Iyer and Shubman Gill will be eager to go full throttle at them here. They have found the perfect rhythm of batting on these sluggish tracks here.

Skipper Rohit hoped as much. "It is going to be a good game. Australia has a rich history of playing well in ICC tournaments. Now, it's about us to do things right. We have to be focussed on what we need to do on that day. Looking forward to that, hopefully we can stitch one towards us," he said after the match against New Zealand.

But he will not be unaware of the batting might the Aussies possess as the latter hunted down a 350-plus target without any meaningful contribution from Head and captain Steve Smith. India will certainly want to evict

them at the earliest, particularly Head as he has been the team's nemesis in recent years.

It is also a chance for Rohit and his company to mitigate the still lingering pain of losing to Australia in the 2023 World Cup final in Ahmedabad.

This match could be slow-burner but brace for a cracker nonetheless.

**Teams (from):**  
**India:** Rohit Sharma (c), Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohd. Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Ravindra Jadeja, Varun Chakravarthy.  
**Australia:** Steve Smith (c), Sean Abbott, Alex Carey, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Aaron Hardie, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Spencer Johnson, Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell, Tanveer Sangha, Adam Zampa, Cooper Connolly.