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WORLD 8

EU LEADERS OPEN EMERGENCY SUMMIT ON DEFENCE AND UKRAINE AID



INDIA BREACHED IN UK



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a conversation with Director and CEO of Bronwen Maddox at Chatham House in England PTI

concluding an interactive session at the institute, home to Royal Institute of International Affairs, on Wednesday evening. The external affairs minister was in London as in the first leg of his six-day visit to the UK and Ireland from Tuesday that is aimed at exploring ways to further boost bilateral cooperation. "We have seen the footage of a breach of security during the visit of the external affairs minister to the UK," ministry of external affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "We condemn the provocative activities of this small group of separatists and extremists," he said. "We deplore the misuse of democratic freedoms by such elements. We expect the host government in such cases to fully live up to their diplomatic obligations," Jaiswal added. Videos posted on social media showed a small group of pro-Khalistan protesters holding yellow flags were shouting slogans against India and Jaishankar on the opposite side of the road from Chatham House. Continued on page 2

Rana seeks stay of extradition to India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW YORK

Mumbai terror attack accused Tahawwur Rana has moved an "emergency application" with the US Supreme Court against his extradition to India, claiming that he will be tortured there since he is a Muslim of Pakistani origin. Rana, 64, a Canadian national of Pakistani origin, is currently lodged at a metropolitan detention centre in Los Angeles. He is known to be associated with Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley, one of the main conspirators of the 26/11 attacks. Rana has filed an "Emergency Application For Stay" with the Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and Circuit Justice for the Ninth Circuit. President Donald Trump last month announced that his administration approved the extradition of "very evil" Rana, wanted by Indian probe agencies for his role in the 26/11 attacks, "to face justice in India". This followed the rejection of his review petition by the Supreme Court in January. Now, Rana is seeking a stay of his extradition and surrender to India pending litigation (including exhaustion of all appeals) on the merits of a petition he filed in February. In that petition, Rana argued that his extradition to India violates United States law and the United Nations Convention Against Torture "because there are substantial grounds for believing that, if extradited to India, petitioner will be in danger of being subjected to torture." "The likelihood of torture in this case is even higher though as petitioner faces acute risk as a Muslim of Pakistani origin charged in the Mumbai attacks," the application said. The application also said that his "severe medical conditions" render extradition to Indian detention facilities, a "de facto" death sentence. It cited medical records from July 2024 showing that he has multiple "acute and life-threatening diagnoses", including multiple documented heart attacks, Parkinson's disease with cognitive decline, a mass suggestive of bladder cancer, stage 3 chronic kidney disease, and a history of chronic asthma, and multiple COVID-19 infections. "Accordingly, petitioner certainly has raised a credible, if not compelling, factual case that there are indeed substantial grounds for believing he would be in danger of torture if surrendered to Indian authorities. "Further, because of his Muslim religion, his Pakistani origin, his status as a former member of the Pakistani Army, the relation of the putative charges to the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and his chronic health conditions he is even more likely to be tortured than otherwise would be the case, and that torture is very likely to kill him in short order." Continued on page 2



Trump issues last warning to Hamas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump on Wednesday issued what he called a "last warning" to Hamas to release all remaining hostages held in Gaza, directing a sharply worded message after the White House confirmed that he had recently dispatched an envoy for unprecedented direct talks with the militant group. Trump, in a statement on his Truth Social platform soon after meeting at the White House with eight former hostages, added that he was "sending Israel everything it needs to finish the job." "Release all of the Hostages now, not later, and immediately return all of the dead bodies of the people you murdered, or it is OVER for you," Trump said. "Only sick and twisted people keep bodies, and you are sick and twisted!" The pointed language from Trump came after the White House said Wednesday that US officials have engaged in "ongoing talks and discussions" with Hamas officials, stepping away from a long-held US policy of not directly engaging in the militant group. Continued on page 2

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday took strong objection to a security breach during External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit to UK and condemned such "provocative activities." The incident took place in London on Wednesday during an event attended by the minister. A pro-Khalistani protestor attempted to break barricades while some were shouting anti-India slogans. Protestors also tore up the Indian flag. In a firm reaction, New Delhi said it expects the host government to fully live up to their diplomatic obligations in such cases and deplored the "misuse of democratic freedoms" by those elements. The incident happened as Jaishankar was leaving the Chatham House after

Babbar Khalsa terrorist arrested

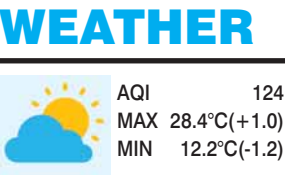
BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a major counterterrorism operation, the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) and Punjab Police have arrested a suspected terrorist linked to Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI. The suspect, identified as Lazar Masih, a resident of Kurlian village in Ramdas area of Amritsar, Punjab, was nabbed around 3.20 am in Uttar Pradesh's Kaushambi district. Addressing a press conference in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) Prashant Kumar said Masih had planned a major terrorist attack during the

Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. The Maha Kumbh was held at Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26. "However, due to intensive security checks at the religious gathering, he failed to execute his plan," he said and added: "The arrest of the terrorist also verifies smuggling of arms and drugs from Pakistan into India." He added the UP STF succeeded in recovering some explosives material and illegal arms from the terrorist. Among the seizures made are three active hand grenades, two active detonators, one foreign-made pistol and 13 cartridges of foreign make, the officer said. Besides, a white coloured explosive powder, an Aadhaar card

with a Ghaziabad address, one mobile phone without SIM card was also seized from his possession, he said. According to security officials, Masih was actively working for Swaran Singh, also known as Jeevan Fauji, the head of BKI's Germany-based module. He was reportedly in direct contact with ISI handlers based in Pakistan. Investigators revealed that Masih had escaped from judicial custody in Punjab on September 24, 2024, and had been evading arrest since then. His capture is being considered a significant breakthrough in preventing potential terrorist activities in India. Continued on page 2

MARKETS



Wankhede returns to Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) has set aside the transfer of IRS officer Sameer Wankhede from Mumbai to Chennai, saying the revenue department "patently violated" its own guidelines. Wankhede, a 2008 batch Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer, made headlines for allegedly demanding ₹ 25 Crore from Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan's family by threatening to implicate his son Aryan Khan in the Cordelia cruise drug bust case during his tenure in the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Mumbai in 2021. The principal CAT bench comprising Justice Ranjit More and member Rajinder Kashyap found procedural lapses and potential bias in the transfer decision issued by the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance. The tribunal said while government officers had an all-India service liability, transfer policies must be implemented in a fair, transparent, and just manner. "We are well aware of the facts that it is a settled law that a transfer, which is an incident of service, is not to be interfered with by the courts, unless it is shown to be clearly arbitrary or vitiated by mala fides or infraction of any professed norm or principle governing the transfer. Continued on page 2

Motor mouth cleric derides Shami



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

All India Muslim Jamaat president Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Bareilvi has criticised Indian cricketer Mohammed Shami for not fasting during Ramadan. The cleric stated that fasting is an obligatory duty in Islam, and anyone who deliberately avoids it is committing a sin. Maulana Razvi claimed that by choosing not to fast, Shami had committed a grave wrongdoing in the eyes of Islamic law. "Islam mandates fasting as one of its fundamental obligations. If a healthy person does not observe Roza, they are guilty in religious terms. Mohammed Shami was seen drinking water during a Champions Trophy match, which means he was not fasting. This is a serious offense in Islam," he said.

The cleric added that since Shami was playing a match, it indicated that he was physically fit. "If he was capable of playing, he was also capable of fasting. By drinking water in public, he has sent the wrong message to the community. He will have to answer to God for this," Maulana Razvi asserted. The cleric's remarks have sparked mixed reactions. While some religious figures expressed their disappointment, others defended the cricketer, arguing that professional athletes often have different requirements due to the physical demands of their sport. Maulana Zaheer Khan calls the controversy uncalled for. "Islam is a progressive religion. It has some prohibitions for persons keeping Roza. It is up to a person to keep Roza on that day or not. In case of Shami, he is on national duty and it is of paramount importance that his body remains hydrated during each game. So, drinking water or not keeping roza on match days is permissible," he said. Shami's coach, Mohammed Badruddin, dismissed the criticism, asserting that the bowler was not in the wrong. "Nothing is above the nation. Shami is playing for his country, and that should be the priority," he stated. Senior BJP leader and MLC Vijay Bahadur Pathak defended Shami and said that sports and religion should not be intertwined. "Shami is a dedicated athlete who has brought glory to India on multiple occasions. If he felt fasting might affect his performance, it must have been a difficult decision for him. He is a proud Indian, and his commitment to the game should not be questioned," Pathak said. Shami played a crucial role in India's four-wicket victory over Australia, helping the team secure a spot in the Champions Trophy final. The Indian bowling attack, led by Shami, restricted Australia to 264 runs, with the pacer claiming three wickets for 48 runs in his 10-over spell. This is not the first controversy to emerge during the tournament.

RSS ignites Marathi-Hindi fire in Mumbai

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Hours after he was pilloried by political leaders of all hues for his statement that "those coming to Mumbai from outside need not necessarily learn Marathi," a chastened RSS leader Bhaiyyaji Joshi on Thursday demanded that Bhaiyyaji Joshi be booked for sedition for his statement, Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnis was forced to intervene in the matter and issue a statement in the state Assembly saying that "Marathi is the language of Mumbai and Maharashtra. It is an integral part of Maharashtra's cultural heritage" and it will be "respected and preserved". On a day when Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Uddhav Thackeray demanded that Bhaiyyaji Joshi be booked for sedition for his statement, Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnis was forced to intervene in the matter and issue a statement in the state Assembly saying that "Marathi is the language of Mumbai and Maharashtra. It is an integral part of Maharashtra's cultural heritage" and it will be "respected and preserved". Seeking to douse the political fire unleashed by Joshi, Fadnis made a categorical statement in the state Assembly. "Marathi is the language of Mumbai, Maharashtra, Maharashtra. The state government and the people living here should adopt it. Marathi language is a part of the culture and identity of the state, and it should be the duty of every citizen to learn it. The Marathi language will be



respected and preserved in Maharashtra, and it is an integral part of our cultural heritage." After the chief minister's statement, Joshi issued a clarification on his stand on the importance of Marathi in Mumbai and Maharashtra, seeking to end the raging controversy over the remarks that he reportedly made at a function held at Ghatkopar in north-east Mumbai on Wednesday night. Speaking at a function held at Ghatkopar, Joshi had said: "Mumbai does not have a single language, Mumbai has many languages. Different areas have different languages. For example, the language of Ghatkopar is Gujarati. Similarly, you will find fewer people speaking Hindi in Girgaon. There, you will find people speaking Marathi...people coming to Mumbai may necessarily have to learn Marathi".

Before long, Joshi came in for a severe flak from leaders of different political parties, including the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), Sharad Pawar-headed NCP (SP) and Congress. Demanding that Joshi be booked for treason, Uddhav Thackeray dared the RSS leader to make such remarks in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal and come back. "Just because the Marathi mannos does not complain that does not mean that you can say anything and get away. Bhaiyyaji Joshi should be booked for treason. How can Bhaiyyaji Joshi make such a statement? This is what I call it sadist mentality. This is a ploy to break Mumbai. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi had indulged in this kind of divisive tactics during the campaigning for the state Assembly polls when he spoke about 'batenge toh katenge'". Continued on page 2

First woman officer tames Jaguar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a first, Flying Officer Tanuska Singh has become the first woman pilot permanently assigned to IAF's Jaguar fighter jet squadron. It marks a significant step in gender inclusion in combat roles. The officer will shortly report for duty. While other women have flown the Jaguar during training, Tanuska's permanent induction into the squadron is a first. The Jaguar is a key tactical strike aircraft for the IAF, known for its precision attack capabilities. Hailing from a family having served in the armed forces, Tanuska initially considered a career in the Indian Army. However, she shifted her focus to the Air Force after learning about the opportunities available to women. She underwent training at the Air Force Academy in Dundigal, Telangana, followed by specialised training on the



Hawk MK 132 aircraft. Born in Uttar Pradesh, she has lived in Mangaluru since 2007. She completed her schooling in Suratkal and later studied in Mangaluru. She also earned a BTEch in electrical and electronics engineering in 2022. Incidentally, the first batch of three female pilots - Avani Chaturvedi, Bhawana Kanth and Mohana Singh were inducted in Indian Air Force

fighter squadron on 2016. Squadron Leader Mohana Singh later made history as the first female fighter pilot in the country to be cleared to fly the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas fighter jet last year. Mohana Singh, along with Avni Chaturvedi and Bhawana Kanth, was part of the trio of female pilots in the Air Force's fighter streams. In the early days, the three pilots flew various aircraft from the Air Force's fighter fleet. Currently, they are flying the regular fleets of Su-30MKi and LCA Tejas. Indian Air Force (IAF), the world's fourth-largest air force, currently accounts for around 20 women fighter pilots. The service opened its fighter stream to women, a watershed in India's military history, in 2016. It has opened all frontiers for women and is giving them opportunities on a par with their male counterparts.

PERENNIAL TOURISM



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a visit to Harsil, in Uttarakashi district of Uttarakhand PTI







# Global economies grappling with population crisis: Chandrababu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday stated that the world's leading economies are grappling with a population crisis. Speaking at a book launch, Naidu emphasised that while these countries possess advanced resources such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cutting-edge technologies, they lack a sufficient workforce to operate them. "All top countries in the world are struggling. There is no population. AI and technology exist, but there are no people to operate them," he said.

Citing examples of Europe, China and Japan, Naidu noted that ageing populations have become a significant challenge for these economies. However, he suggested that



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu during book launch of 'World History' written by former Minister Daggubati Venkateswara Rao in Visakhapatnam

India remains largely unaffected by this issue. Over the past few months, the TDP supremo has urged the people of Andhra Pradesh to have more children to counter the declining population trend. Naidu also highlighted that India is at a pivotal moment in history. Recalling the Liberalisation,

Privatisation, and Globalisation (LPG) reforms introduced in the early 1990s under the Congress government, he said India gained a "first-mover" advantage in the

Information Technology sector. Expressing confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, Naidu asserted that Andhra Pradesh would achieve similar progress through its Swarna Andhra 2047 initiative.

Despite Andhra Pradesh facing multiple challenges, Naidu reaffirmed his determination to navigate them, envisioning the Telugu people as a globally leading community. Comparing the state's current situation to being on a "ventilator," he stated that he regularly seeks support from the central government to address its issues. On Thursday, he also requested assistance from Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The event in the port city was attended by former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu and Sitharaman.

# School paint sparks allegations of saffronisation in Odisha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJP government in Odisha has decided to paint all government school buildings with a shade of orange, prompting the Opposition Biju Janata Dal (BJD) to allege that it is part of the ruling party's attempt at saffronisation of education. The BJD, on the other hand, asserted that the BJD, during its 24-year rule till June 2024, had painted school buildings green and student uniforms were green and white, similar to the party's colour code. The Odisha State Education Programme Authority (OSEPA) has recently issued an instruction to all district collectors about painting school buildings with 'Orange Tan-N' colour. "The government has been pleased to approve the new colour code. In this context, it is requested to issue suitable instructions to concerned field

functionaries for adoption of the approved colour code in all government schools, including PM SHRI schools, during construction, repair and renovation works," OSEPA state project director Ananya Das wrote to all collectors, who are the chairpersons of Samagra Shiksha in districts. This order would be in supersession of all previous instructions related to the colour code of school buildings, she said. Responding to the development, senior BJD leader Prasanna Acharya said it is "sheer politics and condemnable". "It is a peculiar psychology. I don't understand why this government is making such bogus decisions. What is the purpose? Can you change the education system by changing the colours? Can you infuse more energy among the children by changing the colour?" he asked. Alleging that the BJP is trying to infuse politics in the minds of schoolboys and girls,

Acharya claimed that nothing positive would be achieved by such a decision which involved crores of rupees of from the state exchequer. In his reaction, School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond said the previous BJD government had changed the colour of the schools and painted them with their party colour code. "We are not changing the colour of the school buildings. It was the BJD government which had changed the colours of school uniforms to buildings. The decision will create a good environment and the schools will look attractive," Gond said. In October last year, the BJD government changed the colour of the school uniforms of students studying in classes nine and 10 of government and aided schools. The new uniforms have a combination of light brown, chocolate and clay-baked yellow colours.

# BJP brawls, walks out in Jharkhand Assembly, demands higher pensions for widows, PwDs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ RANCHI

BJP legislators on Thursday created a ruckus in the Jharkhand assembly, demanding an increase in the pension of widows and Persons With Disabilities (PwDs). The saffron party MLAs demanded a hike in the pension so that these people get financial assistance at par with beneficiaries of the 'Maiyan Samman Yojana'.

The BJP legislators trooped into the well of the House, seeking a reply from the JMM-led government to their demand, and later staged a walk-out. They asked the government whether it intended to raise the pension amount of widows, physically challenged persons and elderly people at par with the beneficiaries of 'Maiyan Samman Yojana'.

Under this scheme, the government provides ₹2,500 per month to women beneficiaries in the age group of 18 and 50 years. The government assured the agitating members that it would consider the demand. BJP MLA Satyendra Nath Tiwary first raised the issue during question hour. Replying to this, scheduled caste, tribe and backward class welfare minister Chamra Linda said 'Maiyan Samman' and pension are two different programmes. "Maiyan Samman is a government's women empowerment programme, while the pension scheme is run under the Centre-state share arrangement. There are complications in increasing the pension amount. If the Centre increases its share, we will also hike our share," Linda said.



Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren with his wife and JMM MLA Kalpana Soren during the Budget session of the state Assembly in Ranchi

Tiwary said the population of widows in Jharkhand is around 2.85 lakh, while the number of physically challenged persons is around 72,000. "They receive only ₹1,000 a month, while 'Maiyan Samman' Yajana beneficiaries monthly receive ₹2,500. Interestingly, cooks in schools and health sahiyas (assistants) get monthly remuneration of ₹2,000, which is lower than the benefit of Maiyan Samman scheme," Tiwary said. Congress MLA Rameshwar Oraon also urged the government to address the alleged disparity. State minister Sudivya Kumar said that the government would soon increase the remuneration of cooks and health sahiyas to ₹3,000. BJP MLA Shatrughan Mahto again brought up the issue in a starred question. Dhanwar MLA and Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi said widows and physically challenged persons

should get a pension, which should be at par with the benefits of 'Maiyan Samman Yojana'. "I want to ask the government if it is in favour or not of the pension hike." Replying to this, parliamentary affairs minister Radha Krishna Kishore said that they would study the pension system of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Chandigarh and then will consider the demand. BJP legislators sought a specific reply from the government if it would increase the pension amount of widows and physically challenged persons. Subsequently, they trooped into the well of the House and raised slogans against the government. Speaker Rabindra Nath Mahato urged them to go back to their seats as the government assured them to consider the matter. The BJP legislators, however, continued to create a ruckus in the Assembly and then walked out of the House.

# Haryana CM urges CRPF trainees to serve impartially

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini called upon the trainee officers of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to take a pledge to carry out their duties impartially and fearlessly. He also urged them to always be ready to protect the law and the Constitution, safeguard the rights of the people with sensitivity and stand firm in their commitment to truth, honesty and dedication, regardless of the circumstances.

The Chief Minister was speaking as chief guest at the passing out parade ceremony of 55th batch of directly appointed Gazetted Officers of the CRPF in Gurugram on Thursday. A total of 39 trainee officers, including two women officers, passed from the CRPF academy after completing a rigorous training program. He expressed confidence that these 39 trainee officers would discharge their responsibilities

with utmost honesty and devotion, contributing to the integrity, unity, and sovereignty of the nation in line with the proud legacy of the CRPF. Commending the CRPF for its invaluable contribution to the country's internal security, the Chief Minister described the force as the backbone of country's security. He also commended the CRPF for adopting modern technologies and training techniques, which are helping to develop professional and capable officers prepared to face any challenges in the field. The Chief Minister further encouraged the newly passing out officers to engage in constant learning, stressing that ongoing education and re-learning are essential for success.

He highlighted that the CRPF is progressing towards modernisation and empowerment, ensuring that the force remains equipped to tackle evolving security challenges. "Congratulating the trainee officers, their families, and the entire CRPF, the Chief



Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini during the passing out parade of the 55th batch of DAGOs at CRPF Academy in Gurugram

Minister expressed his confidence that these officers would make significant contributions to the country's internal security and nation-building," he said. Saini also recalled the historic decision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to allow women in the Armed Forces, recognising the power of half the nation's population.

cent in the near future, he added. Highlighting the Haryana government's commitment to strengthening security forces, the Chief Minister said that special attention has been given to technical upgrades, resource enhancement, and the expansion of training facilities to better equip police force for any challenges they may face. "In addition, the state has established a dedicated Sainik and Ardh-Sainik Welfare Department to support ex-servicemen and paramilitary forces. In cases of martyrdom, families of Haryana soldiers serving in the armed forces and paramilitary forces receive a financial assistance of ₹1 Crore, along with a government job for one family member. To date, 415 dependents have been provided with jobs," he informed. Director General CRPF Gyanendra Pratap Singh, Director CRPF Academy Sunil Kumar Jha and others dignitaries were also present on this occasion.

# Congress to challenge BJP on key issues in Haryana Assembly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ CHANDIGARH

The budget session of Haryana Assembly, which will begin here on Friday, is likely to be a stormy as the Opposition Congress will likely corner the ruling BJP over a host of issues, including unemployment, paper leak, rising debt, law and order and farmers' plight.

According to the tentative schedule of the Budget session, the session will begin with the Governor's Address on Friday. There will be general discussion in the House on the Governor's Address on March 10, 11 and 12. The Budget estimates for 2025-26 will be presented on March 13 by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, who also holds the Finance portfolio while general discussion on the budget will take place on March 17 and 18. As per the tentative schedule, the Budget session will continue till March 25. Congress leader and former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda has said his party will strongly raise the issues including 'paper leak, unemployment, law and order and corruption'.

"It has become clear to the entire state that the BJP is protecting the paper leak mafia, because one paper after another is getting leaked and there have been scams in every paper from the state board exams to recruitment under this government," Hooda said recently. "One after the other, scams, including those related to mining, are being exposed. Corruption, unemployment and crime are continuously increasing in the state," Hooda alleged. The damage to farmers' crops because of recent heavy rain, "deteriorating law and order, rising debt" and other issues will also be raised by the party, he said. Indian National Lok Dal has said the party will prominently raise various issues related to public interest during the Budget session. Meanwhile, with the Assembly session beginning Friday, the Congress party is yet to name the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader. After BJP rode to power for a third consecutive term in Haryana in last year's Assembly polls, the Congress MLAs have attended three sittings of the Assembly without a Leader of Opposition. Meanwhile, during the Budget session, the government is going to bring a fresh version of the bill on the regulation of travel agents. Chief Minister Saini had recently said the travel agents involved in sending the state youth abroad through illegal routes are being identified and strict action will be taken against them. Saini had also said the government has made full planning to implement the 'Lado Lakshmi Yojana'.

Ahead of the October 2024 Haryana polls, the BJP had promised ₹2,100 to women as monthly financial assistance for the women under this scheme if the party returned to power. The Budget session is coming up and we will be making the provision of its budget, Saini had said. Meanwhile, ahead of the presentation of the Budget, Saini, in recent weeks, held pre-budget consultations with diverse groups to gather valuable suggestions. He also sought suggestions from ruling and opposition MLAs. Saini had on Tuesday said that the state budget for 2025-26 will be growth-oriented, with a special focus on sectors such as agriculture, education, health, sports, infrastructure, and women empowerment. He emphasised that the budget will lay a strong foundation for the state's progress and contribute to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India) by 2047. "Our goal is to present a budget that drives prosperity for every citizen of the state," he added. Saini said the state government is working to improve the lives of people through various reforms. The state government has brought about a revolutionary change in governance over the past 10 years, marking the most significant transformation in over a decade, Saini added.

# Abhishek conspicuously absent from TMC meeting

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Amid speculations of an widening crevice between Mamata Banerjee and her nephew Abhishek who is also the Trinamool Congress (TMC) general secretary the latter on Thursday remained conspicuous by his absence in the crucial core committee meeting of the party that the Bengal Chief Minister had constituted last week to deal with the alleged permeation of electoral rolls with "ghost voters" - as an alleged "part of BJP's ploy to win the next year's State elections."

The leaders of the core committee - comprising Firhad Hakim, Subrata Bakshi, Arup Biswas among others considered close to the Chief Minister - met on Thursday to discuss the issue of "spurious" electoral rolls. According to sources close to the junior Banerjee he would hold a separate meeting on March 15 where he is likely to call all district and block level leaders. Though sources in the TMC said that much should not be read about Abhishek Banerjee's Thursday's developments there was hushed talks about his absence from the meeting. The junior Banerjee who is also an MP from Diamond Harbour constituency is reportedly unhappy with the way his own coterie being marginalised in the party. Incidentally the issue became public recently when Abhishek



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee

himself clarified his stand from a public platform. He told a party organisation meeting called by the Chief Minister at Netaji Indoor Stadium that rumors were being fanned that he was moving away from the party which he vowed to be untrue. "There is a propaganda in the social media that I am quitting the party. This is being done by the vested interests in the BJP. But I must say that I am not a traitor like Suvendu Adhikari or Mukul Roy. I had identified them as traitors who were betraying the party. I will not join the BJP come what may even if they cut my throat. I will still shout 'Mamata

Banerjee Zindabad. I will not join BJP. I will not betray the TMC or Mamata Banerjee," Abhishek had told the party members in presence of the Chief Minister. Meanwhile, in a related development senior TMC leaders including Subrata Bakshi, Firhad Hakim, Arup Biswas, Chandrima Bhattacharya and Ritabrata Banerjee on Thursday met the Chief Electoral Officer to discuss the permeation of fake voters in the electoral rolls. "We have alerted our leaders down the line and a statewide scrutiny is on. Hundreds of fake names are appearing that have been included in the voters' list. Many of these people live outside

Bengal and have different EPIC numbers in some cases they have the same EPIC numbers. This is a big scam and we have alerted the CEO about this and scrutiny will continue," said Bhattacharya. Earlier the Chief Minister had alleged that the BJP was filling the voters' list with ghost voters in order to win the 2026 Assembly elections like they allegedly did in Haryana, Maharashtra and Delhi. "The leaders in Haryana, Maharashtra and Delhi could not catch this trick but here we have caught it and will purge all the voters' lists clean. We will defeat the BJP once again," she said.

# Army hosts 'Arunachal Pradesh - India Centric Geospace' seminar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DIBRUGARH

The Indian Army hosted a two-day seminar titled 'Arunachal Pradesh - India Centric Geospace' in Assam's Dibrugarh district, an official release said on Thursday. The two-day seminar, which began on Wednesday at Dinjan Military Station, was attended by senior military officials, policymakers and scholars. It provided valuable insights into the region's geopolitical, economic and development aspects, it added. Leading scholar and commentator on transboundary rivers, climate change and the Arctic, Uttam Kumar Sinha, emphasised the need for India to enhance its river management capabilities independently rather than reacting to China's activities. He stressed a scientific, sustainable and people-centric approach to infrastructure development.

## A game changer

The strengthening of EU-India ties offers a promising path towards stability, prosperity and technological advancement

The European Union's outreach to India has gained significant momentum, marking a new chapter in their strategic relationship. In the wake of global disruptions, including the shifting stance of the United States under Donald Trump characterised by tariffs, the withdrawal of support for Ukraine, and disengagement from Gaza—the strengthening of EU-India ties emerges as a stabilising force in global geopolitics. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's recent visit to India underscores the EU's commitment to deepening ties with New Delhi. Meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Hyderabad House, von der Leyen expressed the EU's high regard for India as a partner. She emphasised that as the two enter the third decade of their strategic partnership, "the best is yet to come." This sentiment reflects the EU's vision of India as a key player in shaping global economic and political landscapes. A focal point of their discussions was the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a crucial initiative aimed at boosting connectivity, trade and energy cooperation.



Given the evolving geopolitical dynamics, this corridor could serve as a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative, ensuring a more diversified and resilient global supply chain. A significant highlight of the India-EU partnership is its deepening engagement in digital and technological arenas. With India emerging as a technological powerhouse and the EU striving for digital sovereignty, collaboration in these areas can create a formidable synergy. The EU's focus on clean energy aligns with India's ambitious renewable energy goals. Such initiatives can help India and the

EU lead the global transition towards a sustainable future. Beyond technology and energy, trade remains a cornerstone of EU-India ties. Both sides are actively negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that could unlock significant economic potential. The EU is India's second-largest trading partner and a comprehensive trade agreement would not only boost exports but also enhance supply chain resilience, particularly in a world grappling with economic volatility. With Trump's protectionist policies disrupting global trade, an EU-India trade pact could serve as a counterweight, ensuring that both economies remain competitive and open to global commerce. The collaboration on supply chain resilience will also be crucial in mitigating risks associated with overdependence on specific markets. With Trump's policies creating uncertainty in trans-Atlantic relations and global trade, the EU's pivot towards India reflects a strategic recalibration. The EU recognises India's growing role as a stabilising force in global affairs—both as a democratic counterweight to authoritarian regimes and as a crucial player in maintaining a rules-based international order. The EU-India partnership stands at a defining moment. With digital collaboration, green energy initiatives, and robust trade negotiations at the forefront, this relationship could reshape global economic and political alignments.



An Indian myna perches on a red silk-cotton tree (Bombax ceiba), in Nadia

# When no solution is the only solution



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Whether due to ego or rivalry, certain disputes become intractable, spanning generations. The irony is that winning does not always make one a winner

One of the bigger challenges in life is to find an answer to a question dealing with life itself. The glib belief is that every problem has a solution. A wise-crack has rightly commented that every problem has a solution but the solution creates a problem of its own. If it were a simple, straightforward dimension, such as that, there would be nothing to worry about because problems and solutions would be in a dyadic relationship.

The problem arises when a problem is not solvable because two sides want a solution on their terms or indeed have no solution at all. This need not necessarily be an act of mischief, but it may be a simple case of jealousy/envy or indeed a bitter competitiveness that brooks no solution at all. The first exposure to such an intractable jungle-like situation today is that the two parties concerned themselves do not see a solution worth pursuing. This may be because of many reasons, one of them being that the person concerned may genuinely believe he has an upper hand and that he is not going to lose that advantage. Very often, this gets intertwined with ego, worth, or dislike.

If there are stakeholders beyond this, of a variety which see an advantage in the contending parties being maintained as contending parties, or there is a personal dislike between the two people concerned, then also a solution becomes well-nigh impossible. Thus, it is that certain problems have subsisted beyond generations and led to devastating wars which ultimately wiped out both parties, and there was nothing for the winner to take away at all. The story of the Mahabharata is a telltale story of the winners ultimately having nothing to gain, at least for the generation in play. In more recent times, World War I and World War II did not produce any obvious winners, and the world went



back to a full circle. The better-known cases of history have similar dots on a lesser scale and indeed, this can be true also in personal lives. The long and short of it is, it takes more than a 'win' to become a winner. At a different scale altogether, personal dislikes and prejudices can be so large that one adopts an attitude where one concludes that, irrespective of the nuances, one will simply not work towards a solution. Here again, the resolution of the conflict becomes difficult. Hence, it is a fortunate situation where both sides want a situation of solution and therefore are open to it. This is so often a given in this set of circumstances that to pray for it would be to hope for the near impossible.

To expect divine grace to sort out the situation may be the only route forward. Other factors prevent a meaningful resolution of a conflict, one being a gender dimension and another as sibling rivalry. Be that as it



THUS, IT IS THAT CERTAIN PROBLEMS HAVE SUBSISTED BEYOND GENERATIONS AND LED TO DEVASTATING WARS WHICH ULTIMATELY WIPED OUT BOTH PARTIES AND THERE WAS NOTHING FOR THE WINNER TO TAKE AWAY AT ALL

may, it is necessary to recognise that no conflict can be eternal either. While it is true that generations have transferred the conflict from one to another, the nature of the conflict itself became an impediment to solutions, and if nothing else, the ego factor may become a primary determinant of the way forward.

Under such circumstances, the generational transformation of the rivals involved alters the nature of the solution that is feasible. Indeed, no solution is feasible unless it is doable and sustainable. People often align together because of their own needs and then find arguments to sustain their position. In many cases, logic gives way to simple impulses and a non-thinking solution takes hold of the operationally powerful. The operationally powerful impose their solution, and the predictable happens. The flawed solution is subverted by the party whose basic need for advantage

flowing out of the conflict was not met. Under such circumstances, it may be useful to suspend the conflict and learn to live with it rather than solve the problem. Avoiding a problem or indeed learning to live with it may at times be a solution. This can follow many routes including not letting the problem escalate. The enigmatic context is that very often, as the needs of the combatants change, the search for solutions also becomes elusive. This is because one has no use for "the solutions". The times have changed, and the solutions are passive because there is nothing left to enjoy in becoming a winner. It is therefore important to realise, in many cases, that a solution is only a solution if it makes winners of all concerned. However, that may be another matter altogether.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BLUE ECONOMY NEEDS PROTECTION

Madam — Kudos for 'Balancing growth and conservation' (March 6) for highlighting the most sensitive issue of conservation at Kerala's Quilon fish bank. This is only one of the several aspects of conservation, and its ignorance has a massive, devastating effect on the blue economy and fishing community. Fifty-six per cent of our coastal population is directly and indirectly dependent on the blue economy. The conservation aspect of sustainable growth and development has long been ignored by the policymakers. The political ecosystem is insensitive to conservation. In fact, extensive conservation projects need to be conceived and implemented on all river fronts, particularly in the hilly areas. In the absence of geological studies and research and conservation, mass destruction of life and property in hills is caused by torrential rains and floods.

Several rivers are disappearing fast, causing mass annihilation of flora and fauna as well as cultivation. The Geological Survey of India should carry out wide-ranging and widespread surveys and research in hills, riverbeds, and coastal regions to ascertain and fetch fresh data. The Archaeological Survey of India should engage conservation architects for carrying out conservation of excavation sites, historic places and buildings, ancient temples, river fronts, and coastal regions. Against all beliefs and perceptions, the conservation projects are potential employers and sources of revenue. Unfortunately, our engineering colleges are producing fewer conservation architects. Urban development is incomplete without conservation. Oceanic studies and research institutions should be established in all potential regions for sustainable growth and development.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

### US IMPOSES HEAVY TARIFF

Madam—US President Trump launched trade war against America's three biggest trade partners, drawing immediate retal-

## PM Modi inaugurates Vantara



The recent visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the inauguration of Vantara - Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre in Gujarat's Jamnagar has hit the headlines with heart warming pictures of the PM spending happy moments with the animals there. Spread over 3,000 acres, Vantara—a brain child of Anant Ambani of the Reliance group is all set to become the world's largest zoo and

rehabilitation centre. The world class rehabilitation centre is equipped with modern veterinary technology, including ICU, MRI, CT scan, X-ray, dialysis, ultrasound and endoscopy units, besides research institutions and academic hubs. Vantara which received the prestigious 'Prani Mitra' national award focusses on rescue, rehabilitation and protection of animals globally. The facility has through its various operations rescued abused, injured and endangered animals from different parts of the globe. The rehabilitation center has been designed to recreate a natural and nurturing environment akin to the lush habitats from which the rescued animals hail from.

M Pradyu | Kannur

proceedings against US at the WTO on the additional tariffs. Trump's new tariff Imposition will certainly rattle financial markets, raising concern about renewal inflation and business uncertainty in US and abroad.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

### CONG LEADER COURTS CONTROVERSY

Madam — Congress spokesperson Sharma Mohamed stirred controversy by calling Rohit Sharma "fat for a sportsman" and the "most unimpressive" captain India has had. Congress is already losing deposits and the recent debacle at Delhi elections proved their worth and the high command must have decent control over the cadres by teaching them how to talk on a public platform. In a historic achievement, India captain Rohit has become the first captain to lead his team to the final in all four major Men's ICC tournaments.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## A parent's reflection on society and the next generation



SANJAY CHANDRA

I was raised with the values of respect, resilience and financial prudence principles. yet, I sometimes wonder if these values still carry the same significance

I was born in a middle-class family 66 years back, less than 12 years after independence. My father was an engineer in a state government department. I came across my mother's diary a few years back. She had spent her life painstakingly balancing a low government income against the rising expenses of bringing up three children. My parents inculcated in us the value of money.

Another value that was deeply ingrained into our psyche by them was to respect everyone. I was taught that relationships were more important. A look of reproach from my mother was enough for me to realise my mistake if I was disrespectful.

This is what I tried to pass on to my children. I often look at them with pride. Having lived a better part of my life trying to hold on to these values, I now find myself at crossroads. Rapid urbanisation has resulted in concentration of bigger population in apartments. Technology has evolved like never before to provide faster modes of communication. Society WhatsApp group is unfortunately used by a few people at the expense of har-



monious relationships. Recently, I found myself at the receiving end of a vitriolic diatribe. My fault was that I had taken the initiative of organising a cultural and literature festival.

I sincerely believe that our youngsters need more exposure to the arts to navigate an increasingly fast-paced and more stressful world than what we grew up in. The language used by a few of these persons, who have claimed to be my good friends and neighbours over the past eight years, left me nonplussed at best and painfully hurt at worst. It should not have surprised me. These very people have been habitually doing the same followed by profuse apologies as it suits them. It just seems expedient to them in the murky world of society

politics. It does not matter to them if their actions are derogatory. The condominium seems to be mirroring the happenings beyond the residential complex. I am left wondering that two factors that should create a unified society, are used to divide.

It is at times like these that I start doubting the values inculcated by my parents, and that in turn, I expect my children to follow. I talked to many other residents working with me for the festival. They were also indignant and sad about the way things were turning out to be. They had their own stories to narrate. One lady was rudely told to curb her flair for taking good initiative. Another lady was left with only four

other friends when it was time to pitch in. The majority suffers in silence at the hands of the minority. It made me rethink if our parents were wrong in turning us what many may call timid to suffer mental anguish. I also debated if we passed the right values to our children.

We were unanimous in our shared belief. I derived strength as I looked around, and talked to these parents, many of whom were younger. We have been right in teaching our children to be better humans. Our children are better than us. They are putting the same technology to better use. #Me Too, Girls' Right to Education, Let's Talk, Good Touch Bad Touch are only a few of the initiatives that they are pursuing with single-minded devotion to make this a better world. I am confident that they will set better examples for the next generations to raise their voices and not suffer in silence against the bullies

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## THE RISE OF EU-INDIA DIGITAL COOPERATION

The EU and India are strengthening ties in digital governance, AI and semiconductor resilience



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Even as President Trump of the USA was busy being the world's most popular content creator, the global forces were turning the gears of a strategic realignment. After the televised, admonishment of Ukrainian President Zelensky by US President Trump and his VP JD Vance, the former was seen with several leaders of the European Union. As the case may be European leaders didn't have much to offer to Ukraine, except a subtle message to make peace with the US President. It may be a matter of time, before, Ukrainian President Zelensky has to evacuate his bunker office in Kyiv and perhaps make way for a more, current US head of state worldview representative. The message for the world was clear, the US would no longer be happy to bankroll, what it considers vague political narratives, potentially considered to be the hallmark of a free liberal world order. This world order, incidentally a post-World War creation, by the US, ensured free fair open markets, meant for the prosperity of all. What this free world order has achieved in the past many decades can be debated, however, it has ensured the US retains its supremacy in the economic prosperity index and so have many of the aligned nations including India (since the 1990s). Just before the US and Ukraine visible spat, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen led a large delegation of senior ministers to Delhi to re-establish the high-level EU India Trade and Technology Council conversations. Given the current geo-political landscape, one of the major focus areas was Digital Economy and Governance.

The European Union (EU) and India reaffirmed their commitment to deepening digital cooperation, emphasising shared values through their Working Group 1 on Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance, and Digital Connectivity. Both sides pledged to accelerate human-centric



digital transformation and advance key technologies, including AI, semiconductors, High-Performance Computing and 6G, to benefit both economies and societies. The two parties agreed to enhance research and innovation to improve competitiveness and economic security while promoting a cyber-secure global digital ecosystem. They also stressed the importance of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in fostering inclusive digital economies. Both sides committed to ensuring interoperability between their respective DPIs, safeguarding human rights, and protecting personal data and intellectual property. They also discussed mutual recognition of e-signatures to facilitate cross-border digital transactions.

On semiconductor collaboration, the EU and India focused on strengthening the resilience of supply chains and expanding joint research in areas such as chip design and sustainable technologies.

The two sides underscored their shared commitment to the responsible development of AI, agreeing to further cooperation through joint projects and the development of frameworks for ethical AI. They also plan to enhance cooperation on large language models and AI applications in sectors like climate change and bioinformatics. They also committed to implementing the Global Digital Compact, which was endorsed at the UN General Assembly in September 2024, and ensuring continued global support for multi-stakeholder internet governance at the upcoming World Summit on Information Society +20. It may be the right click for both the EU and India. The EU and India are seizing the opportunity to strengthen their digital and technological ties. Their renewed partnership signals a commitment to fostering a resilient, secure, and inclusive digital future, underpinned by shared values and mutual economic interests. As old alliances shift, new partnerships may define the contours of the evolving world order.

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



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

tems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, including the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems. However, their population has now become fragmented, with significant numbers surviving only in isolated sections of these river systems. The Ganges dolphin is a unique freshwater species that is functionally blind and relies

on echolocation to hunt. Despite its remarkable adaptations, the species faces severe threats, primarily due to habitat degradation from large-scale development projects, including dam construction, drainage works, and embankments. Pollution further exacerbates the risks to their survival. Recognizing the urgent need for conservation, India has taken steps to protect the Ganges dolphin. The National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC), the country's first dedicated research facility for this species, was inaugurated on March 4, 2024, in Patna, Bihar. Located on the Patna University campus, near the Ganges River, the center spans 4,400 square meters and aims to conduct in-depth research

on dolphin behavior, survival, and threats. It also provides training to fishermen, equipping them with conservation techniques to protect dolphins during fishing activities. Despite conservation efforts, human infrastructure projects continue to pose significant challenges. The collapse of a four-lane bridge under construction over the Ganga River at Sultanganj-Agwani in Bihar for the third time has drawn attention to the environmental impact of such developments. In 1990, the Bihar government declared a 60-km stretch of the Ganga River from Sultanganj to Kahaigaoon as the Vikramshila Ganges Dolphin Sanctuary, aiming to protect the species while promoting eco-tourism. Recognizing the ecological



significance of the Ganges dolphin, the Government of India designated it as the national aquatic animal in October 2009 during the inaugural meeting of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA), chaired by then-Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. The Vikramshila Ganges Dolphin Sanctuary currently hosts approximately 250 dolphins, frequently observed between Shankar Talkies and

Manik Sarkar Ghat. While government agencies have made efforts to protect the species, conservationists emphasize that illegal sand mining must be curbed to ensure its survival. Large-scale sand extraction disrupts river ecosystems by altering water flow and destroying the dolphins' habitat and food sources, such as small fish. Mechanized sand mining further exacerbates environmental damage, creating deep trenches that negatively impact

river health. Experts warn that unless illegal activities are controlled, the already fragile dolphin population will continue to decline. On a more optimistic note, Union Water Resources Minister C.R. Patil has stated that the Namami Gange Mission—a large-scale initiative aimed at rejuvenating the Ganga—has contributed to a rise in the dolphin population. Experts view this as an encouraging sign of improving environmental conditions. According to the Wildlife Institute of India, approximately 4,000 Gangetic dolphins currently inhabit the Ganga and its tributaries, with nearly 2,000 residing in Uttar Pradesh alone. In response, the Uttar Pradesh government has introduced a tourism policy designating a dolphin sanctu-

ary within the Chambal Sanctuary to bolster conservation efforts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's launch of Project Dolphin has significantly increased public awareness of the species. This initiative strengthens conservation measures while promoting the ecological health of the Ganga River. Further emphasizing its commitment to protecting the species, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife has designated October 5 as National Dolphin Day. With increasing awareness and conservation initiatives, there is renewed hope that these remarkable creatures will continue to thrive in their natural habitat.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

## Namaste at Oscars: Indian cinema has arrived

Indian storytelling captivates and inspire audiences worldwide. With the right strategy, this moment can shape the future of Indian cinema



CHAITANYA K PRASAD



The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 has reinforced the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: "The world is one family," a vision that transcends borders yet thrives on respect, mutual interdependence and a shared spirit of creativity. This symbolic gesture was not merely a greeting but a powerful moment of inclusivity, reflecting cinema's unique ability to bring together artists, audiences and creators from across the globe.

This moment at the Academy Awards highlighted how soft power is no longer confined to diplomacy alone; it now permeates events, institutions, and cultural exchanges. Cinema, often regarded as the perfect brand platform for fostering relationships, stood at the centre of this phenomenon.

The Namaste was a gateway, introducing the legacy of Indian storytelling to a diverse global audience and reinforcing the deep cultural interconnect between nations through the lens of cinema. Beyond its immediate impact, this gesture has set the stage for the future of the Oscars and similar global platforms.

It paves the way for cultural ethos to play a larger role in how nations and their creative industries collaborate and connect.

A simple, well-timed Namaste has given Incredible India a renewed global identity, transforming its participation in world cinema from occasional recognition to strategic influence.

Conan O'Brien's decision to open the Oscars with Namaste was not accidental. It was a statement, an acknowledgement that Indian cinema is no longer at the periphery of global storytelling. This was not a token mention of India, nor was it a cursory reference to its billion-strong audience.

This was a recognition of India's growing cinematic legacy and influence. India has long been part of Oscar history, but often through an external gaze. Films like Gandhi (1982) won big, Lagaan (2001)



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came close, and Slumdog Millionaire (2008) swept the Academy Awards, yet these narratives were largely shaped by Western filmmakers. The paradigm began to shift with R (2022), which not only won an Oscar for Naatu Naatu but also forced global audiences to acknowledge the unapologetic, high-energy storytelling of Indian filmmakers. This shift was further cemented when Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine as Light (2024) won the Grand Prix at Cannes, a rare honour for Indian cinema. Films like Chaitanya Tamhane's The Disciple (2020), Rima Das's Village Rockstars (2017), and Nandita Das's Manto (2018) have been steadily breaking barriers, proving that Indian cinema is no longer defined by stereotypes but by diverse, powerful narratives.

The power of this Namaste must be harnessed beyond the Oscars. As India gears up for Cannes 2025, this moment should serve as a launching pad for stronger positioning. India's representation at global film festivals must be strategic; ensuring that films sent to these platforms reflect the depth, diversity, and dynamism of Indian storytelling.

The Cannes Film Festival has already been a crucial stepping stone for Indian cinema. From Neecha Nagar (1946) winning the Palme d'Or to Masaan (2015) winning the Un Certain Regard prize, India's legacy at Cannes has been long-standing. However, now is the time to transition from isolated wins to sustained influence.

The government and industry stakeholders must work together to ensure that Indian cinema is

not just participating but actively shaping the conversation. One powerful example of how such moments create ripples is Life of Pi (2012). When director Ang Lee won the Oscar for Best Director, he greeted the audience with a Namaste, acknowledging the deep Indian cultural influence on the film.

That moment reinforced India's storytelling traditions, but the Namaste at the Oscars 2025 is even more significant; it wasn't just about one film, it was about the entire Indian cinematic movement. India must now leverage this momentum through platforms like WAVES, the country's film export initiative. WAVES has the potential to push Indian cinema into untapped markets, ensuring that films from independent, regional, and mainstream creators reach wider international audiences.

By riding the wave of this Namaste moment, WAVES can position Indian cinema not just as entertainment, but as a formidable cultural force. Strategic collaborations, international distribution networks, and dedicated Oscar campaigns must now be part of the plan.

If South Korea could orchestrate a global push for Parasite (2019), resulting in its historic Oscar win, India must now do the same, systematically pushing its best films into the international awards circuit.

This is not just about recognition; it's about claiming a rightful place in world cinema. The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 should serve as a wake-up call, a reminder that Indian cinema has evolved from

a land of fantasy to a nation of action. It is no longer a question of whether Indian films will win the Oscar; it is now a matter of when and how often. India is no longer a guest at the global film table-it is a host, a creator, and an influencer.

The Namaste was not just a greeting; it was an invitation for the world to recognise Indian cinema's true potential. The time to capitalise on this moment is now. With the right vision and action, this could be the defining decade when Indian cinema not only participates in global storytelling but leads it.

The world has acknowledged India. Now, Indian cinema must ensure that every frame, every story, and every festival presence echoes the power of that Namaste. The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 was more than a greeting-it was a defining moment for Indian cinema on the global stage. It symbolised India's growing influence in storytelling, marking a shift from sporadic recognition to strategic presence. To sustain this momentum,

India must leverage platforms like WAVES, push for global collaborations, and ensure strong representation at festivals. The world has acknowledged India's cinematic potential; now, it is time for Indian cinema to lead. With the right strategy, this moment can shape the future, ensuring that Indian storytelling continues to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide.

(The writer is former civil servant writes on cinema and strategic communication. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

## Ganges dolphin resurfaces in Charikadia river after 25 years

The conservation of the Gangetic dolphin is not just about protecting a single species; it is intrinsically linked to keeping the Ganga clean

The recent sighting of the endangered Ganges dolphin (Platanista gangetica) in Assam's Charikadia River at Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur district, has sparked immense interest. Locally known as Sihu, this marks the first recorded presence of the species in the river since 1998, ending a 25-year absence. The prolonged disappearance of the Ganges dolphin from this waterway had fueled concerns over its dwindling numbers and possible extinction.

The disappearance of the species from the Charikadia River has been attributed to several factors, including hunting, habitat destruction, and depletion of food sources. Historically, Ganges dolphins thrived across major river sys-



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

tems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, including the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems. However, their population has now become fragmented, with significant numbers surviving only in isolated sections of these river systems. The Ganges dolphin is a unique freshwater species that is functionally blind and relies

on echolocation to hunt. Despite its remarkable adaptations, the species faces severe threats, primarily due to habitat degradation from large-scale development projects, including dam construction, drainage works, and embankments. Pollution further exacerbates the risks to their survival. Recognizing the urgent need for conservation, India has taken steps to protect the Ganges dolphin. The National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC), the country's first dedicated research facility for this species, was inaugurated on March 4, 2024, in Patna, Bihar. Located on the Patna University campus, near the Ganges River, the center spans 4,400 square meters and aims to conduct in-depth research

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river health. Experts warn that unless illegal activities are controlled, the already fragile dolphin population will continue to decline. On a more optimistic note, Union Water Resources Minister C.R. Patil has stated that the Namami Gange Mission—a large-scale initiative aimed at rejuvenating the Ganga—has contributed to a rise in the dolphin population. Experts view this as an encouraging sign of improving environmental conditions. According to the Wildlife Institute of India, approximately 4,000 Gangetic dolphins currently inhabit the Ganga and its tributaries, with nearly 2,000 residing in Uttar Pradesh alone. In response, the Uttar Pradesh government has introduced a tourism policy designating a dolphin sanctu-

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(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)





China's premier & American president: Two leaders, two speeches, two differing world visions

AP ■ BEIJING

Their words came just an hour apart this week — two major speeches by two of the world's most powerful leaders, delivered on opposite sides of the planet. Together, they illustrate the very different approaches the world's 21st-century powers are taking to achieve their respective national ambitions.

government's performance last year and its plans for 2025. He spoke from the stage of a grand, theatre-like chamber in the Great Hall of the People, a monumental, communist-era edifice on Beijing's renowned Tiananmen Square.

in the cheerleading way of American politicians pumping up support for their policies. He promised steps — including cutting energy costs — to defeat inflation, a pain point for many Americans.



deflation than inflation. But Li acknowledged the other challenges the economy faces, chiefly falling real estate prices and depressed consumer spending.



He reaffirmed Beijing's "unswerving commitment" to opening up. "Regardless of changes in the external environment, we should remain steadfast in our commitment to opening up," Li said. "We

will continue to expand our globally oriented network of high-standard free trade areas." In a statement that no doubt referred in large part to the United States, he cautioned that "an increasingly complex and severe external environment may exert a greater impact on China in areas such as trade, science and technology."

our auto workers and companies from economic destruction." Beijing, on the contrary, is betting on a greener economy. Li said it would be a priority to accelerate "green transition" for "all areas of economic and social development".

with impacts on both the economic and military rivalry between the two. Trump made no mention of technology except to say that it would help build "a golden dome" missile defense shield over the U.S.

Such unscripted moments — and the high emotions visible behind them — are rare in China. It is a one-party state, and the Communist Party brooks no dissent in public.

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Public Notice: Notice is hereby given to the Public that the Sale Deed executed between Subhash Chander...

Public Notice: It is to inform that certain individuals are misusing the stamp of Advocate SHALU...

Public Notice: Notice is hereby given that Max Multi Speciality Centre, Panchsheel Park & Max Institute of Cancer Care...

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Office of the Superintending Engineer 1st Circle, Public Works Department, Almora. NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING (E-Tendering) E-TENDER NOTICE

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# GST Council reconstitutes GoM on GST revenue analysis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

The GST Council has reconstituted the Group of Ministers on GST revenue analysis which will suggest sector-specific issues that need policy intervention, and the feasibility of a unified enforcement platform to check tax evasion.

Chhattisgarh (O P Choudhary), Gujarat (Kanubhai Desai), Andhra Pradesh (P Keshav), Maharashtra (Ajit Pawar), Punjab (Harpal Singh Cheema), Tamil Nadu (Thangam Thennarasu) and Telangana (M B Vikramarka).

revenues, challenges faced by agrarian and smaller states, and analyse the impact of amendments made in GST acts and rules.

particularly for states suffering high revenue shortfall. The expanded ToR of the GoM comes at a time when another GoM, under Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, is already working on rationalisation of GST rates and slabs.

# Ashwini Vaishnaw launches IndiaAI compute portal, dataset platform AIKosha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

Marking a year of the IndiaAI Mission, Union IT minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday launched the IndiaAI compute portal and dataset platform AIKosha, among a slew of other initiatives under the IndiaAI Mission, aimed at improving access to AI and fostering innovation.

to help transform potential ideas into industry solutions. Datasets will be available for model builders and developers to work with and launch India-specific AI models.

using these GPUs is historically low at less than ₹100/hour. MeitY Secretary S Krishnan said the launch of the compute portal will enhance the way AI gets rolled out and implemented across the country.

# India Semicon Mission-2 in the works: IT Secretary

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ GANDHINAGAR

The government is ready with an outline of next phase of India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) and discussions are on internally for its rollout, a senior government official said on Thursday.

# CitiCorp Investment Bank settle FPI rules violation case with SEBI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

CitiCorp Investment Bank (Singapore) Ltd on Thursday settled with SEBI a case relating to issuance of offshore derivative instruments to Symmetry Master Fund Ltd without completing the KYC norms, on payment of ₹36 Lakh.

Are settled in respect of the applicant? It was alleged that the applicant issued an offshore derivative instrument (ODI) to Symmetry Master Fund Ltd on December 19, 2023 without complying with the Know Your Client (KYC) norms as required under the FPI Regulations.

February 26, 2024 with a delay of 69 days. These findings pointed to violations of FPI regulations. As per another separate settlement order, BCL Industries and its promoter and MD Rajinder Mittal settled with Sebi a case of violation of regulatory norms on payment of settlement amount.

# Sensex rallies 610 points to reclaim the 74,000 mark

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex rallied nearly 610 points to reclaim the 74,000 mark while Nifty closed above 22,500 on Thursday following heavy buying in Reliance on easing crude oil prices and firm global trends after US President Donald Trump softened stand on tariffs.



higher with the BSE smallcap gauge climbing 1.63 per cent and midcap index advancing 0.65 per cent. Among the BSE sectoral indices, Energy, metal, Oil and Gas, Commodities, Utilities, Services, Power, healthcare, FMCG and Industrials were the gainers.

Krishnan in his virtual speech said that the second phase of ISM proposes to provide support for gases and other elements that are required for semiconductor production. He said that the first phase of ISM had a total outlay of ₹76,000 Crore comprising ₹65,000 Crore for chip manufacturing and ₹11,000 Crore for modernising semiconductor lab at Mohali and ₹1,000 Crore for the design-linked incentive scheme.

# Rupee falls six paise against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ MUMBAI

The rupee snapped its three-day rally and settled with a loss of six paise at 87.12 against the US dollar on Thursday amid uncertainty over trade tariffs and persistent foreign fund outflows.



four-month low as the US decided to delay implementing higher tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico. Choudhary further said the rupee is expected to trade with a slight positive bias on positive domestic markets and weakness in the US dollar.

# NITI Aayog, India SME Forum launch 'A Million Women Arise' initiative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

Government think tank NITI Aayog and the India SME Forum on Thursday launched a joint initiative, A Million Women Arise, to empower women entrepreneurs across India.

to create a cohesive support system through access to finance, markets, compliance support, skilling, mentorship, and networking. Vinod Kumar, President India SME Forum said, "Through this collaboration with NITI Aayog, we aim to extend WEP's initiatives to Millions of aspiring women entrepreneurs, providing them with the knowledge and support needed to build successful businesses".

# Mitalee Agrawal honoured with Grand Queen 2025

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD

Mitalee Agrawal, a distinguished leader in corporate communication and strategic management, has been honoured with the prestigious Grand Queen 2025 - Corporate Communication Leadership Award by the Young Lions Club.



IIIT Raichur. She has also led techno-commercial operations for a USA-based multinational packaging company, overseeing the publication of over 500 Safety, Installation, Maintenance, and Operational (SIMO) manuals and 300+ operation videos.

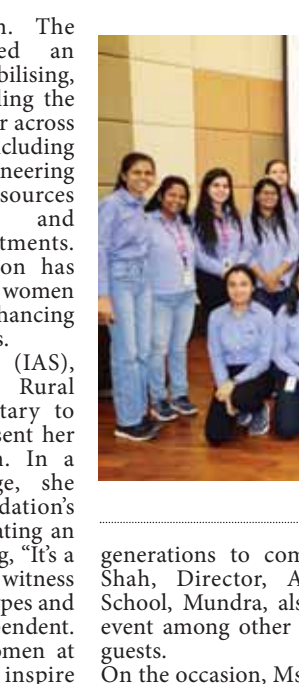
Agrawal's remarkable journey has been recognised with multiple accolades, including the Chanakya Award by PRCI (twice) for Social Media and Relations Management, e4m 40 Under 40 Award for PR and Corporate Communication and the Dynamic Women Leadership Award in Communication. Further solidifying her stature as a multifaceted leader, she was recently crowned Mrs India Telangana 2025, adding to her legacy of excellence across diverse domains.

# Adani Foundation felicitates over 1,000 'Lakhpatti Didis' ahead of International Women's Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUNDRA (GUJARAT)

Ahead of the upcoming International Women's Day on March 08, 2025, the Adani Foundation felicitated more than 1,000 'Lakhpatti Didis' at an event in Mundra in Kutch, Gujarat. The Foundation has been working tirelessly in Kutch and beyond to empower women and make them self-reliant.

Solar on the occasion. The Foundation has played an instrumental role in mobilising, encouraging and counselling the women to join Adani Solar across an array of job roles, including technical associates, engineering positions in Human Resources (HR), manufacturing and production departments.



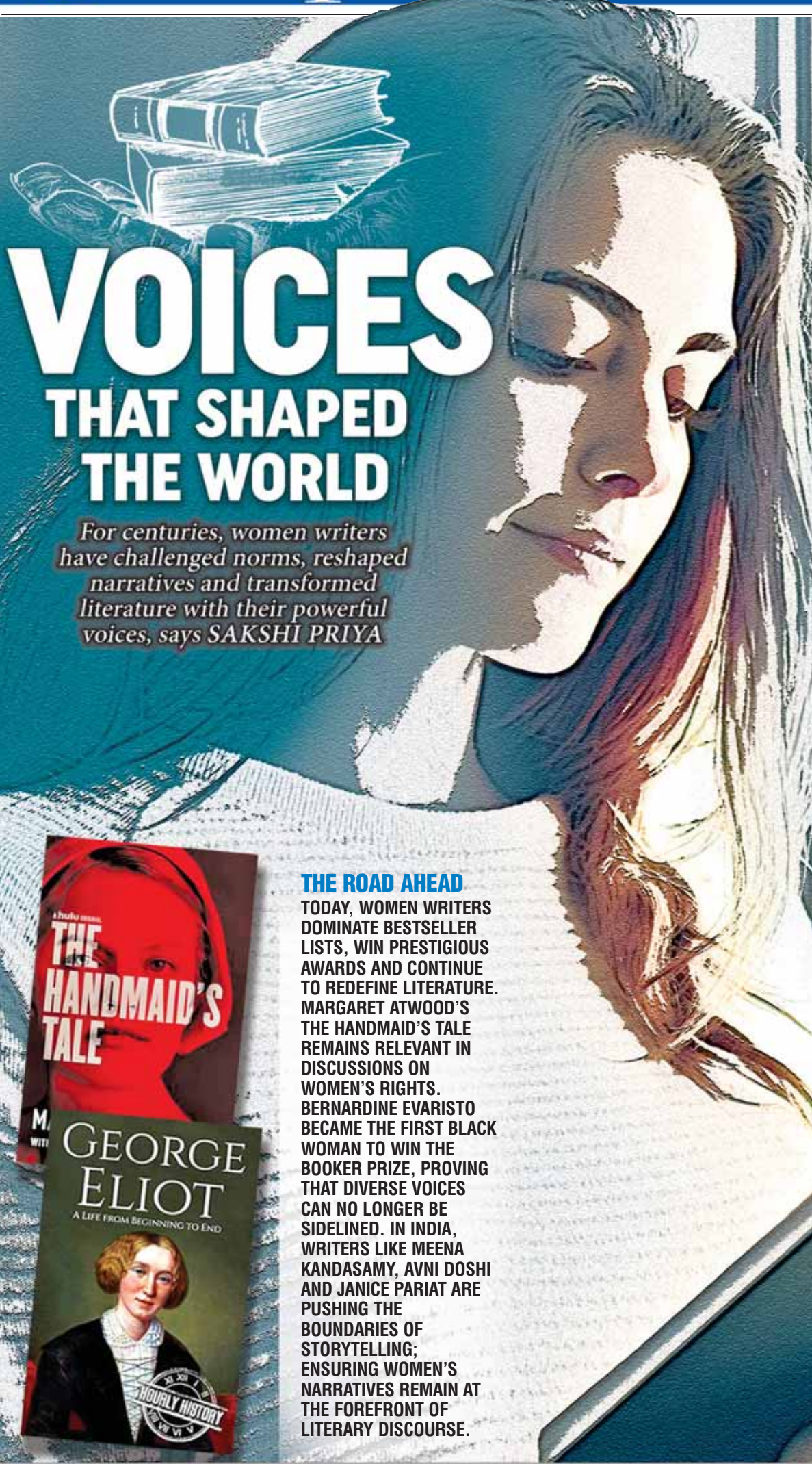
generations to come." Ms Ami Shah, Director, Adani Public School, Mundra, also graced the event among other distinguished guests. On the occasion, Ms Pankti Shah, CSR Head, Gujarat, Adani Foundation, emphasized the collective responsibility of society towards promoting gender equality.

community, and the corporate sector is essential. When women are empowered to balance their professional and personal lives, they not only excel in their careers but also drive a positive change within their families and society," she said.

community to step out for work due to the unavailability of safe transportation. But with the Adani Solar's dedicated transport facility, I commute to my workplace comfortably, with my family assured about my safety."

For nearly three decades, the Adani Foundation has been dedicated to empowering women across the country through a series of targeted interventions, as part of its Butterfly Effect framework. This unique framework has been specifically designed to address the evolving needs of women throughout their lives, right from infancy to old age.

Through its dedicated initiatives, the Foundation has positively transformed the lives of over two million girls and women across the country. Since 1996, the Adani Foundation, social welfare and development arm of the Adani Group, has remained agile and deeply committed to making strategic social investments for sustainable outcomes across India. It is empowering and enriching the lives of children, women, youth, and marginalised communities in the core areas of education, health and nutrition, sustainable livelihoods, climate action, and community development. The strategies of the Foundation are integrated in national priorities and global Sustainable Development Goals. The Adani Foundation is currently operating in 6,769 villages across 19 states, positively impacting 9.1 Million lives.



# VOICES THAT SHAPED THE WORLD

For centuries, women writers have challenged norms, reshaped narratives and transformed literature with their powerful voices, says SAKSHI PRIYA

## THE ROAD AHEAD

TODAY, WOMEN WRITERS DOMINATE BESTSELLER LISTS, WIN PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS AND CONTINUE TO REDEFINE LITERATURE. MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* REMAINS RELEVANT IN DISCUSSIONS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS. BERNARDINE EVARISTO BECAME THE FIRST BLACK WOMAN TO WIN THE BOOKER PRIZE, PROVING THAT DIVERSE VOICES CAN NO LONGER BE SIDELINED. IN INDIA, WRITERS LIKE MEENA KANDASAMY, AVNI DOSHI AND JANICE PARIAT ARE PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF STORYTELLING; ENSURING WOMEN'S NARRATIVES REMAIN AT THE FOREFRONT OF LITERARY DISCOURSE.



**WHY WOMEN'S STORIES MATTER**  
WOMEN'S LITERATURE IS NOT A NICHE; IT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR COLLECTIVE HUMAN EXPERIENCE. IT CHALLENGES STEREOTYPES AND DEEPENS EMPATHY. EVERY BOOK WRITTEN BY A WOMAN CARRIES WITHIN IT THE STRUGGLES, DREAMS AND HISTORIES OF THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE HER.

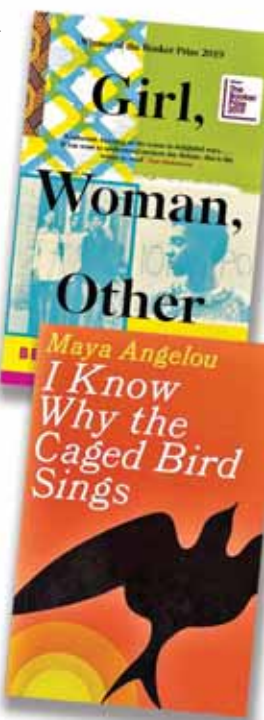
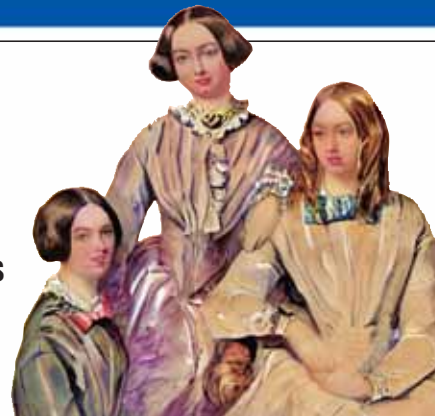
For centuries, women have used literature as a means of resistance, self-expression and transformation. Yet, history has often overlooked their contributions, celebrating male writers while marginalising women's voices. From medieval poets to contemporary literary powerhouses, women writers have not only broken barriers but also redefined storytelling, shaping cultural and social narratives across the world.

## The Struggle for Recognition

In earlier times, societal norms denied women access to education, making it difficult for them to enter the literary world. Many resorted to pseudonyms to get published. *Mary Ann Evans* wrote as *George Eliot*, while the *Brontë sisters* first published under the names *Currer*, *Ellis* and *Acton Bell*. Even *Jane Austen's* early works were signed "By a Lady." Despite these challenges, their narratives carried immense depth, challenging gender roles, class structures and moral dilemmas in ways that few male writers dared to explore.

In India, the struggle was even more pronounced. For centuries, women's stories remained within the oral tradition, passed down through generations but rarely written. It was only in the 19th century that writers like *Toru Dutt* and *Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain* began breaking societal constraints. *Hossain's Sultana's Dream*, published in 1905, imagined a world where women ruled and men were confined to their homes, questioning patriarchal norms in a way that was revolutionary for its time.

The 20th century marked a turning point globally and in India. Women writers not only published under their real names but also dictated literary trends. *Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own* questioned the systemic suppression of women's voices in literature.



Nobel laureate *Toni Morrison* chronicled the Black female experience in America with unmatched brilliance. Meanwhile, *Amrita Pritam* became a literary icon with her evocative poetry on *love and Partition*, particularly *Ajj Akhaan Waris Shah Nu*. *Mahasweta Devi's* writings on tribal communities and marginalised women forced society to confront uncomfortable truths.

## Literature as Change

Women's literature has never been just about storytelling, it has also been a tool for activism. *Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex* laid the foundation for feminist thought. *Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* exposed racism and misogyny with raw honesty. In India, *Ismat Chughtai's Lihaaf* challenged conservative mindsets with its bold depiction of female desire. *Kamala Das's* poetry and autobiographical works fearlessly explored themes of identity, love and rebellion, inspiring generations of women to embrace their truths.

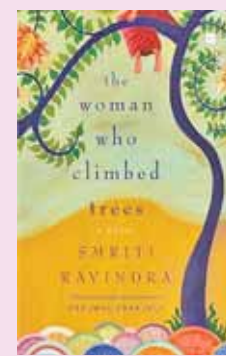
*Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's We Should All Be Feminists* reframed gender discussions for a new generation. In contemporary Indian literature, writers like *Arunadhari Roy*, *Jhumpa Lahiri* and *Perumal Murugan* continue to challenge social norms, bringing stories of the unheard into mainstream cultural consciousness and discourse.

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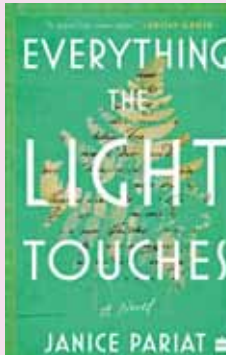
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THIS WOMEN'S DAY, LET US NOT ONLY CELEBRATE WOMEN WRITERS BUT ALSO READ THEM, AMPLIFY THEIR VOICES AND RECOGNISE THEIR ROLE IN SHAPING OUR WORLD, ONE STORY AT A TIME

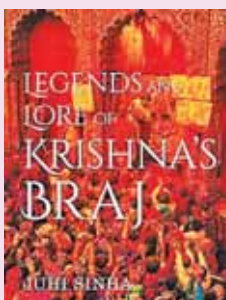
## MARCH READS



Book: *Woman Who Climbed Trees*  
Author: Smriti Ravindra  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Price: ₹599



Book: *Everything the light touches*  
Author: Janice Pariat  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Price: ₹599



Book: *Legends and lore of Krishna's Braj*  
Author: Jui Sinha  
Publisher: Niyogi Books  
Price: ₹1750



Book: *The Artistry of Handwork*  
Author: Jaya Jaitly  
Publisher: Niyogi Books  
Price: ₹395

## Strength, Sisterhood & Survival

**Fearless & Unstoppable**  
For the trailblazers, risk-takers and rule-breakers who refuse to conform.  
● *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus - A brilliant scientist-turned-TV-star shakes up the male-dominated world of the 1960s.  
● *Great Circle* by Maggie Shipstead - A daring female pilot battles societal constraints to chase her dream of flying.

With Women's Day approaching, we celebrate the resilience, strength and complexity of women through literature. From fearless heroines to deep explorations of sisterhood, identity and psychological suspense, these books capture the essence of being bold, unapologetic and true to oneself.

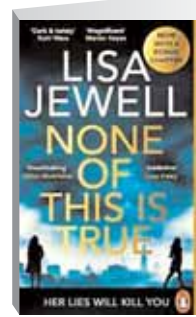
**Stronger Together**  
Because the women who stand by us, our friends, sisters and chosen family, shape who we become.  
● *Everything I Know About Love* by Dolly Alderton - A raw, witty memoir on friendship, heartbreak and growing up.

**Unapologetically Herself**  
For those embracing every part of who they are.  
● *Open When* by Julie Smith - A heartfelt guide to self-care, resilience and mental well-being.  
● *The Path to Self-Love* by Ruby Dhal - A warm, empowering roadmap to putting yourself first.  
● *The Book You Want Everyone You Love to Read* by Philippa Perry - A witty and wise take on relationships, self-discovery and emotional well-being.

**Women on the Edge**  
Complex heroines, unsettling twists and gripping suspense that will keep you hooked.  
● *Strange Sally Diamond* by Liz Nugent - A woman with a traumatic past unearths chilling family secrets.  
● *None of This Is True* by Lisa Jewell - A journalist's chance meeting with a mysterious woman spirals into a terrifying nightmare.



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## Books That Uplift and Inspire Women

BY TEAM VIVA

Here's a specially curated list of books from Rupa and Aleph, celebrating the strength, resilience and brilliance of women.

**She Storms the Norms - Anisha Motwani & Priyadarshini Narendra**  
A powerful sequel to *Storm the Norm*, this book shares inspiring stories of women who have shattered societal barriers and self-doubt to redefine success. A must-read for those who dare to challenge the status quo.

**About the Authors**  
*Anisha Motwani* is a business leader, speaker and author of the bestselling *Storm the Norm*. She serves as an independent director on various boards and has been recognised among the '50 Most Powerful Women in Indian Business' by Business Today.  
*Priyadarshini Narendra* is a marketing and strategy expert with decades of experience in advertising, consumer research and consulting. She has authored fiction books and contributes to discussions on women in the workplace.

**1700 in 70: A Walk for a Cause - Gita Balakrishnan**  
Follow architect *Gita Balakrishnan's* extraordinary 1,700-km journey across India on foot, exploring design's impact on life and culture. A story of endurance, discovery and the power of walking with purpose.

**About the Author**  
*Gita Balakrishnan* is an architect and founder of the Ethos Foundation, which promotes design awareness. An avid marathon runner, she has embarked on multiple walking expeditions, advocating for the role of design in everyday life.

**Beyond the Bell: Preparing Students for Life - Chitra Prasad**  
A transformative guide on holistic education, this book goes beyond academics, focusing on life skills,

values and personal growth to help students thrive in a rapidly changing world.  
**About the Author**  
*Chitra Prasad* is an educationist with three decades of experience and head of the NSN Group of Schools. With a strong focus on values-based learning, she integrates spirituality into education to shape well-rounded individuals.

**A Stitch in Time: The Biba Story - Meena Bindra**  
The inspiring journey of *Meena Bindra*, who built Biba from a home-based venture into a fashion empire. A compelling story of passion, perseverance and the rise of India's fashion industry.  
**About the Author**  
*Meena Bindra*, a pioneer in Indian fashion, founded Biba, transforming the salwar kameez into a modern style statement. From a small home-run business to a leading brand, her journey is a testament to innovation and determination.

These books offer wisdom, courage and motivation, perfect for Women's Day and beyond.

## A Story of True Friendship

A touching story celebrating the strength, trust and support found in women friendships across generations, says TEAM VIVA

As International Women's Day approaches, there is no better time to celebrate the power of friendship, resilience and support. *The Wall Friends Club* by *Varsha Seshan* beautifully captures the essence of human connection, showing how even the most unexpected friendships can shape our lives in meaningful ways. Told through an epistolary format, the novel follows two young protagonists, Anandi and Sriya, who form an unlikely bond through letters slipped into a hidden gap in a wall. Despite never meeting, their relationship grows into something deeply special, proving that true friendship goes beyond physical presence.  
*Varsha Seshan*, speaking about the book, shares, "I love letters, old-fashioned letters, not just emails. I also had several pen pals as a child, which made me wonder ... could two children who never meet grow to be the best of friends? An epistolary novel has always seemed an exciting genre to explore, so here is my first one: *The Wall Friends Club*."  
At its core, the story is about breaking barriers, embracing differences and find-

ing comfort in the written word. Anandi and Sriya start as strangers, hesitant yet curious, unsure of who will find their letters. But as their exchanges continue, their letters become a refuge, a place where they can share their dreams, fears and small moments of joy. Their honest and heartfelt conversations reflect the beauty of friendships where trust and support come naturally, unburdened by the complexities of adulthood.



**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
Book: *The Wall Friends Club*  
Edited by: Varsha Seshan  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Price: ₹175

*The Wall Friends Club* truly special is its timeless message about women's friendships. It reminds readers, especially girls, of the importance of lifting each other up rather than competing or tearing each other down. The characters, though young, face real struggles, doubts, insecurities and moments of self-reflection. Their journey resonates with anyone who has ever felt unsure about their place in the world or struggled to find their voice.  
Since *International Women's Day* is around the corner, this book is a perfect fit as it carries a powerful message about kindness, connection and the importance of supporting one another.

# We will play according to situation: Ravindra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LAHORE

Dashing New Zealand opener Ravindra feels adapting to the conditions will be key to succeed on an “unknown” Dubai surface in the Champions Trophy (CT) final against India on Sunday. Except the group match against India in Dubai, New Zealand have played all their games in Pakistan. The Kiwis had also played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa.

India, on the other, have played all their matches in Dubai and are familiar with the conditions.

“We do not quite know what the Dubai pitch is. We saw in our (group) game against India the ball turning but the other day didn't turn so much. We found ourselves adapting and playing according to situations, which we will need to do on Sunday again.

“We will see in the next couple of days and hopefully it's a good cricket wicket,” said



Ravindra after an emphatic 50-run win over South Africa in the semifinal here on Wednesday. Ravindra scored only six against India in the group, falling to Hardik Pandya while going for an upper cut, but the left-hander hopes for a better outing in the final.

“You get out pretty much every time you bat. Hopefully I can bat for a longer period of

time and continue to play well for my team,” he said.

He is also aware about the expectations from the side in any big ICC event.

“Whenever you approach a tournament, you expect hopefully to be among the top four teams and lucky enough we have been consistently good over a period of time.

“We are happy with our preparation, coming here

early, we can see we are cooking reasonably well. Trust and ability around the group is great.”

Ravindra (108) smashed his second century of the tournament on Wednesday and together with Kane Williamson (102) starred in New Zealand's win.

Senior middle-order batter Daryl Mitchell, who made 49 off 37 balls in the semifinal,

said the loss to India in the group stage is a thing of the past not and the final will be a new day.

“The final is a new day and really excited to stuck into that challenge and adapt to whatever conditions and surfaces we get on the day and find ways to win moments throughout that game.

“Hopefully, we can put some pressure on them and walk away with white jacket,” he said.

Mitchell is not interested in poking his nose in the talks surrounding an unfair advantage to India because of playing all their matches at one venue.

“Just really happy with winning the game today and moving onto the final, it's an exciting opportunity,” Mitchell said.

“That's the nature of international cricket. We do a lot of travelling and we are used to that. It's not for me to decide how the tournament should be planned. I am just excited to be in an ICC final and looking forward to play in a few days time.”

# 300 women boxers to compete in national championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 300 pugilists will compete for glory at the 8th Elite Women's National Boxing Championship in Greater Noida from March 21-27.

Organised in association with the UP Boxing Association, the tournament returns to the venue that hosted its last edition in 2023.

Held under the World Boxing and Boxing Federation of India (BFI) competition guidelines, the championship is open to boxers born between January 1, 1984, and December 31, 2005.

Each state unit can field a maximum of 10 boxers, with entries by numbers closing on March 10 and final name confirmation due by March 15. The action officially begins on March 20 with the arrivals, draw, and technical meeting. The opening rounds will take place from March 21 to 24, followed by the quarter-finals



on March 25 and the semi-finals on March 26, leading up to the finals on March 27.

The tournament will follow a three-round format, with each bout consisting of three-minute rounds with a one-minute rest period. The ten-point must-scoring system will be in place, and all matches will adhere to World Boxing Technical & Competition Rules.

Boxers will also be required to undergo a daily weigh-in throughout the competition. Beyond the 300 competing boxers, the championship will also bring together over 100 coaches and support staff, along with 60 technical officials, ensuring a top-tier spectacle.

Defending champions Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) will be looking to retain their title after a dominant performance in the previous edition, where they clinched five gold medals, one silver, and two bronzes.

RSPB nudged Haryana by eight points, the latter finishing second with seven medals, including three golds, three silvers, and a bronze.



# We are still evolving as a team: Rob Walter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LAHORE

Yet another knockout stage heartbreak at yet another ICC event. But perennial bridesmaid South Africa remains on the right track two years before the ODI World Cup at home, feels the team's head coach Rob Walter after its semifinal exit from the Champions Trophy here.

Having topped their group, South Africa came up short in the second semifinal against New Zealand here on Wednesday night and went down by 50 runs in a chase of 362. Walter said there are enough positives to take back home notwithstanding a tough loss.

“You know, in the wins, we managed to put some significant partnerships together. We had guys contributing significantly with the bat. From a bowling point of view, I think our biggest development was our accuracy. We were able to be very accurate as a seam unit,” said Walter in the post-match press conference.

“And that's something that we have been working really hard on. Every game we play is a learning opportunity. We just keep trying to take the little lessons. Today is a hard lesson, you feel it a little bit more, because it's the end of a campaign.

“But we certainly continue to keep learning from things, little bits here and there, that we can do better. We're still evolving as a team; there's no doubt in my mind. Two and a half years to 2027 and that's

the eyes on the prize,” he added.

The 2027 ODI World Cup will co-hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Walter was expectedly asked about South Africa going down in a knockout game of another global event. Last year, the Proteas lost the T20 World Cup final to India from a commanding position.

“I don't think it was any one particular thing that resulted in the loss, probably a couple. We could have handled the last 10 overs (while bowling) a little bit better. They got away from us a little bit.

“There was a period sort of in the middle of the innings where Kane (Williamson) and Rachin (Ravindra) started to up their rates a bit. And we missed a few opportunities there,” he explained.

“...When we were batting. We were just starting to get going and that partnership got broken and really slowed us down in the middle and obviously we saw Dave (Miller) play unbelievably well in the end to get a hundred... You know you're just one partnership away from doing something special,” said Walter.

With Williamson and Ravindra easily manipulating the bowlers, it seemed South Africa ran out of ideas. However, Walter did not agree to that.

“No, I don't think that's entirely accurate. We certainly tried to change it up, we tried to change the pace. I think the ball wasn't really gripping at that stage in the early phases, so the ball kept sliding on.”

# Gujarat Giants eye on WPL playoffs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LUCKNOW

With two consecutive wins firming up their bid for a spot in the Women's Premier League (WPL) playoffs, Gujarat Giants will look to carry forward the momentum in their top-of-the-table clash against Delhi Capitals here on Friday.

Gujarat Giants were languishing at the bottom of the WPL points table but two big wins — by six wickets over Royal Challengers Bengaluru and by 81 runs against UP Warriorz — have propelled them to the second position in the five-team points table.

On Friday, the second-ranked Giants, with six points in as many games, will have the perfect opportunity to put their recent ascent to test against a formidable Delhi Capitals, who sit atop the table with 10 points.

Delhi Capitals, who have already booked a place in the playoffs, would be keen to record a win and take their tally to 12 points and, in the



process, also better their net run rate to seal their spot in the final.

It seems like things are falling in place at last for the Giants, who showed determination against all odds to beat RCB in a low-scoring thriller, with skipper Ashleigh Gardner (58 not out) and Phoebe Litchfield (30 not out) taking the side over the line.

The Giants then demolished UP Warriorz by 81 runs in their previous outing, riding on Beth Mooney's stunning 96 not out and a collective show from their bowlers to

restricted the opponents to a mere 105 in pursuit of 187.

The huge win not only lifted the Giants from the last spot but also improved their NRR to 0.357 from -0.450, better than the third-placed Mumbai Indians (0.166) with whom they are tied on six points.

Additionally, with MI having three more games left, the Giants will be keen to keep their fate in their hands and not depend on the outcomes of other games.

The Giants' pacers, in particular, exploited the new ball and

conditions to good effect, blowing away UP Warriorz's batting after Mooney missed recording the first-ever ton by any player in this WPL.

Their recent performances would surely fuel their fire but the Giants will have to be wary of the all-round strength of the Delhi Capitals, who too would be keen for a win, for it would help them finish at the top and qualify directly for the final.

Currently, Delhi Capitals hold the top spot with 10 points from seven matches. They are in pole position to finish first, which would ensure direct entry into the title round.

The teams finishing second and third will face off in the Eliminator next week.

Meg Lanning has blown hot and cold this season but still remains dangerous, while India batter Shafali Verma (260 runs) has lit up the tournament with her aggressive stroke-play. Jess Jonassen has made all-round contributions for Delhi with 128 runs and joint second-highest nine wickets.



# PSG lose to Liverpool in Champions League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain's (PSG) wasteful finishing came back to haunt the French team in a 1-0 loss to Liverpool in the first leg of the Champions League round of 16.

Harvey Elliott's late goal on Wednesday punished PSG at Parc des Princes. It was only Liverpool's second attempt on target compared to a whopping 28 for PSG.

Wasted chances galore hampered PSG during the group stage — where it lost to Arsenal, Atletico Madrid and Bayern Munich, scoring just one goal in those three games.

But coach Luis Enrique's side had turned the corner in fine style with 40 goals scored in 10 straight wins before this game.

PSG had 12 attempts on goal in the first half alone where Liverpool could not cope with PSG's pace, movement and constant positional switches on a night where Liverpool's 30-goal top scorer Mohamed Salah was kept quiet.

Luckily goalkeeper Alisson was at his defiant best, however, making nine saves overall.

The imposing Brazilian twice denied Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and kept out attempts from Bradley Barcola and Ousmane Dembélé. There were also bad misses from Barcola and midfielder João Neves, who both shot over from good positions.

Kvaratskhelia thought he had

scored with a brilliant curling shot from the right of the penalty area in the 20th minute but the Georgia star's effort was ruled out for a razor-thin offside following a video review.

VAR went in Liverpool's favour a second time minutes later, when referee Davide Massa checked for a red card check to see whether Ibrahim Konaté had pushed Barcola in the back. But no foul was given.

Kvaratskhelia went close with a free kick early in the second half and had another low shot saved.

Former England captain David Beckham was among the crowd at Parc des Princes. He played half a season for PSG after joining in 2013 during the start of the club's Galactico era and then retired.

It was turning into a night of frustration for this PSG side. A corner almost went in, until Liverpool midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai stuck a leg out on the line.

Then, with the clock ticking, Alisson made the save of the night when he somehow got both hands at full stretch to substitute Désiré Doué's bending shot from 20 meters.

Luis Enrique said before the game that Liverpool were Europe's counterattack specialists and he was proved right.

The return leg is on next Tuesday at Anfield and the winner faces either Aston Villa or Club Brugge in the quarterfinals.

# India have 'real clarity' on how they want to operate in Dubai: Williamson

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LAHORE

New Zealand batting mainstay Kane Williamson reckons India have “real clarity” on how they want to operate in Dubai, having played all their Champions Trophy (CT) games at the same venue but his team will also be reasonably well-prepared for the tournament finale due to its limited past familiarity with conditions.

Williamson did not specifically say that India had an advantage of playing at one venue, choosing to compare it to New Zealand's understanding of conditions in Lahore, where they beat South Africa on Wednesday to set up a final clash against the Rohit Sharma-led side in Dubai on Sunday.

New Zealand had played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa.

“I suppose having played there on a number of occasions; there's real clarity in how they want to operate,” said Williamson when asked if India go into the final with an advantage of knowing the



conditions.

“A little bit like our opportunity here, having played a number of times at this venue as well and I think that's part and parcel in cricket,” he added.

Having scored a hundred in the semifinal, Williamson is high on confidence and looking forward to the final.

“It is what it is (India play all games in Dubai). Our focus is the next match, the location of that match, the opposition,

they're all factors. Obviously, we played India once there,” he said.

“The conditions are different, so it's important that we try and take away some of those positives and be nice and clear in how we're trying to operate come two or three-days' time in the final,” he said referring to New Zealand's loss to India in the group stage.

Both Williamson and Rachin Ravindra struck hundreds to fashion New Zealand's emphatic win.

Williamson called Ravindra, who has score two hundreds in three games, a special talent.

“It's a final, so it's exciting. If we go back to Rachin, an incredibly special talent. It's always great to bat with him. He goes out and he puts the team first and he plays with that freedom.

“When we were out there batting together, there were moments where there were some good spells and it was a little bit challenging. We tried to feed off each other and keep each other focused on the job,” Williamson said.

# Aravindh defeats Giri in Prague Masters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ PRAGUE

Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram crashed through the defenses of super-solid Anish Giri to jump in to sole lead after the end of the seventh round of Prague Masters chess tournament now underway here.

It was Aravindh all the way while R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with pre-empt rating favourite Wei Yi of China. Aravindh took his tally to five points out of a possible seven and now enjoys a half point lead over Praggnanandhaa who needs to catch up.

With just two rounds to come, Sam Shankland of United States defeated Quang Leim Le of Vietnam. Interestingly, both Quang Leim and Giri had drawn the first six games and the axe fell on them at the same time.

In the other decisive game 16-



years old Gurel Ediz of Turkey scored over local Nguyen Thai Dai Van to reach a fifty percent score while David Navara of Czech Republic played out a draw with Vincent Keymer of Germany.

Aravindh on five and Pragg on 4.5 are now followed by Wei Yi, Ediz, Keymer and Shankland on 3.5 points each and these four are a half point behind the duo of Giri, Navara and Le.Dai Van is alone at the bottom now with 2.5 points in his kitty. The

battle lines are drawn between the two Indians only.

Aravindh is a cool customer in normal positions with a deep eye for tactical complexities and a rare chance against Giri provided him to dismantle the king side and enter record books.

There are as many as five Indians in top 15 live world rankings and Viswanathan Anand stands at number 15. Aravindh at 14, entered the top fifteen for the first time ever. It was a Queen's gambit

declined wherein Giri overestimated his chances and pushed his king side pawns in trying to secure a space advantage. Aravindh came up with a shocker on his 24th turn when he put his knight in front of a pawn and it was a one-way tide thereon. Black's attack was soon impossible to handle and Aravindh won in 39 moves.

Praggnanandhaa started with the English opening against Wei Yi and the game took shape in a Tarrasch defense wherein the Chinese was under some pressure but never really out of the game.

The Indian won a pawn to reach a rook and pawns endgame and despite having a passed pawn deep outside the position was technically drawn. The game lasted 61 moves.

In the challengers' section, Jonas Buhl Bjerre added to the woes of lone Indian Divya Deshmukh who remained at

the last spot on 1.5 points from seven games.

The lead in this section is shared by Bjerre and Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan on 5.5 points each.

Results round 6: Quang Leim Le (Vie, 3) lost to Sam Shankland (Usa, 2.5); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 4.5) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 3.5); Anish Giri (Ned, 3) lost to Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 5); Gurel Ediz (Tur, 3.5) beat Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2.5); David Navara (Cze, 3) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 3.5).

Challengers: Richard Stalmach (Cze, 3) drew with Fintel Vaclav (Cze, 3); Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 1.5) lost to Jonas Buhl Bjerre (Den, 5.5); Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 5.5) beat Ivan Salgado Lopez (Esp, 3.5); Marc'andria Maurizzi (Fra, 4) beat Nemeq Juchym (Cze, 2); Ma Qun (Chn, 4) drew with Stamatis Kourkoulous-Arditis (Gre, 3).

# Mushfiqur Rahim retires from ODIs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DHAKA

Veteran Bangladesh wicket-keeper batter Mushfiqur Rahim has retired from ODI cricket with immediate effect.

The 37-year-old was part of Bangladesh's squad that exited the Champions Trophy (CT) from the group stage.

He made the announcement on social media.

“I am announcing my retirement from the ODI format as of today, Alhamdulillah (Thank God) for everything. While our achievements may have been limited on a global level, one thing is certain: whenever I stepped onto the field for my country, I gave more than 100 per cent with dedication and honesty,” Rahim wrote on his official Facebook page.

“The last few weeks have



been very challenging for me, and I have come to realise that this is my destiny. “Lastly, I would like to deeply thank my family, friends and my fans for whom I have played cricket for the last 19 years,” he added.

Rahim made his ODI debut almost 20 years ago and ended up representing the country in 274 ODIs, aggregating 7795 runs at an average of 36.42. Only Tamim Iqbal (8357 runs) has

scored more ODI runs than him for Bangladesh. He has also played 94 Tests and 102 T20s.

In the team's disappointing Champions Trophy campaign, Rahim failed to score against India before making just two runs against New Zealand.

Rahim has already retired from the shortest format but in the longest format, he is on course to become first from his country to play 100 Tests.