

GREAT OFFERS!



Scan to Subscribe



PAGE 3 CITY
 CM Rekha Gupta vows quality education for Viksit Delhi



PAGE 7 LAW & JUSTICE
 Devaswom Board to file affidavit on womens' entry in Sabarimala



PAGE 10: BUSINESS
 Everything fine with Fino Bank?



PAGE 13 GLOBAL
 Hegseth, Caine hold news conference as Iran conflict intensifies in region



PAGE 16 SPORTS
 Switched off phone, social media: Samson on dealing with lows

PIONEER IN SHORT

INDIA ANNOUNCES RELIEF FLIGHTS

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) on Monday announced that IndiGo plans 10 special relief flights from Jeddah to India on Tuesday, March 3, to help stranded passengers, pending approvals and airspace conditions. The airline is coordinating with the Indian Consulate in Jeddah. Air India Express will also resume flights to and from Muscat on Tuesday. The announcement followed a high-level review chaired by Civil Aviation Minister Rammoohan Naidu, attended by Civil Aviation Secretary Samir Kumar Sinha and senior officials. MoCA said it is closely monitoring Middle East airspace and its impact on international operations. Indian carriers have adjusted schedules, resuming long-haul flights via alternate routes that avoid restricted airspace. Aircraft and crew positioning is underway, and additional capacity is being deployed to facilitate passenger movement. Foreign carriers are also operating limited services. Passengers are urged to check official airline updates for flight status, refunds, and assistance. Over 300 international flights were cancelled Monday due to ongoing disruptions.

The Bystander



CONFLICT TO LAST 4-5 WEEKS, SAYS TRUMP

US President Donald Trump on Monday said Iran operations are likely to last four to five weeks but that he's prepared "to go far longer than that." Trump spoke Monday at a White House ceremony. The war in West Asia spiralled further Monday as Israel and the US pounded Iran. Tehran and its allies hit back against Israel, neighbouring Gulf States, and targets critical to the world's production of oil and natural gas. The intensity of the attacks, the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the lack of any apparent exit plan has set the stage for a prolonged conflict in a volatile region.

KASHMIR PROTESTS LEAVE 14 INJURED

At least 14 people, including six security personnel, were injured on the second day of protests across Jammu and Kashmir following the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in a reported US-Israeli strike, officials said. Authorities imposed sweeping restrictions, shut schools and throttled mobile internet across the Union Territory as a precaution. Around 75 rallies were held in the Kashmir Valley, with smaller demonstrations in Jammu. Most were peaceful, though clashes in parts of Srinagar, Pulwama and Budgam left eight protesters and six security personnel injured. Security forces used mild force to disperse crowds in some areas. Restrictions were tightened amid a one-day strike call by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, which drew support from political parties, including Mehbooba Mufti. Ghanta Ghar at Lal Chowk was sealed, with heavy deployment of police and paramilitary forces.

India closely monitoring West Asia crisis: PM Modi

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the evolving tensions in West Asia as a "grave concern" for India, assuring that the Government is closely monitoring the situation and prioritising the safety of Indian nationals in the region.

His remarks come amid escalating hostilities involving Iran, the United States and Israel, which have raised fears of broader instability across the region.

At the joint press conference with his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney, PM Modi reiterated that India consistently advocates for peaceful resolution of



WE SUPPORT DIALOGUE AND DIPLOMACY AS THE WAY FORWARD. DIFFERENCES MUST BE RESOLVED THROUGH TALKS, NOT CONFRONTATION

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

conflicts. "We support dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward. Differences must be resolved through talks, not confrontation," he said, underlining New Delhi's long-standing position on

global disputes. PM Modi emphasised that the Government is in constant touch with Indian missions abroad and is coordinating with regional authorities to safeguard the interests of Indian citizens. "The

safety and security of every Indian, wherever they are in the world, is our foremost priority," he stated.

According to official sources, Indian embassies in affected areas have stepped up advisories and are maintaining communication with community groups. Contingency planning is also underway should the security environment deteriorate further.

India has significant economic and strategic stakes in the region, including energy supplies, trade links and a large expatriate population. Any prolonged instability could have implications for global oil markets and supply chains, officials noted.

Oil, gas prices spike as conflict expands

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

As the US-Israel-Iran conflict entered its third day on Monday, international oil and gas prices rose sharply. On Monday, Saudi Arabia's national oil company, Aramco, shut down a refinery as a precautionary measure, while Qatar's State owned QatarEnergy suspended production of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), even as at least three ships were attacked near the Strait of Hormuz at the weekend. The waterway to the south of Iran transports about 20 per cent of the world's oil and gas supplies.

International crude oil prices have risen over 10-13 percent while prices of natural gas has spiked by nearly 50 per cent. India is the world's fourth-largest buyer of LNG. Further, according to Government data between 2.5-2.7 million



Smoke billows out from an oil tanker after it came under attack from the Iranian military off Oman's Musandam peninsula

CONFLICT WIPES OUT ₹8 LAKH CR WEALTH

New Delhi: The bloodbath on Dalal Street translated into a massive erosion of investor wealth as the conflict between Iran and Israel entered its third day on Monday. Total market

capitalisation on the BSE slid by more than ₹7-₹8 lakh crore, dropping from nearly ₹463 lakh crore on Friday to about ₹454 lakh crore during intraday trade. DETAILED REPORTS ON >> P11

barrels per day of India's crude imports move through the Strait of Hormuz, primarily sourced from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas,

Hardeep Singh Puri reviewed the supply situation for crude oil, LPG, and other petroleum products with senior officials from the ministry and public sector companies.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

PM Modi condemns attacks in talks with Gulf leaders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday held separate telephone conversations with the King of Bahrain, Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, and the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Bin Salman, condemning the recent attacks on the two countries and terming them violations of their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Earlier, Prime Minister Modi had also spoken with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu and the President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, as part of India's ongoing diplomatic engagement in response to the unfolding crisis.

During the discussions, Prime Minister Modi stressed that the swift restoration of peace and stability in West Asia is of utmost importance. He also



PM Modi with Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in New Delhi on January 2026

expressed gratitude to both leaders for ensuring the safety and well-being of the Indian community residing in their countries amid the ongoing tensions.

The Prime Minister's comments signal a calibrated diplomatic approach — balancing concern over rising tensions with a call for restraint and engagement. As the situation continues to unfold, the Government is expected to remain in close coordination with international partners while focusing on the

welfare of its citizens abroad.

In a post on X, the Prime Minister said he had discussed the evolving regional situation with Prince Mohammed bin Salman and reiterated that India condemns the attacks on Saudi Arabia.

He noted that both sides agreed on the urgent need to de-escalate tensions and restore stability at the earliest, while also thanking the Saudi leadership for its continued support to the Indian diaspora during challenging times.

Indian killed in tanker attack off Oman coast

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

An Indian national was killed on Monday when an explosive-laden unmanned boat struck an oil tanker off the coast of Muscat Governorate, according to reports.

"The Maritime Security Centre reported that the oil tanker MKD VYOM was attacked by an unmanned boat 52 nautical miles off the

LOCAL MEDIA REPORTED THAT THE VICTIM WAS AN INDIAN

coast of Muscat Governorate," Oman's Ministry of Defence said in a statement.

It said that the attack resulted in a fire and explosion in the engine room and

the death of one crew member. The remaining 21 crew members were evacuated.

The ministry did not identify the nationality of the deceased, but local media reported that the victim was an Indian crew member of the tanker.

"The attack triggered a fire and explosion within the main engine room, resulting in the fatality of one

crew member of Indian nationality," State-run Oman News Agency reported.

In coordination with the Maritime Security Centre, the tanker's complement of 21 crew members — 16 Indian nationals, four Bangladeshi nationals, and one Ukrainian national — was evacuated via the commercial vessel MV SAND, which flies the flag of the Republic of Panama, it said.

Pakistan declares war against Afghanistan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan intensified on Monday after the Afghan Taliban claimed responsibility for a series of armed drone strikes on key Pakistani military installations, including the Command and Control Centre at Nur Khan Air Base in Rawalpindi.

The air base, a strategically significant facility, was previously damaged during Operation Sindoor in May



US Army staff tightens up the rear rotor of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter at Pakistan Air Force Base Nur Khan

2025. Reconstruction and repair efforts had been ongoing for months following the confrontation between India and Pakistan. The latest reported strike is expected to further complicate restoration work at the site.

In a statement shared via its official X account, Afghanistan's Ministry of National Defense said its air force carried out "precise and coordinated aerial operations" targeting several Pakistani military positions.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Shah kicks off Poribortan Yatra in West Bengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kolkata

Union Minister for Home Affairs, Amit Shah on Monday gave a clarion call to "bring a BJP Government" in West Bengal, kicking off the BJP's Poribortan Yatra in the poll bound State.

Launching the rally from Mathurapur in South 24 Parganas, Shah said, "Within 45 days we will implement the Seventh Pay Commission for State Government employees, fill vacant posts without bribery, ensure security for women, and jail those who killed BJP workers."

It was the home minister's first visit to the State since the publication of electoral list after Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls on Saturday. Shah slammed the TMC Government over what he described as years of unchecked infiltration under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's watch, signalling that border security and citizenship will anchor the BJP's final electoral push.

Sharpening the saffron party's infiltration pitch he said, "Right now, only names



Home Minister Amit Shah during the BJP Parivartan Yatra ahead of the West Bengal Assembly elections, in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

are being deleted from voter rolls, and Mamata Didi is nervous. Once BJP forms the Government, we will identify and remove every infiltrator from Bengal."

His remarks came days after the Election

CCS reviews West Asia crisis

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday reviewed the evolving situation in West Asia and expressed concern over the safety and security of the large Indian expatriate community in the region.

An official statement said the CCS also directed all concerned departments to take necessary



and feasible measures to assist Indian nationals affected by the developments. The CCS also underscored the importance of an early cessation of hostilities and a return to dialogue and diplomacy.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

India, Canada target \$50B bilateral trade by 2030



PM Narendra Modi interacting with Canadian PM Mark Carney at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi

Canadian uranium producer Cameco Corp has signed a \$2.6 billion (about \$1.9 billion) agreement to supply nuclear fuel to India, marking a major outcome of Prime Minister Mark Carney's first official visit to the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney met in the Indian capital on Monday to chart what they described as a more ambitious and future-focused relationship between two major democracies.

Under the long-term contract, Cameco will deliver 22 million pounds (approximately 11,000 tonnes) of uranium to India between 2027 and 2035, according to the Canadian Prime Minister's office. The pact is expected to support India's expanding civil nuclear energy programme as it seeks to increase low-carbon power generation.

Beyond nuclear cooperation, Canada and India agreed to deepen collaboration in liquefied natural gas, critical minerals, solar energy and hydrogen — sectors seen as central to energy security and the global transition to cleaner fuels.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



IN BRIEF

Namo Bharat, Meerut Metro to run from 5 pm to 10 pm on Holi



Namo Bharat and Meerut Metro services will operate for a limited window, from 5 pm to 10 pm, on the occasion of Holi on March 4, the National Capital Region Transport Corporation said on Monday. The services will remain suspended during the morning and afternoon hours on the day of the festival and will resume operations in the evening to facilitate essential travel, the NCRTC said. The corporation added that on all other days, including Sundays, both Namo Bharat and Meerut Metro will run daily from 6 am to 10 pm, with the schedule maintained across the week for commuter convenience. The services connect key stretches in the National Capital Region, including Meerut, and are aimed at providing faster and more comfortable urban and regional mobility.

14 JNU students who were held in protest march released



Fourteen Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) students who were arrested during a protest march last week have been released, student leaders said on Monday, calling the development a relief for the university community. Those released include JNUSU president Aditi Mishra, vice-president Gopika K Babu, joint secretary Danish Ali, former JNUSU president Nitish Kumar, and AISA All India president Neha, among others. A Delhi court on Sunday ordered the immediate release of the 14 students who were arrested in connection with a protest demonstration at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus recently.

President launches 4 welfare schemes for women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday launched four major welfare schemes for women in Delhi in the national Capital. The officials described the schemes as a historic step towards women-led development. The mega programme, titled "Sashakt Naari, Samridhdh Delhi," was held at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in the presence of Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta.

The President formally launched the Delhi Lakhpati Beti Yojana, the Saheli Pink Smart Card, a scheme to provide free LPG cylinders on Holi and Diwali to ration card holders, and the transfer of over ₹100 crore through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to 40,642 girls under the Ladli scheme.

Under the "Meri Punji, Mera Adhikaar" initiative, ₹100.25 crore was transferred directly into Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of eligible beneficiaries. In an earlier phase, around ₹90 crore had been transferred to nearly 30,000



President Droupadi Murmu, Delhi LG VK Saxena and CM Rekha Gupta during an event to launch schemes for women including the Lakhpati Beti Yojana

girls. The scheme aims to ensure transparency and timely delivery of benefits.

Addressing the gathering, President Murmu said women's empowerment is essential for building a developed India by 2047. She said true empowerment means giving women the ability to make independent decisions, live with dignity, and access education and equal rights. She added that women are excelling in fields such as science, sports, administration, and defence, but chal-

lenges like violence and economic inequality must still be addressed.

The President said Delhi, as the national Capital, must present a model of women-led development for the country. She urged society to ensure safety, dignity, and equal opportunities for daughters.

The Delhi Lakhpati Beti Yojana has been introduced as a digital and incentive-based replacement for the Ladli scheme. Under it, ₹61,000 will be deposited in stages from

birth until graduation. The amount will grow to around ₹1.25 lakh with interest by the age of 21, subject to conditions such as completing graduation or a vocational diploma. A budget provision of ₹128 crore has been made for the scheme. Girls living in child care institutions will also be included, with the Government acting as guardian. The scheme will operate through a fully digital portal, and its financial management will be handled by SBI Life Insurance Company

FOUR WELFARE SCHEMES

- Under the "Meri Punji, Mera Adhikaar" initiative, ₹100.25 crore was transferred through DBT to 40,642 eligible girls under the Delhi Ladli Scheme directly into Aadhaar-linked bank accounts, ensuring transparency and good governance.
- The Delhi Lakhpati Beti Yojana has been introduced as a modern, digital and incentive-based replacement for the Ladli scheme. Under the scheme, ₹61,000 will be deposited in stages in the name of each eligible girl, which will grow to over ₹1 lakh with interest by the age of 21, subject to conditions such as completion of graduation or a vocational diploma. The scheme will operate through a fully digital, faceless, end-to-end online portal. Its financial management will be handled by SBI Life Insurance Company Limited under the SBI Life Dhanrashi Sadhan framework.
- To strengthen safe and accessible mobility for women, the Saheli Pink National Common Mobility Card has been launched, enabling free travel for women in Delhi Transport Corporation buses in line with the One Nation-One Card vision. This card will eventually be integrated and can be used for travel across various public transit modes including Metro and RRTS. The Delhi Government has set up around 50 centres across the city to facilitate the issuance of the "Pink Saheli" cards and the distribution process will commence from Tuesday. Around 50 centres, including offices of district magistrates and sub-divisional magistrates, along with select Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) locations, have been established for card issuance, according to a statement.
- Additionally, beginning in 2026, ration card-holding families in Delhi will receive free LPG cylinders on Holi and Diwali, with the benefit delivered through DBT to ensure transparency.

Speaker Gupta advises students on power, welfare

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta addressed the students of the Indian Institute of Democratic Leadership (IIDL) on Monday. The Speaker told the students that power is a sacred public trust and must be used for the welfare of the last citizen.

Addressing Cohort IX students during their visit to the Delhi Legislative Assembly, Gupta said democracy draws strength not only from laws but from the ethical grounding of those who serve. He urged the students to see themselves as future architects of the nation



and to act with responsibility and humility.

The visit was organised as part of IIDL's structured field study programme in the national Capital.

The Speaker welcomed the initiative and praised institutions that train youth in

democratic leadership. He said that classroom learning must be complemented by exposure to real legislative institutions to gain a deeper understanding of governance and public policy.

In his keynote address, Gupta spoke about the vision

of 'Viksit Bharat'. He said becoming a developed nation is not just an economic goal but a commitment to inclusive and transparent governance.

He stressed that India needs leaders who can take informed decisions in the national interest and uphold constitutional values. "A prosperous nation is built on responsible legislators, efficient administrators, and an aware citizenry," he said.

Sharing insights into his role, Gupta explained the daily functioning of the Assembly. He said debate, deliberation, and scrutiny form the foundation of a healthy democracy.

Mayor urges property owners to grab tax amnesty deal



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Mayor Sardar Raja Iqbal Singh on Monday urged property owners to avail the benefits of the Property Tax Amnesty Scheme 2025-26, Sumpattikar Niptaan Yojana (SUNIYO). The scheme has now been extended till March 31, 2026. He said the scheme will not be extended further.

Addressing citizens, the Mayor called it a "golden opportunity" to settle outstanding property tax dues without paying penalties or interest. He appealed to all eligible taxpayers to take advantage of the final extension and clear their dues before the deadline.

According to official data, over 1.87 lakh taxpayers

have already benefited from the scheme and paid property tax amounting to ₹1,089.97 crore up to March 1, 2026. Out of this, ₹211.44 crore was collected from 1,34,666 residential properties, while ₹78.52 crore came from 52,759 non-residential properties.

The Mayor said citizen participation in the amnesty scheme has been encouraging. He highlighted that 1,02,201 new taxpayers paid property tax for the first time under SUNIYO. The total tax collected from these first-time taxpayers stands at ₹395.96 crore.

Under the scheme, taxpayers can avail a complete waiver of property tax, along with interest and penalties, for the period prior to the financial year 2020-21.

BJP leaders join journalists at Holi bash, target Kejriwal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Senior BJP leaders on Monday joined hundreds of journalists at the Delhi BJP Media Department's annual Holi Milan, where political messaging mixed with festive celebrations. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva used the occasion to attack AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal, saying Delhiites have already rejected him and will not be misled again.

The Holi Milan was attend-

ed by BJP National General Secretary (Organisation) BL Santosh, BJP National General Secretary Arun Singh, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Union Minister of State Harsh Malhotra, and several MPs, including Manoj Tiwari, Nishikant Dubey, and Kamaljeet Sehrawat.

Addressing the gathering, Sachdeva said Delhi has witnessed a visible transformation over the past year, and the city's image will improve further in the coming year. He said that when munic-



ipal elections are held, people will vote on the basis of the work done. Targeting Kejriwal,

Sachdeva said the former chief minister tried to prove himself innocent under the cover of a lower court but

has already been sent out of Delhi by the people's verdict. He added that Delhiites will not fall prey to deception again.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the resolve for women's empowerment has gained new strength. She said it is not just about welfare schemes but about building an empowered woman and a prosperous, developed Delhi. The Chief Minister added that development works are

progressing steadily and foundation stones for several projects are being laid.

She said after Holi, the pace of development will increase further. The Government, she said, remains committed to the people of Delhi round the clock.

MP Nishikant Dubey described Holi as a symbol of harmony and brotherhood. He said the festival conveys the message of forgetting differences and working together for the nation's progress.

The Pioneer Classified

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Taruna Jain W/o Narendra Kumar Jain R/o I-4/103, First floor Rohini Sector 16 Rohini Sector 7 Delhi-110085 inform that I have changed my name Tarun Jain to Taruna Jain for all future purposes. Taruna Jain & Tarun Jain both are one & the same person.
PD(384)C
I, Gauri Shankar Yadav, Father of- No.15685602M Hav Kamlesh Kumar Yadav, R/o- Vill & Post- Hariharpur, Dist- Ballia, U.P.- 277401, have changed my name from Gauri Shankar Yadav to Gauri Shankar Yadav, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(385)C
I, Ambika Devi, Mother of JC-472175M Sub Balbir Singh, R/o- H.No.11/2B-3, Kalpanath Nagar, PO-Dumraon, Teh- Maunath Bhanjan (Sadar), Dist- Mau, U.P., have changed my name from Ambika Devi to Ambika Singh, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(386)C
I, JC-472175M Sub Balbir Singh, R/o- H.No.11/2B-3, Kalpanath Nagar, PO-Dumraon, Teh- Maunath Bhanjan (Sadar), Dist- Mau, U.P., have changed my name from Prakash Punj Singh to Punj Prakash Singh, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(387)C
I, Renu Maurya, W/o- No.14660355H Nk Santosh Kumar Maurya R/o- Vill- Balarampur, PO- Viroam, Teh- Pindra, Dist- Varanasi, U.P.- 221201, declare that in my husband's service records my D.O.B is wrongly written as 25/07/1983 whereas my correct D.O.B is 25/08/1983 which may be amended accordingly.
PD(388)C
I, Rabindranath Maity, Father of- No.15187012K Hav Ratan Kumar Maity, R/o- Vill & PO- Uttar Eral, P.S.- Sabang, Dist- Paschim Medinipur, W.B.- 721144, have changed my name from Rabindranath Maity to Rabindra Nath Maity, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(389)C
I, Saraswati Maity, Mother of- No.15187012K Hav Ratan Kumar Maity, R/o- Vill & PO- Uttar Eral, P.S.- Sabang, Dist- Paschim Medinipur, W.B.- 721144, have changed my name from Saraswati Maity to Saraswati Maikap Maity, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(390)C
I, Jogenra Jena, Father of JC-571998P Sub Clk(SD), R/o- Vill- Jodamba, PO- Angula, Teh- Soro, Dist- Balasore, Odisha- 756045, have changed my name from Jogenra Jena to Jogenra Prasad Jena, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(391)C
I, Manoj Singh Tomar, Father of- No.16015619F Hav Sanjay Singh Tomar, R/o- Vill- Raipur, PO- Gadhia (Raipur) Teh- Porsa, Dist- Morena, M.P., have changed my name from Manoj Singh Tomar to Manoj Singh, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(392)C
I, Padmavati Jena, Mother of JC-571998P Sub Clk(SD), R/o- Vill- Jodamba, PO- Angula, Teh- Soro, Dist- Balasore, Odisha- 756045, have changed my name from Padmavati Jena to Padmabati Jena, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(393)C
I, Puspaa Devi, Mother of No.16015619F Hav Sanjay Singh Tomar, R/o- Vill- Raipur, PO- Gadhia (Raipur) Teh- Porsa, Dist- Morena, M.P., have changed my name from Puspaa Devi to Pushpa Devi, vide affidavit dated 02/03/2026 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(394)C

PM SHRI KENDRIYA VIDYALAYA KHICHRIPUR

Near Shiv Mandir Block-6, Delhi-110091
E-Mail: pmshrikhichripur@kvsdelhi.in Tel : 011-21200604
Affiliation No. 270043 CBSE School ID-29001

PM SHRI Kendriya Vidyalaya Khichripur, Delhi-110091

फ. संख्या: के. वि. खिचड़ीपुर / part-time / 2025-26 / निम्नतः 3.03.2026

(Walk-In-Interview)

A walk-in interview for the preparation of a panel of part-time teachers/staff against probable vacancies for the session 2026-27 at PM SHRI Kendriya Vidyalaya, Khichripur, Delhi is scheduled on 07.03.2026 & 09.03.2026. Interested candidates may appear for the interview on the specified dates with their application form, recent passport-sized photograph, original documents of educational and professional qualifications, experience certificates, along with self-attested copies.

For detailed information regarding posts, qualifications, and other conditions, please visit the school's official website: <https://khichripur.kvs.ac.in>.

- Date of interview:** 07.03.2026 - Posts: PRTs and PGTs in subjects English, Chemistry, Political Science, Maths & Economics.
- Date of interview:** 09.03.2026-Posts: TGTs in subjects English, Hindi, Math and for Computer Instructor, Yoga Instructor, Sports Coach, Nurse, Special Educator, Educational Counsellor, & Atal Tinkering/Vocational Lab Instructor.

Principal

Metro Railway, Kolkata

e-Tender is invited by Principal Chief Engineer, Metro Railway for the following work:
Name of work: "Rehabilitation/Repair/Replacement of cooling tower foundation, TSS/RSS building and other miscellaneous work between Km 7/14 to Km 16/18 (KCN to KMUK) of Blue Line of Metro Railway, Kolkata." Approx. Cost of Work: Rs. 2,30,29,751.72. Earnest Money : Rs. 2,65,200. Completion Period: 09 (Nine) Months, Date and Time of Closing: 25.03.2026 at 12:00 Hrs. The Tender Document and other details can be obtained from the website www.ireps.gov.in Amendments/Corrigendum, if any, would be uploaded only on the website.
Abridged e-Tender Notice No. : Civil-2560-2026-(Open)

Follow us at: [/t.me/metrorailwaykol](https://t.me/metrorailwaykol) [/www.facebook.com/metroraikolkata](https://www.facebook.com/metroraikolkata)

NORTHERN RAILWAY

CORRIGENDUM

Ref. - Tender Notice No. 82/2025-2026 Dated-23.01.2026.
Tender No. 07250207, Due on 13.03.2026.

In reference to above tender,
(1) Tender due date has been extended from dated 27.02.26 to 13.03.26.
(2) Tender quantity increases 961 nos. to 3288 nos.
(3) EMD had been updated.
All other terms and condition remain unchanged.
The corrigendum has been published on website www.ireps.gov.in.
650/2026

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE

SR. NO.	NAME OF DEPARTMENT	NAME OF WORK NOTICE TENDER	OPENING DATE CLOSING DATE	AMOUNT / EMD (APPROX.) IN RUPEES	WEBSITE OF THE DEPARTMENT	NODAL OFFICER/CONTACT DETAILS/EMAIL
1	PWD B&R, AMBALA	IMPROVEMENT OF ROAD BY PROVIDING 20MM THICK PREMIX CARPET IN PWD COLONY AT AMBALA CANTT IN AMBALA DISTRICT + 3 WORKS	25.02.2026 05.03.2026	53.88 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9417362462 pwd-eeep2-ambala@hry.nic.in
2	PWD B&R, HISAR	CONSTRUCTION OF NEW BUS STAND AT TOHANA IN DISTT. FATEHABAD. (PDG. SOLAR POWER PLANT) + 1 WORKS	27.02.2026 09.03.2026	26.11 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01662225651 pwd-eeep-hissar@hry.nic.in
3	PWD B&R, HANSI	RE-CONSTRUCTION OF GOVT. VETERINARY DISPENSARY AT VILLAGE BHATOL JATTAN IN HISAR DISTT. (WITHOUT GST) + 1 WORKS	27.02.2026 05.03.2026	51.80 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01663259688 pwd-eeep-hansi@hry.nic.in
4	PWD B&R, KATHAL	CONSTRUCTION OF MULTIPURPOSE HALL IN PLACE OF JUDO HALL IN THE VILLAGE SONGAL IN KATHAL DISTRICT (UNDER C.M ANNOUNCEMENT 25131 DATED 22.02.2019)	CLOSING DATE 09.03.2026	375.25 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9896320998 pwd-eeep-kathal@hry.nic.in
5	PWD B&R, GURUGRAM	SPECIAL REPAIR FOR VULNERABLE WITNESS COURT IN COURT COMPLEX AT GURUGRAM	CLOSING DATE 05.03.2026	1.02 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01242322424 pwd-eeep1-gurgaon@hry.nic.in
6	PWD B&R, GURUGRAM	RENOVATION OF COURT NO.13 IN JUDICIAL COURT COMPLEX AT GURUGRAM	CLOSING DATE 05.03.2026	1.45 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01242322424 pwd-eeep1-gurgaon@hry.nic.in
7	PANCHAYATI RAJ,KARNAL	DETAILED ESTIMATE OF CONST. OF ILBP RASTA FROM F/O MASTER AMRISH S/O RAIPAL TO F/O JOGINDER S/O HUKAM SINGH ON MANSI DEVI ROAD VILLAGE-SALWAN BLOCK-ASSANDH DIST. KARNAL SCHEME-HGVY + 6 WORKS	28.02.2026 09.03.2026	264.79 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9896202019 prexeeng.krl@hry.nic.in
8	PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING, HISAR	DESILTING OF SEWERAGE MANHOLE BY MECHANICAL METHOD USING DESILTING MACHINERY REQUIRED TO DE-SILTING WORK INCLUDING DISPOSE-OFF DE-SILTED SILT OUT SIDE THE CITY ETC ON WARD NO. 16 HISAR TOWN + 1 WORKS	CLOSING DATE 03.03.2026	11.10 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	01662-247033 eeehisar@gmail.com
9	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, JHAJJAR	DESILTING AND STRENGTHENING OF CRITICAL REACHES OF OUTFALL DRAIN NO. 8 FROM RD 0.000 TO 42.590 KM + 2 WORKS	CLOSING DATE 05.03.2026	455.19 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9050805156 xenjwsvdjr@rediffmail.com
10	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, NARWANA	CONSTRUCTION OF PUMP HOUSE AT RD 92000-R DHAMTAN DISTY. IN VILLAGE UJHANA FOR REUSING FLOOD WATER IN THE DHAMTAN DISTY. IN BWS MECHANICAL SUB DIVISION NARWANA + 1 WORKS	25.02.2026 11.03.2026	84.82 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9660864175 xen-wsrnw.irr@gov.in
11	IRRIGATION & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT HARYANA, PANIPAT	BRINGING TO DESIGN SECTION OF TRIBUTARY DRAIN NO. 3 AND RECONSTRUCTION/CONSTRUCTION OF 02 NO. VR BRIDGES AT RD 95620 AND RD142500 OF TRIBUTARY DRAIN NO. 3 TO PROTECT THE ABADI FROM OVERFLOW OF DRAIN. + 1 WORKS	CLOSING DATE 09.03.2026	111.38 LACS	https://etenders.hry.nic.in	9466159501 xenpwsdiv@yahoo.in

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION KINDLY VISIT www.etenders.hry.nic.in RO 43457-I-27-7



Canteen owner killed, body chopped and dumped in Yamuna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Coveting gold and cash, a 29-year-old man, along with his live-in partner and associates, allegedly murdered a canteen owner, chopped his body into pieces and dumped them in Yamuna, the Delhi Police said on Monday. Four people, including a woman, have been arrested in connection with the killing that took place on February 18.

According to the police, the main accused, Happy alias Suraj (29), had befriended Anroop Gupta (48), who ran a canteen at Chhattisgarh Niwas in Dwarka, nearly a year ago. After noticing the gold ornaments that Gupta frequently wore, Happy grew greedy. He also learned that the canteen owner was living separately from his family.

On February 18, Happy invited Gupta for a party at his rented home in Matiala

Extension. There, Happy, along with his associates, tied Gupta with ropes and beat him with sticks, demanding money, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Ankit Singh said.

Gupta told them that his gold rings and bracelet were in his SUV parked at the Chhattisgarh Niwas.

The accused forcibly took the car keys, brought the vehicle to Matiala and retrieved the gold ornaments. However, when Gupta refused to give them money, they stabbed him to death after brutally assaulting him.

"In a shocking act of brutality, Happy procured a machete and cut the body into pieces. The body parts were packed in three plastic bags, which were transported by using Gupta's SUV. They disposed of the bags in the Yamuna river near Vrindavan," DCP Ankit Singh said in the statement.



Representative photo

In a bid to mislead investigators, they kept Gupta's mobile phone inside the car and did not switch it off.

They also sent messages from the victim's phone to staff at the Chhattisgarh Niwas canteen asking them to close the the outlet and go home.

Another message was sent to Gupta's family stating that he was going on a vacation to Goa and should not be disturbed. The matter came to light when Gupta's family reported him missing at Delhi Police's Dwarka North police station on February 23 after they failed to contact him.

After the missing report, a

dedicated team to trace the canteen owner and a case was registered at Bindapur police station, the DCP said.

"Details were also shared with the Uttar Pradesh Police. Following coordinated efforts with police in Mathura district, the mutilated body parts were recovered from the Yamuna river," he said.

The police said that they checked CCTV footage for three days at toll plazas and the place of the incident to trace the victim's movement.

It was found that Gupta had booked a bike ride on February 18 and left his SUV parked at Chhattisgarh Niwas before heading to Matiala Extension. CCTV footage showed him entering a building there, they said.

"He was never seen coming out. Four other persons were later seen entering the same building," DCP Singh said.

Further scrutiny of CCTV

footage revealed suspicious movement of the victim's car, which was later seen entering and exiting the basement of the building before heading towards the Yamuna Expressway on the intervening night of February 19 and 20.

The DCP said, "NHA1 toll data confirmed that the SUV travelled towards Vrindavan and returned to Noida within a few hours. The key conspirator, Happy, a resident of Hansi in Haryana, was identified from CCTV footage and traced."

During interrogation, he confessed to hatching the conspiracy, along with his associates — Bhupender, Balram, Neeraj and his live-in partner Rakhi, the officer said. Bhupender, Balram and Rakhi have also been arrested, while Neeraj remains absconding. Efforts are being made to trace and arrest him, the officer added.

According to police

sources, Gupta shifted to Dwarka Sector 14 around two months ago.

"When he went missing, a team was immediately dispatched to the apartment where he was staying. We also got to know that he was staying with a woman there," the source said.

He further said that Gupta's family members stay in Faridabad. A team also visited Faridabad and also checked the CCTV footage of the society in Dwarka as well. Gupta left his house and he was carrying a bag with him as well, the source said, adding that all the CCTV footage is being connected to ascertain the sequence of events.

Police is also trying to identify the woman who was staying with Gupta, he said.

According to the police, the mortal remains were handed over to the family members after autopsy.

Security beefed up at embassies; 15,000 cops out for Holi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Police has stepped up security across the diplomatic enclave of Chanakyapuri and increased patrolling outside the embassies of the United States, Israel, and Iran amid escalating tensions following the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in a joint US-Israeli military strike on Sunday.

Police said prohibitory orders under BNSS Section 163, which bars gatherings, have been imposed across the diplomatic area. Barricades have been put up around the US and Israeli embassies, and additional personnel have been deployed.

Security has also been increased at big markets and religious places that

often see high footfall. Police officers said intelligence agencies are monitoring the situation in the West Asian countries closely, as well as its impact on India's internal security.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Home Affairs has asked States to keep an eye on pro-Iran radical preachers giving inflammatory statements that may result in violence in the wake of the Israel-US attack on Iran, officials said.

In a letter circulated to all States on February 28, the Ministry also asked all states and UTs to keep vigil on social media activities of extremists and global terror group handles, they said. Advising the states to ensure that no law-and-order issues arise, the ministry has asked the States to heighten vigilance, as global events might have a domestic ripple effect



through rhetorical statements, they said.

The circular asked the states to increase security at consulates, embassies, and other diplomatic offices of the USA and Israel in their jurisdictions, and at other entities of the two countries to prevent any untoward incident and maintain peace

and tranquillity. One Sunday, visuals showed groups of people outside the Iran Cultural House in Delhi, where a meeting was scheduled to mark Khamenei's death. Some protesters were also seen raising slogans in parts of Jor Bagh, expressing grief over the Iranian leader's death. According to police,

more than 15,000 police personnel will be deployed across Delhi on Wednesday to maintain law and order during Holi celebrations, with special focus on preventing drunken driving and motorcycle stunts. Police said elaborate security arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the festival of colours is celebrated peacefully and safely.

Senior officers said teams will be stationed at sensitive locations, major intersections, markets and residential areas to prevent any untoward incident. Police personnel, including district police staff, traffic personnel and PCR units, will conduct intensified patrolling across the city. Special checking drives will be carried out to curb drunken driving, rash driving and dangerous stunts on motorcycles.

Six schools, three banks evacuated after bomb threats

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

At least three banks and six schools in the national Capital received bomb threats via email on Monday, which were later declared a hoax after exhaustive searches, officials said.

Delhi Fire Services said calls regarding bomb threats started coming in around 8.20 am after the institutions received emails warning of explosives on their premises.

Among the banks that received the threats were the Axis Bank branch in Connaught Place, the State Bank of India AIIMS branch and the SBI branch in East Delhi's Shahdara.

The six schools that received similar emails



included Army Public School in Delhi Cantt, Salwan Public School, Sardar Patel Vidyalaya, Mira Public School in Janakpuri, Ramjas Public School in Rajendra Nagar and Rabea Girls' Public School. "Teams from the local police, bomb disposal squad, dog squad and fire department were immediately dispatched to all the locations. Every nook and corner was checked thoroughly.

Nothing suspicious was found, and all the calls were later declared a hoax," the senior police officer said.

CM Rekha Gupta vows quality education for 'Viksit Delhi'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday reiterated her Government's objective to ensure quality education and improved infrastructure for every child, thereby strengthening the resolve to build a Viksit Delhi.

The Government's vision, she emphasised, goes beyond literacy and focuses on preparing children to meet future challenges by equipping Government schools with modern facilities and fostering holistic development.

Rekha Gupta made these assertions after performing the BhumiPujan (ground-breaking ceremony) for the permanent building of Kendriya Vidyalaya at Khajurikhas in North-East Delhi. She also inaugurated the temporary premises of the school, enabling classes to commence without delay.

With the commencement of this new school, the total number of Kendriya Vidyalayas in Delhi has increased to 47. The institution will not only provide



quality and affordable education to local children but will also help ease admission pressures on other schools in North-East Delhi.

At present, these 47 Kendriya Vidyalayas are serving more than 119,000 students across the national Capital.

Describing the occasion as historic for Karawal Nagar and the wider North-East Delhi region, the Chief Minister noted that the area had long faced a shortage of quality educational institutions and had until now depended on a single Kendriya Vidyalaya.

The establishment of the new school will ensure that children no longer have to travel long distances in pursuit of quality education and will help foster a stronger academic environment across the locality, she said.

The event was attended by Education Minister Ashish Sood, Tourism Minister Kapil Mishra, senior officials of the Education Department and other distinguished guests.

Referring to the tenure of previous administrations, Rekha Gupta observed that the condition of schools in the region had once been deeply concerning.

Capital set for hotter days as mercury climbs to 30.9°C

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi is set to experience hotter days in the upcoming week as the influence of a western disturbance over the plains weakens, with the city recording a maximum temperature of 30.9 degrees Celsius on Monday, 3.5 degrees Celsius above normal.

The minimum temperature settled at 15.1 degrees Celsius, which was 1.7 degrees Celsius above normal, according to official data.

Day and night temperatures are likely to rise gradually over the next few days by about 2 to 3 degrees Celsius above normal, Mahesh Palawat, vice president, meteorology and climate change, Skymet said.

"The expected rise is attributed to clear skies and bright sunshine prevailing over the city. Any western disturbance during this period is likely to remain confined to the hilly regions and is not expected to impact the plains, leading to a steady increase in heat



conditions in the national Capital," he said.

Among the five stations here, Ayanagar recorded the highest maximum temperature at 31.1 degrees Celsius, which was 4.0 degrees Celsius above normal.

It was followed by Safdarjung at 30.9 degrees Celsius (3.5 degrees above normal), Ridge at 30.7 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees above normal), Lodi Road at 30.2 degrees Celsius (3.2 degrees above normal) and the Palam at 29.1 degrees Celsius (2.1 degrees Celsius above normal).

For minimum temperatures, Ridge recorded the highest at 15.8 degrees Celsius, 1.7 degrees above normal, followed by Ayanagar at 15.6 degrees Celsius (2.6 degrees above normal), Palam at 15.3 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees above normal).

Safdarjung recorded 15.1 degrees Celsius (1.7 degrees above normal), and Lodi Road at 14.8 degrees Celsius, which was 2.8 degrees above normal.

The city saw its hottest start to March in three years, with the maximum temperature on March 1 touching 30.7 degrees Celsius. The last time a higher temperature was recorded on March 1 was in 2023, when the maximum temperature reached 31.2 degrees Celsius. Humidity levels stood at 74 per cent at 8.30 am and 38 per cent at 5.30 pm.

CM watches Shatak, calls it inspiring tribute to RSS at 100

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday watched the recently released film *Shatak*, which chronicles 100 years of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and described it as an inspiring portrayal of dedication and nation-first commitment.

After viewing the film, the Chief Minister shared her response on X, calling the RSS's centenary journey "a bright example of unwavering penance, sacrifice and selfless service." She said that since its inception, the organisation has treated "Nation First" as the core principle of its life and work.

Referring to RSS founder Keshav Baliram Hedgewar,

she said he made individual character-building the foundation of nation-building.

The Chief Minister wrote that *Shatak* presents an inspiring expression of the Sangh's hundred-year journey, its spirit and its commitment to the nation. She termed the film a powerful medium to connect the younger generation with this legacy and urged people to watch it.

Shatak traces the RSS's century-long journey, highlighting its ideological roots and various social initiatives undertaken over the decades. The film was released in theatres on February 20, 2026.

Conceptualised by Anil D Agarwal, the film is directed by Aashish Mall and produced by Vir Kapur, with Aashish Tiwari as co-producer.



From begging to business: 400 skilled and rehabilitated in Delhi Government drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

In a move to curb begging, the Delhi Government has trained to more than 400 beggars skilled and rehabilitated in the past one-and-a-half years. Majority of them are now working as street vendors and linked to welfare schemes.

Under the SMILE scheme, the Delhi Government trained around 400 panhandlers and identified nearly 4,000 people engaged in begging across the city, of whom about 21 per cent were elderly, an official said.

The process began with NGOs identifying beggars and shifting them in eight selected "rain baseras" run



by the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board, where they underwent medical check-ups, basic grooming and counselling, she said.

"Most of them had slipped into begging due to poverty, age or separation from families. Many were migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and parts of

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh," the official said, adding that the majority were above 35 - 40 years of age.

Given their age and willingness, the focus of skill training remained practical and livelihood-oriented, she said. "We trained most of them as street vendors - selling vegetables or fruits while some received training in cooking, domestic work and basic painting jobs," she said. Several beneficiaries were trained and rehabilitated in areas such as Dwarka and Najafgarh, where they were also registered as street vendors with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, she said.

Registration helped protect them from harassment and enabled access to Government credit and pension schemes, the official said and added, "Once registered, they were linked with Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana and other social security schemes, depending on eligibility."

French artist Kesadi paints live mural at LSR College

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Students gathered around a rising wall mural at the Lady Shri Ram College for Women this week as internationally acclaimed French street artist Olivier Poizat, who paints under the name Kesadi, transformed a surface into a live canvas, drawing curious students and art enthusiasts alike.

According to college officials, the project is being executed in collaboration with Alliance Francaise de Delhi, the Institut Francais en Inde, and the Embassy of France in India, giving students a rare chance to observe an international public art process up close and interact with the artist.

"Over the past few days, small groups of students have



been stopping by between classes — some taking photographs, others asking questions — as Kesadi steadily builds the graffiti-inspired composition," Kanika Ahuja, acting principal, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, said.

College officials said the initiative is meant to expose students to global artistic practices beyond the classroom. "This mural brings into dia-

logue two seemingly distant figures, Sarojini Naidu and Annie Ernaux, through a shared commitment to voice, memory, and the everyday. The nightingale, long associated with Sarojini Naidu, is not used here as a decorative emblem but as a metaphor for poetic utterance, for a voice that transforms lived experience into language," officials said.

They pointed out that rather than placing the bird in a romantic or natural landscape, it is positioned atop a modest grocery store facade. "The grocery store references the everyday spaces central to Annie Ernaux's writing: supermarkets, small shops, domestic interiors, sites often overlooked in grand narratives, yet deeply embedded in memory and social identity. In Ernaux's work, the ordinary becomes political; the personal becomes collective," they said.

Ernaux is a French writer who was awarded the 2022 Nobel Prize in Literature. "By placing the nightingale above the grocery store, the mural proposes that poetry does not descend from distant, elevated spaces, it rises from the lived, the routine, and the unremarkable beauty around us.



IN FOCUS

Toxic gas leaks from Palghar chemical unit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Palghar

A massive leak of hazardous oleum gas at a chemical unit in Maharashtra's Palghar district on Monday led to the evacuation of over 2,600 people, including 1,600 school students, while three persons complained of minor eye irritation, officials said.

The oleum (fuming sulphuric acid) gas leak affected areas in a five-kilometre radius of the unit in the Boisar MIDC locality on Mumbai's outskirts and led to the evacuation as a precautionary measure, they said. The leak, which



occurred around 2 pm at the unit of Bhageria Industries Ltd, created a dense cloud of white fumes that spread rapidly due to wind velocity, causing panic among residents and workers in the industrial belt.

The cause of the gas leak was not immediately known. Palghar District Collector Dr Indu Rani Jakhar, who is personally monitoring the

situation, said disaster management plan was activated immediately. "The leakage occurred from a 2,500-litre capacity oleum gas tank. Due to the wind direction, the smoke spread to surrounding areas, impacting a radius of approximately 5 kilometres," the administration stated in a press release.

As a precautionary measure, the authorities ordered the immediate evacuation of 1,600 students from a local school, Tarapur Vidyamandir. Additionally, more than 1,000 workers from Bhageria Industries and neighbouring firms were moved to safety, it informed. Teams from the National

Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), and the Fire Brigade initially faced hurdles in reaching the unit where the gas leak occurred.

"Due to the high smoke concentration in affected areas, response teams were facing difficulties in reaching the exact location of the leak," the official release noted. Chemical experts and NDRF personnel eventually located the source and entered the premises using self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). To suppress the fumes, responders have deployed sandbags around the leaking tank, it said. At least three persons

were reported to have suffered minor eye irritation and are receiving medical treatment at hospitals, according to the officials.

District Superintendent of Police Yatish Deshmukh, who was at the leakage site, asked the villagers not to panic as authorities were taking all possible measures to deal with the situation. Jakhar appealed to people to stay indoors and follow instructions given by the administration.

"The situation is being constantly monitored in coordination with all departments concerned. Citizens should not believe in rumours," the collector emphasised.

Amethi residents stranded in Iran

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ AMETHI

Several people, including four students, from Uttar Pradesh's Amethi are stranded in Iran amid the ongoing joint strikes by the United States and Israel, police said on Monday. They are all residents of Bhanauli village under the Musafirkhana area, they said. According to police, the four students — Kunail (18), Syed Imam Ali (20), Mohammad Aamir (25) and Taraheer Fatima (25) — along with Sadaf (30), Musaitiyab (35), Nusrat Hussain (55), and their families are stuck in the Iranian city of Qom.

Syed Imam Ali's father, Israr, said that he had a brief conversation with his son on March 1. "He (Syed Imam) said that we are in Qom city, but there is no talk of war right now. He then disconnected the call and since then, there has been no contact," Israr said. He also urged the Centre to bring back all the people stranded in Iran safely to India. SHO Musafirkhana Vivek Singh said that the report has been sent to the higher authorities and a team are in constant touch

with the families. As flight operations to and from West Asia remain disrupted after the US and Israel's attack on Iran, hundreds of Indians are stranded in Dubai and other key hub airports, with many of them taking to social media to appeal to the Indian government for assistance.

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has reviewed the evolving situation in West Asia and expressed concern over the safety and security of the large Indian expatriate community in the region.

The CCS has also directed all concerned departments to take necessary and feasible measures to assist Indian nationals affected by the developments.

The CCS, which met on Sunday evening under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also underscored the importance of an early cessation of hostilities and a return to dialogue and diplomacy.

An official statement said the CCS met to review the evolving situation in West Asia, and the meeting was briefed on the air strikes in Iran on February 18.

Celebrate Holi with dignity, harmony, avoid vulgar songs: CM Adityanath

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Gorakhpur

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday appealed people to celebrate Holi with dignity, avoid vulgar songs and refrain from using chemicals or force while applying colours, saying festivals bring joy only when observed in peace and harmony.

Addressing a gathering at the 'Bhakt Prahlad Shobhayatra' organised by Shri Shri Holika Dahan Utsav Samiti at Pandehata in Gorakhpur, he said Holika



Dahan should be performed in a manner that does not cause inconvenience or damage to anyone's property. "Holi songs should be sung in the true spirit of the festival. There should be no obscenity. Whenever vulgarity creeps into songs, it diminishes the significance of our festivals," he said,

adding that every daughter, sister and trader should feel safe during the celebrations.

The chief minister said only colours and gulal should be used during Rangwali Holi, and mud and chemicals must be avoided.

"Do not apply colour on someone's face forcibly. There may be elderly people, children, the sick or families going through grief who may not wish to participate. No one should be compelled," he said.

Adityanath also urged people to ensure that Holika Dahan is organised at a safe distance from homes.

IndiGo plans 10 special relief operations from Jeddah to India amid Gulf crisis

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) on Monday said that IndiGo has planned 10 special relief operations from Jeddah to India on Tuesday, (March 3) to facilitate the return of stranded passengers, subject to required approvals and prevailing airspace conditions. IndiGo is coordinating with the Consulate General of India at Jeddah for passenger facilitation. Besides, Air India Express will restart flights to and from Muscat on Tuesday.

This comes after a high-level review meeting chaired by Union Civil Aviation Minister Rammohan Naidu. The meeting was attended by Civil Aviation Secretary Samir Kumar Sinha and other senior officials.

The ministry said after the meeting that it is closely monitoring the evolving airspace situation in parts of the Middle East and its impact on international flight operations.

"Indian carriers have undertaken calibrated adjustments to their schedules, with long-haul and ultra long-haul operations being progressively resumed through alternative routings that avoid restricted airspace. Aircraft and crew repositioning measures are underway to restore operational stability at the earliest. Special arrangements are being made to facilitate the



movement of stranded passengers. Airlines are deploying additional capacity where required and coordinating closely with foreign aviation authorities and Indian missions abroad to ensure safe and orderly passenger movement," the Ministry said in its latest update on Middle East airspace situation.

According to the Ministry, foreign carriers operating between India and the Gulf region are also undertaking limited operations, subject to operational and airspace considerations.

"Passenger safety remains paramount. All airlines have been advised to maintain transparent communication with passengers and ensure adherence to regulatory requirements concerning refunds, rescheduling, and passenger assistance.

Passengers are advised to check the latest flight status directly with their respective airlines before proceeding to the airport and to rely only on official sources for updates," it added. More

than 300 international flights including arrivals and departures have been cancelled on Monday as the operational disruptions caused by the Middle East conflict continued for the third day.

On Monday, IndiGo cancelled more than 163 flights while Air India Group — Air India and Air India Express — cancelled over 110 services. SpiceJet cancelled at least 20 flights whereas Akasa Air did not operate eight flights, according to officials and information gathered from websites and X. Together, Indian airlines cancelled over 300 overseas flights.

Air India operated around 20 flights to North America and Europe on Monday. The flights took the longer route of overflying Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt before entering Europe. Meanwhile, Mumbai and Delhi airports saw 116 and 87 cancellations, respectively, during the day. The cancellations at Bengaluru and Chennai airports stood at 72 and 28 services, respectively.

Stabbing accused killed in UP police encounter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Lucknow

An accused wanted in connection with the alleged stabbing of a YouTuber died after being injured in an encounter with the police in the Loni area of Ghaziabad on Sunday night, officials said.

According to Loni Police Station House Officer (SHO) Mukesh Singh Solanki, the deceased, identified as Zeeshan (24) a resident of Amroha, was involved in the alleged stabbing of YouTuber Salim Ahmed, also known as SalimWastik, and carried a reward of Rs 1 lakh.

A knife, a country-made pistol, cartridges and a motorcycle were recovered from the encounter site. Another accused in the case is still at large.

"The accused, Zeeshan, was injured during an exchange of fire with a police team," Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Amitabh Yash said, adding that he was taken to a hospital where he died during treatment.

According to the police, the YouTuber, Salim Ahmed, was stabbed multiple times in his office at Ali Garden shortly after morning prayers.

Two individuals wearing helmets and riding a motor-



cycle carried out the attack, leaving Ahmed with critical injuries to his neck, abdomen, and ear. He was initially taken to a local hospital before being referred to Guru TegBahadur (GTB) Hospital in Delhi. His condition was stated to be critical, according to a source at the hospital. Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), Loni, Siddhartha Gautam, had earlier said Ahmed runs a YouTube channel where he identifies as an 'Ex-Muslim.'

Preliminary investigations suggested that the attack may have been motivated by his videos criticising certain religious practices, the officer said. A case was registered based on a complaint filed by the victim's son, Usman. Seven people in the case, including an AIMIM leader identified as Aggar, along with Ashraf, Shahrukh, Sonu and Bhati Builder. Multiple teams were formed and raids were conducted at different locations across Delhi and Ghaziabad to track the suspects, the police added.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank president praises Delhi-Meerut Namo Bharat project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

President of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) Zou Jiyai and her delegation, on Monday delegation appreciated the wide-ranging economic benefits of the Delhi-Meerut Namo Bharat project, ensuring poly-centric development and its potential to reshape the landscape of an entire metropolitan region, a transformation already being witnessed along the corridor.



welcomed by the National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC)

Managing Director Shalabh Goel, got first-hand experience of the world-class Namo

Bharat train when it made a round trip.

The AIIB President commented the adoption of cutting-edge technologies and lauded the inclusive design of both trains and stations. The delegation noted with appreciation the strong focus on passenger comfort.

They also interacted with commuters onboard and learnt about their experience of travelling on Namo Bharat and how it has reduced the commute time significantly and enhanced

their quality of life. The visit commenced at Sarai Kale Khan Namo Bharat station where a comprehensive briefing was made to the President, AIIB, on India's first Namo Bharat RRTS, outlining the project overview, advanced technologies deployed, and its pioneering initiatives.

Sarai Kale Khan is the originating and one of the largest stations of the corridor. It is also a multi-modal transit hub, providing seamless connectivity with Metro, Railway Station, ISBT, City Bus stand

and Ring Road, which delegates experienced first-hand. She was also informed that all three priority Namo Bharat corridors of Phase 1 will converge at Sarai Kale Khan and will be interoperable.

Following the core principle of MMI, the RRTS stations are being integrated with existing modes of public transport, creating a vast network of networks to ensure seamless movement of commuters between the transit options in turn to encourage people to leave their private vehicles and use public transport. She

was apprised of how Namo Bharat is addressing critical urban mobility challenges such as pollution and congestion, while contributing to a more sustainable urban development over a long-term.

During the visit, the delegation undertook a round trip on the Namo Bharat train from Sarai Kale Khan to Anand Vihar stations, experiencing firsthand the commuter-centric features of the trains and the amenities at the stations. At the Anand Vihar Station, they also witnessed on ground, how the

efforts of MMI are helping commuters on a daily basis. Jiayi was also apprised of NCRTC's gender-inclusive operational model and interacted with women train operators and station controllers, who form a significant part of the workforce.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 22 dedicated the entire Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut Namo Bharat Corridor to the nation, marking a transformative new chapter in the country's urban mobility landscape.

FROM PAGE - 1

Oil, gas prices spike as conflict expands

"We are continuously monitoring the evolving situation and all steps will be taken in order to ensure availability and affordability of major petroleum products in the country," the ministry posted on social media. Retail petroleum prices have been frozen since April 2022, with oil marketing companies absorbing losses when crude prices are high and making profits when rates are low.

Retail fuel prices are not expected to be raised immediately, as the government continues to follow a calibrated policy of allowing companies to build margins when international prices are low and cushioning consumers when rates rise, sources said. The government wants to continue to shield consumers and the same policy will continue unless there is a huge spike in crude prices, according to sources. With assembly elections in critical states like West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Assam round the corner, it doesn't want anything that could give the opposition a handle.

"They (oil companies) have enough cushion to sustain this kind of prices spike," a source with direct knowledge of the matter said. "We have seen prices rise to \$119 per barrel in June 2022 in the aftermath of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That year they had nominal profits but in FY24 they posted record ₹81,000 crore profit."

"While Iran supplies 4.5-5 per cent of global oil, the main concern is disruption at the Strait of Hormuz which is vital for almost half of India's

imports of both these commodities, thus increasing vulnerability," said Sehul Bhatt, Crisis Intelligence Director. "Sustained disruptions would keep crude prices elevated and tighten LNG availability underscoring the need for strategic planning to protect India's energy security," he added.

India, Canada target \$50B bilateral trade...

The agreement follows recent policy changes in India's nuclear sector. Earlier this year, New Delhi moved to end the state monopoly over atomic power generation and eased liability provisions that had previously deterred private and foreign investment. The talks, held at Hyderabad House, covered trade, clean energy, defence collaboration and education, with both leaders signalling that India and Canada are ready to move beyond incremental progress toward deeper strategic alignment. At the heart of the discussions was a shared goal to lift bilateral trade to \$50 billion by 2030 — a target that would substantially expand current commercial exchanges between the world's fifth-largest economy and a G7 nation rich in natural resources and technology. They also agreed to step up cooperation in critical minerals — an area central to battery manufacturing, electric vehicles and next-generation industries.

In a move underscoring climate alignment, Canada will join the International Solar Alliance and the Global Biofuel Alliance. Modi announced

that an India-Canada Renewable Energy and Storage Summit will be convened later this year to connect policymakers, investors and industry leaders in solar, wind, hydrogen and storage technologies. Beyond economics, the leaders agreed to strengthen defence industrial cooperation and enhance coordination in maritime security, reflecting shared interests in a stable Indo-Pacific and Arctic environment.

Pakistan declares war against Afghanistan

Besides Nur Khan Air Base, the statement named the 12th Division headquarters in Quetta, Balochistan, and the Khwazai Camp in the Mohmand region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa among the targets. The ministry also released what it described as drone footage of the strikes. The cross-border escalation follows claims by Taliban officials that they had shot down a Pakistani fighter jet over Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan. According to media, the pilot ejected and was taken into custody shortly after landing. Local sources said the pilot was detained by Taliban forces.

The situation deteriorated further on Friday when Pakistan launched air operations targeting locations in Kabul and Kandahar. Kandahar holds particular importance as it is the base of Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada. A Pakistani government spokesperson stated that the strikes resulted in the deaths of 133 Taliban fighters, with more than 200 injured. Several

Taliban posts were reportedly destroyed or seized. Taliban authorities described Pakistan's actions as a continuation of earlier cross-border attacks and said their own operations were carried out in retaliation. Afghan officials claimed that subsequent counter-strikes killed at least 55 Pakistani soldiers.

Amid the spiralling violence, Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said the country was in a state of "open war" with Afghanistan, underscoring the severity of the confrontation. The latest exchanges mark one of the sharpest military escalations between the two neighboring countries in recent years, raising concerns of a prolonged conflict along the volatile border.

Further independent verification of casualty figures and damage assessments from both sides remains pending.

CCS reviews West Asia crisis

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attended the meeting.

The CCS meeting was also attended by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Principal Secretaries to the Prime Minister P K Mishra and Shaktikanta Das, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.

The statement said the CCS met to review the evolving situation in West Asia, and the meeting

was briefed on the air strikes in Iran on February 18 and the subsequent escalation, including attacks in several Gulf countries.

"It (CCS) expressed serious concern over the safety and security of the large Indian expatriate community in the region," the statement said.

The CCS also reviewed the difficulties faced by Indian travellers transiting the region and students appearing for scheduled examinations, as well as the broader implications for regional security and economic and commercial activities. "The CCS directed all concerned departments to take necessary and feasible measures to assist Indian nationals affected by the developments. It underscored the importance of an early cessation of hostilities and a return to dialogue and diplomacy," the statement said.

There are around 10,000 Indian citizens who live, study and work in Iran, while over 40,000 live in Israel. The number of Indians who live in the Gulf and West Asia is about 9 million.

Currently, the airspace of West Asia is almost closed. With flight services disrupted due to the military escalation in West Asia, hundreds of Indians are stranded in Dubai, Doha and other key hub airports, with many of them taking to social media to appeal to the Indian government for assistance.

India has in the past successfully evacuated thousands of Indians from different parts of the world, including West Asia, amidst conflicts.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Indian missions across the region are in continuous contact with nationals, and helplines have been activated.



Protests continue in Kashmir over killing of Khamenei

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Several parts of the Kashmir valley, for the second consecutive day, witnessed fresh protests amid strict restrictions imposed by the authorities to prevent any untoward incident. A large number of women and children also participated in protests against the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in a joint US-Israeli airstrike. During the day, as protesters took to the streets after defying the prohibitory orders, the police personnel fired tear gas shells to disperse the crowd.



People from the Muslim community raise slogans amid tear smoke fired by police at a protest over the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in parts of Kashmir, Srinagar on Monday

residents in the valley, heavy deployment of police personnel was made on several other routes leading to the Lal Chowk area.

According to reports, sporadic protests broke out in Bemina, Gund Hassibhat, and Jehangir Chowk areas of the city here, and in Pulwama town in south Kashmir. The Magam area in Budgam also witnessed a large assembly of women and children.

Carrying placards and posters, protesters marched through the streets, raising anti-US and anti-Israel slogans.

Police have, meanwhile, issued an advisory urging all media organisations and news platforms to exercise the highest level of responsibility and professionalism in their reporting.

"Please refrain from publishing unverified information, speculation, or rumours; ensure that all reports are confirmed through credible and authoritative sources before dissemination; and avoid sensational headlines that may create unnecessary panic," the advisory read.

The police said responsible and accurate reporting is essential to maintain public trust and prevent misinformation.

Elsewhere, members of the Muslim community carried out a peaceful candlelight protest rally in Vijayawada, condemning the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a joint US-Israeli military strike.

The Andhra Pradesh State president of Muhammad Ali Muslim Welfare Association, Mushtaq Ali, organised the

and accused US President Donald Trump of high-handed attitude.

"We strongly condemn the attack on Iran and the martyrdom of Ayatollah Khamenei. You (Trump) call yourself the messenger of peace to this world, but you are raining bombs on children and civilians. What message do you want to give by destroying homes and killing innocent people?" Mushtaq Ali asked while interacting with reporters.

He alleged that targeting civilians in the name of war sends a dangerous message, and he said that conflicts should not harm common people. He further remarked that wars should be confined to military establishments and not civilian areas.

critical minerals and vowed to soon conclude a comprehensive economic partnership agreement. This came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney held wide-ranging talks in New Delhi.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said India and Canada have signed an agreement on the supply of uranium and on cooperation in building small modular reactors.

After India's very first commercial nuclear reactor, supplied by the US company GE at Tarapur in Maharashtra, Canada was assisting India in

setting up heavy water reactors at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu, and other places, he pointed out.

This assistance was stopped after the peaceful nuclear explosion at Pokhran on May 18, 1974, Ramesh said on X.

These reactors were actually called CANDU reactors for Canada Deuterium Uranium, he said.

"The agreement that Canada and India have signed today has been made possible ONLY because of

Uranium pact possible only due to 2008 nuclear deal: Congress

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

With India and Canada sealing a key pact on the supply of uranium, the Congress on Monday said this was made possible only because of the 2008 Indo-US nuclear agreement, which was signed as a result of then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's insistence and persistence.

India and Canada on Monday sealed key pacts on the supply of uranium and



the Indo-US Nuclear Agreement finally signed in Oct 2008. This agreement was ENTIRELY because of Manmohan Singh's insistence and persistence. The agreement had been vehemently opposed by the BJP then," Ramesh said on X.

In a media statement after the talks, Modi said, "In civil nuclear energy, we have signed a landmark deal for long-term uranium supply. We will also work together on small modular reactors and advanced reactors."

Carney described the uranium supply agreement as a reflection of shared commitment to clean, reliable energy.

critical minerals and vowed to soon conclude a comprehensive economic partnership agreement. This came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney held wide-ranging talks in New Delhi.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said India and Canada have signed an agreement on the supply of uranium and on cooperation in building small modular reactors.

After India's very first commercial nuclear reactor, supplied by the US company GE at Tarapur in Maharashtra, Canada was assisting India in

setting up heavy water reactors at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu, and other places, he pointed out.

This assistance was stopped after the peaceful nuclear explosion at Pokhran on May 18, 1974, Ramesh said on X.

These reactors were actually called CANDU reactors for Canada Deuterium Uranium, he said.

"The agreement that Canada and India have signed today has been made possible ONLY because of

States Focus



ANDHRA CM ORDERS USE OF AI TO BOOST GOVT EFFICIENCY

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday directed officials to increase administrative efficiency by leveraging Artificial Intelligence across departments. The chief minister instructed officials to establish a mechanism to integrate data from drones, CCTV cameras and satellite sources effectively to deliver better public services and improve performance. "Naidu directed officials to increase administrative efficiency by leveraging Artificial Intelligence across all departments," said an official press release.



PARENTS WELCOME PHONE BAN IN HIMACHAL SCHOOLS

With a ban on mobile phones coming into force in schools across Himachal Pradesh on March 1, parents and teachers on Monday lauded the move, saying it will help students focus better on studies and reduce screen time. Reduced phone usage will also improve communication and social interaction among children, they said. On February 5, CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu had announced that mobile phone use by students would be banned in all Government and private schools across Himachal Pradesh from March 1.

Mamata alleges ECI-BJP nexus over voter list deletions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday alleged an "ECI-BJP nexus" behind the deletion of 63.66 lakh names from the State's electoral rolls following the SIR, claiming that the exercise was designed to help the saffron party ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls.

In her first reaction since the publication of the final post-SIR rolls on February 28, the TMC supremo termed the deletions "deliberate and inhumane," asserting that genuine voters were being struck off because the BJP "cannot win elections on its own merit".



The CM also declared that she would emerge victorious in her Assembly constituency, Bhabanipur, notwithstanding the deletions, and "even if there is one vote left".

"These deletions in voter rolls due to SIR have been done deliberately by the BJP and the ECI. The ECI has deliberately deleted genuine voters. I am shocked. This is a very sad and inhumane state of affairs," she said at a

Holi programme here. The post-SIR rolls recorded 63.66 lakh deletions, about 8.3 per cent of the electorate, reducing the voter base to a little over 7.04 crore. In addition, more than 60.06 lakh voters have been placed in the "under adjudication" category, subject to scrutiny in the coming weeks, marking one of the most sweeping electoral revisions in the state since 2002.

With the state heading into a fiercely contested election likely in April, the scale of the revision has injected fresh volatility into Bengal's political battlefield, sharpening the narrative war between the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC)

and the BJP. At the heart of the controversy lies Bhabanipur, widely regarded as Banerjee's pocket borough and the constituency she represents in the Assembly.

Banerjee claimed that "massive deletions" had taken place in her seat, but declared she would prevail regardless.

"Bhabanipur is a small constituency. There were only about 2.6 lakh voters. Earlier, 44,000 were excluded. This time, 14,000 more were placed 'under adjudication', and also around 2,000 because of so-called logistical discrepancies. Where are these voters? Why are they missing?" she said.

Will remove infiltrators from West Bengal: Shah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mathurapur (WB)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday sharpened the BJP's "infiltration" pitch, declaring that while "only names are being deleted now" from West Bengal's electoral rolls under the SIR, the infiltrators would be "removed from the State" once the party comes to power, raising the stakes ahead of the Assembly polls.

Launching the BJP's 'Poriborton Yatra' from Mathurapur in South 24 Parganas, his first visit since the publication of the post-SIR rolls on Saturday, Shah slammed the TMC Government over what he described as years of unchecked infiltration under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's watch, signalling that border security and citizenship will anchor the BJP's final electoral push.

"Right now, only names are being deleted from voter rolls, and Mamata Didi is nervous. Once BJP forms the Government, we will identify and remove every infiltrator from Bengal," he said, addressing a gathering in the coastal belt abutting the Sundarbans and close to the porous Indo-Bangladesh frontier.



His remarks came days after the Election Commission's post-SIR rolls recorded 63.66 lakh deletions, 8.3 per cent of the electorate, reducing the voter base to just over 7.04 crore ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls.

Dharmendra Pradhan invites foreign universities to partner with India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Monday called upon foreign higher education institutions (HEIs) to collaborate with India's fast-growing and innovation-driven education system.

The minister stressed that education is the most-enduring bridge between societies in a world marked by uncertainty and rapid change.

Pradhan made these observations in his address at the "Study in India Edu-Diplomatic Conclave 2026", organised by the Ministry of Education, bringing together



immense opportunities to learn, research, innovate and implement. India's greatest strength lies in its vibrant knowledge ecosystem, demographic dividend and fast-growing economy. Through the NEP-2020 and the Study in India initiative, the country is expanding global pathways for students, researchers and institutions," he said.

"From artificial intelligence, biotechnology and semiconductors to sustainable energy, India is emerging as a trusted innovation partner, advancing a Global South model rooted in collaboration, capacity-building and shared knowledge," he added.

ambassadors, high commissioners, representatives of diplomatic missions from more than 50 countries and officials of the ministry to deliberate on strengthening international cooperation in higher education.

"India continues to remain a bright spot in the global economic landscape, offering

Embrace AI for last-mile service delivery: President to IAS officers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Asserting that technology and innovation are transforming governance at unprecedented speed, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday urged a group of newly-inducted IAS officers to fully embrace AI-driven solutions to simplify administrative systems, besides ensuring more efficient service delivery to the last mile. She also asked them to combine technology with human sensitivity and reasoned judgment while adopting modern systems.

"India's transformation into a developed nation will be meaningful only when the benefits reach the most vulnerable and deprived sections. You should make untiring efforts to ensure that no community is left behind due to geographical, social, or



economic reasons," the President said.

She was addressing the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers inducted from the State civil services and attending the 128th induction training programme at Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA). These officers had called on the President at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

RSS calls for global peace amid West Asia conflict

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Monday called for peace in the world, saying battles should only happen for the good of humanity and truth, not for "selfish" reasons. Addressing an event in New Delhi, RSS national publicity and media department head Sunil Ambekar also expressed concern over the safety of Indians stranded in various locations abroad due to the prevailing situation in West Asia.

The senior RSS functionary's remarks came amid widening conflict in West Asia after the United States and Israel tar-

Wars are happening. It would certainly be good if there were a peaceful resolution. India always wants peace and progress in the world."

"If there is a battle, it should be for the good of humanity and truth, not for selfish reasons. We wish that peace be established across the world," the senior RSS functionary told the gathering. Ambekar also expressed concern over the safety of Indians stranded abroad due to prevailing situations in West Asia.

"Indians are stranded in different parts of the world due to the war; I wish that they come out of this crisis at the earliest and get relief," he

Congress takes dig at PM with Manmohan video; says self-styled Vishwaguru will never learn lesson

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Congress on Monday recalled then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's remarks in the US in 2005, describing the Iraq invasion as a "mistake", and said a Government that stands up for its beliefs as well as its people's interests is also one that is respected across the world.

"That's a lesson that the self-styled Vishwaguru will never learn," Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Ramesh shared a video clip on X of Singh's remarks made in Washington on July 20, 2005.

"As far as the (US-led) invasion of Iraq is concerned, it was our sincere view that it was a mistake," Singh had said.

In his post on X, Ramesh said, "The PM who was singularly responsible for the India-US nuclear agreement also said this in Washington on July 20, 2005. A Government that stands up for its beliefs and its people's interests is also one that is respected across the world."

"That's a lesson that the self-styled Vishwaguru will never learn," he added.

His remarks came as the war in the Middle East escalated broadly on Monday.

The Congress on Sunday "unequivocally" condemned the targeted assassination of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and said no external power has the authority to engineer a regime change, as such actions amount to imperialism and are incompatible with a rules-



based international order.

Khamenei was killed in a major attack by Israel and the US in the

early hours of Saturday, with Iran's state media reporting on Sunday that the 86-year-old supreme

leader was killed in an air strike targeting his compound in downtown Tehran. The Congress on Saturday condemned the attacks launched on Iran by the US and Israel, and called upon the Indian Government to help bring the hostilities to an end and ensure the safety of all Indians in the Middle East.

The opposition party has expressed concern over the escalating hostilities in the region and urged the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government to ensure that all Indians living there are safe.

The United States and Israel launched a major attack on Iran on Saturday, with US President Donald Trump calling on the Iranian public to seize control of their destiny and rise against the Islamic leadership that has ruled their country since 1979.



geted Iran in coordinated attacks over the weekend that killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and dozens of other senior figures. Iran retaliated by firing drones and missiles at Israel and US military installations around the Gulf, and also at the global business hub of Dubai.

In an apparent reference to the prevailing situation, Ambekar said, "Many things are happening in the world.

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has reviewed the evolving situation in West Asia and expressed concern over the safety and security of the large Indian expatriate community in the region.

The CCS also directed all departments concerned to take necessary and feasible measures to assist Indian nationals affected by the developments.



States Focus

Bengal polls: EC finalises district-wise force

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

Ahead of the announcement of the West Bengal Assembly poll schedule, the Election Commission on Monday released the district-wise list for the deployment of 480 companies of central forces across the State.

While 240 companies of central forces have already reached the State and started route marches in various districts as part of pre-poll deployment, the remaining 240 are scheduled to arrive on March 10, the official said.

"With the second phase of deployment, the total strength and distribution of 480 companies across districts has now been finalised,"

he said. In north Bengal, Darjeeling will get 11 companies, six deployed in the first phase and five in the second. Siliguri Police Commissionerate will have five companies, while Kalimpong will get four.

Alipurduar will have seven companies, and Jalpaiguri 10 in total, the official said.

In Uttar Dinajpur district, the Islampur Police district will get nine companies, of which five have already arrived, while the Raiganj Police district will get 10 companies.

Dakshin Dinajpur will have 10 companies, with no additional deployment planned in the second phase, the official elaborated.

Malda will see 18 compa-



nies, including 12 already deployed and six more in the second phase.

Murshidabad Police district will get 20 companies in total, while Jangipur Police district

will get 15 companies.

In Nadia, Krishnanagar Police district will get 13 companies and Ranaghat Police (9).

Kolkata will have a total of

30 companies, including 12 deployed in the first phase and 18 to be sent in the second phase.

Howrah Police Commissionerate will get 10 companies, while Howrah Rural Police District will have 11. Hooghly (Rural) will see 16 companies, and Chandernagore Police Commissionerate 11.

In North 24 Parganas, Barasat Police district will have 11 companies, Bongaon 6, Basirhat 17 and Barrackpore Police Commissionerate 19 companies.

Bidhannagar Police Commissionerate will have five companies.

In South 24 Parganas, Baruipur Police district will have 13 companies, Diamond Harbour 11 and Sundarban 9.

In Purba Medinipore, 28 companies will be deployed, while West Midnapore will get 20.

Jhargram will have 11 companies, the poll body official said. Purba Bardhaman will have 25 companies, Asansol-Durgapur Police Commissionerate (17), Birbhum (21) companies, Purulia (20) and Bankura (13).

Officials said the deployment was aimed at strengthening security arrangements well before the formal announcement of the poll dates.

"The objective is to instil confidence among voters and ensure that the elections are conducted in a free, fair and peaceful manner," a senior official said.



REPORT CYBERCRIME EARLY TO RECOVER MONEY: GUJARAT DGP

Cybercrime incidents reported at the earliest can ensure swift intervention, significantly increasing the chances of recovering the defrauded money, Gujarat Director General of Police (DGP) KLN Rao has said. Rao on Sunday chaired a high-level crime conference in Rajkot and reviewed the cybercrime situation, road accident and drug abuse cases across the State. Speaking to reporters after the conference, the senior official said that citizens were well-informed about the available helplines: '1930' for cybercrime, '1933' for drug-related complaints, and '1908', where they can provide information or file complaints.



BENGAL TO GIVE 105 ACRES TO BSF FOR BORDER FENCING

The West Bengal Government has in-principle approved the transfer of around 105 acres to the Centre for border fencing and construction of outposts, official sources said on Monday. The land will be transferred to the Border Security Force (BSF) for fencing nearly 17 km and for setting up border outposts (BOPs), he said. A ministerial group constituted to examine proposals involving the transfer of land to central agencies held a meeting at the State secretariat 'Nabanna' on Friday and cleared the proposal in principle, he added.

Nagpur factory blast: Minister Bawankule blames company's negligence for 19 deaths

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Nagpur

Maharashtra minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule on Monday said prima facie there was "negligence" on the part of the Nagpur-based SBL Energy Limited, where a blast claimed 19 lives, and safety measures were not followed by the explosives manufacturer.

The Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), the Directorate of Industrial Safety and Health (DISH) and the labour commissionerate also failed to ensure safety practices in explosive



manufacturing units in the region, and their accountability must be fixed, Bawankule told reporters.

Nineteen persons died, and 23 were injured after a blast occurred at the SBL Energy

limited factory, a mining and industrial explosives manufacturer, at Raulgaon in Katol tehsil of the district on Sunday. Of the injured persons, 13 were in critical condition, the district

guardian minister said.

He said the company will pay a compensation of ₹75 lakh to the families of each of the deceased and ₹25 lakh to the injured persons. Besides, the Centre will give ₹2 lakh and the State Government will provide ₹5 lakh to the families of the deceased.

The victims' families will get a total compensation of ₹82 lakh, Bawankule said.

A rehabilitation package will also be drawn up for those who suffered physical disabilities in the incident, he added. The blast took place at the detonator assembly plant of SBL Energy Limited, the minister informed.

Arunachal Minister launches child rights awareness drive



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Itanagar

Arunachal Pradesh Women and Child Development Minister Dasanglu Pul on Monday launched a child rights awareness initiative and said it will promote a safe, child-friendly environment across the State.

At a programme held in the Civil Secretariat, Pul unveiled a series of pamphlets aimed at educating children, parents, teachers and the public on key laws such as the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (APSCPCR), Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, and the POCSO, an official release said.

Pul praised the APSCPCR for compiling the information provided in the pamphlets in a way that is easy to understand, and said it would help children know about their rights to protection, dignity and education.

She urged the general

public to report violations of child rights and seek assistance from appropriate authorities, such as Child Helpline 1098, Police ERSS number 112, Child Welfare Committee, District Child Protection Unit, Labour Officer, and the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

"This initiative marks a significant step towards strengthening grassroots awareness and promoting a safe, child-friendly environment across Arunachal Pradesh," the APSCPCR said.

APSCPCR chairperson Ratan Anya said, "Creating awareness is the first step towards prevention. When children, parents, and teachers are informed about child protection laws, we empower society to stand against abuse, exploitation, and discrimination."

The Commission remains fully committed to protecting the rights and well-being of every child in Arunachal Pradesh, she added.

CM Pema Khandu calls for conviction-oriented policing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Itanagar

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday emphasised the requirement of strong internal security, technology-driven policing, and a conviction-oriented criminal justice delivery system.

Addressing the inaugural session of the state-level conference of Superintendents of Police (SPs) and Commandants at DK Convention Centre, Khandu stressed the need to strengthen cyber capabilities and digital forensics, as technology has become the future of policing, according to an official report.

He also underlined the

need to activate official social media platforms of the police department to enhance public awareness and transparency. Suggesting the formation of a dedicated social media team under the DGP, he advised SPs to use official platforms responsibly.

"The public must know the good work done by the police. Social media should be used for official communication, not personal purposes," he said.

Addressing border management, the chief minister observed that Arunachal Pradesh, the largest State in the Northeast, shares international boundaries with Bhutan and Myanmar and Tibet.

He called for correct official



references in correspondence and emphasised vigilance along the Myanmar border, particularly in Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts, where extortion and drug trafficking linked to cross-border insurgent influence remain concerns. "We do not have a home-

grown insurgency. Whatever challenges exist, we must take ownership and resolve them. We cannot remain dependent on the Government of India for everything. It is our State, and we must rectify our issues," he said. He commended the Arunachal Pradesh Police for neutralising

attempts to revive insurgency under the name of United Tani Army and called for strengthening the Special Task Force, enhancing training and manpower, and improving coordination with central armed forces, including Assam Rifles.

Acknowledging the State's tribal diversity, Khandu advised officers to understand the unique social pulse of each region. "Inclusive governance requires structured dialogue with stakeholders. Arunachal's diversity is its strength, but we must understand local sensitivities," he noted. On the issue of illegal immigration, Khandu said that the Inner Line Permit system under the Bengal

Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, is being technologically upgraded and will soon be launched in a digital format across the State. He emphasised the need to check illegal immigration proactively in the coming days.

The CM described the new criminal laws — Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam — as a transformative shift in India's criminal justice system.

He congratulated the State police for achieving 100 per cent training coverage and rolling out initiatives such as e-Suraksha, e-Summons, ICJS integration, Nyay Shruti, and deployment of mobile forensic vans.

Over 100 Kannadigas stranded in UAE, Bahrain; CM assures help

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bengaluru

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said that he is closely monitoring the evolving situation in parts of the Middle East following the recent escalation of tensions, and assured that the safety and well-being of Kannadigas abroad remains his top priority.

Taking to social media, Siddaramaiah said that as per the information received so far, around 100 Kannadigas are currently stranded in the UAE (Dubai) and nine in Bahrain due to airspace disruptions and flight cancellations.

"Our teams are in constant touch to verify details and extend assistance," he said. Sharing the helpline numbers of Indian Embassies in the Gulf region on



his post, the chief minister said, "I am closely monitoring the evolving situation in parts of the Middle East following the recent escalation of tensions. The safety and well-being of every Kannadiga abroad is our highest priority."

Indian Diaspora Across the Middle East

Country-wise distribution of overseas Indians in West Asia



Punjab Govt issues helplines for citizens in West Asia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Chandigarh

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday announced a round-the-clock helpline number to assist Punjabis stranded in affected countries following the joint Israel-US action against Iran, assuring them all possible help.

Stating that the State Government is in constant touch with the Centre to ensure their safe and prompt return, CM Mann said Punjab will extend full support and cooperation to those stuck in the strife-torn West Asia.

"The State Government is constantly in touch with the Government of India to ensure the safe and prompt



return of those stuck. Due to the conflicts in Arab countries, many Punjabis in these nations are facing serious difficulties. The Punjab Government has set up a helpline. If any person or

their family is stranded in these countries, they can call on these numbers," he said. "People can call 0172 2260042 and 0172 2260043, or send a WhatsApp message to +91 94787 79112, if any kind of

help is required," the CM said. Reiterating the Government's commitment, CM Mann said, "We are committed to providing all necessary support and assistance to the stranded people as soon as possible."

Expressing solidarity with the families of the youth and students stuck in Gulf countries, he said, "The State Government stands firmly with these families in this hour of crisis." He also urged the Centre to intervene for the safe evacuation of Punjabis stranded in West Asia. Meanwhile, the BJP and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) also released helpline numbers for those stuck in the affected countries.

An appeal is made to all

Punjabis that if any family member, relative, or friend of yours is stranded in the Gulf or is in need of any kind of immediate assistance, then please contact the helpline number 7408560065 issued by the Punjab BJP immediately, it said in a social media post.

SAD also said that in this hour of crisis, the entire party stands shoulder to shoulder with its Punjab community and is fully prepared to provide every possible assistance. "An appeal to all Punjabis: If any individual, family, or your relative or friend in these countries needs any kind of help, please contact the helpline number +91 9501287100," said the party in a post.

Govt working on interim council for FNTA: Nagaland Governor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kohima

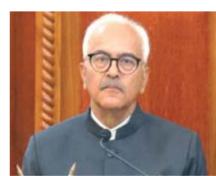
Nagaland Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Monday said the State Government is working on constituting the interim council for Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA) in consultation with ENPO and tribal hohos of eastern Nagaland.

Delivering his maiden address on the opening day of the Budget Session of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly, the governor said the State would soon move for the enactment of special legislation for the constitution of the FNTA in consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs, as provided in the Memorandum of Agreement signed on February 5, 2026.

Bhalla extended greetings to members at the commencement of the 8th Session of the Fourteenth Assembly and expressed confidence that the House would uphold the highest democratic standards during its deliberations.

Referring to the Naga political issue, Bhalla reiterated the Government's commitment to an early and honourable settlement.

He highlighted the constitution of a Political Affairs Committee (PAC) comprising ministers, elected representatives of all tribes, leaders of political parties and Members of



Parliament from the State to facilitate dialogue.

A sub-committee has also been formed to streamline the process, he said. He informed the House that the chief minister, along with cabinet colleagues and members of the PAC sub-committee, recently met Union Home Minister Amit Shah to seek the appointment of a political-level interlocutor to expedite the ongoing peace talks.

On the census exercise, Bhalla said India's decennial census, formally notified on June 16, will be conducted in two phases. In Nagaland, the first phase will be house listing and housing census to be carried out from July 1 to July 30 this year, with self-enumeration available from June 16 to June 30.

He urged members to extend full cooperation to ensure its smooth conduct in the State.

Touching on law and order, the governor commended the district administration, police and security forces for maintaining peace and appreciated the support of tribal bodies and civil society organisations.

Meghalaya to witness total lunar eclipse

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Shillong

Residents of Meghalaya are set to witness the concluding phase of a total lunar eclipse on Tuesday evening, with the northeastern State expected to get a clearer view of the celestial event compared to most parts of the country.

In Shillong, moonrise is expected at 5.23 pm, while the totality phase will end at 5.33 pm. However, the full eclipse will conclude at 6.48 pm, giving observers a viewing window of about one hour and 25 minutes from moonrise, IMD officials said on Monday.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) officials added that weather conditions are likely to remain favourable for viewing in most parts of Meghalaya.

"According to the current forecast, we expect generally clear to partly cloudy skies over Shillong and adjoining areas on Tuesday evening. This should allow people to witness the eclipse without major weather-related obstruction," an IMD official said.





**TRANSGLOBE
ADVISORS**

**Your Trusted
Management
Advisory**

www.transglobeadvisors.in

Order Order

Delhi Court directs Akasa Air to pay ₹1.08 crore to travel agent



A Delhi commercial court recently directed Akasa Air to pay ₹1.08 crore to a travel agent for loss of profits after cancelling a group booking of 640 airline seats made in advance for the peak December-January festive season. District Judge (Commercial) Lalit Kumar at Saket courts held that the airline's cancellation of eight confirmed group bookings, despite having received 25 per cent of the total fare as advance, amounted to breach of contract. "The loss claimed is loss of opportunity arising from cancellation of a confirmed group inventory during peak season. In commercial transactions, especially in the travel industry, group bookings for festive periods are made precisely to capitalize on predictable seasonal demand," the Court observed. In the February 23 order, the Court directed payment of ₹1,08,80,000 towards loss of profits though it rejected other claims of damages for mental agony and interest.

The dispute arose from bookings made by ABS Tours & Travels in April 2023 for 640 seats on Delhi-Goa and Goa-Delhi routes for travel during the peak festive period between December 23, 2023 and January 13, 2024. The travel agent had paid ₹4,82,640, which made up 25 per cent of the fare, through the airline's portal following which passenger name records (PNRs) were generated. More than a month later, in May 2023, the airline cancelled the bookings. The advance amount was refunded nearly three months later, in August 2023.

In its defense, the airline argued that the bookings were cancelled because group bookings of more than 70 seats required a 50 per cent advance payment, and the travel agent had not met this condition.

SC ruling brings finality to SKS Power insolvency dispute

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court ruling in the SKS Power insolvency matter has brought finality to a long-running contest over control of the company, while also casting fresh light on the role of former promoter Anil Gupta in the background of the dispute.

The case arose from the corporate insolvency resolution process of SKS Power Generation (Chhattisgarh) Ltd., where multiple bidders had submitted resolution plans namely, Torrent Power, Jindal Power, Vantage Point Pte and Sarda Energy and Minerals Ltd.

Post an extensive bidding and clarification process, the Committee of Creditors approved the plan submitted by Sarda Energy and Minerals Ltd. with full voting support. That decision was challenged by unsuccessful applicants, but the challenge failed before the National Company Law Tribunal, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal and now the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court on February 27, 2026 held that what was being described as a change in the bid was, in substance, only a clarification. On that basis, the Court found no reason to interfere with the lenders' decision.

The ruling is significant because it once again underlines a settled principle under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code: the commercial wisdom of the Committee of Creditors will not ordinarily be reopened by courts unless there is a clear breach of law or material irregularity in the process. The Court made it clear that unsuccessful bidders

cannot reopen the resolution exercise merely because they disagree with the lenders' commercial choice. Beyond the legal findings of the Court, the SKS Power saga has been shadowed by external allegations concerning the company's former promoter, Anil Gupta.

While not a subject of the present Supreme Court order, separate reports and previous allegations have suggested that Gupta sought to regain control of his flagship company by backing Vantage Point's bid through the insolvency process.

The controversy involving Anil Gupta and his brother, Deepak Gupta, goes back to the coal block allocation cases during the UPA-II period. The two were accused of obtaining coal blocks in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh by allegedly extending financial favors to certain public officials and ministers.

In a separate judicial development January 2026, Deepak Gupta was convicted by a CBI court in connection with one of the coal block allocation cases and was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Despite these background allegations, the Supreme Court remained focused on the statutory limits of judicial review, affirming the NCLAT's October 2024 order and confirming SEML as the rightful owner of SKS Power.

"The ruling serves as a stern reminder to the insolvency ecosystem that once a transparent process is followed and lenders take a commercial call within the framework of the law, the courts are unlikely to interfere," said advocate in the matter.



Devaswom Board to file affidavit on womens' entry in Sabarimala

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) on Monday said that it will file an affidavit before the Supreme Court to preserve existing traditions when the court considers petitions related to the entry of women of menstruating age at the hill shrine of Sabarimala Temple. The TDB president K Jayakumar said the issue of filing the affidavit was discussed at a board meeting held here, and a decision was taken to maintain the current practice. The prevailing practice at Sabarimala restricts the entry of women of menstruating age at the Lord Ayyappa temple.

"The board has no difference of opinion on this. The TDB is constituted under rules that mandate the protection of the temple and its traditions. So we will contest the decision of the Supreme Court," he said at a press meet, referring to the women's entry issue. He said the board's stand is that the existing tradition regarding women's entry at Sabarimala should continue. "It has to be informed to the Supreme Court before March 14. We have decided to appoint the concerned persons to inform the court, and a resolution in this regard was taken during the board meeting," he said.

He clarified that the TDB does not support the Supreme Court's 2018 verdict permitting the entry of women



of menstrual age at the temple, but added that whether the judgment should be reviewed is not within the board's purview. "Advice received by us was to take the matter as a resolution in the board meeting and file an affidavit in court," he said, adding that the Devaswom has only one stand — that traditions should be protected and followed.

Asked whether the CPI(M) Government held the same position, the TDB president said that the enquiry should be directed to the Government itself. He said the TDB's earlier stand had also been the same and that the board had not taken any other position in the matter. "Whether a review of the court

decision is required does not come under us. We can only explain our stand when the review is considered," he said.

When asked about the earlier stand reportedly taken by the TDB's counsel against reviewing the 2018 verdict, Jayakumar said that might have been the counsel's view, but the board's policy remains the protection of temple traditions. In 2018, the Supreme Court allowed the entry of women of menstruating age into the Sabarimala temple.

The review petitions are currently under consideration, and the apex court has asked the aggrieved parties, including the state Government, to state their stand before March 14.

Delhi HC stays Sessions Court order halting bail to IYC chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

In a relief to Indian Youth Congress president Uday Bhanu Chib, the Delhi High Court on Monday stayed a sessions court order that had halted his bail in the AI summit protest case. A bench of Justice Saurabh Banerjee was hearing a petition filed by the counsel of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) chief challenging the sessions court order, which had stayed a magistrate court order granting bail to Chib.

"Some application of mind has to be there. If there is no application of mind, the order has to be stayed," the high court said.

It noted that the sessions court order was not clear in its findings while putting a stay and calling it a "rare and exceptional" case.

"Where is reasoning in this order? You see page one. Turn over the page. Where is reasoning or finding?" Justice Banerjee asked.

On February 28, the sessions court put an interim stay on the bail granted to



Uday Bhanu Chib

Chib by the magistrate court.

In its order, the sessions court had said, "When the court exercises the power of granting ex parte ad interim stay of an order granting bail, the court is duty-bound to record reasons why it came to the conclusion that it was a very rare and exceptional case where a drastic order of ex parte interim stay was warranted."

Speaking to the media after the high court restored Chib's bail, his counsel said they were waiting to receive a physical copy of the order and most probably, the IYC chief would walk out of jail on Monday.

No records on Sambhal Jama Masjid's origin, ASI tells CIC

MOHIT SAINI
■ New Delhi

The Archaeological Survey of India has told the Central Information Commission that it does not have any records indicating whether the Jama Masjid in Sambhal was constructed after demolishing any earlier structure or on vacant land, nor does it have documents identifying the landowner at the time of its construction.

In an RTI application, Satya Prakash Yadav sought to know whether the Mughal-era mosque, Jama Masjid, was built by demolishing any ruins or on vacant land, along with the name of the landowner at the time and the documents granting ownership rights.

The ASI, in its reply, stated that "no such information is available in this office".

On questions relating to the nature of constructions at the site at the time it was taken under protection, any subsequent new construc-



tions, and past disputes associated with the mosque, the ASI said that such information was not available in its records.

However, during the first appeal proceedings, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) pointed to an incident in 2018, stating that no new construction is permitted within

the protected area of a centrally protected monument. It disclosed that an "illegal" steel railing was being erected at the Jama Masjid site that year and that the department had issued orders to stop the work.

The applicant had also asked about the period of construction of the mosque. The ASI replied that, as

per its records, "Jama Masjid Sambhal was constructed in the year 1526," and referred to supporting material. On whether the structure was known by any other name earlier, the department said the mosque has been protected by the ASI under the same name.

In response to a query on the present nature of the structure, the ASI stated, "At present, it exists as a mosque." It further said the Jama Masjid was taken under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1920, citing a gazette notification.

During the hearing before the Commission, the appellant argued that key information had been wrongly denied on the ground of non-availability.

The ASI maintained that it had provided all information available on record and that it could not be compelled to create or collect information not maintained by it.

Upholding the ASI's stand, the Commission observed that the RTI

Act obliges public authorities to disclose only existing records and does not require them to generate fresh information. It cited judicial precedents to underline that information not held by a public authority cannot be directed to be furnished.

The Sambhal Jama Masjid has been at the centre of a legal dispute over its history, following a petition claiming that the mosque was built over an ancient Hindu temple. The issue drew wider attention after riots erupted in Sambhal on November 24, 2024, during protests against a court-ordered ASI survey of the structure. The violence led to four deaths and injuries to several people, including police personnel.

Finding no grounds for further intervention, the Commission dismissed the appeal, holding that the ASI's replies — including its statement of having no records on whether the mosque was built over ruins or vacant land — were in accordance with the law. (PTI)

Zubeen case: Court de-freezes Festival organiser Shyamkanu's account over 'technical lapse'

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

A court here on Monday ordered the de-freezing of the bank account of an accused in the Zubeen Garg death case over "technical lapses", while fixing March 19 for consideration of charge hearing, the special public prosecutor (SPP) in the case said.

The Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court, which is hearing the case, also rejected a petition by another accused seeking report of the Singapore Police, he said. SPP Ziaul Kamar, briefing reporters, said, "The honourable court has set March 19 for consideration of charge hearing. After that, the trial will begin."

He asserted that the prosecution, which leads the charge hearing, will be ready for it, though he could not

comment on behalf of the accused.

"I don't know what the accused will do, what petition they may file," Kamar, who had earlier charged the accused of adopting delaying tactics by submitting different petitions, added.

He said the court has ordered to de-freeze the bank account of one of the accused, Shyamkanu Mahanta, for "technical reasons".

Garg's wife, Garima Saikia, who was present at the hearing along with the celebrated singer's sister Palme Barthakur, expressed "disappointment" at de-freezing of Mahanta's bank account. "It is bad news for us. It was ordered due to some procedural lapse and technical issue," she said.

The senior counsel further said that the court has rejected the petition by another accused, Siddharth Sharma,



Zubeen Garg

seeking a copy of Singapore Police's report in Garg's case.

"The court said that the Assam Police has already acquired all the details and it can be accessed by the accused for further examination on March 10 to 12, from 2 pm to 4 pm," he said.

On Sharma seeking de-attachment of his flat in Guwahati, Kamar said the court has ordered that it may be opened if Sharma provides a bank surety of Rs 16

lakh to the police.

Sharma, Garg's manager, is accused of using an amount of Rs 16 lakh embezzled from the singer while purchasing the flat.

A separate case concerning a packaged drinking water company, Mahabir Aqua, of which Sharma is a co-owner, will also be taken up by the same court on March 19, Kamar added.

Asked about any progress in setting up the fast-track

court to take forward the case as announced by the Government, the SPP said it is a matter between the Government and the Gauhati High Court.

He maintained that it will definitely expedite the hearing process, though "legal procedures cannot be curtailed".

"The accused also have their rights. They might file petitions (before the fast-track court), we might also have to file petitions," Kamar added.

Garima also hoped that setting up a fast-track court will expedite the case, though she was not aware of progress in the matter.

The celebrated singer had died on September 19 last year while swimming in the sea in Singapore, where he had gone to attend the 4th edition of the North East India Festival (NEIF).

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the state police's CID probed the case and submitted the charge-sheet in December, which included murder charges against some of the accused.

Besides NEIF chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta and Sharma, Garg's two band members Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amrit Prabha Mahanta, his cousin and now-suspended Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg, and his PSOs Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya are in jail as accused in the case.

The state cabinet had earlier appointed a five-member team of Special Public Prosecutors (PP) with senior advocate Ziaul Kamar to lead it. It had named Brojendra Mohan Chaudhuri as additional PP, and Kishor Dutta, Pranjal Dutta and Vikash Jammur as assistant PPs.

Two sides of NCERT fiasco



SEEMA SINDHU

The Government and judiciary are in open war now. In the revised NCERT syllabus, a new section "corruption in the judiciary" has been added in the chapter "The role of the judiciary in our society" in the 8th class social studies book. The content targets the judiciary for corruption at various levels and large arrears of cases in courts at different hierarchy.

While the old content talked about independence of judiciary, access to justice etc, the new content is a direct attack on the judiciary in a systemic manner never seen before in our Independence History.

The Supreme Court has taken note of it without a blink and the CJJ Surya Kant has ordered a suo moto case on this saying "it seems to be a very calculated and deep rooted measure". After the backlash on it, NCERT has withdrawn the books and the even the

PM had to "regret" it. Such is the gravity of the matter. While there's no denial that the judicial system has many serious questions to answer and challenges to meet, exposing 8th class students to this kind of content is no less than "scandalous" to court and the country in whole as it sows seeds of scepticism in the minds of children of an age who are not capable of understanding the complexity of the matter.

Corruption in judiciary and backlogs are half truths and without giving the children the other half truth it's a fraud played on these young minds.

The debate needs to be contextualised with Govts wanting committed judiciary and bureaucracy against the Constitutional provision of Separation of Power. The Govt doesn't speak of deep rooted corruption in bureaucracy, politicians and their nexus with corporates in a systemic way it has done with the judiciary. This is a very dangerous feat achieved by the Govt. Anarchy starts with erosion of faith in judicial system.

This move of the Govt is not without its past. In the past, then Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar continuously targeted judi-

ciary in a consistent and calculative manner which was aided by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey who said the then CJJ Sanjeev Khanna was to be blamed for all the civil wars in the country in the backdrop of a matter pertaining to the Waqf (Amendment) Act and the TN Governors case setting timelines for assent to Bills.

There have been systemic efforts to build a public narrative against the judiciary to bring back National Judicial Appointments Act, 2014 (NJAC) which the Supreme Court struck down in 2015 as unconstitutional. NJAC was brought by the NDA Govt in August 2014.

Undoubtedly such propaganda against the judiciary must be checked, but at the same time the judiciary must put its house in order. It would be disastrous to have Govtdomination in appointment of higher judiciary, but the collegium system has a lot to improve.

It needs to have more transparency in In-House Mechanism of inquiry against judges. Then CJJ Sanjeev Khanna did wield some transparency, albeit at later stage, in dealing with the alleged cash burn scam of Justice Yashwant Verma but withholding the indictment report from public was two steps back.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The writer is practicing lawyer at Supreme Court

@SeemaSindhu



Editor's TAKE

Can Carney's visit melt the ice?

After nearly two years of diplomatic frost, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to India signals a carefully calibrated attempt to restore strained ties

India and Canada have been two nations that have enjoyed cordial relations for long though that spell was abruptly broken in 2023 when Canada accused Indian agents of killing Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh separatist and a Canadian citizen; allegations which India vehemently denied. That was the time Justin Trudeau was the prime minister but after the elections when Mark Carney took over Canada has constantly tried to improve ties with India and leave the incident behind. Before the Mark Carney's visit it even declared that India no longer posed a threat to Canadian security. In this context Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to India is more than just a routine state visit. It is a carefully crafted diplomatic move to mend fence with India. Canada as the rest of the world is coming to terms with the Trump's rather erratic moves which have led Canada to seek partnerships outside of US ambit for which India is an ideal candidate. For nearly two years, ties between Ottawa and New Delhi deteriorated following former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's assertion of pointers to Indian agents involved in Nijjar's killing in Canada in 2023.

This led to diplomatic expulsions, suspended trade talks and political disengagement. Carney's mission is therefore to put back the ties on track while improving trade relations to cement the relations and also hedge against the US tariffs. The agenda signals pragmatism: discussions on a strategic partnership, revival of trade negotiations, cooperation in energy, critical minerals, innovation and strengthening people-to-people ties. It is diplomacy and economic realism rolled into one. Under Carney, Ottawa has sharpened its Indo-Pacific focus, in line with Canada's 2022 strategy to diversify trade and security partnerships beyond its overwhelming dependence on the United States. India's vast and fast-growing market has acquired renewed importance for Canada's petroleum, liquefied natural gas and technology sectors. For India, Canada is a potential long-term partner in energy security and a reliable source of critical minerals essential for the green transition. For over 15 years, India and Canada have intermittently negotiated a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), with little to show. Talks were effectively frozen after the 2023 diplomatic rupture. But the geopolitics has changed in past two years. India has recently advanced trade frameworks with the UK, the European Union and the United States. Canada, notably, remains the only G7 country without a preferential trade agreement with India. Canadian Prime Minister has deliberately avoided the issues concerning Sikh community in Canada. Even a visit to Punjab is not in his itinerary. The omission underscores the visit's economic focus and an attempt to avoid domestic political optics overshadowing strategic goals. Given Canada's large Sikh diaspora, this balancing act is delicate. Carney must reassure his domestic constituency that, even as he rebuilds trust with India, he will not compromise their concerns to placate New Delhi.

India's balancing act in the West Asia

At a moment when geopolitical calculations intersect with religious sensitivities, New Delhi faces the delicate task of safeguarding national interests abroad while preserving communal harmony at home



BHOPINDER SINGH

To assume that there is no sectarian angle to the attack on Iran is to live under a rock. What started as dispute over leadership after the death of the holy prophet, soon evolved into an irreconcilable theological divide of Shia-Sunni framework. First signs of the violent divide within the Ummah (Islamic World) came with the First Fitna (656-661 CE). Since then the sectarian dissonance got institutionalised within the respective sects.

In majority Shia Iraq, the Sunni leader Saddam Hussein had a predominantly Sunni Military and he diminished his Shia populace. Recently deposed Bashar al-Assad led Syria, had majority Sunni populace which was ruled by a predominantly Shia (Alawite) clique. In Sunni majority Yemen, the Shias were outliers. In majority Shia land of Bahrain, the Shias are kept under tight control by the minority Sunni monarchy of the House of Khalifa. In countries like Lebanon who have almost equal number of Sunnis and Shias, each side has had its own protective militias and turfs. In other countries like the Sunni-majority Pakistan or Afghanistan, the Shias have been routinely suppressed and openly discriminated against.

Unsurprisingly when Iran was coming under threat from Israel and the United States of America, the predominantly Sunni Arab Sheikdoms chose to either remain silent or played meaningfully platitudes. In many ways these Arab Sheikdoms actually supported the Israeli cause (beyond pursuing the Abraham Accords), but without officially saying so. On 13th-14th June, when Iran was retaliating to Israeli strikes on Iran by launching drones at Israel, the Jordanian Air Defenses actually intercepted and shot down the Iranian drones from hitting Israel. Coincidentally, Jordan was the second Arab country (after Egypt) to normalise relations with Israel following their Israel-Jordan Treaty of Peace, as way back as 1994!

In recent times, it has only been Iran and its co-sectarian militias like the Hezbollah (Lebanon) or the Houthis (Yemen) who have offered any modicum of opposition to Israel following the pummeling of Gaza Strip and the killing of nearly 70,000 Palestinian Gazans - ironically predominantly Sunnis. The Arab Sheikdoms and other major Islamic powers like Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia or even Pakistan have remained content to "express concern", "call for calm", and suchlike mealy-mouthed inanities. Therefore the recent frus-



IRAN UNDER THE AYOTOLLAH REGIME HAD OFTEN TAKEN INDIA'S SIDE ON KASHMIR IN THE OIC MEETINGS, WORKED TOGETHER IN AFGHANISTAN, AND WAS HOME TO THE GEOSTRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHABAHAR SEAPORT

trated Iranian counter-attacks on Arab Sheikdoms like UAE, Qatar or Saudi Arabia (all with American Military bases), elicited sharp anger against Iran, which itself was reeling under attacks by Israel and the USA, simultaneously. Today the sectarian divide in the Middle East theatre is clearly visible.

In the Indian narrative, the early signs of such divisive sectarianism came during the rule of the 17th Century under Aurangzeb, who was less accommodating and tolerating of the Shia sect. In independent India, the first Shia-Sunni violence came with the 1969 Lucknow Riots, after which the phenomenon of tensions surrounding the Muharram procession, became commonplace.

While the sectarian tensions have come down significantly in the last couple of decades, it is still delicate e.g., an offensive social media post had led to sectarian tensions in 2025 in Kanpur. For the 25 million odd Shias in India, certain enclaves like Lucknow, Kargil or Budgam are Shia-dominated - but 200 odd million Sunnis are the clear majority. It is in line with the global Shia population estimated at 10-15% of the Ummah, with about 300 million globally.

For Shiite faith worldwide, Iran has a special, emotional, and psychological significance as the centrality of their faith, even though many other places like Najaf and Karbala (both in Iraq), Sayyida Zeinab Shrine (Syria) etc, are very important. This is especially so, for the "Twelver" Shias. Therefore the institution of Ayotollah (Persian for Sign of God) is rooted in the seminary system (hawza) where the Grand Ayotollah or Marja is the top faith authority whose rulings are widely followed.

It transcends borders and resonates in the far-flung by-lanes of Srinagar, Lucknow, Lahore, Kabul etc., wherever the Shias reside.

With this backdrop, the recent killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini's death by bombing conducted by Israeli jets has led to an outpouring of grief, protests, and mourning rallies.

Sentiments of many Indian Shias could understandably be wounded and it is imperative to handle the same with utmost dignity, care, and maturity. Dialogue with the Shia leaders to assuage their grief without pandering to politics of divide-and-rule, or of inelegantly celebrating the moment, must be ensured. Many politicians and the so-called "fringe elements" are prone to making provocative statements and the government must disallow any such vituperative outpourings, especially in its name.

India has had civilisational relations with Iran, and more recently with Israel. Iran under the Ayotollah regime had often taken India's side on Kashmir in the OIC meetings, worked together in Afghanistan, and was home to the geostrategic development of the Chabahar seaport. Indeed, it also worked increasingly with Israel with the Indian Prime Minister having concluded a trip to Israel, days before the attack on Iran.

But it must delink the sovereign's geopolitical moves from the treatment of its "own", especially in a sensitive and emotional moment like now.

India's track record on sectarian rift within communities has been amongst the best in the world, and therefore care to ensure that it remains so, going forward, is critical.



The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry

dailypioneer
@LTRajputs
The Pioneer

PICTALK



An artist works on a painting of Lord Krishna and his divine consort Radha amidst preparations ahead of the 'Holi' festival, in Nadia. PHOTO: PTI

Women in science: Beyond celebration, towards equity



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

2ND OPINION

Every year, we celebrate National Science Day on 28th February to commemorate the discovery of the 'Raman Effect' by the eminent physicist Sir C.V. Raman while working in the laboratory of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Kolkata. For this discovery, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1930. On National Science Day, theme-based science communication activities are held across the country. This year's theme is "Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat", which underpins the role of women in our journey towards Viksit Bharat. It's really time to introspect on the lives of women in science. Since time immemorial, women have been facing discrimination from society, which is reflected even in today's science.

For many girls, the journey towards science begins with conditional encouragement. Curiosity is welcomed, but

ambition is carefully moderated. A boy aspiring to be a physicist or wildlife biologist is seen as committed; a girl with the same aspiration is frequently advised to "balance" her goals with future domestic responsibilities. Science demands long years of training, uncertainty, and professional risk-conditions that society still hesitates to extend to women without scrutiny. For a girl to succeed in science, she needs her family's support.

When women do enter scientific institutions, the challenges do not disappear; they merely change form. Male chauvinism, though rarely spoken aloud today, remains evident in many laboratories, research centres, and academic spaces.

These can be seen in the authorities' work designation. The areas where they can perform well and make it to the limelight are usually not assigned to them. Another insidious activity is workplace gossip, which targets women scientists. In many national institutions, women are forced to work in silence, fearing repercussions from the higher-ups. There are also disturbing instances where exceptionally brilliant women scientists are deliberately targeted.

Complaints are discouraged in the name of "institutional harmony," and resilience is praised when it really means endurance of unfairness. Such a culture does not merely harm individual careers; it weakens science itself by suppressing dissent, ethical courage, and diversity of thought.

Until very recently, even basic infrastructural needs of women scientists were overlooked. It is startling that in some premier laboratories there were no dedicated restroom facilities for women, not decades ago, but until recent years.

The situation is equally challenging for women at the earliest stages of their research careers. Many male scientists hesitate to take women students, particularly married scholars, fearing maternity leave and perceived "interruptions" to research timelines. Motherhood is thus treated as a professional liability rather than a social responsibility that institutions must be equipped to support. Ironically, such prejudices persist even in environments that pride themselves on rationality and evidence-based thinking. As National Science Day 2026 is observed, the theme must serve as more than a ceremonial slogan. It should prompt institutions, policymakers, and the scientific community to confront uncomfortable realities alongside celebrating success stories. Recognising women in science cannot be limited to awards and anniversaries; it must involve sustained efforts to remove structural bias, ensure dignity at the workplace, and create systems where merit is not filtered through gendered expectations.



(Dr Biju Dharmapalan is the Dean - Academic Affairs, Garden City University, Bengaluru)

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

www.dailyopinion.com

facebook.com/dailyopinion @TheDailyPioneer
instagram.com/dailyopinion linkedin.com/in/ThePioneer

COURT REBUKE EXPOSES FLAWED INVESTIGATION

Court Rebuke Exposes Flawed Investigation. In the bribery case linked to the alleged liquor policy scam, the Central Bureau of Investigation's claim of a 12 per cent wholesale profit margin was dismissed by the court as erroneous, economically unsound and legally untenable. The Rouse Avenue Special Court observed that criminal liability cannot be constructed by stitching together disparate allegations based on assumptions rather than evidence.

Accordingly, 23 accused, including former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Education Minister Manish Sisodia, were acquitted. The court also criticised the CBI for venturing into auditing election expenditure - a function reserved exclusively for the Election Commission. In the absence of

concrete proof, the court ordered departmental action against the investigating officers for wrongly implicating public officials.

The judgment concluded that the case lacked a factual foundation capable of surviving judicial scrutiny.

Yet the political ramifications had already reshaped Delhi's landscape. The episode has intensified scrutiny of investigative agencies such as the CBI and ED, raising concerns about their autonomy and credibility in politically sensitive matters. The verdict underscores the primacy of evidence over assumption and calls for safeguarding institutional integrity to restore public trust in investigative agencies and democratic accountability.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

Please send your letter to the info@dailyopinion.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Grave escalation demands restraint

The reported targeted killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, by U.S. and Israeli forces, if true, represents a deeply troubling escalation. The extrajudicial elimination of a sovereign head of state would mark a serious breach of international norms and diplomatic conventions that underpin global order.

Regardless of political differences, sovereignty and established legal frameworks cannot be discarded in favour of military action. Such steps risk normalising force over dialogue and could trigger retaliatory violence, destabilising an already volatile region.

History shows that cycles of vengeance only deepen conflict and suffering. At this critical juncture, responsible nations must call for immediate de-escalation and a return to diplomatic engagement.

The international community cannot remain silent if foundational principles of international law are undermined. Preventing further bloodshed and containing the conflict requires urgent restraint, dialogue and adherence to global norms before the crisis spirals into a wider conflagration.

VIJAYKUMAR H K | RAICHUR

Rising tensions threaten global stability

The escalating conflict involving the United States, Israel and Iran has taken a deeply alarming turn. Reports that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has warned of grave consequences, even hinting at nuclear retaliation with possible backing from Russia, China and certain West Asian nations, underscore the dangerous trajectory of this crisis. Such developments risk pushing the world toward an unprecedented catastrophe, with devastating consequences for many nations, including India.

Global leadership demands restraint and foresight. Any action that heightens tensions without fully considering its long-term implications places humanity at risk.

Military adventurism and unilateral decisions cannot substitute for diplomacy. It is imperative that all parties step back from confrontation and engage in constructive dialogue.

The world cannot afford a slide into a wider war driven by brinkmanship and power politics. Leaders must prioritise peace, stability and collective security over aggressive posturing. Failure to do so would leave history to judge them harshly for the consequences that follow.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

A historic triumph for Jammu and Kashmir

A Historic Triumph for Jammu & Kashmir. No praise can suffice for Jammu & Kashmir's remarkable maiden Ranji Trophy triumph over Karnataka, secured through a commanding first-innings lead of 291 runs. The victory marks a watershed moment in the region's 67-year cricketing history.

Led by the inspiring Paras Dogra and powered by Auqib Nabi's exceptional tally of 60 wickets - the highest in the tournament - the team also benefited from steady contributions by Shubham Pundir, Abdul Samad, Qamran Iqbal and others. Their achievement is especially significant given the region's limited representation in national cricket, barring rare standouts like Parvez Rasool and Umran Malik.

At a time when Jammu & Kashmir often makes headlines for regional and communal divides, this united team has demonstrated the power of shared purpose beyond religious, ethnic or geographic differences.

Their success mirrors underdog triumphs such as Leicester City's 2015-16 Premier League win and Aizawl FC's 2016-17 I-League title - a testament to belief, resilience and collective spirit.

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA



The new grammar of fiscal federalism

By recalibrating distribution criteria, tightening fiscal expectations, and linking devolution more closely to performance, the Commission signals a gradual movement away from a purely redistributive framework toward one that rewards growth, discipline and governance capacity

FIRST Column



PRAVIN KUMAR SINGH

India's Finance Commissions are often viewed as technical exercises in tax sharing. Yet they are far more than accounting mechanisms. Every Commission reflects a deeper constitutional conversation about equity, efficiency, and the evolving balance between the Union and the states. The 16th Finance Commission (FC), whose recommendations cover the period 2026-31, is no exception. While the headline number, retaining states' share in central taxes at 41 per cent, suggests continuity, the report signals a subtle but important recalibration in India's fiscal federalism.

The real significance of the 16th FC lies not in dramatic structural changes but in the quiet rewriting of incentives. The Commission appears to move India away from a purely redistribution-centric model toward a framework that simultaneously rewards economic contribution, fiscal discipline, and governance performance. This shift, if interpreted correctly, may define the next phase of cooperative federalism.

Stability masking structural change

At first glance, the Commission appears cautious. The continuation of the 41 per cent share for states in the divisible pool of taxes maintains predictability and avoids reopening contentious debates between the Centre and states. Yet fiscal federalism is shaped less by aggregate shares than by the criteria through which those shares are distributed. Here, the 16th FC introduces notable changes. The weight assigned to income distance, the principal equalisation parameter, has been reduced, while a new weight has been given to states' contribution to national GDP. This seemingly technical adjustment marks a conceptual shift. Historically, Finance Commissions emphasised horizontal equity, ensuring that poorer states received greater support to provide comparable public services. By introducing a GDP contribution parameter, the new formula incorporates an efficiency-oriented logic: states that drive economic growth are also recognised in the distribution mechanism. In effect, India's fiscal framework is gradually evolving from pure equalisation toward incentive-compatible federalism.



THE 16TH FINANCE COMMISSION DOES NOT RADICALLY REDRAW INDIA'S FISCAL ARCHITECTURE. INSTEAD, IT QUIETLY ALTERS ITS GRAMMAR

The writer is a policy researcher and Senior Project Associate at the World Intellectual Foundation

dailypioneer
@pravinkushwaha0
pravin-kumar-singh-7b2193226

Equity versus efficiency

The tension between redistribution and growth incentives has always defined fiscal federalism. Too much emphasis on equity risks weakening incentives for revenue mobilisation and economic expansion; too much emphasis on efficiency can widen regional disparities. The 16th FC attempts to walk this tightrope. Income distance remains the largest criterion, ensuring continued support for lower-income states. At the same time, recognising GDP contribution acknowledges that high-growth states sustain national revenue capacity.

This dual approach reflects a maturing federal economy. India today is no longer a uniformly low-income federation. States differ sharply in demographic profiles, industrialisation levels, and governance capacity. A transfer formula designed for a more homogeneous economy may no longer serve emerging realities. The Commission's recalibration implicitly recognises this structural transformation.

However, the shift also raises important political economy questions. Will richer states view this as long-awaited recognition, or merely a modest correction? Will poorer states perceive it as a dilution of redistributive justice? The durability of the new formula will depend less on its mathematics and more on the political trust underpinning federal negotiations.

Demography and the politics of population

One of the most sensitive areas of previous Finance Commissions has been the use of population as a criterion. The 16th FC revises the demographic performance parameter, moving from fertility-rate based measurement to population growth between 1971 and 2011. This change is more than methodological. It represents an attempt to balance competing narratives: states that successfully controlled population growth seek recognition for responsible policy choices, while states experiencing higher growth argue that fiscal needs follow demographic reality.

By shifting the metric, the Commission tries to depoliticise the debate. Yet demography remains deeply embedded in India's federal politics. The question of whether fiscal transfers should reward past policy success or respond to present expenditure needs is unlikely to disappear. The new formula postpones rather than resolves this tension.

The end of fiscal cushioning

Perhaps the most under-discussed aspect of the report is what it removes. The Commission discontinues revenue deficit grants, sector-specific grants, and state-specific grants that were part of the previous framework. This signals a philosophical shift.

Earlier Commissions often acted as fiscal shock absorbers, cushioning states with persistent deficits. The new approach appears to favour harder budget constraints, nudging states toward fiscal self-reliance rather than continued dependence on compensatory transfers. In public finance theory, this reflects a movement away from "soft budget constraints," where subnational governments expect rescue, toward a system where fiscal responsibility becomes a structural expectation. For states, this implies greater pressure to expand their own revenue base, rationalise expenditure, and improve efficiency.

Decentralisation with conditions

The Commission's recommendations for local bodies further illustrate its governance-oriented approach. Significant grants are allocated to rural and urban local governments, but access is conditional upon institutional reforms such as timely accounts publication and functioning State Finance Commissions. Performance-linked grants and targeted components, such as urban infrastructure and wastewater management, suggest that devolution is increasingly tied to outcomes rather than entitlement. This is a notable evolution from earlier phases where transfers were primarily formula-driven and less conditional. In essence, the Commission recognises that fiscal decentralisation without administra-

tive capacity risks inefficiency. The emphasis is now on accountable decentralisation.

Fiscal discipline as constitutional signalling

Beyond transfers, the 16th FC offers a clear fiscal roadmap. It recommends bringing the Centre's fiscal deficit down to 3.5 per cent of GDP by 2030-31, maintaining a 3 per cent deficit limit for states, and crucially ending the practice of off-budget borrowings by bringing them onto formal balance sheets.

This may prove to be one of the most consequential recommendations. Off-budget liabilities have increasingly blurred the true fiscal position of governments. By advocating uniform accounting and transparency, the Commission seeks to restore credibility to fiscal metrics. Seen in historical perspective, this could represent India's second-generation fiscal reform after the FRBM framework, an attempt to institutionalise transparency alongside discipline.

The emerging federal compact

Taken together, the report reflects a broader transformation in India's federal compact. The message is clear: redistribution will continue, but it will coexist with incentives for growth, transparency, and fiscal prudence. States are expected not merely to receive transfers but to demonstrate governance capacity and economic contribution. This shift mirrors global trends in intergovernmental fiscal design, where transfers increasingly reward performance rather than merely compensate for structural disadvantages. Yet India's diversity makes such transitions politically delicate. Federalism here is as much about negotiation as it is about formulae. The 16th Finance Commission does not radically redraw India's fiscal architecture. Instead, it quietly alters its grammar. By retaining aggregate stability while modifying incentives, it signals a gradual transition toward a more performance-oriented federal system. Whether this evolution strengthens cooperative federalism or deepens inter-state contestation will depend on implementation and political consensus. Fiscal formulae alone cannot sustain federal harmony; they require trust, transparency, and shared developmental purpose.

What the Commission ultimately offers is a constitutional nudge, urging India's states to move from a paradigm of entitlement toward one of responsibility and growth. The success of this shift will shape not just fiscal outcomes, but the future character of India's Union itself.

Jamsetji Tata and the power of purpose



RAJESH SETH

On March 3, as India marks the birth anniversary of Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, it is worth reflecting on a question that remains strikingly relevant more than 150 years after he laid the foundations of the Tata enterprise: Why do some companies endure for generations, while others fade despite early success?

Jamsetji Tata did not build businesses merely to manufacture goods or generate profit. He believed enterprise was a means to strengthen the nation, advance science and education, and improve the lives of people. That belief - a deeply held sense of purpose - continues to shape the Tata Group more than a century later. It also offers a powerful lens through which to understand corporate longevity.

Purpose is often spoken of today, but rarely with clarity. In his book *Deep Purpose*, Harvard Business School professor Ranjay Gulati argues that purpose, when genuinely embedded, becomes an organization's operating system - guiding decisions, shaping culture, and sustaining performance over time. Larry Fink, co-founder, Chairman and CEO of BlackRock, reinforces this idea, noting that purpose must act as both a strategic compass and a guide for everyday behaviour, not a symbolic slogan.

It helps to distinguish between three layers of purpose, a distinction that is often blurred but critically important. At the most basic level is functional purpose. This is operational in nature and answers the question: How do we run the business efficiently? It focuses on processes, productivity, and execution. Every organization needs this layer, but on its own it rarely inspires loyalty or longevity.

The second layer is strategic purpose, which supports competitive advantage and medium-term goals. It aligns teams, strengthens brands, and builds customer trust. Strategic purpose asks: How do we create and sustain advantage? Many successful companies operate effectively at this level, yet it remains largely instrumental.

The deepest layer is core purpose - the organization's *raison d'être*. It is enduring, values-driven, and largely stable over time. Core purpose answers the fundamental question: Why should we exist at all? For Jamsetji Tata, that answer lay in using enterprise to advance national self-reliance, scientific capability, and social progress - not merely commercial success. It shapes culture, ethics, leadership behaviour, and an organization's responsibility to society.



Crucially, it guides decision-making in moments of crisis and transition.

This layered view helps explain why some business groups endure for decades - sometimes over a century - while others struggle to survive leadership transitions or environmental shocks. Functional and strategic purposes can deliver performance; only core purpose delivers permanence.

This idea of purpose-driven endurance is not confined to an earlier era or to Indian enterprises alone. Contemporary examples from global business echo the same logic. The American outdoor apparel company Patagonia, for instance, has explicitly placed environmental stewardship at the heart of its existence, declaring that "Earth is now our only shareholder." Founder Yvon Chouinard embedded this belief not merely in brand messaging but in ownership structure and governance, ensuring that the company's profits are channelled toward environmental causes. Patagonia's success demonstrates that when purpose is treated as a governing principle rather than a marketing slogan, it can guide strategy, shape culture, and sustain relevance even in intensely competitive markets.

Jamsetji Tata's life offers a compelling illustration. He did not establish textile mills in Nagpur merely to manufacture cloth. Beyond demonstrating Indian industrial capability and promoting self-reliance, he pioneered organised worker welfare - introducing provident fund-like schemes, along with measures such as gratuity and accident compensation, long before these became the norm. Business success and social responsibility were inseparable in his worldview.

His commitment to nation-building extended well beyond industry. Believing education to be the foundation of progress, he established the J N Tata Endowment in 1892 to support "the best and the most gifted" Indian students for higher studies overseas. Since then, the Endowment has supported more than 5,700 scholars, including former President K.R. Narayanan and renowned astrophysicist Jayant V. Narlikar.

Jamsetji's vision for scientific advancement was equally bold. In 1893, during a chance meeting with Swami Vivekananda aboard SS Empress of India from Yokohama to Vancouver, he discussed his dream of establishing a research university. He later pursued this idea with Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India. Jamsetji did not live to see its fruition, but in 1909 - five years after his death - the Indian Institute of Science was established in Bangalore, fulfilling one of his most enduring aspirations.

Other Indian business founders articulated similar deep purposes. Ghanshyam Das Birla, influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of trusteeship, viewed wealth as a social trust. His enterprises aimed to develop skills, spread education, generate employment, and help build an independent India free from poverty and disease.

The Godrej family's business philosophy was grounded in equally firm beliefs: that business must serve society, ethics are non-negotiable, national self-reliance is a moral obligation, and wealth carries responsibility rather than entitlement.

It is therefore no coincidence that groups such as Tata, Birla, and Godrej - operating across different industries and eras - have endured for over a century. Nor is it accidental that other long-lived Indian groups such as the JK Organisation, the Kirloskar Group, the Murugappa Group, the TVS Group, and the Wadia Group were founded on a shared conviction that enterprise is a form of stewardship. They did not merely pursue profit; they pursued purpose.

Globally, the pattern is similar. The longest-surviving companies - including Barclays, Coca-Cola, DuPont, HSBC, Mitsubishi, Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, Siemens, Toyota and Unilever - tend to share three characteristics: a core purpose beyond profit, an ability to adapt strategy without losing identity, and strong institutional values transmitted across generations.

In the long run, deep purpose is not a slogan; it is the most reliable multiplier of organisational longevity. Companies that define their purpose beyond profit do more than just survive - they become institutions.

The writer Professor of Practice, IIM University, Gurgaon
dailypioneer
@TheDailyPioneer
dailypioneer

Protecting the living heritage



ANJALI PATHAK

Every year on March 3, World Wildlife Day is celebrated by wildlife enthusiasts and nature lovers with much fanfare. It is indeed a day to ponder over how we can conserve the wildlife for posterity. Given the fact that hundreds and thousands of species have become extinct, and many more are on the way to becoming extinct. It was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, the date commemorates the signing of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in 1973. It is both an occasion to honour the planet's extraordinary biodiversity and a moment to reflect on our shared responsibility to protect it.

Wildlife sustains life in both visible and invisible ways. Forests regulate climate and replenish the air. But deforestation, habitat fragmentation, poaching, pollution, unsustainable consumption and climate change are accelerating species loss at an alarming pace. Global assessments warn that nearly one million species face the threat of extinction in the coming decades. World Wildlife Day is a warning bell echoing across continents.

India's situation reflects both urgency and hope. Despite occupying only 2.4 per cent of the world's land area, India hosts nearly 8 per cent of global biodiversity - a remarkable concentration of life. From Himalayan ecosystems to coastal mangroves, from arid grasslands to tropical rainforests, the country's ecological wealth is immense. The landmark Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 laid the legal groundwork for conservation, establishing protected areas and safeguarding endangered species. Over the decades, India has expanded its network of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and biosphere reserves, with more than 5 per cent of its geographical area now under protected status. Among India's most celebrated conservation efforts is Project Tiger, launched in 1973 was one of the most successful projects. India today has over 3,000 tigers - nearly 75 per cent of the global tiger population.

Project Elephant focused on securing elephant corridors and mitigating human-elephant conflict. Yet challenges remain formidable. As human settlements expand and infrastructure projects multiply, forests shrink and wildlife corridors fragment. Human-wildlife conflict has intensified, particularly in ecologically fragile regions such as the Sundarbans, where the delicate coexistence between the Royal Bengal tiger and local communities is under severe strain. Climate change compounds these vulnerabilities, threatening coastal mangroves and Himalayan habitats alike. Wildlife



tourism adds another complex dimension. When conducted responsibly, eco-tourism can generate livelihoods and foster conservation awareness. However, unregulated safaris, intrusive construction of resorts and excessive noise and artificial lighting can disturb animal behaviour and degrade habitats. It is not to suggest to prohibit tourism, but to align it with ecological sensitivity. Community-based models offer a way forward.

The wildlife tourism adds yet another layer to wildlife protection. Often, wildlife safaris do not conform to the standard protocols and become a menace to the wild life. Besides the construction of guest houses, lodges and resorts often become scary for the animals. Loud music and bright colours distract the animal and change their behaviour. It is not to suggest that wildlife tourism should be banned but we have to chalk out a policy in which the interests of tourists and well as animals, are kept in mind. Though various efforts have been made in the country.

For instance, in the Gir Forest, Laurent Guiraud, the brain behind Woods at Sasan experimented with a regenerative tourism model that goes beyond sustainability to actively restore the local ecosystem. Drawing on traditional ecological knowledge, the biophilic design uses local stone, bamboo and wood, and a developing food forest that mimics a natural woodland system. With floor-to-ceiling windows blending into the landscape near Gir National Park, the resort emphasises harmony with nature. "We have drawn heavily from the local population and experience as they are the keepers of this place who have a wealth of knowledge about the forest and wildlife around and are committed to preserving it which is sustainable and rewarding," says

Culturally, wildlife is woven into civilisational memory and spiritual symbolism. In India, the tiger, elephant and peacock are not merely species; they are emblems of identity and heritage. Local communities must be recognised as stakeholders and partners, not passive observers. Conservation is not a choice between development and environment - it is the only credible path to sustainable development.

The writer, a wildlife conservationist is consultant for sustainable wildlife projects
dailypioneer
@TheDailyPioneer
dailypioneer

**BLASÉ CAPITAL
SP(OIL)S OF WAR**



Over the past five trading sessions, the Sensex, the Bombay Stock Exchange index, was down by almost 3,000 points, before it recovered a bit to close at just over 80,000 points on Monday. More than 2,000 points were shaved off in the last two trading sessions, obviously due to the joint US-Israel attacks on Iran, and retaliation by the latter on the US bases, and other locations like airports in the Middle East. Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz, which accounts for the sea transport of a fifth of the global crude oil supplies, and the bulk of the shipments to Asian nations such as India, China, Japan, and South Korea.

There are several reasons to explain the jitters among the investors. They encompass macro factors, as well as micro, and sector-related ones. Economists feel that if the Iran war lingers on, and along with the ones in Ukraine, and Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the global economy may walk into a recession. If the Strait remains closed for a few days, or a week, most analysts feel that a global recession is a certainty. It can easily reduce growth in the Eurozone by a minimum 0.5 per cent, and have a larger impact on the Asian economies, especially India.

In addition, inflation is likely to raise its ugly head. Most experts feel that the transmission from high crude prices, now expected to jump over \$100, and even up to \$130 due to a prolonged war, to inflation and high prices due to its multiplier effect will be immediate. In Europe, if oil is at \$100, the prices may jump up by a minimum 0.7 per cent, and the impact on India may be a 1-2 per cent increase due to other factors such as supply and logistics constraints. Oil at \$130 can push up the US inflation to 4.5 per cent, and 4 per cent in Europe.

According to a media article, "For Europe, the timing is brutal. The Eurozone has just achieved its 2 per cent inflation target in December (2025) after three years of battling price pressures that peaked over 10 per cent. The ECB (central bank) has held rates at 2 per cent for four consecutive meetings, and growth projections for 2026 had been revised upwards on the back of Germany's Euro 500 billion fiscal expansion, and improving domestic demand. An energy shock from the Gulf threatens to undo that progress in weeks."

Energy security of various consuming nations will be hampered, and the risk premiums on oil will shoot up. China will seek to dip into its inventories and strategic reserves, and seek alternate supply routes. India will do the same, and the US Supreme Court judgment on the president's trade tariffs, along with the Iran war, may spur New Delhi to re-rely on Moscow for crude supplies. India has a valid excuse to depend on any and every source possible, and not listen to the US.

Iran has invariably been the epicentre of regime changes, which disrupted the global oil markets several times in the past 50 years. In 1979, after the Islamic revolution led to a regime change, crude prices more than doubled, and "Iranian production never recovered. If history is any guide, the economic consequences of this conflict will outlast the military campaign regardless of how quickly a ceasefire is reached." After the death of Iran's supreme religious leader, Khamenei, a regime change looks more likely, even though the clerics are striving to look for an immediate replacement, with societal changes.

Other lessons from history are crucial. In the recent past, global crude oil prices have witnessed huge volatility. In late February 2022, after Russia attacked Ukraine, they zoomed to \$100, and reached \$130 within a month. Subsequently, they came down drastically, and reached a low of less than \$60, as Russian oil continued to reach the consumers despite the western sanctions, and Europe shifted to traditional sources like coal that were earlier shut. Similarly, in 2008, oil peaked at \$145 just before the Great Recession, and later crashed to \$40. Hence, pessimism can quickly turn to optimism.

Obviously, the mindset of the producers and consumers are different. The former will aim to use the short-term adverse impact to rake in higher profits, as will the global oil giants. They will want the prices to remain at \$75 or higher for several months. The consumers will dip into existing reserves, and hope for the best. If they can somehow ride through the short-term shocks, they will benefit from lower prices due to sudden oversupplies, and higher production. The situation is tricky for the large producer-consumers like Europe and the US.

Setbacks in equities may prove to be positive for the bullion. Over the past few years, especially since the Great Recession in 2008, experts pointed at a unique trend of bullion and stocks showing similar trajectories. Generally, it is believed that gold moves up when equities are down, and vice versa, as the yellow metal is a hedge against stocks. But both have gone up in the past decade or so. This convergence may now return to the traditional divergence, at least for some time. Gold prices jumped nearly six per cent in the past week.



Everything fine with Fino Bank?

An arrested CEO, and stock down by 40 per cent in three months

Two weird events happened with the Fino Payments Bank in the past few days. First, its MD and CEO, Rishi Gupta, was arrested, which sparked instant reaction from the business community, and forced Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to admit that she will look at the case. On Monday, the stock price dropped nearly 10 per cent in the pre-trading period. During the day, it not only recovered the losses, but closed higher by nearly ₹2 compared to the previous trading session's closing price. Both were seen by experts as knee-jerk reactions, when fears, emotions, and sentiments overtook rationality.

Both incidents, however, are linked to Gupta. The fintech business community pleaded with the FM on social media that neither the CEO-MD nor the bank was linked to the alleged GST frauds. The illegal deals, which resulted in short payments of the taxes, were done by business associates. The arrest was irregular, and not warranted. Fino Bank clarified to the investors that the arrest was not related to the bank's GST compliance, and the probe was linked to managers in various banks. The bank was not involved in the non-payments. As it is, Gupta has no role in the business activities of the managers.

However, it is unusual for the investigating agencies to arrest a CEO. Even in cases that involve non-payment of loans of ₹1,00,000 crore, promoters and chairmen are interrogated, with restrictions on foreign travel, as is the case with Anil Ambani. The arrest signifies a larger issue. Unless, of course, we assume the logic that the investigators find it easier to arrest the small fish, and generally go easy on the whales and sharks. Fino Bank is a small entity, with 16 million customers (as in December 2025), deposit base

of just over ₹2,000 crore, and processed ₹1,10,000 crore in transactions in Q2-2026.

More importantly, a mere resignation of a CEO can render chaos within a firm, and among its shareholders. Both globally, and in India, one has seen high-profile exits followed by share slumps. On August 1, 2025, the shares of PNB Housing Bank fell by 17 per cent, despite strong quarterly results, when its CEO announced that he would step down. If a mere resignation can lead to investor concerns, an arrest is more meaningful, and portends dangers. For investors to become buyers, instead of sellers, due to a clarification, seems confusing.

One can agree that there are no GST liabilities on Fino Bank because of Gupta's arrest, but the investigators allege his involvement in "relation to provisions of real-money gaming services by a partner entity, and the alleged under-reporting of GST." The latter part is insignificant, especially when the central bank approved Gupta's reappointment a month ago. In December, 2025, received the regulator's approval to convert from a payments bank to a small finance bank, which the CEO-MD termed as a "natural progression." But he termed it "historic and momentous occasion in Fino's evolution journey."

The difference between a payments bank and a small finance one lies in what they can and cannot do. The former can accept deposits up to ₹2,00,000 per customer, offer digital payments, and debit cards. But it cannot issue credit cards, offer loans, and issue credit products. A small finance bank can perform these activities, and "provide full banking services similar to

regular commercial banks." In the case of Fino, the conversion enables it to expand products and customers, and offer more choices, solutions, and conveniences to the customers.

However, on December 8 (Monday), 2025, two days after Fino Bank revealed an 'in-principle' approval to become a small finance bank, the share price crashed by nearly five per cent in the early trades. It closed at almost ₹315 on Friday (December 5). The closing price on December 8 was below ₹277, or a huge fall. Since then, the stock has slid to below ₹195, or nearly 40 per cent in less than three months. After a brief respite in early February 2026, the fall continued. Clearly, the investors were unhappy with the so-called good news.

One of the reasons, as pointed by analysts on December 8, was immediate profit-booking. But there were larger concerns. As a small finance bank, Fino will need to adhere to specific compliances. There may be obvious execution risks related to the change, and the process may take a few years. In the past, before the central bank's clearance, Gupta had said that he wishes to be cautious rather than opt for nationwide expansion. Despite the transition, payments is likely to remain the main and most important business of the bank.

In the current arrest, there are efforts to distance Gupta from the fraud. For example, Fino Bank clarified that the managers responsible for the non-payment of GST are entities who source merchants for UPI transactions for it. Both the lender, managers, and merchant on-boarding processes are compliant with the regulatory requirements. The bank is compliant with the GST payments. The on-boarding was not done by the MD-CEO. Finally, according to Fino Bank, there is no "material impact" on the operations and, if there is, it will inform the stock exchanges. Hence, the bank is on firm and stable ground.

One can see a few holes, albeit small, in the logic and arguments. Of course, a MD-CEO does not on-board merchants, which is handled by specific teams and departments. But the CEO needs to take moral responsibility for the wrongdoings, if any. Gupta's arrest hints that the authorities believe that he possibly aided or abetted the non-payments. Fino Bank cannot simply pass the buck lower down, and absolve the leader. The bank seems uncertain about the financial fallout. Hence, it is keeping the door open for future adverse disclosures.

At a technical level, chartists contend that the chart appears weak, which have resulted, and may result, in selling pressures. There is a temporary support for the stock price but it is not yet "backed by strong bullish confirmation. The overall price action continues to indicate lower highs and lower lows, which keeps the broader trend negative," says an analyst. According to others, "A decisive close above ₹208 (current price: ₹194) is required to signal strength, and improve short-term momentum. Until such a break occurs, upside attempts may face resistance.... On the downside, immediate support is placed around ₹165, and a breakdown below this level could trigger weakness."

OUR TAKE



KS CHALAPATI RAO and KVK RANGANATHAN

The crucial issue related to foreign direct investment (FDI) is the design, rather the architecture of the fast-rising and high outflows. An analysis shows that the imbalance between inflows and outflows is not due to a single policy error or a sudden loss of investor confidence. It reflects deeper structural shifts linked to the nature of FDI, India's liberalisation trajectory, and evolving character of global capital. Several factors contribute to the existing trends and patterns, which include disinvestments by the Indian state and foreigners.

A leading factor to the large outflow of FDI lies in the inflows. Since the mid-2000s, the composition of foreign investors has changed. A growing share of ownership is by global financial investors like private equity and hedge funds, which generally operate with defined exits, and seek multiple-fold returns within short timeframes. The major exceptions are sovereign wealth funds and pension funds, who may have a longer-term view on investments. Since India opened infrastructure sectors, the financial investors slowly gained over MNCs.

Our earlier estimates for the period between 2005-06 and 2013-14 suggest that financial investors accounted for 26.9 per cent of the inflows compared to 47.8 per cent by the MNCs. At 58.2 per cent, the share of financial investors was the highest in construction and real estate. According to our ongoing study, between 2014-15 and 2018-19, the share of financial investors in equity inflows was 29.2 per cent compared to the MNCs' share of 58.9 per cent. Hence, the MNCs became more dominant in the 2000s and 2010s.

However, over the next five years, 2019-20 to 2023-24, the financial investors, with a share of 44.9 per cent, left the MNCs (41.4 per cent) behind. More importantly, the former's share in non-manufacturing activities jumped from 33 per cent to 47 per cent in the second half of the decade. This changing nature implies that the incoming investments were more likely to culminate in exits, and sizable repatriations, both due to the mindset and thinking of financial investors, and their penchant for non-manufacturing segments.

The next big draft for the outflow is dividends paid by the payments by foreign subsidiaries and associates in India to overseas parents, and other investors. Between 2021-22 and 2024-25, this figure (excluding reinvested earnings) jumped from \$17.6 billion to \$33.1 billion. Reinvested earnings remained stable at around \$20 billion, which suggests that the

Cracks in FDI architecture

Most money is coming from financial investors, and in services



foreign investors prefer to remit dividends rather than retain them in India. In other words, they do not reinvest much.

In a short span of four years, royalty payments almost doubled from \$9 billion in 2021-22 to \$17.3 billion in 2024-25, or a cumulative figure of \$51.9 billion, most of which was paid to foreign parents and affiliates. According to the Reserve Bank of India's Survey of Foreign Collaboration, royalties or royalties-technical fees were the most preferred form of payments for technology in foreign collaborations. Most partnerships are between the subsidiaries and affiliates. Unaffiliated firms account for 28 out of the 255 collaborations.

Evidence suggests that the bulk of payments originate from foreign-affiliated entities. In some cases, royalties function as intra-group transfer mechanisms to supplement dividend remittances. Thus, combining dividends and royalties may provide a better picture of the MNCs' returns on investments (RoIs) rather than a comparison with dividends. In fact, RoI will be better captured by combining the capital gains part of the overall annual and regular repatriations.

In the recent past, large MNCs such as

Hyundai Motor India, Orkla India, and LG Electronics listed the shares on the Indian stock exchanges, and the foreign parents sold a part of their holdings through the offer-for-sale (OFS) route. When this happens in IPOs (Initial Public Offerings), the proceeds go abroad, and not to the Indian subsidiaries. Only the ownership changes. A portion of the sold stakes of the foreign owners may be purchased by foreign portfolio investors.

Another factor for the FDI outflows is the complete exit (not a part sale through OFS) of MNCs from the Indian subsidiaries. For example, the Tata Group took over Wipro from its foreign shareholders for \$128 million in early 2024. Other exits include Daiichi Sankyo, Citibank (consumer banking business), Akzo Nobel, Thyssenkrupp Electrical Steel, and Metro. If such deals involve overseas share transfers, as in the case of Holcim-Ambuja one, they are not reflected in FDI outflows. But if the transactions happen in India, they do.

Internal restructuring of the ownership patterns, as opposed to OFS and complete sellout, may result in simultaneous outflows and inflows of FDI. This includes cases when, within MNC groups, one of the MNCs sells, and other arms buys. Both transactions

match each other. While we are not sure how these are treated in the statistics, there is a possibility that they may inflate inflows and repatriations.

But as mentioned in yesterday's column, India faces a paradox. While the developed nations resort to technology protectionism, India largely counts the quantum of FDI inflows. The external account reflects the claims generated by the past inflows. This may be described as an emerging FDI trap. For every dollar that enters, multiple streams of payments gradually emerge over time, which reduce the contribution to the national savings. Such concerns were flagged repeatedly. Since a large component of incoming FDI is in the services sector, and by financial investors, most of it cannot directly generate surpluses on the trade front. But policy favours maximising inflows over long-term balance.

The Economic Survey (2025-26) adopts a pragmatic tone. It states that India "depends on foreign capital flows to maintain a healthy balance of payments," and candidly admits that "when they run drier, rupee stability becomes a casualty." It notes that a nation that runs persistent current account deficits, and depends on foreign savings must pay a risk premium to global capital. This is a significant shift. It is a rare case when official thinking recognises that external capital is a supplement, not a substitute, for domestic resource mobilisation.

More importantly, the Survey points towards the real solution, which is to transform India into a surplus-generating economy, and strengthen domestic financial systems as a buffer against volatile global flows. Durable reduction in the cost of capital will come from correcting the savings-investments imbalance, and building manufacturing export capacity. The European Union's efforts to strengthen its financial markets aims to make it easier for firms to raise long-term capital within the continent. Resilience needs to be rooted in strong domestic savings, technological upgrading, and manufacturing. Openness is sustainable when it strengthens internal capacity. FDI is, of course, welcome.

Rao is Senior Research Fellow, Academy of Business Studies, and Ranganathan is an independent researcher



Stock markets suffer major meltdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty nosedived over 1 per cent on Monday as investors' sentiment were hit hard following a sharp spike in crude oil prices amid escalating tensions in West Asia.

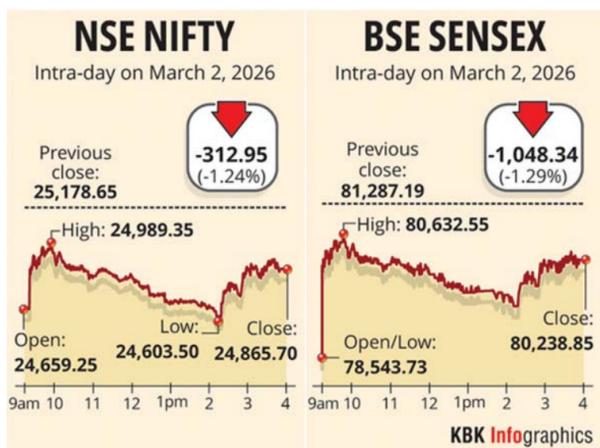
Weak trends in global markets and heavy foreign fund outflows also dented sentiments.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 2,743.46 points or 3.37 per cent to 78,543.73 in early trade. It later ended at 80,238.85, down 1,048.34 points or 1.29 per cent.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 575.15 points or 2.28 per cent to 24,603.50 in intra-day trade. The benchmark later settled 312.95 points or 1.24 per cent down at 24,865.70.

From the Sensex pack, InterGlobe Aviation, Larsen & Toubro, Adani Ports, Maruti, Asian Paints, and Bajaj Finserv were among the biggest laggards. Bharat Electronics, Sun Pharma and ITC were the only gainers.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 8.34 per cent to \$78.95



per barrel. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in a coordinated US-Israeli airstrike on Tehran early Saturday, with the Iranian state media confirming the death on Sunday. Iran began firing missiles at Israel and the Arab countries in the region in retaliation for the killing of its supreme leader.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 fell over 1 per cent and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index tumbled more than 2 per cent, while Shanghai's SSE Composite index ended in positive

territory. Equity markets were closed in South Korea due to a holiday.

Markets in Europe were trading sharply lower.

The US market ended lower on Friday. "Rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East have unsettled global markets, with concerns over possible extension of the situation given the killing of Iran's supreme leader.

"Rising crude oil prices and a weakening INR reflect concerns over potential disruptions to oil supply, which could increase inflationary pressures in India and impact fiscals and strain margins for energy and chemical-dependent sectors," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

The India VIX has edged higher, signalling increased uncertainty and risk aversion among market participants, he added.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹7,536.36 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs), however, bought stocks worth ₹12,292.81 crore.

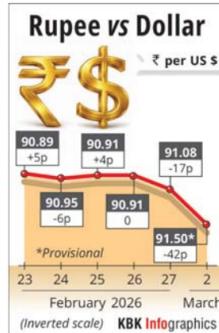
Rupee crashes 42 paise to settle at 91.50 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

The rupee saw a steep loss of 42 paise to settle at 91.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday after US and Israeli attacks on Iran intensified worldwide risk aversion, setting crude oil prices on fire and demand for the American currency soaring.

Massive selling in domestic equity markets and withdrawal of foreign funds further dragged the Indian currency down, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.23 and touched the intraday low of 91.65 against the greenback.

The currency ended the session at 91.50 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a steep loss of 42 paise from the previous closing



level. On Friday, the rupee lost 17 paise to settle at 91.08 against the dollar.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said the rupee declined nearly half a per cent on risk aversion in global markets after the US and Israel attacked Iran over the weekend.

He said the FII outflows and overnight gains in crude oil prices further pressurised the rupee, which is expected to trade with a negative bias on risk-off sentiments in global markets amid heightened geopolitical tensions.

"However, any diplomatic talks between the US and Iran or any restraint and RBI intervention may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may also take cues from ISM manufacturing PMI data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 91.10 to 91.80," Choudhary added.

According to Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury at Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was present at 91.46/47 levels against the greenback, which kept the rupee protected at the 91.50 levels against the US dollar.

Shares of aviation firms, tour operators dive



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Shares of airline companies, tour and travel related services providers tumbled on Monday morning trade amid escalating tensions in the Middle East. The stock of InterGlobe Aviation tanked 7.50 per cent, while SpiceJet declined by 7.27 per cent on the BSE.

Shares of Yatra Online tumbled 11.14 per cent, Easy Trip Planners slumped 9.39 per cent, TBO TEK edged 8.19 per cent and Thomas Cook dropped 5.40 per cent.

In the equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex traded 1,027.60 points lower at 80,284.17. The 50-share NSE Nifty tumbled 305.95 points to 24,864.35. The conflict

between Israel, the US, and Iran has resulted in multiple airspace closures in the Middle East, massively disrupting flight operations.

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) on Sunday reported a noticeable rise in booking cancellations and rescheduling requests, particularly for sectors connecting India with Europe via major Gulf hubs, due to airspace restrictions arising from the Middle East crisis.

IATO President Ravi Gosain said that travel agents across the country are working closely with airlines and overseas partners to minimise inconvenience to passengers by facilitating re-bookings, refunds, and alternate routings.

Escalating hostilities in West Asia risk renewed energy, inflation shocks: Moody's

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Escalating hostilities in the Middle East are heightening risks for India and other Asian commodity importers, as military strikes and retaliatory attacks disrupt key energy and trade routes, Moody's Analytics said on Monday.

The United States and Israel launched military strikes on targets in Iran over the weekend. Tehran retaliated with missiles and drones aimed at Israel and countries hosting US forces, including the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Media reports suggest the conflict has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, a key conduit for global energy flows. Roughly one-third of the world's seaborne crude oil exports and about 20 per cent of liquefied natural gas shipments transit the narrow waterway.

India, the world's third largest oil importer, imports roughly half of its oil needs through the narrow Strait.

"This (closure of Strait of Hormuz) raises the risk of



further disruptions in the Red Sea and across the wider Middle East," Moody's Analytics said. "Airspace closures have compounded the strain, affecting passenger travel and cargo flows through one of the world's most important trade corridors." Asia is particularly exposed as it buys the lion's share of oil and gas produced in the region.

"Roughly a third of global seaborne crude oil exports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, with most volumes destined for large Asian economies such as China, India, Japan and South Korea.

Around 20 per cent of global liquefied natural gas shipments also transit the strait. Brent crude oil prices jumped to around \$80 per barrel in early Monday trading in Asia, up from around \$72 per barrel at the close on Friday, while equity markets slipped in initial trading.

"Higher commodity prices would raise consumer and producer inflation, potentially forcing central banks to pause their easing cycles or even raise policy rates," it said. "Higher prices would also inflate import bills, weakening trade balances. As imports become more costly, greater financial outflows

would weaken currencies."

A broader or more drawn-out conflict would risk increasing the strain on emerging Asian economies that have, in past years, struggled with external debt repayment, it added.

The conflict injects fresh uncertainty into the trade outlook.

"The conflict complicates matters for India, which imports large amounts of Middle East oil and has agreed to wind down purchases of Russian oil as part of a trade deal with the US — a deal which now sits in limbo after the US Supreme Court struck down US President Donald Trump's country-based tariffs," it said.

Although China is a major buyer of Iran's discounted crude oil, it maintains sizeable reserves that could cushion short-term supply disruptions. Chinese officials have called for an immediate cessation of military operations. But renewed tensions with the US cast a shadow over the upcoming China-US presidential meeting and added uncertainty to their already fragile trade truce, Moody's said.

Exporters seek waiver of demurrage charges on cargo due to conflict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Apparel exporters on Monday urged the government to waive demurrage charges on export cargo at airports, as flight disruptions arising from ongoing West Asian crisis may impact movement of consignments.

In a communication to the civil aviation ministry, Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEP) said the prevailing situation has significantly disrupted international flight operations, resulting in route restrictions, airspace closures, flight diversions, schedule irregularities, and

brokers, freight forwarders, or air cargo agents.

Sakthivel has "requested for the waiver of demurrage charges on export cargo due to flight disruptions arising from ongoing West Asian crisis".

Under the existing tariff structure of Cargo Terminal Operators (CTOs), demurrage charges become applicable when cargo remains in terminal facilities beyond the stipulated free period, he said.

"However, the present circumstances constitute an exceptional and unavoidable disruption in the global air logistics chain," he said. Imposition of demurrage in



operational constraints at certain overseas airports.

Airport demurrage charges are fees on cargo or baggage at an airport terminal being kept beyond the allowed free period.

These charges encourage swift clearance. It varies by airport, cargo type and duration.

These unforeseen developments have directly impacted the timely movement of export cargo from Indian airports to various international destinations, AEP Chairman A Sakthivel said.

As a consequence, he said export consignments are currently stranded at multiple airport cargo terminals across India.

The delays are solely attributable to external and unforeseen factors beyond the control of exporters, customs

such cases would place an undue financial burden on exporters who are already facing shipment delays, contractual uncertainties, and market-related challenges, he noted.

Sakthivel requested DGCA (Directorate General of Civil Aviation) to consider issuing suitable instruction to Cargo Terminal Operators to grant waiver of demurrage charges on export consignments that could not be lifted due to flight disruptions, airspace restrictions, or related operational constraints arising from the ongoing international developments.

Such an intervention would provide much-needed relief to the exporting community and help sustain confidence and continuity in India's air cargo trade during this challenging phase, he added.

Defence stocks rally

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Defence stocks were in the limelight on Monday morning trade, with Ideaforge Technology surging over 15 per cent, amid escalating tensions in the Middle East in the wake of an attack on Iran by the United States and Israel, which triggered retaliatory strikes from Tehran across the region.

Shares of Ideaforge Technology zoomed 15.11 per cent, Paras Defence and Space Technologies surged 13.14 per cent, Sika Interplant Systems rallied 4.25 per cent, Bharat Dynamics jumped 4 per cent, Bharat Electronics

Oil could top \$100 as Strait of Hormuz closure halts flows

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Oil prices could exceed \$100 per barrel if tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz is not swiftly restored, as the waterway's closure threatens to disrupt 15 per cent of global oil supply and 20 per cent of global LNG supply, consultancy Wood Mackenzie said.

Following US and Israeli attacks on Iranian government, military and nuclear facilities, Iran warned shipping away from the strait and insurers withdrew coverage, effectively halting tanker movements.

The disruption, Wood Mackenzie said, creates a dual supply shock.

Current exports through the strait are suspended, while additional OPEC+ volumes and most of OPEC's



spare capacity — typically used to balance the global oil market — are inaccessible as long as the waterway remains closed.

Global oil prices rose after at least three ships were attacked

near the Strait of Hormuz. Brent crude was up more than 8 per cent at \$78.72 a barrel, while US-traded oil was up by around 7.6 per cent at \$72.20.

"The key question is when vessels

re-establish export flows," said Alan Gelder, senior vice president of refining, chemicals and oil markets at Wood Mackenzie. While tanker rates and insurance costs are set to surge, he said those increases would represent only a fraction of the price impact if oil flows are curtailed for more than a few days.

In the most optimistic scenario, export flows could take weeks to resume, he added.

Oil prices are "heavily risked to the upside" during that period. Gelder cited the early stages of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, when fears over Russian supply losses drove prices above \$125 per barrel.

"In the current scenario, oil prices above \$100 per barrel are possible if transit flows are not re-established quickly," he said.

India's manufacturing sector activity jumps to 4-month high in February

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

India's manufacturing sector activity growth jumped to a four-month high of 56.9 in February, supported by substantial improvement in domestic demand even as growth in new export orders witnessed a decline, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 55.4 in January to a four-month high of 56.9 in February.

In the PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India's final manufacturing PMI reflected an acceleration in manufacturing activity in February. Output



expanded at a faster rate for a second month, supported by stronger domestic orders," Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, said.

Goods producers indicated that demand buoyancy, marketing initiatives and rising client requirements underpinned another expansion in new business intakes.

"According to panel

members, efficiency improvements, healthy underlying demand, rising intakes of new work and tech investment collectively boosted production volumes," the survey said.

One area where growth took a step back was new export orders. Where external sales rose, monitored companies cited gains from Asia, Europe the Middle East and the US.

SEBI boosts tech-driven enforcement to curb scams

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mumbai

As the number of retail investors surges, SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey said the regulator is intensifying surveillance and technology-driven enforcement to curb rising pre-investment scams that divert funds before investors even interact with registered intermediaries.

Pandey, who completed one year at the helm of the regulator on March 1, noted that many new and intending investors are being misled by fake trading apps, WhatsApp groups and promises of high returns, often diverting funds to personal accounts of fraudsters long before any engagement with SEBI-regulated intermediaries.

He stressed that investor caution must evolve beyond mere awareness to informed action, especially given the country's expanding retail base.

Responding to a query on pre-investment frauds, Pandey said many individuals intending to enter the markets are being "hijacked by scamsters" even before they reach a SEBI-registered intermediary. "Someone who is intending to come is actually being trapped



by promises of high returns. It doesn't even come to SEBI or to any broker because the person has already fallen prey," he said in an interview, pointing to the growing use of WhatsApp groups, fake apps and other digital channels to lure investors. Calling such instances "quite many," Pandey said the regulator has stepped up measures to curb the menace and safeguard investors' money.

SEBI chief highlighted the importance of tools like SEBI Check — developed to help users verify the legitimacy of entities soliciting investments — and encouraged wider dissemination of validated platforms and UPI handles to safeguard payments.

While noting that such initiatives are not new, Pandey emphasised that widespread adoption remains critical to combating cyber fraud. Pandey said that the regulator will do all kinds of

campaigns. It has launched a project which will roll out multimedia campaign, multilingual campaign in order to see that these frauds are done.

He also called for investor discipline, advocating long-term investment strategies such as SIPs (Systematic Investment Plans) and pooled vehicles over speculative trading in complex instruments like derivatives, which many retail participants engage in without adequate understanding.

He reiterated SEBI's push for investor education and warned against unrealistic returns touted by unregistered "finfluencers".

On the supervisory technology front, Pandey highlighted SEBI's ongoing and evolving deployment of AI and data tools to monitor market misconduct, flag misleading content and track unregistered advisories in real time, as part of the regulator's broader investor protection framework. Currently, India has over 140 million unique investors.

To a questions on high level committee on conflict of interest, Pandey said the recommendations of the committee was discussed in the board and required more deliberations. "So, we will discuss it in the next board".

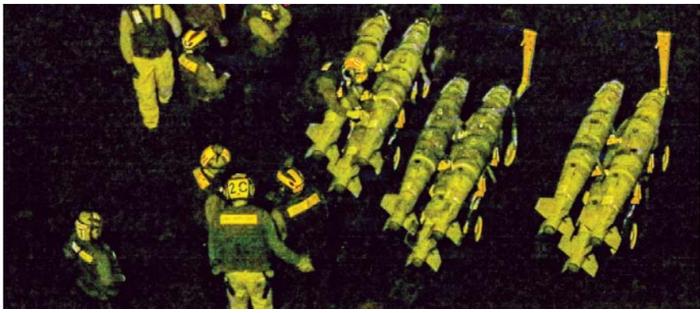
Kuwait mistakenly shoots down 3 US F-15E

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Dubai

Iran and allied armed groups fired missiles at Israel, Arab states and US military targets around the region on Monday, while Israel and the United States pounded Iran as the war expanded to several fronts.

Kuwait mistakenly shot down three American warplanes over its skies. The intensity of the attacks, the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the lack of any apparent exit plan indicated the conflict would not end anytime soon.

It was already having far-reaching consequences: Safe havens in the Mideast like



Navy sailors moving ordnance on the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln in support of Operation Epic Fur

Dubai have seen incoming Iranian missiles and drones. Iran has long threatened, if attacked, to drag the region into total war, including targeting Israel, the Gulf Arab states and the flow of crude

oil crucial for global energy markets. All of these came under attack on Monday. The chaos of the conflict became apparent when the U.S. military said Kuwait had

"mistakenly shot down" three American F-15E Strike Eagles while attacks from Iranian aircraft, ballistic missiles, and drones were underway. US Central Command said all six pilots ejected safely and are in stable condition. Israel and the US bombed Iranian missile sites and targeted its navy, claiming to have destroyed its headquarters and multiple warships.

As several airstrikes hit Iran's capital of Tehran, the top security official Ali Larjani vowed on X: "We will not negotiate with the United States." The death toll grew on all sides. The Iranian Red Crescent Society said that the U.S.-Israeli operation has killed at least 555 people. In Israel, where several locations were hit by Iranian missiles, 11 people were killed.

The Hezbollah militant group also targeted Israel, which responded with strikes on Lebanon, killing more than two dozen people. Meanwhile, four American troops have been killed, and three people were reported killed in the United Arab Emirates and one each in Kuwait and Bahrain.

Nepal President Ramchandra Paudel extends Holi wishes



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Kathmandu

Holi festivities kicked off in Nepal with President Ramchandra Paudel saying that the festival may inspire people to end social anomalies and evil customs. President Paudel extended greetings as the festival of colours was observed in the hilly districts of the country; however, it will be celebrated in the Terai region on Tuesday.

The festival may inspire people to end social anomalies and evil customs, he said, adding that the festival may help maintain social harmony and unity in the country.

The celebrations formally commenced on February 7 with the erection of the chur, a

32-plus feet bamboo stick at Basantapur Durbar Square in Kathmandu. Colourful clothes were attached to the stick, marking the start of the festival. However, people celebrate the main day of Holi on the full Moon day of Falgun, a significant month in the Hindu calendar, primarily marking the transition from winter to spring. Monday midnight is also the last day of the election campaign in Nepal before the House of Representatives (HoR) elections on March 5. Candidates belonging to different political parties, including independent candidates, are seen launching their campaign in Kathmandu and elsewhere despite the festival.

169 killed after raid in South Sudan



ASSOCIATED PRESS
Juba

At least 169 people were killed after insurgents raided a village in a remote area of South Sudan, a local official said Monday. It's the latest bout of sporadic violence that has left the country teetering on the verge of full-blown civil war.

The victims, including 90 civilians, were attacked on Sunday in Abiemnom county, said James MonyLuak, information minister for the administrative area of Ruweng. He said women and children were among the dead, in addition

to dozens of combatants. The UN Mission in South Sudan, known as UNMISS, said in a statement that 1,000 people sought shelter at its base after the attack. "Such violence places civilians at grave risk and must stop immediately," Anita Kiki Gbeho, a UNMISS official, said in a statement. "I urge all involved to cease hostilities without delay and engage in constructive dialogue to address their grievances." "Our peacekeepers will continue to do everything within their capabilities to protect civilians seeking refuge at our base," she added.

Hegseth, Caine hold news conference as Iran conflict intensifies in region

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Washington

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth on Monday spoke to widening concerns that the US-Israeli strikes in Iran could spiral into a protracted regional conflict by declaring, "This is not Iraq. This is not endless." Hegseth, along with Air Force Gen Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, held the Trump administration's first news briefing since Saturday's strikes.

President Donald Trump, while he's conducted a few phone interviews with individual reporters, has not taken questions on camera and only released two videos since the operation began.

Hegseth said the operation had a "clear, devastating, decisive mission" to "destroy the missile threat" from Iran, destroy its navy and "no nukes." "This is not a so-called regime change war, but the regime sure did change and the world is better off for it," Hegseth said. The briefing comes as the conflict has intensified



into a wider war in the region. Iran and its allied armed groups have launched missiles at Israel, Arab states and US military targets in the Middle East. Four American troops have been killed in action. Trump on Sunday predicted there would be more US casualties.

Caine on Monday said the US expected to have additional losses.

"We grieve with you, and we will never forget you," he said of the family members of those killed. The latest sign of the escalating upheaval came when US ally Kuwait

the strikes, Hegseth pointed to the Iranian regime as having started the conflict from its inception, declaring that for 47 years it has "waged a savage, one-sided war against America." "Their war on Americans has become our retribution against their Ayatollah and his death cult," he said.

"mistakenly shot down" three American fighter jets during a combat mission as Iranian aircraft, ballistic missiles and drones were attacking. US Central Command said all six pilots ejected safely from the American F-15E Strike Eagles and were in stable condition.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Official Notice:
Distributorship Terminated
ACO Systems and Solutions Pvt Ltd (ACO India) hereby announces that the distributorship of GMGR Sanitary and Allied Pvt. Ltd., Delhi stands terminated with immediate effect. The company is no longer authorised to represent, market, or sell ACO products. Public and business partners are hereby advised to take note of the above information.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS), PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT, ASSAM, GUWAHATI-03
No. CE/DEV/MMPPNA/RIDF-XXXI/345/2025-26/11
PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER (RE-BID)
The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites on line Bid on behalf of Governor of Assam for **1 (One)** nos. of packages for **Construction of Roads under Mukhya Mantrir Pakipath Nirman Achan (MMPNA) under RIDF-XXXI of NABARD for the year 2025-26** in Jorhat District of Assam amounting to **Rs. 180.65 Lakhs** (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam.
Details may be seen from **05-03-2026** at website www.assamtenders.gov.in. Amendment /Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website www.assamtenders.gov.in.
(The Bid Price may vary at the time of detail tendering for which no claim will be admissible)
Sd/-
Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3
DIPR/C/PIO/930/3-Mar-26

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS), PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT, ASSAM, GUWAHATI-03
No. CE/DEV/TB/120/2025-26/53
PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites Bids on behalf of Governor of Assam for **1 (One)** nos. of package for construction of Roads & Bridge project under SOPD-G for the year **2025-26** in **Barpeta District** of Assam amounting to **Rs. 112.98 Lakhs** (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam.
Details may be seen from **06-03-2026** at website www.assamtenders.gov.in. Amendment /Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website www.assamtenders.gov.in.
Schemes are not yet sanctioned by the competent authority. In the event of non-sanction of the schemes, the bids may be cancelled and no claim what so ever on this account shall be entertained from the bidders
(The Bid price may vary at the time of detail tendering for which no claim will be admissible)
Sd/-
Chief Engineer (Roads) PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3.
DIPR/C/PIO/928/3-Mar-26

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS), PWRD, ASSAM, GUWAHATI-03
No. CE/DEV/TB/60/2025-26/80
CANCELLATION NOTICE
This is for general information to all concerned that the Bid for SI.1,2 following tenders invited against Detailed Notice Inviting Tender (DNIT) No. CE/DEV/TB/60/2025-26/16 dated 11.08.2025 are hereby cancelled due to technical reasons.

DNIT SI No	Tender ID	Name of District	LAC	Name of Work	Package No
41	2025_PWD_4668_5_48	West Karbi Anglong	Rongkhang	Improvement of Road from (1) Englung Arong (Langminso) to proposed Eklavya Vidyalaya, (2)27th KM Of BKK Road to Rongmirdan Ronghang Gaon Via Rongpangbong Under Mukhya Mantrir Pakipath Nirman Achan (MMPNA) Under RIDF-XXXI of NABARD for the year 2025-26.	MMPNA_RIDF_XXXI_25_26_4_02
43	2025_PWD_4668_5_50	West Karbi Anglong	Rongkhang	Improvement of Road From (1) Zerikinding Terang Arong to Zerikinding Burial ground via Tisso Arong- Ronghang Arong, (2)Zerikinding Terang Arong to Mokoilum Main Road, (3)Arnam Teplong Tiniali to Thong Rongman Under Mukhya Mantrir Pakipath Nirman Achan (MMPNA) Under RIDF-XXXI of NABARD for the year 2025-26.	MMPNA_RIDF_XXXI_25_26_4_04

Details may be seen at website www.assamtenders.gov.in
Sd/-
Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3.
DIPR/C/PIO/934/03-Mar-26

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, PWD
JALUKBARI TERRITORIAL ROAD DIVISION, FANCY BAZAR, GUWAHATI-01
No. JTRD/TB-11/Pt-II/2025-26/3081-A
CORRIGENDUM
The value of work is hereby modified as **Rs. 318.20268 Lakh** (approx) in stead of **333.21675 Lakh**, issued vide No. JTRD/TB-11/Pt-II/2025-26/3065 Date :27.02.2026 and details may be seen on www.assamtenders.gov.in on 02.03.2026. Other terms and condition will be remain unchanged.
Sd/-
Executive Engineer PWD Jalukbari Territorial Road Division, Fancy Bazar, Ghy-01
DIPR/CF/PIO/4308/3-Mar-26

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is informed to all the General public that my clients Mr. Jai Singh S/o Sh. Koki Ram and Ms.Manta W/o Sh. Jai Singh R/O- HN-781, K- block, Mangolpuri, North West Delhi-83 my clients have no control upon his/her daughter Meenal, my clients have debarred/dismised her from their life as well as from his movable & immovable property w.e.f 27th Feb. 2026. Now my clients will not be liable / responsible for any act of her in future as my clients have no concern or relation with them since 27th Feb 2026.
Kapil Kumar (Advocate) Ch.No.819, Saket Court New Delhi -17

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that my client Smt. Pimlesh is in the process of availing a (LAP) from (Bimal Finance Ltd) against Property Bearing No. 14 area measuring 50 Sq. Yds. with roof/terrace rights Out of Kharsa No. 580 Situated at Block-D in the area of Village Navada Delhi State Delhi Colony/Abadi known as Mohan Garden, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059 having acquired by way of Relinquishment Deed dated 22/7/2024 Doc. No. 2024/25/19747 executed by (1) Mr. Hitesh Kumar Sharma, (2) Mrs. Seema Sharma & (3) Mr. Ravi Sharma and (4) Mr. Pawan Sharma.
All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.
Kamali Kant Gupta (Advocate) Unit No. FF-2, First Floor, Mahaluxmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vaishali, Gzb. U.P. Mob. 9810063351

PUBLIC NOTICE
Mr. Vaibhav Kaushik has approached ICICI Bank Ltd., DCM Building, New Delhi (Bank) to avail a loan for purchase of Property No. SJ/63, (371.62 sq. mtrs.), Shastri Nagar, G.M.P. Sector-XVI, Ghaziabad, U.P. from Mr. Surinder Kumar Dua (mutatee vide Mutation Letter dated 21.08.2025 issued by Ghaziabad Development Authority), who has represented that he himself, Mrs. Neerja Malhotra, Mr. Vinay Dua & Mr. Aditya Dua are the only Class-I legal heirs of Mrs. Santosh Dua, who was owner of the said property by virtue of Sale Deed dated 21.10.1999 (Doc. No. 304/5305). If anybody, person, body corporate has any right, lien or claim whatsoever on the said Property by way of inheritance or otherwise, then he/she/it may contact the undersigned with documentary proof of claim within 15 days of publication of this notice, otherwise it shall be deemed that either there are no claims or the same have been waived off. No claim or objection shall be entertained thereafter and Bank shall proceed to advance the loan on mortgaging of the said property.
Amit Kumar, Advocate GNA & Associates D-28, Jangpura Extension, New Delhi-110014.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD (HEALTH AND EDUCATION), ASSAM CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-3.
Cancellation Notice
No. CE/TB-III(H&E)/28/2025/14
It is for general information of all concerned that the bid invited vide No. CE/TB-III(H&E)/28/2025/10, dtd. 23/02/2026 for the work "Construction of Centralized Mid Day meal Kitchen at Majuli (Balance work)", is hereby cancelled due to technical reasons.
Chief Engineer, (Health & Education) PW (H&E) Deptt.
DIPR/C/PIO/929/3-Mar-26

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS), PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT, ASSAM, GUWAHATI-03
No. CE/DEV/TB/295/2025-26/02
PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER
The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites Bid online on behalf of Governor of Assam for **1 (one) no. of package under SOPD for the year 2025-26** in **Nagaon District**, Assam amounting to **Rs. 338.04 Lakhs** (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam.
Details may be seen from **05-03-2026** at website www.assamtenders.gov.in. Amendment /Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website www.assamtenders.gov.in.
(The Bid Price may vary at the time of detail tendering for which no claim will be admissible)
Sd/-
Chief Engineer (Roads) PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, GUwahati-3.
DIPR/C/PIO/932/3-Mar-26

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTORATE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION, ASSAM SIXMILE, KHANAPARA, GUWAHATI-22
REQUEST FOR BIDS
INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING
Directorate of Medical Education, Khanapara Sixmile on behalf of O/O Project Director, Assam Health Infrastructure Development and Management Society (AHIDMS) invites "Request for Bid" from reputed suppliers for supply of the following advance medical equipments funded by Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA) for SMCH, Silcahr in Assam:
1. Bronchoscopy System
The details may be seen in the Request for Bid document uploaded in the Assam E-procurement portal (<https://assamtenders.gov.in>) & <https://ahidms.assam.gov.in>. The applicant must be registered with the E-Tendering system (ETS) of the Govt. of Assam. (**Website: https://assamtenders.gov.in**). The Project Director, AHIDMS reserves the right to accept or reject all bids without showing any reasons whatsoever.
Sd/-
Directorate of Medical Education, Assam
DIPR/CF/PIO/4300/03-Mar-26



PROSPECT

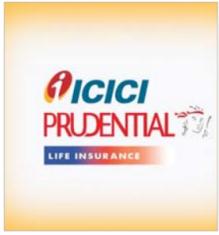
RBI says 98.44% of withdrawn ₹2,000 banknotes returned

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said 98.44 per cent of the ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation have been returned. The central bank announced the withdrawal of ₹2,000 denomination banknotes from circulation on May 19, 2023. The total value of ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation has declined to ₹5,551 crore at the close of business on February 28, 2026, from ₹3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on May 19, 2023, when the central bank announced withdrawal of ₹2000 banknotes, the release said. A facility for exchanging ₹2000 banknotes is available at the 19 issue offices of the Reserve Bank (RBI Issue Offices) since May 19, 2023. From October 9, 2023, RBI issue offices also accept ₹2,000 banknotes from individuals/entities for deposit into their bank accounts. Additionally, members of the public are sending ₹2,000 banknotes through India Post from any post office within the country to any of the RBI issue offices for credit to their bank accounts, the RBI said in a release. The central bank further said ₹2,000 banknotes continue to be legal tender.



ICICI Life Rolls Out Dividend Leaders 50 Index Fund

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has rolled out the Dividend Leaders 50 Index Fund under its Unit Linked Insurance Plans (ULIPs), targeting long-term wealth creation through investments in fundamentally strong companies with consistent dividend histories. The rule-based fund tracks the BSE 500 Dividend Leaders 50 Index, featuring 50 stocks from the BSE 500 universe that have paid dividends reliably for 10 years. It emphasises diversification across sectors for stability, with annual rebalancing and periodic reviews. Disciplined strategy on four pillars: Chief Investment Officer Manish Kumar said: "This fund offers a transparent way to invest in sound companies with steady dividends, backed by quality checks on financials and cash flows." The approach



rests on dividend-focused selection, financial strength filters, sector spread, and passive index-mirroring—though regulations may cause tracking errors. Strong historical returns as of January 30, 2026, the index delivered annualised total returns of 33.63% (3 years), 30.96% (5 years), and 20.40% (10 years), underscoring the power of disciplined investing. Available with popular ULIPs like ICICI Pru Signature Assure, SmartKid Assure, and SmartInsurance Plan Plus (SIP+), the fund pairs equity exposure with life cover. Details at www.iciciprulife.com.

Sunil Mittal shares succession plan for Airtel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The next generation of Sunil Bharti Mittal's family will get more share in Bharti Telecom, the promoter firm of Bharti Airtel, as part of the succession plan unveiled by the telecom czar in a recent call with investors. Mittal during an investor call held on February 26 said that his children are running their own businesses independently and getting trained outside Bharti Airtel where they are seeing their own failures, successes, pain points and managing conflicts.

"I believe I still have some years left to give back to Airtel and Bharti Enterprises but the next generation of my family are all building muscle in different forms and shapes. I think in a few years time you will start to see them at the shareholders table more visible," Mittal said. Mittal has three children—Shravin Mittal, Kavin Mittal and Eesha Pasricha. "Shravin has already been working for Airtel Africa. He was in the operations when we acquired



Sunil Mittal

the company in 2010 till 2012 and he's been on the board of Airtel Africa since 2018. You will start to see some of the next generation members of the Bharti family in the shareholder forums in the coming years," Mittal said. He said that Bharti Telecom is the promoter of Airtel and currently owns about 41 per cent stake in the telecom firm. "It will be my wish and desire one

day to see Bharti Telecom come back to 50 per cent plus shareholding of Airtel. That can, to my mind, happen only with very large dividends and or buyback by Airtel in the future. It is a wish, but even if we have 41 per cent, you would agree with me that as a Nifty 10 company, a 40 per cent plus stake is a very comfortable stake for any promoter to have," Mittal said. He said that the company will

start doling out more dividends and sought investors backing to the company for long run and superior returns.

Mittal said some of the friendly investors were not happy when Airtel decided to start operations in Africa in 2010 and now Airtel Africa is a star performer and helped Indian operations during the difficult period of 2016-19 for the telecom sector.

"Airtel Africa in the next few years is poised to be a \$10 billion revenue company generating upwards of \$5 billion and a very strong subsidiary of Airtel India generating very handsome returns for the company," Mittal said. Talking about Airtel in India, Mittal said that 8-9 years ago he had advocated for ARPU (average revenue per user) — an important matrix for telecom operators growth, should be ₹300.

"I am not counting all the inflation that has taken place in the last eight or nine years. ₹300 is now 15 per cent away from where Airtel is today. When will it happen? I don't know but it will certainly get there.

Is it a matter of months or is it a matter of a year or two."

He said that free unlimited data on 5G may need to be bundled into a more coherent way than the current plans.

"I see no reason why heavy consumers, business users and high-end users should be paying only Rs 400 a month which as you know is now nearly about four dollars a month. A dollar or two more to provide them these high-quality, high-bandwidth services is the legitimate expectation we have.

"I remain very hopeful that we will get to 300 but adjusting for inflation. All I think is that we have a new slogan to say an ARPU of ₹350 would be the most appropriate ARPU in today's time frame," Mittal said. In the third quarter ended December 31, 2025, Bharti Airtel recorded a 5.7 per cent increase in ARPU (Average Revenue Per User) of ₹259 during the quarter, as compared to ₹245 a year ago.

Analysts expect telecom operators in India may increase mobile tariffs by 15 per cent after about two years by June this year.

PM Modi inaugurates ₹3,600 crore PowerGrid projects in Rajasthan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jaipur

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated two major transmission infrastructure projects in Rajasthan, developed by the Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) with a combined investment exceeding ₹3,600 crore.

The projects, executed by the Maharatna PSU under the Ministry of Power, are designed to facilitate the large-scale evacuation of renewable energy from Rajasthan's Renewable Energy Zones (REZ). The first project, part of the Phase-III Part-B1 scheme for evacuating 20 GW of power, includes the 765/400/220 kV Bhadla-III substation and a 765 kV double-circuit transmission line connecting Bhadla-III to Sikar-II.

The second initiative, under the Phase-II Part-E



strengthening scheme for 8.1 GW of solar power, comprises a second 765 kV double-circuit line between Bhadla-II and Sikar-II.

According to a statement from the PSU, these strategic systems focus particularly on the Bhadla region, which houses one of the world's largest solar parks with a capacity exceeding 2.2 GW. The infrastructure is expected to underpin the country's

expanding renewable energy ecosystem and support long-term economic growth.

As of February 15, 2026, POWERGRID operates 290 substations and more than 1,84,370 ckm of transmission lines across the nation.

By adopting automation and digital solutions, the corporation has maintained a transmission system availability of over 99.84 per cent.



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met Zou Jiayi, new president of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) on Monday. Among other issues, Finance Minister stressed on AIIB's role in developing the capital markets, expediting the approvals of projects in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and setting up a regional office in India, given the scale of AIIB's operations here

SEARCH-CUM-SELECTION COMMITTEE GST APPELLATE TRIBUNAL ASSAM

Selection to the post of Technical Member (State)

Applications are invited for appointment to one post of Technical Member (State) of the Assam Bench of Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) at **Guwahati**.

2. The details of the post of Technical Member (State) including eligibility, salary, emoluments, terms and conditions etc are mentioned in the Vacancy Circular published on the website <https://commercialtax.assam.gov.in> and <https://Finance.assam.gov.in>.

3. Eligible and interested candidates may apply online on **GSTN portal** <https://gstn.org.in/gstat-state-application/#/home> 5th March, 2026 to 5.00 P.M. on 5th April, 2026. from

4. Applications will be scrutinized based on the eligibility criteria for the post. Shortlisted candidates may be called for personal interaction by the Committee. Subsequent communications, if any, regarding the selection process will be uploaded on the above-mentioned websites.

Sd/-
Member Secretary
Search-cum Selection Committee
(Commissioner & Secretary, Finance,
Taxation, Department)

DIPR/D/PIO/931/03-Mar-26

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

Notice Inviting Tender www.verka.coop

Manual/e tender are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Head Office, Chandigarh Replacement of cemented shed sheets with steel profile sheets of main store at Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy.	Three months
2.	For Verka Chandigarh Dairy a) Manual tenders :- i. Lids for ice cream cups (65ml & 80ml). ii. Lids for ice cream cones (125ml). b) e-tenders :- i. Chikki ii. Krisp Refined Palm Kernel Oil. iii. Mango Pulp Concentrate. iv. Ice cream cones with foil wrappers (125 ml) (Butterscotch, Chocolate & Cookie delight).	Annual/ 12 Lacs 8.0 Lacs Annual/ 7000 kg 20,000 kg 15 MT 8.0 Lacs
3.	For Verka Mohali Dairy i. Supply of veterinary medicines. ii. Pest Control Services.	Annual Annual
4.	For Verka Gurdaspur Dairy i. Supply, Installations & Commissioning of wood/biomass briquettes fired boiler capacity 3TPH. ii. Auction of old un-serviceable vehicles (bolero).	01 No. 02 No's
5.	For Verka Sangrur Dairy a) Hiring of Mahindra Maxi Truck Pickup, Bolero pickup or equivalent for:- i. Transportation of milk through cans to lift the milk from various societies/ Dairy farms to MCC/BMC/Dairy Dock. ii. Lift cattle feed and allied products from milk plant/stores to various Societies/Dairy Farms/MCC/BMCs. b) Hiring of Diesel Car for Field/Extension work/ Marketing work etc. i. Swift Dzire, Toyota Etios or equivalent. ii. Bolero iii. Bolero Camper or equivalent.	02 No's 01 No. 01 No. 01 No. 01 No.
6.	For Verka Jalandhar Dairy i. Transportation of LSHS Premium, FO & LDO from panipat, Mathura Refinery to Milk Plant, Jalandhar. ii. Ventilation Fan (Motor 1.5 HP).	Annual 100 No's
7.	For Verka Ludhiana Dairy Transportation of Ambient Products, Milk Powder between different stations.	One year with extension up to one year
8.	For Verka Amritsar Dairy Hiring of insulated Single Portion Road Milk tankers (Capacity-10000 ltr.) for the transportation of milk from BMC/MCC.	Two Year/ 05 No's

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

1018/12/2025-26/8998 General Manager (Purchase)

Mega Ex-Servicemen Rally Organised at Agartala Military Station

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Agartala

Albert Ekka Brigade of Red Shield Division under the aegis of Spear Corps successfully organised a State Level Mega Ex-Servicemen Rally at Agartala Military Station on 02 March 2026.

The rally witnessed enthusiastic participation of over 1500 veterans and Veer Naris from all eight districts of Tripura, reaffirming the Indian Army's steadfast commitment towards the welfare and well-being of its veteran community.

The event was graciously attended by Shri Indrasena Reddy Nallu, Governor of Tripura as the Chief Guest along with the presence of senior military and civil dignitaries including Lt Gen Abhijit S Pendharkar, UYSM, AVSM, SM, GOC Spear



Corps. During the programme, veterans and Veer Naris were aptly felicitated in recognition of their dedicated service and supreme sacrifice for the service of the nation. A wide range of comprehensive facilitation stalls to include ECHS assistance, SPARSH pension support,

Aadhaar facilitation, banking services for defence veterans and medical services like consultation and on-the-spot distribution of medicines were also established to address the welfare needs of veterans.

In addition, a "Know Your Army" display was also



organised to spread general awareness and interest about the Indian Army among the citizens of Tripura and NCC cadets.

The display highlighting the ethos, operational capabilities, modern equipment and career opportunities in the Army, fostered greater

military-civil connect and inspired the youth.

The event concluded with vibrant cultural programmes reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the region further strengthening the bond between the Armed Forces and the people of Tripura.

Mercedes-Benz India rolls out V-Class MPV at ₹1.4 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

German premium car maker Mercedes-Benz India on Monday said it is hopeful of posting growth in its vehicle sales next fiscal, though it may not be in double digits, as it rolled out a locally-assembled V-Class luxury MPV, priced at ₹1.40 crore.

The company also said domestic market for the MPV segment has evolved post-Covid for the luxury MPV segment, which is also evident in the Top-End Vehicle sales, which grew 11 per cent last year.

"Indian fundamentals are quite strong, so growth should be possible. But I would still not peg a double-digit growth," Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director and CEO Santosh Iyer said.

The company was flattish on volumes in the Calendar Year 2025 so this financial year will be in similar direction, he said. He, however, sounded



optimistic of growth in CY 2026, saying, "March is the biggest month in this quarter so a lot will depend on how March pans out. If you look at the local economic setup, I think we have a strong GST collection and a lot of inquiries as well. But luxury is also a sentimental one sometimes these geopolitical topics may have an impact."

He said the company has already increased price in January and the second price increase will take place in April so these are also "dis-

ablers to some extent". "So we have to wait and see but overall we still feel this year should deliver growth, some growth," Iyer said.

The all-new six-seater V-Class, which has made a comeback in the domestic first firm being introduced in 2019, comes with an extra-long wheelbase and debuts the petrol engine for the first time in India.

Besides, its AIRMATIC air suspension on both petrol and diesel is specifically developed for Indian roads,

the company said. "We are delighted to introduce the all-new V-Class for the Indian market, redefining the concept of a 'private suite' offering luxury, space and privacy to our exclusive customers. "The V-Class addresses a growing trend amongst India's opulent customers and trend setters, who seek an oasis of personal space, tranquility and privacy, while travelling in the lap of luxury. The decision to start the local production of the V-Class further reinforces our India com-

mitment," he said. On bringing the V-Class back to the domestic market, he said, "Post-Covid we have seen a clear growth in the top-end vehicle segment, which grew by 11 per cent last year (for the company)." "So clearly the market dynamics have changed in the top-end segment pre- and post-Covid. Secondly, we could have brought this car a bit earlier as well but we didn't have an India-specific product because our customers gave very clear feedback." "First we got the product right, then we said if this product has to come in it would be in the region of Rs 2-odd crores and we said that maybe localising will help us to position this car at 1.40-crore which is a sweet spot to expand the market," he added.

This would be Mercedes-Benz India's 12th model to be produced at the company's Chakan Manufacturing facility in Pune, which has the capacity to produce 20,000 cars annually.



BRIEFLY

New Delhi to host SJFI National Convention



The Sports Journalists Federation of India (SJFI) National Convention will be held from March 13 to 16, marking the return of the annual gathering to the national capital after 23 years. The National Convention, organised by the Delhi Sports Journalist Association (DSJA), will also celebrate the Golden Jubilee of SJFI, making it one of the most significant editions in its history.

SJFI is recognised and affiliated with the world body of sports journalists, the International Sports Press Association (AIPS). The National Convention will bring together sports journalists from the North, East, West and South Zones, along with leading figures from Indian sport, administration and broadcasting. The four-day programme includes a Grand Sports Conclave featuring top administrators and Olympic icons, the JK Bose Inter-Zonal T20 Cricket Tournament, the AC Bali Table Tennis Tournament, multi-dimensional family and youth engagement activities like the Modern Pythian Games, and a grand Finals and Closing Ceremony.

Modern Pythian Games to debut at Youth Delphic Games



The Modern Pythian Games will touch a historic milestone when India sends its first national delegation of youth artists to the first Youth Delphic Games of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Member Nations in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The 65-member Indian delegation will depart on March 22 for Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, which currently holds the Chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This marks the first occasion that an Indian team of artists will represent the country as an officially structured national delegation, on the lines of international sporting events. The Indian contingent comprises 41 young artists – 21 from Delhi, 10 from Himachal Pradesh, four from Karnataka, and one each from Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttarakhand and Haryana. The participants will compete across disciplines including folk music, dance, singing, pop music, DJ arts, visual arts, arts and crafts, and piano. The 1st Youth Delphic Games are being hosted by the Mayor of Bishkek in collaboration with the International Delphic Committee, Moscow, the apex body organising Delphic Games across the CIS region. The Games draw inspiration from the ancient Pythian Games, which celebrated excellence in arts and creativity. Bijender Goel, founder of the Modern Pythian Games, will address a special session of SCO Member Nations during the event.

Diksha Dagar finishes T-20 at NSW Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Wollongong (Australia)

Diksha Dagar, the lone Indian to make the cut, finished with yet another solid round to pick up a top-20 finish at the Women's NSW Open, here.

Diksha, who began the week with a 6-over 77 and was in danger of missing the cut, finished the week with a round of 68 on Sunday that gave her a 8-under total of 276 for a T-20 finish.

Agathe Laisne was crowned the Ladies European Tour (LET) winner after overcoming a crowded leaderboard on a dramatic final day.

The French golfer followed up her third round 64 (-7) with a 65 (-6) in the final round to secure a one-shot victory over Thailand's April



Angurasarane and Korean amateur Soomin Oh on 16-under par. This came after opening with rounds of 72-67 during a rain-hampered first couple of days.

The other three Indians in the field, Hitaashee Bakshi, Pranavi Urs and Avani Prashanth missed the cut in the weather-hit event.

Laisne has in the past won one Epon Tour title which came in 2023 and two LET Access Series (LETAS) wins which both came in 2020.

She also becomes the second LET winner of the season after Charley Hull won the PIF Saudi Ladies International.

In solo fourth finished English rookie Charlotte Heath on 13-under par. The LET debutant finished with a flurry at Wollongong Golf

Club going six-under par for her final six holes.

Australia's Sarah Kemp, Germany's Alexandra Forsterling and England's Caley McGinty finished the week T5 on 12-under par.

Eight players rounded off the top-10 in T8 on 11-under par including Australian amateur Amelia Harris.

Laisne moves into a tie for 1st with Hull after collecting 500 points for the win. Angurasarane moves into T2 with South Africa's Cassandra Alexander after her brilliant week – one which included a hole-in-one on Saturday. Heath soars into fifth after collecting 180.00 points.

Next up on the LET's 2026 Australia swing is a trip north of Sydney to Magenta Shores for the Australian Women's Classic.

Stranded Sindhu to miss All-England Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Birmingham

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu is set to miss the All England Championships starting here on Tuesday after being stranded in Dubai amid the US bombing of Iran and the resultant air space closure in the Gulf region.

Travel disruptions have marred the build-up to the Super 1000 event, with Sindhu stuck in Dubai since Saturday after flights were suspended amid following US and Israeli strikes on Iran and the subsequent retaliation by Tehran.

Sindhu and her team, including Indonesian coach



Irwansyah Adi Pratama, had a narrow escape after an explosion near their place of stay. They were subsequently moved to a secure location as tensions flared across the Gulf.

The Indian ace was sched-

uled to face Thailand's Supanida Katethong in the opening round but with Dubai airspace and airport continuing to be closed, she will be forced to pull out of the tournament.

watch, maintaining "real-time oversight of the situation and stand ready to assist delegations experiencing delays or route changes."

"This includes reviewing and preparing potential contingencies within the competition schedule should any players experience delayed arrival," it said.

While Sindhu's participation remains uncertain, some of her fellow shuttlers have managed to reach Birmingham via alternate routes of Singapore and Africa. However, it remains to be seen how the long and taxing travel will impact their preparations.

Aaron Rai finishes T-23rd, Yellamaraju is Tied-17th

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Palm Beach Gardens

Aaron Rai shot a modest even par 71 on the final day to sign off Tied-23rd despite being in contention for a Top 10 finish for much of the week at the Cognizant Classic.

The Indo-British golfer had just one birdie and one bogey in the final round. With cards of 68-69-69-71, he totalled seven-under for the week.

Another player of Indian-origin Sudarshan Yellamaraju (68) finished Tied-17th at eight-under after cards of 68-72-68-68.

Colombian Nico Echavarría



did not make a bogey all weekend and shot five-under 66 to win despite being three shots back with three holes left. The win earned Echavarría a trip to the Masters in April.

Messi, Segovia rally Inter Miami victory over Orlando City

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Orlando

Lionel Messi scored twice in a four-goal second half, defender Telasco Segovia added a goal and two assists and defending champion Inter Miami rallied to beat Orlando City 4-2 on Sunday night, winning for the first time at Inter and Co. Stadium.

Messi took a pass from Segovia and scored in the 57th minute to pull Inter Miami (1-1-0) even at 2-2 and Segovia scored unassisted in the 85th for the lead.

Messi put the finishing touch on the victory when he scored off a free kick in the 90th. The reigning MVP's first two goals of the season give him 52 in his first 55 regular-season MLS matches - 51 of them in his last 49 appearances.



Marco Pasalic took a pass from Ivan Angulo and scored in the 18th minute to give Orlando City (0-2-0) a 1-0 lead. Pasalic has scored in four straight matches against Inter Miami.

Defender Griffin Dorsey set up Martin Ojeda for a goal six minutes later for a 2-0 advantage that stood through halftime.

Inter Miami cut it to 2-1 four minutes into the second half on Mateo Silvestri's first career goal. Defenders Segovia and Facundo Mura had assists as the 20-year-old forward found the net in his fifth career appearance.

Segovia had eight goals and six assists as a rookie last season, while Mura collected his first assist in his first season.

Dayne St. Clair, the reigning goalkeeper of the year, turned away three shots – all in the second half of his second start with Inter Miami.

Maxime Crepeau had four saves in his second start for Orlando City.

Teenager Colin Guske, 19, will miss Orlando City's next match after the rookie picked up two yellow cards in his first start – the second one led to his exit in the 88th minute.

Inter Miami, which had never won in its previous nine trips to Orlando, was coming off a 3-0 road loss to Los Angeles FC.

Orlando City swept Inter Miami during the regular season last year and leads the all-time series 8-7-4.

PCB considering financial penalties on Pak players for T20WC debacle

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

Livid with the Pakistan team's early elimination from the T20 World Cup, the country's cricket board is contemplating financial penalties on the players for their below-par show.

A reliable source said that while reports of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) deducting remuneration of the players were incorrect, appropriate action is being considered in the wake of the team's exit from the Super Eight stage of the event co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

"No final decision has been taken on this as yet. But yes



it is under consideration to financially penalise the players," he confirmed to PTI without revealing the details.

He said it is being debated whether it would be the right step to hit the players financial-

ly. Pakistan failed to qualify for the semifinals and lost to big teams like arch-foes India and England while their Super Eight game against New Zealand was washed out.

Tyler Reddick makes NASCAR history at COTA

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Austin (Texas)

Tyler Reddick became the first driver in NASCAR Cup Series history to win the first three races of the season with a victory at the Circuit of Americas.

Driving a Toyota co-owned by Michael Jordan, Reddick won the season-opening Daytona 500 and a week later at Atlanta, then won from the pole in the first road course race of the year on Sunday.

Reddick held off hard-charging Shane van Gisbergen, the Trackhouse driver and the series' dominant road driver, over the final 20 laps. Jordan, the basketball Hall of Famer, was with Reddick's 23XI pit crew



exchanging high fives as Reddick crossed the finish line.

Van Gisbergen, who won five of six road course races in 2025, lost his bid for a record-tying sixth consec-

utive road win. The only road course race he didn't win last season was in Austin.

Reddick was just too good all weekend in pursuit of history. His 11th career victory was also his second at COTA,

a track built for Formula 1, and the first time he's had multiple victories a track. He won at COTA in 2023. It wasn't easy. Reddick had van Gisbergen on his bumper for several laps in the final stage, but was able to keep him behind. Van Gisbergen began to fall farther and father behind over the final six laps.

Rough day for rookie Zilisch: Trackhouse Cup Series rookie Connor Zilisch came into the weekend with the expectation that he might be the one to end van Gisbergen's dominance on road courses.

But Zilisch's weekend began with a surprisingly poor qualifying position of 25th and got worse Sunday

when he got spun on the restart for stage two. Zilisch fought back into contention for the win in the final stage, but his race effectively ended when he was spun again in a restart out of a caution with 16 laps to go. He finished 14th.

Bowman had to bail out: Hendrick Motorsports driver Alex Bowman had to get out of his car with about 20 laps to go after complaining about being sick.

He was replaced by Myatt Snider who had been working as a pit spotter for the Fox broadcast. Snider had to scramble to put on his race suit and get in the car.

Keselowski finishes race while still recovering from broken leg

Gukesh blunders to hand Abdusattorov another victory

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Prague (Czech Republic)

The fortunes of World Champion D Gukesh did not change for the fifth day running as the Indian blundered from a position of strength to lose to nemesis Nodirbek Abdusattorov at Prague International Chess Festival here.

Just a month back Gukesh had lost to Abdusattorov through a blunder from a decent position during the Tata Steel Masters but the fifth round here was even more heartbreaking as the Indian did everything right for the major part of the middle game and seemed like cruising through to an easy victory.

Employing a new strategy as black, Gukesh tormented the white's king early in the opening and created enough weaknesses for the computer to volunteer that he was closing in on his first victory in Masters section of the tournament.

However, the ticking of the clock had its final say as the Indian faltered in the closing stages of the first time-control.

Abdusattorov almost returned the favour but this was simply not Gukesh's day as another blunder saw white advancing his pawn to glory.

If Nodirbek was lucky, there seems no stopping the Dutch Grandmaster Jorden van Foreest who climbed to number 11 in world ranking



in live ratings following his fourth victory in five games.

On the receiving end was Hans Moke Niemann of United States who made a single error that cast the dye decisively in Foreest favour. The day produced all deci-

sive games in the 10-player round-robin tournament and defending champion Aravindh Chithambaram succumbed to his third defeat in five games, giving David Anton Guijarro of Spain something to rejoice

before the lone rest day. Local star David Navara continued with his excellent run and grinded Uzbek Nodirbek Yakubboev what was certainly the game of the day while in the other duel Iranian Parham Maghsoodloo scored over Vincent Keymer of Germany.

With Foreest on four points, Abdusattorov and Navara are close on his heels a half point behind. Guijarro is the lone occupant on the fourth spot on 3 points, half a point clear of Maghsoodloo while Vincent Keymer is joint sixth on two points alongside Yakubboev.

Gukesh, Aravindh and Niemann occupy the last three spots on just 1.5 points.

MoS sports announces athletics events in 250 districts on IWD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Over two lakh girls across 250 districts nationwide will compete in ASMITA athletics events on March 8 and 9 to mark the International Women's day, Minister of State for Sports Raksha Khadse announced on Monday, advocating increased participation of women in sports to bolster India's 2036 Olympic bid.

The event, which is a part of Sports Ministry's initiative, will also set the ball rolling for the creation of a pool of women technical officials across the country, keeping



in mind the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad and India's bid to become an Olympic host.

The International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated on March 8.

ASMITA (Achieving Sports Milestone by Inspiring Women) is a part of Khelo India Scheme's mission to promote sports among women through leagues. The initiative started in 2021.

Across 250 locations nationwide, 100m, 200m, and 400m races will be held in the Under-13, 13-18 and 18+ categories. Each venue will deploy five Technical Officials, 10 Volunteers, one Competition Manager, a Past Champion Athlete (PCA) and District Youth Officer to manage the events.



Sanju needed a break after NZ series, says Gambhir

KUSHAN SARKAR ■ Kolkata

Sanju Samson is a man of unquestionable talent but his wretched run in the bilateral series against New Zealand forced the team management to give him a break to ease the mounting pressure ahead of T20 World Cup, head coach Gautam Gambhir said after the Kerala player took the hosts into the semi-finals with his epic knock.

Samson produced an unbeaten 97-run knock under pressure, anchoring a tricky 196-run chase against the West Indies on Sunday night. "Obviously, he had a tough series against New Zealand. So sometimes it's important to give him (Samson) a break

as well, because you want to get the guy off that pressure situation as well," head coach Gambhir replied to a query from PTI at the post-match press conference.

After being sent down the order in the Asia Cup which disturbed his rhythm, Samson got a full series against New Zealand but poor sequence of scores — 10, 6, 0, 24, 6 — led to critics writing his epitaph.

Samson didn't start against the USA in India's tournament-opener but Abhishek Sharma's ill-health brought him back for the Namibia game before being dropped again. A tragedy with Rinku Singh (death of his father) and in their bid to break the monotony of way

too many left-handers at the top-order, prompted the team management to bring the opener back.

So what kind of conversations did the coach have with Samson to keep him in right frame of mind as it becomes difficult for a player if he is consistently in an out of the squad?

"I have conversations with everyone and the most important thing is the guys who are part of this squad, are world class players and that's why they are representing the country. We always knew the talent that Sanju had. Three T20 hundreds, not many people have it, so we always knew that.

"And we always knew that whenever we need him in the



World Cup game, he'll come and deliver for us." Gambhir believes that seeds of his match-winning

knock against the West Indies were sown during his quick-fire 15-ball-24 against Zimbabwe in the previous

game when he replaced Rinku. "Against Zimbabwe, he delivered for us. We got a

start that we wanted in the first three overs. And today, again, from where he left against Zimbabwe, he showcased his talent. And this is what we expect from Sanju to do more consistently."

The hallmark of Samson's innings was the pace at which he scored the runs. He went at a strike-rate of nearly 200 (194) yet it never looked as if he was going hammer and tongs. Even Gambhir agreed.

"I actually thought that he never accelerated the innings. It was just a very, very normal cricketing shots and I never saw any muscling the ball as well and that is the kind of talent he has."

Samson was seen hitting a

lot of balls through the ground and ran some quick twos, something that is usually not associated with his format.

"When you know that you are in control of the game and feeling good, you start hitting the ball really well in the nets."

His critics have always panned him for consistency but Gambhir believes that this knock is the beginning of many more such knocks from Samson.

"I have always said that he is a world class player, he is a great talent and hopefully he can kick off from now and hopefully we can see a lot more innings like this from Sanju. It was all about backing him. (PTI)

For too many years, we only spoke about certain contributions: Gambhir

KUSHAN SARKAR ■ Kolkata

For Gautam Gambhir, the essence of team sport is acknowledgement of every contribution big or small, which according to him was missing in Indian cricket for long.

Had Shivam Dube not smashed a couple of boundaries in the penultimate over, no one would have spoken about Sanju Samson's match-winning 97 against West Indies on Sunday, said the Indian head coach. Gambhir asserted that till he is the coach, every contributions will get an honourable mention.



"Glad you're talking about every contribution because for many years, we've only spoken about certain contributions. This is a team sport, and this will always remain a team sport," Gambhir said, speaking in his inimitable style although without refer-

ring to certain contributions. "For me, Shivam's two boundaries are as important as Sanju's 97 because if he hadn't hit those two boundaries, you won't even spoken about it (97-run knock).

"The big contribution makes headlines. The small contribution, the contribution that can help the team win, cross that line, are very important."

Gambhir has underlined his team philosophy and till he is around there won't be any special contribution.

"And that's why I say that this is going to be the philosophy going forward till I am there." (PTI)

Switched off phone, social media: Samson on dealing with lows

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

India opener Sanju Samson shut down his phone and social media accounts to ensure that he did not lose self-belief during a lean patch that ended with a match-winning knock in the do-or-die T20 World Cup game against the West Indies here.

Samson smashed a 50-ball 97, dotted with 12 fours and four sixes, to steer the side home in a steep chase of 196 in the must-win Super Eight game here on Sunday.

The 31-year-old was brought back to the opening slot following India's heavy loss to South Africa in the Super Eight opener, to break the left-handed monotony

of the defending champions' struggling top-order.

"Shot selection was something I kept working on. I did not want to change too much because I knew I had performed with the same setup, so I kept believing in myself, switched off my phone, switched off social media and listened to my own self," Samson said on Star Sports after India's five-wicket win here on Sunday.

"I am very happy it happened in a very special game." Samson was, in fact, a lone warrior last night with some support from skipper Suryakumar Yadav (18) and Tilak Varma (27).

"It was a bit of a difficult chase. Looking at our batting



power, I felt that chasing 190-odd at Eden Gardens, when dew comes in, gets a bit easier, but losing wickets

at regular intervals made it challenging," the wicket-keeper-batter acknowledged. "To be honest, that's where

my experience and my role played a big part. I got a good start, but when the wickets kept falling, I felt I needed to finish the game and take it till the last moment.

"Normally you feel like doing it, but it doesn't happen all the time, so I am very grateful it happened in this game...When you are chasing a score like this in a pressure game, you take different options and play more boundaries rather than looking at risk-taking options," he added.

Speaking on his run of underwhelming scores prior to last night, including the home series against New Zealand, Samson elaborated on the changes he made to his technique.

I take blame as captain: Shai Hope on WI exit from T20WC

TAPAN MOHANTA ■ Kolkata

Taking responsibility for the West Indies' elimination from the T20 World Cup, skipper Shai Hope said he should have batted faster at the top to post a more challenging target for India in their must-win Super Eight game here.

Defending champions India chased down a fairly stiff 196-run target to knock the former winners out of the tournament at the Eden Gardens here on Sunday.

The visitors appeared at least 20 runs short as Hope ate up 33 balls for his 32, striking at just over 96, including 17 dot balls that probably cost them heavily in a high-scoring contest.

"Yes, I'll take the blame. I should have batted a lot faster — if that's what you want me to say," said Hope in the post-match media interaction without dodging any tough question, here on Sunday.

"When you're leading, you want to put your hand up and set the tone at the top. It didn't happen for me today. I just didn't get going today," he conceded.

"But in situations like this, when you're struggling, everyone struggles. But I don't think I was batting badly."

India had the perfect plan to tighten the marauding Windies after Suryakumar Yadav opted to bowl. He went in with Arshdeep Singh,



Hardik Pandya and Axar Patel in the powerplay and they did their job, keeping Hope quiet early.

It was then that mystery

spinner Varun Chakravarthy, held back deliberately for the middle phase, bowled him with a delivery that skidded through to rattle the stumps.

Though opener Roston Chase's acceleration and the late flourish from Rowman Powell and Jason Holder lifted West Indies to 195/4, the total felt under-par on a good Eden surface with dew aiding the chase.

Hope, however, said the shortfall of runs was not for lack of intent.

"It was a bit of both. I hit a few fielders and they bowled well. As much as you'd love to hit every ball for six, it doesn't happen. It's just that I was hitting the fielders and then trying to play the situation a bit more.

"Obviously, I wanted to bat a little bit deeper into the innings and face most of the spin threat in the middle," he explained.

Hope further admitted that the powerplay phase could have been better utilised by his team.

"We wanted 65-70 in the powerplay. We were 45 without loss, so we had a platform. With the batting depth we have, I didn't see it as a big issue at the time, but we didn't execute as well as we wanted."

Calling it a fine-margin contest, he said: "It's always a game of small margins. There are so many moments you can look back at and say maybe we should have done a little more or a little less of something else. But one team has to win."

He further said the conditions aided the chasing side and rued lost toss. (PTI)

Everybody wants Sanju to do well: Sunil Gavaskar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The iconic Sunil Gavaskar says Sanju Samson is such a "nice guy" that everyone wants him to do well and his clutch knock against the West Indies must have taken the pressure off everyone's shoulders.

Samson broke his sequence of low scores with a match-winning 97-run knock at the big stage in a high-stakes T20 World Cup game against the West Indies in Kolkata on Sunday night.

"This knock of 97 not out takes the weight off not just Sanju Samson's shoulders, but off everyone who knows what a fine player he has been. He has had ups and downs, and we have felt them too because he is such a nice guy. Everybody wants him to do well," said Gavaskar on a Star Sports show.

Samson endured a lean patch in the lead-up to the World Cup, with a string of low scores failing to reflect his true potential.

"All Indian cricket fans will be happy that this sincere cricketer has got the success he deserves."

India will now face England in the semi-finals in Mumbai on Thursday.

Gavaskar said a match-winning performance capped with a century would be the icing on the cake for Samson.

"To be the Man of the Match in a must-win game is a dream come true. You could see the emotions on Sanju's face after he hit the winning runs. He was three runs short of a hundred and it would have been fantastic had he



reached the three-figure mark.

"But maybe another hundred is on the way in some other match. It was not an easy target to chase down, but this set of players didn't give up and they pulled off the unbelievable."

Breaking down how India managed a tough 196-run chase against a formidable side, Gavaskar said avoiding too many dot balls was the key.

"Having a set batter at one end is very beneficial. The other batter can look to knock singles and give more strike to the set batter. That way, there are not too many dot balls. In T20 cricket, the idea is to have as few dot balls as possible," he said.

"I think the Indian team has realized that. If you look at the teams with the lowest percentage of dot balls, India are pretty high up there. I am not saying they are the best, but they are up there. That is where half the battle is won."

"Out of 120 deliveries, if you score runs off 80 to 85 balls, you give yourself a real chance to chase scores like 190 to 200 and India did exactly that against the West Indies."



After Zaheer, BCCI reaches to Harbhajan for off-spinners camp

KUSHAN SARKAR ■ Kolkata

Former India greats Zaheer Khan and Harbhajan Singh have been approached by the BCCI for specialised camps at the Centre of Excellence (COE) in Bengaluru with the "Targetted Players" asked to attend them.

The list of the targeted players is prepared by the BCCI on the basis of potential senior India prospects who have done well at the age group and first class levels, and have also played for India A and, may be, a few games for senior team.

Former left-arm seamer Zaheer Khan is already in Bengaluru for a five-day camp with the young pacers who could be knocking the doors of senior side or have played a few games for them. It is learnt that the COE's Head of Cricket VVS Laxman approached his former teammates for specialised camps — four to five days — to help the Gen-Next of Indian cricket match ready.

Zaheer, Harbhajan and Anil Kumble for specialised camps. Bhajji is trying to work out the dates for four-five day 'Off-spinners' camp'. He is looking forward to help the upcoming prospects who have done well at the age-group and India A level and work with them.

"This is a welcome initiative where those who have played 100 plus Tests for India are sharing their experiences with Gen-Next," a BCCI source privy to development told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

There is a chance that Anil Kumble, the highest Indian wicket taker across Tests and ODIs, has been requested to hold a wrist spinners' camp.

It is understood that the specialised camps will be held before the start of the Indian Premier League as lot of these players will have to link up with their respective IPL teams. Inviting former greats for specialised camps at the erstwhile NCA started at the time when Jagmohan Dalmiya took charge as BCCI chief. (PTI)

Afghanistan Tour of India: One off Test in Mullanpur from June 6-10

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Afghanistan will kick off their upcoming tour of India with a one-off Test match, followed by three one-day internationals in June, the BCCI said on Monday.

"Afghanistan will play one Test match followed by a three-match One-Day International (ODI) series. The Test match will be played in New Chandigarh from June 6 to June 10, 2026," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said in a release. The Test match however is not a part of India's World Test Championship cycle. It is understood that now the



white ball focus will shift towards 50 over cricket looking at 2027 World Cup and hence three ODIs have been arranged.

"The ODI series will commence on June 14, 2026, in

Dharamshala, with the subsequent matches scheduled in Lucknow (June 17) and Chennai (June 20). All ODI matches will begin at 1:30 PM IST. The matches for the IDFC First Bank Afghanistan

Tour of India are:
Test: New Chandigarh, June 6-10.
1st ODI: Dharamshala, June 14, 1:30 pm
2nd ODI: Lucknow, June 17, 1:30 pm.

Zimbabwe cricketers' family-like bond with fan group 'Castle Corner'

BHARAT SHARMA ■ New Delhi

Instead of heading back to the dressing room at the end of a gutsy but gruelling T20 World Cup campaign, Zimbabwe's exhausted cricketers sprinted towards a corner of the spectators' stands to thank half a dozen supporters who they consider family.

The supporters belong to the Castle Corner, a fan group that travels to cheer the Zimbabwe team.

Inspirational skipper Sikandar Raza was not part of the group that acknowledged the support from the loyal fans who secured last minute funding to travel to India for the Super 8 leg of the tournament after witnessing the team's unbeaten campaign in Sri Lanka.

However, he ran towards the 'Castle Corner' after finishing a TV interview following his special all-round performance, albeit in a five-wicket loss to South Africa.



Castle Corner holds a special place in the heart of the players, so much so that every member of the team knows the fans and their family members by name.

For background, Castle Corner is the name of a stand at the Harare Sports Club back home.

With their infectious energy, the members of the group also brought the neutral Delhi residents on their side during Sunday's game.

Every dismissal was hugely cheered as Zimbabwe took three wickets in the powerplay after posting a below 153 for seven. Proteas eventually chased down the target comfortably.

The love and respect for Zimbabwe was because of their giant-killing run in the tournament. A team that was toiling in nondescript locations 18 months ago pulled off upsets against the mighty Australia and Sri Lanka.