

## Balochis take on Pak army

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi/ Islamabad

Security forces rescued 190 passengers from a hijacked train, killing 30 Baloch militants in Pakistan's restive Balochistan, as they continued to battle heavily-armed insurgents for a second day on Wednesday.

The Jaffar Express, carrying some 400 passengers in nine coaches, was going from Quetta to Peshawar when militants derailed it using explosives and hijacked it.

The Baloch Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attack on Tuesday when they said they killed six soldiers. However, there has been no confirmation from the Pakistani authorities on casualties.



A paramilitary soldier takes position at a railway station near the attack site of a passenger train by insurgents in Mushkaf in Bolan district of Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province

The security forces, including the military and frontier corps, are battling the militants who took control of the train near the mountainous terrain of Gudalar and Piru Kunri in a tunnel 160 kilometres from Quetta.

The Balochistan government spokesman, Shahid Rind, said the operation would continue until all passengers were rescued. Rind said extra care was being taken by the security forces because of the hostage situation.

Officials said that some of the militants wearing vests loaded with explosives had formed groups of women and children and forced them to sit near them. Due to the presence of women and children with the suicide bombers, the operation was being conducted with utmost caution, they added.

A security source said that 30 militants had been killed so far in the clean-up and rescue operation, while 190 passengers have been rescued. Around 30 people who sustained injuries had been sent to hospitals. He said two drivers in the main engine and eight security personnel were killed during the operation.

This is the first time the BLA or any insurgent group in the Balochistan province have resorted to hijacking a passenger train, although in the last year, they have stepped up their attacks on security

forces, installations and foreigners in different parts of the province.

The security source said it was not yet clear how many militants were involved in the attack, but some of them were using satellite phones to remain in touch with their handlers.

The Pakistan Railways have set up an emergency desk at the Peshawar and Quetta Railway stations as frantic relatives and friends try to get some information about their loved ones on the train. Pakistan Railways had resumed train services to Peshawar from Quetta after a suspension of more than a month and a half.

The Pakistan media earlier reported intense firing and explosion near the tunnel, where the militants hijacked the train. The insurgents claimed that they freed women and children. However, their claim was contested by officials, with Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry saying the hostages were rescued by the security forces.

Rana Muhammad Dilwar, a district police officer in the area where the train was stopped, said the security forces had surrounded the area, but there were reports that the militants had taken some women and children as hostages.

There were around four to five government officials on the train, he added.

Tariq Mahmood, a senior official of Peshawar Railway Station, said that people should not pay heed to rumours on social media.

Balochistan has witnessed an uptick in terrorist attacks over the past year. In the past, the railway tracks in this area have been attacked by Baloch militants using rockets or remote-controlled bombs, and the BLA claimed responsibility for most of the attacks.

In October last year, Pakistan Railways announced the restoration of train services between Quetta and Peshawar after a suspension of more than a month and a half. A month later, at least 26 people were killed and 62 injured after a suicide blast ripped through a Quetta Railway Station.

Balochistan, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, is home to a long-running violent insurgency. Baloch insurgent groups frequently carry out attacks targeting security personnel, government projects and the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects in the oil and mineral-rich province.

## BJP sweeps Haryana local polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Chandigarh

Less than six months after scoring a hat-trick of wins in Haryana Assembly elections, the ruling BJP swept the civic polls in the state on Wednesday, bagging nine of the 10 mayoral seats. In the outgoing municipal corporations, BJP had its mayors in seven civic bodies. Congress, which was looking to turn around its electoral fortunes after suffering a defeat in the 2024 Assembly polls, failed to open its account. The party lost in Sonapat, where it had its mayor, and Rohtak, considered a stronghold of its stalwart and former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

Independent candidate Inderjeet Yadav was the only non-BJP nominee to win a mayoral seat. She was elected from Manesar, where municipal elections were held for the first time. Celebrations erupted in the BJP camp after the results, with party leaders in Chandigarh and many districts distributing sweets. There were early Holi festivities as jubilant BJP members applied 'gula' (colour) to each other.

After the results, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said people have put their stamp of approval on the works and policies of the BJP government and formed a "triple-

### TRIPLE ENGED SARKAR

MUNICIPALITY	MAYOR
• Sonapat	Rajiv Jain (BJP)
• Gurugram	Raj Rani (BJP)
• Faridabad	Praveen Joshi (BJP)
• Hisar	Praveen Popli (BJP)
• Rohtak	Ram Avtar (BJP)
• Karnal	Renu Bala (BJP)
• Yamunanagar	Suman (BJP)
• Ambala	Shailja Sachdeva (BJP)
• Panipat	Komal Saini (BJP)
• Manesar	Inderjeet Yadav (Indepnd)

engine government" which will work at a fast pace to realise the resolve of "developed Haryana-developed India".

Polls to elect mayors and ward members in seven municipal corporations — Gurugram, Manesar, Faridabad, Hisar, Rohtak, Karnal and Yamunanagar — were held on March 2. The bypolls for the mayoral posts in Ambala and Sonapat and the elections for presidents and ward members in 21 municipal committees were also held that day.

The results have dealt another blow to the

Congress which saw workers and leaders in districts switching over to the BJP ahead of the elections. The party state unit has been, in the past, plagued with infighting and factionalism unlike the BJP, which has a well-organised and strong organisational structure at the grassroots level.

Saini said people have put their stamp of approval on the works and policies of the BJP government. The "triple engine government", a reference to the saffron party being in power at the Centre, in the state as well as in the civic bodies, will undertake development at three times fast pace to realise the resolve of a "Viksit Haryana-Viksit Bharat", he told reporters on the sidelines of the ongoing State Assembly session.

"The results prove that people of Haryana want development and they have given their vote for good governance," Saini said. In Manesar, Independent candidate Inderjeet Yadav defeated her nearest BJP rival Sunder Lal by a margin of 2,293 votes to become the corporation's first-ever mayor. Nikhil Madaan was the outgoing Sonapat mayor and a Congress leader. Ahead of the 2024 Assembly polls, he joined the BJP and won the Sonapat Assembly seat. Senior BJP leader Rajiv Jain won from Sonapat this time.

## Delhi under reporting pollution: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Fine particulate matter could be absorbing moisture from Delhi's humid air during winters, which could result in an underestimation of the city's PM10 pollution by up to 20 per cent, according to a new study.

Researchers, including those from the University of Birmingham, UK, explained that the swelling of fine particulate matter by absorbing water from the humid air — hygroscopic growth — reduces the efficiency of sampling devices, possibly leading to underestimation.

The study, published in the journal NPJ Clean Air, "fills in the gap in the understanding of PM10 pollution in the most polluted megacity in the world."

New Delhi remained the world's most polluted capital city, according to the 2024 World Air Quality report by IQAir, a Swiss organisation.

PM10 particles, sized under a micron in diameter, are especially dangerous as they can penetrate lung tissue and enter the bloodstream, IQAir explains.

Study author Ying Chen, from the University of Birmingham, said, "When carrying out air quality assessments, it is crucial to consider hygroscopic growth and the potential for significant underestimation of pollution levels in humid conditions."

The greatest underestimates in pollution levels occur during the rush hours of winter mornings in December-January, when humidity is at its peak and

pollution is most severe, the researchers said.

"The underestimate can be up to 20 percent (or 50 micrograms per cubic meter) of PM10 concentration on average during humid winter morning rush hours," they wrote.

In contrast, pollution estimates during the monsoon season show negligible bias, as the swollen pollutant particles are washed out by heavy rainfall, the team added.

Controlling emissions from biomass burning and residential sources — which contain highly hygroscopic chlorine particles — could effectively improve air quality and reduce this bias, thereby helping improve how air quality is understood, the study suggested.

## Congress MLAs boycott Assembly



■ Protest suspension of Bahinipati  
 ■ To gherao Assembly on March 27

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Congress MLAs boycotted the Odisha Assembly proceedings on Wednesday in protest against the seven-day suspension of party MLA Tara Prasad Bahinipati.

Bahinipati was suspended after Government Chief Whip Saroj Pradhan moved a motion on Tuesday, requesting the Speaker to impose the suspension due to his alleged unruly and inappropriate behaviour in the House.

Both the Opposition Congress and the BJD demanded an immediate withdrawal of Bahinipati's suspension.

When the Question Hour began, Congress Legislature Party (CLP) Leader Rama Chandra Kadam sought to raise the issue through a point of order. However, Speaker Surama Padhy did not allow him to speak during the session. As a result, the Congress MLAs staged a walkout and sat on a dharna near the Mahatma Gandhi statue in the Assembly premises.

Following this, the Speaker directed

Government Chief Whip Saroj Pradhan to meet the Congress members and request them to return to the House. Pradhan, along with Minister Surabanshi Suraj, visited the dharna site and urged the MLAs to return and participate in the debate.

Meanwhile, the Opposition BJD also criticised the Speaker's decision to suspend Bahinipati. BJD leaders, including Deputy Leader Prasanna Acharya, Deputy Chief Whip Pratap Deb and senior MLAs Ranendra Pratap Swain and Arun Sahoo, met the Speaker in her chamber, requesting her to reconsider the suspension order.

Meanwhile, the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) on Wednesday announced plans to gherao the State Assembly on March 27 in protest against the alleged rise in atrocities against women and the suspension of senior party leader Tara Prasad Bahinipati from the Assembly for his 'unruly' behaviour.

The decision was taken during a meeting at the Congress Bhawan, chaired by OPCC president Bhakta Charan Das.

## Ukraine says it is open to 30 day ceasefire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jeddah

The Trump administration lifted its suspension of military aid and intelligence sharing for Ukraine, and Kyiv signaled that it was open to a 30-day ceasefire in the war with Russia, pending Moscow's agreement, American and Ukrainian officials said Tuesday following talks in Saudi Arabia.

The administration imposed the measures a week ago to push Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to enter talks to end the war with invading Russian forces.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US would present the ceasefire offer to the Kremlin.

"We're going to tell them this is what's on the table. Ukraine is ready to stop shooting and start talking. And now it'll be up to them to say yes or no," Rubio said. "If they say no, then we'll unfortunately know what the impediment is to peace here."

National security adviser Mike Waltz added: "The Ukrainian delegation today made something very clear, that they share President Trump's vision for peace."

Waltz said negotiators "got into substantive details on how this war is going to permanently end," including long-term security guarantees.

The announcements emerged as senior officials from Ukraine and the United States opened talks in Saudi Arabia focused on ending Moscow's three-year war against Kyiv. The discussions started only hours after Russia shot down over 300 Ukrainian drones. It was Ukraine's biggest attack since the Kremlin ordered the full-scale invasion of its neighbour.

President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, is expected to travel later this week to Moscow, where he could meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin, according to a person familiar with the matter but not authorized to comment publicly. The person cautioned that scheduling could change.

Earlier in the day, journalists were briefly allowed in a room where a senior Ukrainian delegation met with Rubio, who smiled at the cameras and when asked about his expectations for the meeting, gave a thumbs-up and replied, "Good."

Across the table, Ukrainian officials, including the country's top diplomat and defence chief, showed no facial expressions as the meeting got underway at a luxury hotel. However, Ukrainian presidential aide Andriy Yermak told reporters that the most important thing was "how to achieve a just and lasting peace in Ukraine."

## Road safety State Govt to launch 'Zero Accident Day'

Women to spearhead campaign  
 PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a major step towards road safety and behavioural change, the Odisha Government is set to launch a Zero Accident Day (ZAD) in the State for a 30-day campaign shortly.

Spearheaded by women, ZAD is a first-of-its-kind, multi-stakeholder movement that aims to create a cultural shift towards responsible road usage.

A high-level preparatory meeting in this regard was convened on Wednesday under the chairpersonship of Commerce and Transport Principal Secretary Usha Padhee.

Experts from IIT Madras presented key strategies to drive the ambitious campaign forward. Bringing together senior officials, law enforce-



ment agencies, urban planners and municipal bodies, the discussions focused on designing impactful interventions that will reshape road safety norms.

The Secretary underscored the need for collective responsibility and inter-departmental synergy in making the initiative a success. "Road safety is not just a policy, it is a mission that requires every citizen's participation. Through Zero Accident Day,

we are empowering communities, particularly women, to lead the charge in making our streets safer, smarter and more inclusive," she said.

The campaign would deploy innovative, evidence-based interventions to minimise accidents, promote responsible driving behaviours and cultivate a safety-first mindset among commuters. Women would play a pivotal role as ambassadors of change, leading

## In State Temp crosses 40 degrees this season

BBSR 36.6 deg; Cuttack 37 degrees  
 PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

As predicted by the weather office, the maximum temperature in the State crossed 40 degrees Celsius for the first time in this season on Wednesday.

Boudh town in western Odisha recorded the highest maximum temperature of 40.5 degrees on Wednesday, said the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) Regional Office here.

Balangir was the second hottest place in the State as it recorded the maximum temperature of 39.9 degrees.

Besides, Baripada, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Sundargarh and Titilagarh

recorded the maximum temperature between 39 and 40 degrees.

As per the IMD, six places, Hirakud, Bhawanipatna, Sonapur, Paralakhemundi, Bhadrak and Rourkela recorded the maximum temperature between 38 and 39 degrees.

The maximum temperature was 36.6 degrees in the capital city Bhubaneswar and 37 degrees in Cuttack. As per the IMD, the maximum temperature is very likely to rise by 2 to 3 degrees gradually across the State during the next five days.

The IMD has predicted heat wave conditions at several places across the State till March 17. It has issued an Orange warning for several districts including Jharsuguda, Samablpur, Balangir and Boudh till March 17.

## In Cuttack Man electrocutes stray dog to death

Locals demand stringent action  
 PNS ■ CUTTACK

In a disturbing incident, a man allegedly electrocuted a stray dog to death in the Shankarpur area under the Badambadi police station in Cuttack.

Sources said the dog died after coming in contact with an electrified fence constructed by the man.

The incident has triggered outrage in the area with residents demanding stringent action against the accused.

The dog became a target for defecating in the man's prop-



erty. In a bid to prevent the dog from entering his property, the accused made electrified fences around his house, due to which the dog came in contact with it and died.

Local animal rights activists are urging stronger enforcement of animal protection laws.

An investigation is underway to determine further legal action against the homeowner, who faces potential charges under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 (PCA).

Residents in the area have expressed their anger and dis-

## In Twin City Police issue strict norms for safe Holi

20 platoons to be deployed in BBSR

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Commissionerate Police has issued stringent guidelines for a safe and peaceful Holi in the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

As many as 20 police platoons would be deployed for maintaining law and order in Bhubaneswar.

As per the guidelines issued by the police, citizens have

been advised not to enter rivers or swimming pools after consuming alcohol. Playing Holi under the influence of alcohol would lead to strict action, including arrests.

In a bid to maintain safety, police along with Fire Services personnel would be deployed at all major river ghats. Besides, those who would create public nuisance or block roads in the name of Holi celebration would be taken into custody.

Besides, special focus would be given to curb the illegal sale of liquor. Moreover, the sale of

chemical-based colours would be restricted, allowing only herbal colours to be used for celebrations.

"I urge people not to enter water bodies in an intoxicated condition. We will deploy police, ODRAF and Fire Services teams at different river ghats. Besides, drunk driving will be monitored strictly," said Bhubaneswar DCP Jagmohan Meena. "As many as 20 platoons of force will be mobilised and IICs will be asked to conduct raids on illegal liquor hubs," Meena added.

## Journalists boycott Assembly proceedings

In protest against mobile phone ban

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Journalists staged a boycott of the State Assembly proceedings on Wednesday in protest of restrictions that prevented them from bringing mobile phones into the press gallery.

While no formal notice had been issued regarding the ban on mobile phones, security personnel at the entry gates stopped reporters from carrying their devices. In response, the journalists gathered near the Gandhi statue in the As-

sembly premises, protesting the Assembly Secretariat's decision. They announced that they would refrain from covering the proceedings until the mobile phone ban was lifted.

The journalists expressed their inability to carry out their professional duties due to the restriction and organised a sit-in near the Mahatma Gandhi statue, demanding the reversal of the decision.

This action came a day after images and videos of a scuffle between MLAs in the Assembly circulated widely on social media. Journalists,

however, emphasised their right to capture photographs and videos during the Question Hour.

The protest ended after a discussion with Speaker Surama Padhy, where it was agreed that mobile phones would be allowed inside the press gallery. However, the restriction on taking photos or videos during the proceedings remained in place. For print media outlets, the Information and Public Relations Department will deploy additional government photographers to capture adequate images of the Question Hour.

## Prez Murmu to come on 2-day visit

Starting March 24

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

President Droupadi Murmu will arrive in Odisha for a two-day visit from March 24. Her programmes include a visit to the Nilamadhaha Temple in Kantilo in Nayagarh district and attending the convocation ceremony of the Ravenshaw University in Cuttack.

In preparation for her visit, security arrangements, temporary accommodations and other logistical measures are being closely monitored. The district Collector and SP of Nayagarh have visited the Nilamadhaha Temple to oversee the arrangements.

The President's helicopter will land at the Paltan Padia



in Kantilo on March 24, following which she will proceed to the Nilamadhaha Temple. On the same day, she is also scheduled to visit Dhanchangada and Kaliapalli regions of the district.

On March 25, Murmu will attend the convocation ceremony of Ravenshaw University as its chief guest.

Notably, the President had earlier visited the State in January this year and graced the high-profile Pravasi Bharatiya Divas.

## Conf on world literature held at XIM Varsity



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The School of Liberal Arts, XIM University (New Campus), in association with the Department of English, hosted an international conference on the topic "Reimagining Existence: Emerging Perspectives in World Literature and Language" on March 10 and 11. The conference began with a welcome address by Dr PV Padma, Academic Dean, School of Liberal Arts. The inaugural address by Vice-Chancellor Fr Antony R Uvari set the tone for the day.

The inauguration also featured the release of the Book of Abstracts and the SLA Newsletter, marking a significant milestone in literary and linguistic research.

The conference witnessed keynote and plenary sessions from distinguished scholars from across the globe.

Prof David Anshen (University of Texas Rio Grande

Valley) delivered the keynote address on contemporary literary and cultural studies. The plenary speeches featured Prof Pramod K Nayar (University of Hyderabad), Prof Matthias Freise (University of Göttingen, Germany), Prof Rita S Kranidis (Montgomery College, Maryland, USA), Prof Avishek Parui (IIT Madras) and Prof Saugata Bhaduri (JNU, New Delhi), each offering insights into evolving literary narratives and linguistic transformations.

The Day 2 continued with engaging sessions, featuring additional plenary speeches and paper presentations, leading to a closing address by Fr S Antony Raj, Registrar, XIM University. The event showcased parallel paper presentations on Postcolonial Literature, Digital Humanities, and Language Studies, fostering lively discussions on the evolving role of literature and language.

## Will we continue studying in KISS or go back to forests?

Tribal students ask CM

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Former and present students of the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), along with the KISS Parents' Association, have come forward to oppose a conspiracy allegedly being carried out by two specific television channels to repeatedly defame and shut down KISS.

In a Press conference held here on Tuesday, the students stated that after the recent unfortunate incident at KIIT University, these TV channels have now shifted their focus to attacking KISS as a soft target. Various organisations have



strongly opposed and condemned this 22-day-long negative media coverage.

Over 40,000 tribal students have completed their education at KISS, and another 40,000 are currently studying there. The relentless negative coverage on baseless issues is resulting in mental harassment and distress to KISS students and their parents. Students and parents stated that in the last 33 years, their chil-

dren have studied at KISS without any complaints against the institution. They questioned why individuals who have never contributed to or cared about the wellbeing of tribal students are now attacking KISS. They alleged that this is a deliberate conspiracy to push tribal students back into illiteracy and poverty by tarnishing the image of KISS.

Tribals are peaceful by na-

ture, but if mental harassment continues, they will be forced to demonstrate across all districts, seek legal action, and involve the media. They urged the authorities to let the underprivileged tribal children study in peace without external interference.

Meanwhile, students and parents have already informed the Prime Minister, Chief Minister, MLAs, and MPs of Odisha about their concerns.

Expressing gratitude to all well-wishers, they have sought to know from the Chief Minister of Odisha if they should continue with their education at KISS or be forced back into the forests due to such conspiracies?

## BJD raises concerns over 2024 poll discrepancies

Seeks urgent reforms

RAJEEV RATHAN  
BHUBANESWAR

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has once again flagged serious discrepancies in the votes cast during the 2024 Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly elections, urging the Election Commission of India (ECI) to take immediate corrective measures. BJD parliamentarians submitted a memorandum to the ECI on Tuesday, reiterating their concerns and demanding urgent action.

In the memorandum, the party reiterated the concerns it had first raised in a memorandum submitted on December 19, 2024. Despite assur-



ances from the ECI during a meeting on December 23, 2024 promising a detailed response and a possible in-person discussion, the issues remain unaddressed, raising further doubts over the electoral process.

The BJD has pointed out inconsistencies in vote counts that it attributes to potential errors in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), human mistakes in data entry or a

combination of both. The party argues that such discrepancies compromise the integrity of the election results and demand urgent scrutiny.

Adding to its concerns, the BJD has criticised District Election Officers (DEOs) for failing to provide Forms 17C Part I & II, despite repeated requests spanning the past seven months. These documents, which contain booth-wise vote records, are crucial

for cross-verification. Several BJD candidates have already filed formal appeals with the ECI, seeking redressal of these irregularities.

To address these concerns and restore public confidence in the electoral system, the BJD has outlined a series of reform measures aimed at improving transparency and accountability in elections. The party has recommended periodic "process audits" of elections by in-

dependent auditors or the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India. The findings should be made public, aligning with best practices in other democracies.

To increase transparency, the BJD has called for structured involvement of citizen groups in monitoring elections from the initial stages to the final vote count. This, it argues, would boost public trust in the electoral process. The party has proposed real-time audits at polling booths and counting centers, ensuring that vote declarations happen only after discrepancies, if any, are resolved.

The BJD has demanded 100% tallying of Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail

(VVPAT) slips with EVM counts at every polling booth. It has further suggested using advanced counting machines for accuracy. The party has also urged the ECI to enforce a 30-day deadline for DEOs to provide Forms 17C Part I & II to citizens upon request. Timely access, it stated, is vital for ensuring accountability in the electoral process.

A BJD delegation, led by former MP Dr Amar Patnaik, met the ECI in New Delhi and submitted the memorandum. Other members of the delegation included Rajya Sabha MPs Dr Sasmit Patra, Debashis Samant, Manas Mangaraj, Sulata Deo, Majibulla Khan, Subashis Khuntia and Niranjana Bisi.

## HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

# Jayanarayan must know western Odisha is integral part of Odisha

Good-humoured, gentlemanly top BJP leader Jayanarayan Mishra recently made a public statement that the western part of Odisha should have remained independent instead of merging with modern Odisha in 1936 as he is inclined to believe the region was never an integral part of Odisha. He also hates the name 'Utkal' saying that is only the northern and eastern parts put together.

Evidently, he has never delved into the historical events of the great eastern State of India, severally known as 'Kalinga', 'Utkal' and 'Udradesh'. Kalinga was the majestic kingdom ruled by the great Jain monarch Kharabela in the 1st century BC. Much later, Gajapati Kapilendra Dev founded the Gajapati dynasty, named the kingdom 'Utkal' which he ruled from 1435 to 1466 AD. He had stretched his kingdom from the Ganga region to Bidar in the south.

In quite a few ancient chronicles and travelogues by foreign travelers, the other name 'Udra' is ex-



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

pressly mentioned indicating the 'Kalinga-Utkal' region where the people had similar cultural practices with regard to choice of food and cuisine, dress, and above all the wedding, birth of babies and death rituals.

Today so many centuries later, the people across the modern Odisha or Utkal have absolutely the same first names and surnames with minor exceptions due to the tribal and domiciled communities from across the country. Needless

to say, the people of western and eastern or costal Odisha eat the same food, marry the same way and mourn in similar manner with very quite unnoticeable differences. Thus, Odisha is wherever the Lord Jagannath sits in all divine glory. 'Utkal' is a popular name because of King Kapilendra Dev.

The biggest mark of 'Utkal', irrespective of linguistic dialects, is the worship of Lord 'Jagannath' an incarnation of Lord 'Vishnu' also known as 'Dadhiman' or his elder sibling Lord 'Balabhadra'. Across the southern, coastal and northern Odisha, one of these deities as the principal God is being worshipped with highest reverence. Not strangely, an important seat of the western region of Odisha called 'Kalahandi' also has a magnificent Dadhiman temple in Junagarh, where people worship Lord Jagannath with the same reverence as in Baripada, Paralakhemundi, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar and more places. Even more significantly, there is a beau-

tiful Jagannath temple in Bhatli near Bargarh, part of the undivided Sambalpur district.

Thus, though Puri houses the most famous Jagannath Temple, western Odisha also features important Jagannath shrines. The Dadhiman Temple in Junagarh has been existing since 1718 AD. The small city was the old capital of the 'Nagavamsi' kings of Kalahandi. The 'Brahmapura' Temple in the region is also considered one of the oldest Jagannath shrines, and its "Rath Chhuan" (devotees touching the chariot wheels) tradition is said to have spread across the entire western Odisha. Junagarh was a well-fortified area with a number of temples that have chaste Odia inscriptions.

So, western Odisha is an integral part of Odisha, also called reverently 'Utkal' for various reasons of glory and pride.

While great sons of the soil including barrister Madhusudan Das, the King of Paralakhemundi, Gopabandhu Das, Harekrishna Mahtab et al fought day in and day

out to have Odisha as an independent State based on language. Sambalpur and several parts of western Odisha were great Odia locations with unmatched poets like Gangadhar Meher and blind Saint Bhima Bhoi who have left behind great works of poetry in purest Odia language. For that matter, the modern Jharkhand was also an Odia region snatched away from the Odia mainland. Part of Chhattisgarh too was Odia location, which history has not chronicled methodically. The truth is that the so-called western Odisha has never had any other script than Odia. They only speak a beautiful dialect of Odia of which every Odia feels immensely proud. It is also undeniable a fact that majority of the western Odisha locations have ancient shrines of goddesses including Samaleswari and Manikeswari whom all Odias worship with utmost reverence and joy.

Jayanarayan Mishra, incidentally, has disapproved of the name 'Utkal' for no reason or rhyme. The whole region was famous for long

with that highly acceptable name which Rabindranath Tagore had recognised and placed in the national anthem. Names do not matter much; culture does. And whole of Odisha has truly one basic culture. If the so-called 'Kosal' was anyway different, the residents would have been using a specifically different script and vastly different language like Telugu or Tamil.

Jayanarayan had never broached this separatist topic or raised any specific narrative to prove western Odisha is not part of the main region. Two highly respectable Chief Ministers, Rajendra Narayan Singh Deo and Hemananda Biswal, had taken great pride in ruling Odisha as their motherland.

There is quite some murmur across the political circles that Jayanarayan is a perfect Chief Minister material who has been ignored badly. He, as the leader of the opposition, had made the life of the last ruling party miserable. He spoke a great deal of sense and put to shame many a biggie in the BJD. The BJP victory is also partly due

to Jayanarayan who exposed terrible flaws and weaknesses of many BJD front-liners. He had questioned the very existence of a make-believe 5T department which did not come under any ministry as per norm. He had also stood like a rock in the opposition bench to protect own party lawmakers when the powerful BJD bulls tried to attack and subdue the otherwise mild opposition members. But unfortunately, when victory came, the safe-guard biggies ignored him completely. He was not even rewarded with a ministerial berth. Perhaps for this heart-breaking reason, Jayanarayan is picking up this issue or that, no matter how inane or irrelevant, only to make his presence felt. On that score, he is not at fault. Anyone in his place would have turned virulent. He is still cool, by and large, except for the fact that he is wrongly encouraging parochial sentiments among a few. But for sure, he will calm down soon and take pride in the long-accepted name 'Utkal' and stop insisting on changing the heart-warming word in the state anthem.

Suddha Sabar community demands ST status

Mohana tehsil office gheraoed

A massive gathering of the Suddha Sabar community was witnessed on Tuesday in Mohana as thousands of members from Gajapati and Ganjam districts staged a protest against the revocation of their Scheduled Tribe (ST) status and not issuing caste certificates.

According to the demonstrators, the Suddha Sabar community has historically been recognised as an indigenous tribal group. However, their ST status has allegedly



been revoked, leading to severe hardships for thousands of people. Despite repeated appeals, caste certificates are being delayed for months, affecting students' education and employment opportunities.

Earlier, a protest march began from the Mohana High School ground, passing through the main market be-

fore reaching the tehsil office. The participants voiced their anger over bureaucratic hurdles, stating that young women and students were facing immense difficulties due to the non-issuance of caste certificates.

A representative of the Suddha Sabar Problem Solving Forum said, "Our commu-

nity has been part of this land for generations, preserving our traditions and tribal heritage. The government's decision to revoke our Scheduled Tribe status is an injustice that threatens our future. The delay in issuing caste certificates is not just an administrative lapse but a direct attack on our identity. We demand immediate restoration of our ST rights and the timely issuance of caste certificates."

The demonstrators submitted a memorandum to the authorities urging immediate intervention by the State Government to reinstate their rightful ST recognition and streamline the caste certificate process. As tensions escalated, the administration deployed security personnel to ensure law and order in the area.

In Brahmapur Kamdhenu, OMFED incentive schemes launched

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

A special event under the Chief Minister Kamdhenu Scheme and OMFED Farmer Incentive Programme was held at the Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC) on Sunday to strengthen Odisha's dairy sector and promote self-reliance.

Under this initiative, Rs 65 crore has been allocated for the OMFED, ensuring financial support for dairy farmers. During periods of milk shortage, farmers will receive an additional Rs 5 per litre as an incentive. The scheme also provides a 60-70 per cent subsidy for cattle and buffalo farming, 85 per cent insurance support and direct benefit transfer (DBT) to ensure seam-



less payments. New cooperative societies will be formed, and inactive ones will be revived to boost production. The State aims to increase daily milk production to 15,000 litres, ensuring economic stability for dairy farmers and advancing Odisha's journey toward self-sufficiency in dairy production.

Speaking on the occasion, Fisheries and Animal Resources Development and MSME Minister Gokulananda Mallik reaffirmed the government's commitment to empowering dairy farmers. He stated, "The Kamdhenu Scheme is a revolutionary step toward making Odisha self-sufficient in milk production. By provid-

ing direct financial aid, subsidies and insurance benefits, we are securing a stable livelihood for dairy farmers while fostering rural employment." The event was attended by Mayor Sanghamitra Dalai, OMFED Managing Director Vijay Amruta Kulange, Ganjam Collector Dibya Joti Parida, local MLAs and other senior officials.

In Rourkela Inter-State criminal nabbed in encounter

Was wanted in Odisha Jharkhand

A notorious criminal. Byas Lakua, wanted in several cases in Odisha and Jharkhand, was nabbed following an encounter with the Rourkela police on Tuesday night.

The encounter took place in the Akhayaasila Waterfall area under the Bisra police station of the city when Byas opened fire on police personnel when they tried to apprehend him. In retaliation, the police fired back and he suffered bullet injuries. Following the encounter, the accused was admitted to the Rourkela Government Hospital.

Multiple cases of robbery and murder are registered

against Byas in various police stations across Jharkhand and Odisha. His modus operandi involved committing crimes in Odisha and fleeing to Jharkhand.

Sources also added that the Rourkela police have now adopted a tough stance against criminals given a spurt in crimes in recent months. Notably, the encounter occurred amid similar operations in Sambalpur and Bhubaneswar.

In a similar instance, the Sambalpur police nabbed two cattle smugglers of West Bengal on Monday night after an encounter. In this case, criminals had opened fire at police personnel, following which a retaliatory measure was taken. Both the accused sustained injuries in their legs and were taken to hospital.

Organised by Kranti, Govt ITI Women's Day: Achievers feted in Brahmapur



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Voluntary organisation Kranti and the Government ITI, Brahmapur, jointly celebrated the International Women's Day with great pomp.

Dr Sandhya Rani Das, retired professor of the Department of Economics, Berhampur University, was the chief guest, while Dr Prabhathi Kumari Mohapatra, HM of Government High School Medical Campus, Monalisa Das, Scout and Guide Ranger, Siddha Bhairavi Higher Secondary School and Punam Behera, Assistant Environmental Scientist, Pollution Control Board, were the guests of honour. They made the students aware of the purpose and need of Women's Day and the importance of rights,

equality, and empowerment for all women and girls.

They emphasized on making all women proud and expressed their views on the use and effectiveness of sincerity.

Executive director of Kranti organization, Dr Debananda Dash presided over the function and said all should support women's power in the world.

ITI's ATO Suchitra Mishra and Sunanda Behera were felicitated with trophies and young journalist Itishree Patra was felicitated for her work efficiency. 400 ITI student contestants who participated in various competitions held earlier were felicitated with certificates. Artists of Kranti Institute along with female members and guests presented attractive dance and music. Finally, Nirmala Dash proposed vote of thanks.

CHRC holds Nat'l Human Rights Conference

Honours distinguished persons

PNS ■ MAYURBHANJ

The Citizens' Human Rights Clinic (CHRC), a leading non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights in India, hosted its 13th National Conference on March 9, in the quaint village of Kohi under the Moroda area in Mayurbhanj district.

The conference, themed "Stand up for Human Rights," drew attendees from across the country, including intellectuals, dignitaries, and local villagers from Kohi and neighbouring areas. The event was marked by significant participation and engagement from all stakeholders.

The conference was inaugurated by Additional Superintendent of Police, Mayurbhanj Goutam Kumar Kissan. Other notable dignitaries included



Professor Nirajan Barik, former Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science at Ravenshaw University as the chief guest; Prof Banshidhar Mallick of NIFFT, Ranchi; Dr Pradipta Kishore Panda, former Principal of Baripada College; Dr Shyama Dash, former Principal of Shrima College; Nitish Nivedan Barik, Team Lead at Accenture, Bengaluru; and Basanta Kumar Das, former Senior Bank Manager and president of the Retired Bank Officers' Association as guests of honour.

Kissan emphasized the crucial role of police in maintaining law and order and urged human rights activists to support police duties and crime control. Professor Nirajan Barik delivered a keynote speech that stressed vigilance against human rights violations and highlighted citizens' responsibilities toward environmental preservation and women's rights.

Other distinguished speakers such as Dr Dash, Prof Mallick, Rashmi Roul, Advocate Pratap Keshari Das, and others shared their insights on

various dimensions of human rights issues. These interactions fostered meaningful dialogue and deeper understanding among the audience.

As part of the proceedings, CHRC honored five eminent individuals for their contributions in fields such as art, literature, social service, and journalism. The awardees included Rama Chandra Mohanta - eminent writer; Dr. Anjali Tipiria - educationist and culture promoter; Sarat Chandra Behera - journalist; Chaturbhuj Patabandha - social activist; and Samarjit Tipiria - renowned Chhau Nritya artist. They were honoured with citations and uttariya. The conference concluded with the adoption of a resolution under the chairmanship of Dr Gopabandhu Mallick, Head of CHRC, Odisha. The resolution will be submitted to the President of India, Prime Minister, Governor of Odisha, and the State Chief Minister for further consideration.

'Women don't need gift, rather job for permanent income'

Says RC Khuntia

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Central and State Governments must ensure human rights and trade union rights of women and women workers. 50% of the population India and around the world are women. In spite of the all effort made by trade unions, UNO and ILO, women representation in all places is not visible. The kind gift of Odisha, Delhi and Maharashtra governments are not the permanent solution for making women self-dependent, said INTUC national vice-president and former Rajya Sabha member Dr Rama Chandra Khuntia.

The government should make all efforts to educate and

train the women to make them capable to do job and the government also should ensure that 50% income and employment should go to the women as women constitute 50% of the total population of our country, he stressed while addressing the International Women workers rally and convention at Brahmapur on Tuesday arranged by INTUC. Odisha Branch Women Workers' Committee president Pranati Mishra presided over the meeting. The conference unanimously resolved demanding 50% reservation of women in all employment and job and implementation of reservation of women in Parliament and Assembly at the earliest.

In Subarnapur Home Guard held for ganja smuggling



PNS ■ SONEPUR

Police detained a Home Guard on the charge of smuggling ganja in his scooter in the Binika area of Subarnapur district on Tuesday.

The Home Guard, identified as Prashant Sandha, was caught transporting the contraband on his scooter. He was later arrested and produced in court. The cops have also arrested his associates in this connection.

Prashant along with his accomplice was involved in ganja smuggling since a long time. The Binika police, acting on a tip-off, orchestrated a special

operation on the banks of Mahanadi river. During this sting operation, officers intercepted him with several packets of contraband.

Cops have confiscated approximately 8 kg of cannabis from Prashant and his aide. Both the accused were subsequently presented before the court. Further investigations are underway to determine the extent of their involvement in the narcotics trade. The investigation forms part of a broader effort to combat drug-related offences in the region, emphasising the strict measures being adopted by police to curb ganja smuggling.

Largest-ever 6.06L Ridley's come for nesting at G'matha

In 5 days RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

As many as 6,06,399 endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles came for mass nesting to two beaches in the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, the largest rookery of the species, from March 5 to March 10, stated Rajnagar Mangrove (forest) and Wildlife Division DFO Sudarshan Gopinath Jadav.

Such a huge number of Olive ridley sea turtles have not come for laying eggs in recent past, he added.

According to DFO Jadav, a record number of 6.64 lakh Olive Ridley turtles came for mass nesting at Gahirmatha marine sanctuary in 2018.

While 3.11 lakh endangered



Olive Ridley sea turtles came for mass nesting to Nasi-2 beach, 2.95 lakh female Olive Ridley sea turtles laid eggs at Ekakula Nasi beach.

This year, the forest personnel too spotted 8 tagged female

sea turtles with metallic tags during mass nesting. The most important thing is the turtles returned to Ekakula Nasi beach, after a gap of 33 years to lay eggs.

During last turtle season,

more than 95 percentage of nests were damaged at Nasi -2 due to over layering. But this year, the percentage of damage due to over layering would be less than 30 percentages, stated the forest officials.

Solar cold storage inaugurated in hunger-prone villages

CSR drive of Utkal Alumina

BADAL TAH ■ RAYAGADA

Once engrossed with tentacles of hunger deaths, Kashipur villages are now catching up with sustainable livelihood practices. Bilamal was one of such villages, where some tribals died consuming gruel prepared out of mango kernels during early 2000s. Those days are over now.

The inauguration of a 5MT solar-based cold storage under the Hariyali Project, a CSR initiative of Utkal Alumina, took place recently in Bilamal to empower farmers with sustainable storage solutions, ensuring better market access and reducing post-harvest losses. It's the first solar cold storage unit in the area.



graced by Bharat Goenka, CFO, Hindalco, Rabi Narayan Mishra, Unit Head, UAIL, Bhaskar Banerjee, CFO, UAIL, Lopamudra Mishra, CSR Head Utkal Alumina, Jagabandhu Majhi, Sarpanch of Tikiri, Sanjeev Kumar Pattnaik, Executive Coordinator of ASSA NGO, and the project implementing CSR

partner agency, the Board of Directors of Ajitai Farmer Producer Company, Sarat Naik.

A large gathering of farmers from Bilamal, Makapadar, Upardheska, Sanamatikana, Badamatikana, Naktiguda, Dwimundi, Tikiri, and Kaliakana, actively participated in the programme.

Rayagada district headquarters has a large dysfunctional government cold storage since last many years. There are stray initiatives here and there without much impact. But, this cold storage facility, powered by solar energy, is a significant step towards sustainable agriculture, ensuring that farmers can store

their produce efficiently while reducing dependency on conventional power sources. The initiative reflects Utkal Alumina's commitment to rural development and agricultural sustainability with forward linkage activities. It will enhance the income of farmers while increasing their living standard.

In Ganjam, Gajapati, Kandhamal Non-govt colleges get grants for infra development

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

The State Higher Education Department has announced grants for the development of infrastructure in non-government educational institutions across three districts, Ganjam, Gajapati and Kandhamal. A total of Rs 15.02 crore has been allocated to 18 non-government colleges for land development and facility improvements.

The colleges had, however, submitted claims totaling Rs 38 crore 75 lakh 57 thousand. This means the grants distributed by the government cover less than 50% of the requested amount, leaving a significant gap in the funding required by these institutions.

In Ganjam district, several colleges have received the following amounts: Asika Science College and Brahmapur City College each received Rs

50 lakh, while Chhatrapur Women's Degree College was granted Rs 12.75 lakh. Ganjam Degree College, Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja Degree College, and Laxminarayana Degree College also received Rs 50 lakh each. Mahamayee Women's College in Brahmapur was allocated Rs 1 crore, and Ramadhan Sanskrit Degree College in Brahmapur received Rs 50 lakh. Political Science College and People's Degree College in Buguda received Rs 2 crore each. Gopalpur Degree College was allocated Rs 50 lakh.

In Gajapati district, Indira Memorial Degree College in Chandiput, which is the only college in the district, received a smaller amount of Rs 1.40 lakh.

In Kandhamal district, several colleges received varying amounts, including

Panchayat Degree College in Piringia, which was granted Rs 50 lakh. KIGM Degree College in Linepada was allocated Rs 60 lakh, while Netaji Subhas Bose Degree College in Tumudibandha received Rs 1 crore. Kandhamal Degree College in Sarangarh received Rs 40 lakh.

Brahmapur Regional Director of Education Dr Siddharth Shankar Padhi said these grants were disbursed to support the infrastructure development of the colleges. He added that despite the shortfall in funding, the government is committed to improving the educational environment in these regions.

However, with the total claims from the colleges far exceeding the actual grants received, many institutions feel that the funding is insufficient to meet their needs for infrastructure improvement.

# PM receives Mauritius' highest award

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday received Mauritius' highest honour, the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean. He called it a tribute to the centuries-old cultural and historical bonds of kinship between the two nations.

Modi is the first Indian leader to receive the Grand Commander of the Order of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean award from Mauritius, which recognises his contributions to strengthening ties between India and Mauritius.

"I express my heartfelt gratitude for being conferred the Highest National Award of Mauritius. This is not just my honour. It is the honour of 1.4 Billion Indians. It is a tribute to the centuries-old cultural and historical bonds of kinship between India and Mauritius," Modi said.

Moreover, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the chief guest at the National Day of Mauritius on Wednesday, a rare repeat invitation for a leader which, officials said, underscores India's special relationship with the island country rooted in shared history, culture, and diaspora ties. Modi first received the honour in Mauritius in 2015, officials said.

The BJP said Prime Minister Modi has emerged as a "phenomenal leader" in the world with 21 countries bestowing on him their highest civilian award so far and the latest being Mauritius.

The officials cited several instances of Modi being the main guest at signature events of several countries to assert that the prime minister as a "global leader is



PM Modi after being conferred highest civilian award of Mauritius

shaping the rising influence of India" at international level.

An official source said, "The 2023 invitation (to PM Modi) to France's Bastille Day Parade was another defining moment, symbolising India's growing military and strategic partnership with France. The sight of Indian tri-services marching on the Champs-Elysees alongside French troops reinforced India's role in global geopolitics."

In 2022, official sources noted, Modi visited Lumbini in Nepal for Buddha Jayanti celebrations, emphasising India's historical connection to Buddhism and its shared heritage with Nepal. His visit

reinforced India's role in promoting cultural and spiritual ties across the region, they added.

In 2021, Bangladesh had invited him to its National Day celebrations, marking 50 years of its independence, an event closely tied to India's role in its liberation. His visit reaffirmed India's commitment to regional stability and shared prosperity, they added.

In 2017, his visit to Sri Lanka for the International Vesak Day highlighted India's leadership in "civilisational and cultural diplomacy". By reaffirming India's role as a custodian of Buddhist heritage, he strengthened spiritual and diplomatic ties with Buddhist-majority nations, they

added. Hailing the award, the BJP said "With this, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has received the highest civilian award of 21 countries so far, emerging as a phenomenal leader in the world. Recently, Barbados also bestowed on him its highest civilian award," party national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi told reporters in the Parliament complex. These 21 countries include Russia, France, the US and nine Muslim countries, he added.

Trivedi further said, "This shows that under the stewardship of Prime Minister Modi, our relationship with various countries in the world have transcended beyond the utility factor of economic, military or diplomatic aspects. "Now, we have reached a different level in which various countries are feeling a very positive, sentimental attachment and respect towards India," the BJP Rajya Sabha MP said, adding, "It's a matter of pride for 140 Crore people of the country."

Trivedi said Prime Minister Modi has received several other international awards including the UN Champions of the Earth Award and Seoul Peace Prize in 2018. "In our eternal concept of 'vishva bandhutva' (universal brotherhood), Prime Minister Modi has led India in such a way that the entire world is looking at India as 'vishwa mitra (universal friend)," he said. "It is a matter of pride for all Indians that under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, we are not just becoming a ray of hope for the world and the driver of growth engine of the world but also an affectionate point of attraction for the most of the countries," Trivedi added.

# Government to ensure fair conduct of examinations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The government is committed to ensure fair conduct of examinations and trying to strengthen the system to prevent any malpractice, Union Minister of State for Education Sukanta Majumdar said on Wednesday in the Rajya Sabha.

Replying to queries during Question Hour related to irregularities in the NEET (UG) exam held last year, the minister cited a Supreme Court order to assert that there was no systemic failure and the government has already asked CBI to investigate the matter and five charge sheets have been filed against 45 people in the paper theft case.

Majumdar said the government has passed a new law 'Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024' and implemented many recommendations of the K Radhakrishnan committee. "Our government is committed that examinations are held in a clean system. We assure that under the Modi government, we will not allow any malpractice," he said.

Already, he said, the Supreme Court has given a verdict that there is no systemic leakage. "So, if we call it a leakage then, we are disobeying or disrespecting the verdict of the Supreme Court." Steps are being taken and will be taken against those who have availed unfair means, Majumdar said. "In the new Act, we have made some provisions through which we can punish those people who will try to breach the system. We are trying to strengthen our system so that no one can

breach our system of examination," he said, adding that the National Testing Agency (NTA) is using CCTV and also metal detectors for searches.

The minister said that if the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan committee are implemented fully, "then, I think, this type of incident will be curbed". The NEET (UG) 2024 Examination was conducted by the National Testing Agency on May 5, 2024. "After the conduct of NEET (UG) 2024 Examination, certain cases of alleged irregularities/cheating/malpractices were reported," Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had said in a statement earlier.

The ministry had asked the CBI to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the entire gamut of alleged irregularities, including conspiracy, cheating, and breach of trust with respect to the NEET (UG) 2024 Examination.

"As on November 21, 2024, the CBI has filed five charge sheets in the NEET (UG) paper theft case against a total of 45 accused," Pradhan said.

Names of candidates, who are beneficiaries of the paper theft/unfair means and names of the MBBS students who had solved the stolen paper or who had appeared in the exam as impersonators have already been identified and sent to concerned authorities, as the case may be, for necessary action, he had stated. In order to suggest effective measures for transparent, smooth and fair conduct of examinations by NTA, the ministry constituted a High-Level Committee of Experts (HLCE) on June 22, 2024.

# 2000 kids awaiting adoption in WB

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Over 2,000 children are awaiting adoption, with West Bengal topping the list among states, the Women and Child Development Ministry said on Wednesday. Replying to a question in Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Women and Child Development Savitri Thakur said the majority of the Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs) prefer to adopt younger children (of normal health and below 6 years of age) in the designated CARINGS portal, Thakur said.

"If there is availability of lesser number of such children in the adoption pool, the waiting period for PAP may be higher," she said in a written response.

According to the data shared by her, 2,321 children are awaiting adoption across the country. The highest number of such children are in West Bengal at 309, followed by Maharashtra at 261, Odisha at 225, Bihar at 205 and Telangana at 197.

Responding to another question, Thakur

said the projected population of all children up to 5 years in India for the year 2021 is 13.75 crores approximately.

"However, only 7.49 crore children up to 5 years were enrolled in anganwadis and registered on Poshan Tracker of the Ministry of Women and Child Development as per the February 2025 data," the minister said.

A total of 7.25 crore of them were measured on growth parameters of height and weight and 39.09 per cent of them have been found to be stunted, 16.60 per cent have been found to be underweight and 5.35 per cent are said to have been wasted (a child too thin for her height), she said. In response to another question, she said the women's helpline has been integrated with Emergency Response Support System and so far, they have handled over 2.10 crore calls and assisted over 84.43 lakh women. She added that as of January 2025, 745 fast track special courts, including 404 exclusive POCSO (e-POCSO) courts, are operational in all states and Union territories.

# IIT-G launches meta platform for schools

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Learning concepts of maths and science in local languages using virtual reality will soon be possible for students at PM Shri Adarsh Vidyalayas in Assam with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati developing the country's first VR-enabled metaverse platform for schools. The project called "Gyandhara" in collaboration with Ministry of Science and Technology, and Department of Education, Assam Government will start as a pilot initiative in 56 PM Shri schools in Assam, later this year. The program is designed to enhance their educational experience by providing a more engaging way to learn about various scientific and academic topics.

# Concerns against child marriage raised in Rajya Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Issues including child marriage, agents duping people to travel to foreign countries and duplicate voter ID cards figured in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Raising the issue of child marriages during Zero Hour, Babubhai Jesangbhai Desai (BJP) made a demand for effective implementation of child marriage act across the country. He said child marriage is a social problem which is hampering education and development of children.

Balbir Singh (AAP) raised the issue of exploitation by travel agents who traffic innocent youth from Punjab to foreign countries.

He said a large number of illegally sent youth are languishing in foreign jails. He also spoke about the recent deportations from the US, wherein youths were brought chained and handcuffed.

He urged the central government to tighten noose on such travel agents. Senior RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha

expressed concern over duplicate voter ID card numbers and demanded that the Election Commission should immediately take a call on the extent of the duplication in the country.

Jha said a large number of duplicate Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers have been found, and due to which fairness of elections is being compromised.

Stressing that it is a matter of concern, the RJD member said the Article 324 of the Constitution enshrines free and fair elections as well as the level-playing field.

He further said that there is a spirit and philosophy behind the concept of free and fair elections.

The RJD MP demanded that the Election Commission should determine the extent of duplicate EPIC numbers, investigate from where the fraud started, and take urgent corrective measures.

He further said the Election Commission should also issue a separate list detailing voter deletions, new additions and modi-

fications. Congress MP Vivek K Tankha asked the government to facilitate pilgrimage to Sharda Peeth, located across the Line of Control (LoC) in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, on the lines of Kartarpur corridor. The Congress MP also spoke about the need for rehabilitation of displaced Kashmiri pandits and the facilitation of religious visits to Sharda Peeth through the LoC border.

Abdul Wahab (IUML) made a demand for additional fund for infrastructure development of existing ITIs in Kerala under hub and spoke model.

While expressing thanks to the Union Government for allocating ₹60,000 Crores for ITIs, he said the allocation for Kerala is quite low.

He said the Centre should allocate ₹2,100 Crore for Kerala. Harsh Mahajan (BJP) asked the government to strengthen the civil aviation infrastructure in Himachal Pradesh which is celebrated for its breathtaking nature, natural beauty and serene environment.

# CBI, Kerala police arrest founder of cryptocurrency exchange

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The CBI and Kerala Police have arrested Lithuanian national Aleksej Besciokov, who was wanted by the United States for setting up cryptocurrency exchange Garantex allegedly to launder the proceeds of criminal activities, including ransomware, officials said Wednesday.

He was arrested when he was allegedly plotting to escape from the country, officials said.

According to the US Secret Service documents, Besciokov, during 2019-25, allegedly "controlled and operated" Garantex, which facilitated money laundering to the tune of at least USD 96 billion in cryptocurrency transactions by transnational criminal organisations (including terrorist organisations) and violated sanctions.

"Garantex received hundreds of millions



Lithuanian national Aleksej Besciokov, wanted by USA, arrested by CBI and Kerala Police

in criminal proceeds and was used to facilitate various crimes, including hacking, ran-

somware, terrorism, and drug trafficking, often with substantial impact to US victims," it said.

It said Besciokov was Garantex's primary technical administrator and responsible for obtaining and maintaining critical infrastructure of the platform as well as reviewing and approving transactions.

The indictment documents cited by the Secret Service said Besciokov is charged with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

He is also charged with one count of conspiracy to violate the International Economic Emergency Powers Act—which also carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in person—and with conspiracy to operate an unlicensed money-transmitting business, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

"On a request submitted by the USA, the Ministry of External Affairs, acting under the Extradition Act, 1962, got issued a provisional arrest warrant on March 10, 2025 against the subject from ACJM Patiala House Court in Delhi. The IPCU, CBI coordinated with Kerala Police for the arrest of fugitive criminal Aleksej Besciokov. The subject would be produced before the Patiala House Court by the Kerala Police," CBI spokesperson said in a statement. He is wanted for facing trial before the United States District Court for the Eastern District Court of Virginia, it said. The US Secret Service executed a seizure order on March 6 authorised by a judge in the Eastern District of Virginia against three website domain names used to support Garantex's operations to prevent these sites from being used for money laundering and additional crimes.

# Defence Ministry inks contract with BEL

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In effort to strengthen indigenous defence capabilities of the country, Ministry of Defence on Wednesday here inked a capital acquisition contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Ghaziabad for the procurement of Low-level Transportable Radar, LLTR (Ashwini) at a cost of ₹2,906 Crore.

The radar is indigenously designed and developed by Electronics and Radar Development Establishment, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

The contract was signed in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, the ministry said.

The LLTR (Ashwini) is an active electronically scanned phased array radar

The contract was signed in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh

based on state-of-the-art solid state technology. The radar is capable of tracking aerial targets from high-speed fighter aircraft to slow moving targets such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and helicopters.

Its acquisition will significantly enhance the operational preparedness of the Indian Air Force.

The programme is a major step towards achieving self-reliance in defence manufacturing by reducing dependency on Foreign Origin Equipment Manufacturers besides acting as a catalyst for the development of defence industrial ecosystem in the country.

# BJP loses Manesar Municipal Corporation polls

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

The results of the Manesar Municipal Corporation (MMC) were interestingly shocking for the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) after the party's mayor candidate and 13 Councillor candidates failed to secure their victory in the civic polls.

The party also failed to get the necessary majority number out of 20 wards of MMC. This was the first MC election in the Manesar area after the formation of the Manesar Corporation.

The saffron party mayor candidate, Sunder Lal Yadav, who was very confident of his victory, was defeated by an independent candidate, Dr. Inderjeet Yadav, wife of Rakesh Yadav, who was claimed by the BJP party as a gangster.

MMC's newly elected mayor, Dr. Inderjeet Yadav, grabbed 26,393 votes, while BJP's Sunder Lal Yadav received 24,100 total votes.

He was defeated with a margin of 2,293 votes. Congress mayor candidate Neeraj Yadav got 5,134 votes, and independent candidate Vijay Singh got 9,163 votes. The newly elected Manesar mayor had asked for a ticket from BJP, but instead, BJP gave the ticket to Sundarlal Yadav. The party also failed to get the necessary majority number out of 20 wards of MMC.

# Stalin using three-language formula as eyewash: AIADMK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

AIADMK MP M Thambidurai on Wednesday attacked Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin over the new education policy row, saying if he is sincere about the two-language formula, he should break alliance with the Congress which first introduced teaching three languages.

The Rajya Sabha MP reiterated that his party is also against the three-language formula but accused Stalin of using the issue as an "eyewash" ahead of Assembly elections in the state due next year.

"As far as AIDAMK, we are in favour of the two-language formula. This is a long-standing issue... We are not for English but for Tamil to become official language. We won't accept imposition of Hindi and the Congress is the root cause for all the issues because the three-language formula was introduced by the Congress only," he told PTI Videos in the Parliament complex.

"If Stalin is sincere about the two-language formula and the state's interest, he has to come out from the Congress' alliance. Otherwise, he is only bringing these issues because elections are coming."

"His protest against the three-language formula is just an eyewash because people are against him, nobody likes him. Family domination is there, the cadre is not happy, the public is not happy, liquor issue raids are going on... He is going to face the same fate as Arvind Kejriwal, so to hide



Pioneer photo

these issues he is playing up the two-language formula," he added.

The Tamil Nadu government and the Centre have been at loggerheads over the implementation of the new National Education Policy and the three-language formula proposed in the policy. Tamil Nadu's refusal to implement key aspects of NEP 2020, particularly the three-language formula, has resulted in the Centre withholding Rs 573 crore in central education assistance under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). According to policy rules, states must comply with NEP guidelines to receive SSA funding, of which 60 per cent is provided by the Centre to states like Tamil Nadu. Under the PM SHRI scheme, the state concerned has to sign an MoU with the central government that it would implement the NEP 2020 and in return the Centre provides funds.

# No tribal to be displaced: Oram

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

There will be no environmental impact and no tribal will be displaced due to the Great Nicobar project, Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram said in the Rajya Sabha while asserting that the project is important for the country owing to its strategic location.

Oram said this while replying to supplementaries during the question hour after several opposition members raised objections to the minister not giving a written reply to the question on tribals who are expected to be relocated as part of the project.

He said China is sitting in Hambantota (Sri Lanka) while noting that "why should India leave our land". "This project is very important socio-economically and commercially in the interest of the country. We are merely 40 kms away from the sea route. That is why we cannot leave this," the minister said.

TMC member Saket Gokhale and Congress' Jairam Ramesh asked why the minister has not replied to the question. Gokhale had asked on the action taken on concerns raised by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) over effect of environmental and forest clearances granted for the Great Nicobar project on local tribal communities. Gokhale also said there are only 229 members

Due to this project, no one will be harmed or will suffer any harm, I assure you: Tribal Affairs Minister

of the Shompen tribe living in the world.

Oram said after the Tsunami struck the island, because of low-lying area, several tribals had shifted out.

A high-powered committee has been formed after the NGT decision and work is being carried out as per NGT orders, he informed the House.

Oram said he has personally as a tribal minister met the Shompen, Jarawa, Andamanese and Great Andamanese, and held dialogue with them. "Due to this project, no one will be harmed or will suffer any harm, I assure you," the minister said.

"No one is being displaced. Only 7,144 square kms of tribal reserve land will be used and no one is being displaced due to the project. The gram sabha has also passed the project. Hence the objection is misplaced. The issue is pending with the high court," the minister told the House.

Oram said on August 11, 2016, the department of border management, Ministry of Home Affairs, and seven other ministries held meeting and decided to undertake the project since this is at a very strategic point on the southern side and is near the international sea route.

# VP Dhankhar discharged from AIIMS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar was discharged from AIIMS-Delhi on Wednesday after making a satisfactory recovery, the premier hospital said.

He has been advised to take adequate rest for the next few days. Dhankhar was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) on March 9 following cardiac-related ailments, it said in a statement.

"After receiving necessary care from the medical team at AIIMS, he made a satisfactory recovery and was discharged on March 12," AIIMS-Delhi said.

In a social media post, Dhankhar thanked the medical team of the AIIMS. "Deeply appreciate the exemplary care and professionalism of the medical team at AIIMS, New Delhi, from my admission on March 9 to discharge on March 12.

Their dedication and meticulous attention ensured a smooth recovery," he said.

"Grateful for the concern and good wishes from well-wishers across India and beyond. Your thoughtful gestures have been truly heartening," the Vice-President added in the post.

# Widows of Vrindavan unveil a kaleidoscope of hope

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Mathura

In a heartwarming display of resilience and change, widows in Vrindavan once again broke societal norms by celebrating Holi at the historic Gopinath Temple on Wednesday.

Defying centuries-old traditions that once kept them in isolation, hundreds of widows drenched themselves in colours, danced to Krishna bhajans, and embraced the festival with flower petals and gulal.

Just a decade ago, such a celebration was unthinkable. Widows in Vrindavan, often abandoned by their families, were considered inauspicious and barred from participating in social and religious festivities. However, change has been sweeping through these sacred lanes, and this Holi, clad in their signature white sarees, these women reclaimed their space in society.

The celebration, organised by Sulabh International, stood as a testament to their journey towards dignity and inclusion. The tradition of Holi for widows began in 2013, initiated by Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, the late social reformer and founder of Sulabh International. His mission was to challenge deeply rooted prejudices and restore joy to the lives of these marginalised women.

Carrying forward his vision, Sulabh International President Kumar Dilip reaffirmed his organisation's commitment to widow welfare. "This celebration reflects the progress we've made in reshaping societal perceptions. Widows actively participating in Holi signals growing social acceptance. At Sulabh, we will continue working towards ensuring they live with dignity, joy, and hope," he said.

The transformation of Vrindavan's widows began in 2012, when the Supreme



Widows in Vrindavan celebrate Holi



PIONEER PHOTO

Court of India intervened and tasked Sulabh International with their welfare. Over the years, these women have gained access to improved living conditions, financial aid, and social support, breaking free from a cycle of neglect.

India has a long history of advocating for widow rights. In the 19th century, Raja Ram Mohan Roy led the fight to abolish sati, while Pt Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar campaigned for widows' right to remarry. Inspired by this legacy, Dr Pathak dedicated his life to eradicating the stigma attached to widowhood.

Today, Vrindavan's Holi is more than just a festival—it is a symbol of empowerment, a beacon of hope for thousands of widows seeking a life of dignity.

As the colors of Holi brighten their world year after year, the dream of a more inclusive society moves closer to reality.

## How UP youths were lured to Myanmar with fake IT jobs

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

When Ankit Sharma (name changed) received a job offer for an AI analyst role in Myanmar, he thought his luck had finally turned. The 26-year-old engineering graduate from Lucknow had been job hunting for months when he stumbled upon a lucrative opportunity through a recruiter on LinkedIn. The salary package—₹70,000 per month—seemed too good to ignore. Within weeks, he and several others were flown to Bangkok, only to realise they had walked into a trap.

As many as 266 Indians, who have been victims of fake job offers in Myanmar and Thailand, were repatriated on Tuesday, the External Affairs Ministry said in a statement. This was in addition to 283 Indian nationals who were repatriated on Monday.

"The moment we crossed into Myanmar, everything changed," Ankit recalled, his voice still shaking. "They took our passports and phones, locked us in a building, and told us we worked for them now. There was no way out."

Instead of coding or working on AI projects, the recruits were forced into cyber fraud. They were made to create fake Instagram and Facebook profiles, using stolen photos of young women to lure unsuspecting Americans.

Once a victim showed interest, they had to extract their WhatsApp numbers and send them on to their handlers. The information was then sold to Chinese cybercriminals, who ran large-scale online scams.

For those who resisted, punishment was swift and brutal. Some were starved for days; others were beaten. When Rahul Verma, a 28-year-old MBA graduate from Kanpur, refused to comply, he was electrocuted. "They tied wires to my fingers and

shocked me until I begged them to stop," he said, holding up his trembling hands. "They told me—work, or die."

Escape seemed impossible. Their captors controlled every aspect of their lives—food, sleep, even bathroom breaks. When they asked about returning to India, they were laughed at. "You belong to us now," one of the guards sneered at them.

But hope came in the form of a smuggled message. One of the captives managed to send out an SOS to Indian security agencies. Soon, a covert operation was set in motion. In a daring rescue mission, 21 young Indians were extracted and brought back home—just in time for Holi.

As they landed in Lucknow, some fell to their knees, kissing the ground. Others simply broke down in tears. "I thought I'd never see my mother again," whispered 24-year-old Rohan Das, who had been promised a cybersecurity job.

Back home, their families had spent sleepless nights, unaware of their children's ordeal. Ankit's mother, Sunita Sharma, sobbed as she embraced him. "I prayed every day for his return," she said. "Never again will I let him go abroad without checking everything a hundred times."

Officials warn that these cybercrime syndicates are expanding, targeting job seekers through professional networking sites and social media. Many victims were promised salaries between ₹30,000 and ₹70,000 but were paid only ₹24,000 if they were paid at all.

The rescued youths, once hopeful professionals, are now grappling with the trauma of their captivity. But for now, they are home. And as they celebrate Holi with their families, they have only one message for others: "If an overseas job sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

(All the names have been changed to conceal identity of victims)

## BJP importing fake Hinduism in Bengal: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Apparently betraying nerves over a reported trend of alienation of Hindu votes from her electoral basket, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday said that it was not the BJP but she and her Trinamool Congress (TMC), which was destined to protect the Hindu religion.

Banerjee known for her "propagandist sympathy" for the minorities on Wednesday slammed state Opposition leader Suvendu Adhikari for "practicing

fake Hinduism." Delivering a speech in the Assembly she said how the BJP had imported a "fake Hinduism" in Bengal and disturbed its communal harmony.

"Your imported Hindu dharma is not supported by the Vedas or the sages. How can you deny the rights of Muslims as citizens? This is nothing but a fraud. You are importing fake Hinduism," Banerjee said adding it was she who would protect Hinduism and not the BJP leaders like Adhikari. "I have the right to protect Hindu dharma. We will protect Hindu religion, but not the one that you preach.

Hindu religion is inclusive, liberal and lenient. Please don't play the Hindu card," Banerjee said.

"Do not engage in deceit in the name of religion. I condemn those who divide people based on religion. They speak of Hindus and Muslims but ignore the true message of humanity," the Chief Minister said. Earlier she had asked the TMC cadres in a party organisational meeting to remain vigilant "against efforts being made by some mischievous elements to stoke communal problem and riots in the State for narrow political gains."

She said that the BJP had been trying to play the Hindu card for years to come to power but the people of Bengal had repeatedly rejected them and they would reject them once again as Bengal being was a politically matured State and traditionally secular.

On Wednesday, Banerjee was referring to a statement made by Adhikari who on Tuesday said that the "Hindus will oust Mamata Banerjee from power," and that when BJP would come to power in 2026 it would ensure that the Muslim MLAs were thrown out of the House.

## Amit Shah to visit Mizoram on March 15

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Aizawl

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will visit Mizoram on March 15 to attend a function for shifting of Assam Rifles establishments from Aizawl to Zokhawsang, around 15 km from the state capital, an official said on Wednesday.

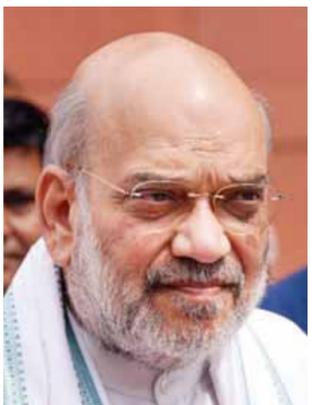
Shah, who will embark on a three-day tour of Assam from March 14 to March 16, will pay a day-long visit to Mizoram on March 15 to attend the function.

He will return to Guwahati on the same day after attending the function, the official said.

During his visit to Assam, Shah is scheduled to attend multiple programmes, including the annual conference of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), he said.

The Mizoram government and Assam Rifles had signed a formal agreement on October 23 last year in New Delhi for relocating the paramilitary force's establishments from the heart of Aizawl to the designated battalion complex at Zokhawsang.

The agreement will come into effect in



Union Home Minister Amit Shah

April this year and the country's oldest paramilitary force will vacate its main barracks complex, AR Ground or Lammual, unit hospital, Loch House, quarters guard and other establishments and lands in dif-

ferent parts of the state capital and shift those to Zokhawsang, officials said.

As per the agreement, Assam Rifles will retain its 23 Sector Headquarters, Mizoram Range in Aizawl's Khalta neighbourhood (95.88 acres) and DIG residence near Raj Bhavan at Tuikhuatlang area (0.85 acre), they said.

The lands and buildings vacated by the AR will be reserved for public use as per the Restriction of Use of Transferred Land Act, 2022, they said. The demand for relocation of AR bases from the heart of Aizawl to Zokhawsang was first raised by the erstwhile Mizo National Front (MNF) government headed by former chief minister Laldenga in 1988 after the paramilitary force allegedly killed 11 civilians in a violent clash.

In February 2019, the Union Home Ministry had directed the paramilitary force to shift its bases to Zokhawsang by May 31 of that year. However, the relocation was delayed after Assam Rifles alleged that certain infrastructure issues were yet to be resolved.

The Zokhawsang complex was inaugurated by Shah in April, 2023.

## Bengal LOP threatens violence against Muslim MLAs

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Rank communal and inflammatory invectives hitherto unknown to the Bengali society were hurled and traded with impunity even as senior Trinamool Congress (TMC) ministers and legislators threatened Opposition leader Suvendu Adhikari with "physical consequences" hours after the latter vowed to throw the Muslim MLAs out of the state Assembly if the BJP came to power in 2026 state elections.

While the police administration maintained a patent indifference a Congress leader and former MLA Ali Imran Ramz on Wednesday registered a police complaint against Adhikari for trying to fan communal disturbance in the State. TMC MLA from Murshidabad Humayun Kabir gave Adhikari a "72 hours ultimatum to withdraw his statements and apologise to the Muslim legislators for his communal and insulting remarks towards the Muslim community or else all the 42 MLAs of my community will assemble outside his chamber inside the Assembly and make him see consequences." When asked whether he was taking responsibility of his statements Kabir said, "Suvendu Adhikari has crossed his limits. He has lowered the status of the Leader of Opposition by saying that he will throw out the Muslim MLAs from the State Assembly if the BJP comes to power in Bengal. If he comes to beat us we are expected to throw sweetmeat at him. We will see how many central forces can protect him." Another veteran leader and senior Minister Siddiquilla Chowdhury too threatened to break Adhikari's legs if he engaged in any misadventure. "Suvendu Adhikari has spoken in most undignified way against the Muslims. He has defied the Constitution as well as the penal laws and has threatened to throw out the Muslim MLAs from the Assembly. But before he does so his legs will be broken."

Adhikari immediately retorted at the alleged "audacity" of the TMC's minority MLAs saying that he would take them on alone inside the Assembly premises. "I will ask for no additional security, keep coming to the House alone and go to my office with my PA and secretary. Let us see what they can do. But let me remind if anything happens to me Speaker Biman Banerjee will be held responsible for that."

Things took an ugly turn on Tuesday evening when Adhikari leading a bevy of BJP MLAs - that had walked out of the State Assembly after being denied opportunity by the Speaker to speak on alleged attacks on Hindu temples and establishments in some areas of the State - said that the "BJP will come to power in 2026 defeating Mamata Banerjee, and after we come to power in the State we will toss the Muslim MLAs out of this Assembly." He said, "how in the last four to five days, there have been incidents of attacks on Hindu temples and idols vandalised and set on fire in a few areas in Tamluk constituency without a single arrest being made," and how "in as Naoda area in Murshidabad district houses and shop belonging to the Hindus were set on fire and looted."

He also complained that Birbhum Police had asked people to finish playing Basanta Utsav in Santiniketan by 11 am as it would be Friday.

## CM Yogi defends Sambhal's rich history

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

amid the ongoing controversy surrounding a mosque in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday asserted that forcibly altering history and suppressing faith is unacceptable. Referring to Sambhal's ancient significance, he claimed that the site predates Islam and once housed a Vishnu temple, which was destroyed in 1526.

"Sambhal has been mentioned in scriptures that are over 5,000 years old, with references to Lord Vishnu's future incarnation. Islam emerged only 1,400 years ago, meaning this history predates it by at least 2,000 years," Yogi stated. He further claimed that archaeological findings have uncovered 18 pilgrimage sites in the area.

Speaking at Manthan: Kumbh and Beyond, an event organised by the RSS-linked weekly Organiser in Lucknow, Adityanath compared the destruction of the Vishnu temple in 1526 to the demolition of the Ram temple in Ayodhya in 1528, emphasising that both incidents were carried out by the same forces.

Tensions in Sambhal have been high since last November following a court-ordered survey of a mosque believed by some to have been built over a demolished temple. The Chief Minister strongly criticised those who admire Aurangzeb, calling it a "mental distortion." Citing historical accounts, he noted that Aurangzeb imprisoned his own father, denied him water, and killed his brother. Taking a jibe at Aurangzeb's supporters, he remarked, "If you admire him so much, name your children after him and be ready to suffer his cruelty." CM Yogi also launched a scathing attack on the opposition, accusing past governments of mishandling the Kumbh



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath

Mela. He recalled several tragedies, including the 1954 Kumbh stampede that claimed over 1,000 lives and the 2013 mishaps under Congress and Samajwadi Party rule, which he described as chaotic and mismanagement.

He pointed out that in 2013, the then Prime Minister of Mauritius was moved to tears by the unsanitary conditions at Sangam. "Past governments turned Kumbh into a hub of filth and disorder, and today, these same people question our 'Swachh Mahakumbh,'" he remarked.

Highlighting the transformation of Kumbh under the BJP government, Adityanath stated that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in 2019, the event was rebranded to focus on cleanliness, security, and technology. He praised initiatives like the Digital Mahakumbh, which helped reunite 54,000 lost individuals through a digital lost-and-found centre.

Additionally, he highlighted the construction of 1.5 Lakh toilets linked with QR codes and the introduction of a multilingual mobile app to assist pilgrims. Adityanath stated that while the initial estimate for attendees was 40 Crore, the final count exceeded 66 Crore 30 Lakh.

Discussing the 2025 Maha Kumbh, he acknowledged an unfortunate incident during Mauni Amavasya (January 28-30), when a massive crowd of over 10 Crore devotees led to injuries and fatalities. He praised the administration's swift response, which involved coordinating with saints and Akhadas to postpone the Amrit Snan until noon for public safety.

"The saints cooperated without disrupting tradition, allowing bathing to resume smoothly after 2 pm.

This showcases the devotion and unity within Sanatan Dharma," Adityanath stated, lauding the religious leaders for ensuring the event's success.

## Allahabad HC directs painting, lighting of Sambhal Jama Masjid

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a significant ruling, the Allahabad High Court has directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to undertake the painting and illumination of the historic Jama Masjid in Sambhal during the holy month of Ramadan.

The court has given ASI a strict deadline of one week to complete the restoration work.

The decision came during a hearing on Wednesday, following a petition that sought renovation and upkeep of the mosque premises.

Earlier, on March 11, the court had deferred the matter to March 12 after ASI submitted an inspection report.

The report stated that while the mosque did not require repainting, the premises had accumulated dirt and overgrown bushes. ASI also provided photographic evidence supporting its assessment.

In response, the court had earlier ordered ASI to carry out a thorough cleaning of the mosque, including the removal of wild vegetation. Both the Muslim and Hindu sides were given time to file their objections and affidavits regarding the ASI report. After hearing arguments from both sides, the court had initially reserved its judgment until March 12.

However, in the proceedings on Wednesday, the court ruled in favour of the petitioners, allowing the mosque to be repainted and illuminated for Ramadan.

The issue of the Jama Masjid's maintenance has been a contentious one, particularly since November 24, 2024, when a survey of the mosque triggered communal tensions and unrest in the area. Since then, additional police forces have been deployed around the site, with security personnel maintaining a close watch to prevent any disturbances. The court's decision is expected to alleviate local concerns and ensure that the religious site is well-maintained ahead of the sacred month of Ramadan.

Meanwhile, the district administration in Sambhal has taken significant security measures for the upcoming Holi celebrations.

Given past incidents of communal ten-

sion, authorities have decided to cover mosques located along the route of the Chaulpai (religious procession) with tarpaulin sheets to avoid any controversy.

According to Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Shachandra, a total of 10 mosques, including the Jama Masjid, will be temporarily covered with plastic sheets or tarpaulin in consultation with both Hindu and Muslim community leaders.

The decision has been taken with mutual consent to maintain communal harmony during the festivities.

Sambhal District Magistrate Rajendra Pensia stated that extensive security arrangements have been put in place to ensure peace during the celebrations.

He highlighted that multiple rounds of peace committee meetings have been held, and 27 Quick Response Teams (QRTs) have been deployed in sensitive areas.

**The situation remains completely peaceful. We have made elaborate security arrangements, and agencies are fully prepared**

— RAJENDRA PENSIYA, DM SAMBHAL

The district administration has divided the city into six zones and 29 sectors, with magistrates and senior police officers assigned to each section.

Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) battalions have been stationed in key areas as part of a three-tier security plan. To enhance surveillance, 250 CCTV cameras have already been installed, with an additional 100-150 cameras set up for real-time monitoring. Drone surveillance will also be conducted to maintain law and order during the festival. Authorities have instructed sector magistrates to patrol their designated areas actively and report any suspicious activities. "At present, the situation remains completely peaceful. We have made elaborate security arrangements, and law enforcement agencies are fully prepared to handle any situation," said DM Pensia.

With these measures in place, the administration hopes to ensure a smooth and peaceful celebration of Holi while maintaining communal harmony in Sambhal.

## Soldier injured in cross-LOC firing

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

A soldier of the Indian Army deployed along the line of control in the Nowshera sector of Rajouri was hit by a stray bullet fired from across the border after a loud mysterious blast rocked the forward area near Kalsiyar early Wednesday morning.

This is the first incident of cross-border

firing in the region after the Brigade commander's level Flag meeting, which took place near Chakan-da-bagh in Poonch, on February 21.

According to official sources, the injured soldier was airlifted to the Udhampur based Command hospital for advanced medical treatment.

Till late evening, no official statement was issued about the circumstances under

which the soldier received a bullet injury on the forehead post.

Local reports also claimed that an explosion was also reported along the zero line in the area around 6 am, followed by three rounds of gunfire.

However, there was no immediate report of any casualty in the blast, the cause of which is not known immediately, the official sources said.

**Editor's TAKE**

## Mark Carney to take on Voldemort

**A known Trump critic, Mark Carney replaces Justin Trudeau as Canada's Prime Minister**

In a historic political shift, Mark Carney has been announced as the next leader of the Liberal Party and the 24th Prime Minister of Canada, succeeding Justin Trudeau. Carney won the leadership race decisively, securing 131,674 votes, approximately 85.9 per cent of the ballots. His transition into office marks a significant turning point for the Liberal Party and Canada's future, particularly in its economic policies and international relations. Carney brings a wealth of economic expertise to the position, having previously served as the Governor of both the Bank of Canada (2008–2013) and the Bank of England (2013–2020). He is widely credited with steering Canada through the 2008 financial crisis, earning him a reputation as a pragmatic and reliable leader. His experience on the global financial stage, positions him as a leader with strong economic acumen. A former Goldman Sachs executive, Carney has long been seen as a steady hand in times of crisis, making him an ideal choice to ensure stability and economic resilience in the face of global uncertainties.

One of Carney's most immediate and critical challenges will be navigating Canada's relationship with the United States, particularly with former President Donald Trump returning to power. Trump's previous tenure was marked by a disdainful approach toward Canada, imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum, challenging trade agreements, and openly criticising the country's economic policies. In his second term, Trump has become even more vitriolic towards Canada. Carney's economic background makes him suited to address Trump's aggressive trade tactics. Having managed financial stability through turbulent times, he is likely to adopt a measured yet firm approach in negotiations. His experience in global financial leadership suggests he will prioritise economic diplomacy, leveraging Canada's trade alliances, including the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Canada-European Union trade deal, to counterbalance US pressure.

However, Carney's personal history with Trump presents an interesting dynamic. In the past, he has been openly critical of Trump's economic policies and even likened him to Voldemort, the infamous antagonist from Harry Potter. While this past remark may resurface in political discourse, Carney is expected to adopt a professional stance, emphasising economic pragmatism over political rhetoric a stark departure from his predecessor. Carney's leadership is expected to focus on economic stability, climate change initiatives, and maintaining Canada's social programs. Given his strong advocacy for sustainable finance, his administration may prioritise green investments, aligning Canada's economic policies with global climate commitments. Trade diversification will be another key aspect of his strategy. To mitigate the risk of overreliance on the US market, Carney may seek to strengthen economic ties with Europe, Asia, and emerging markets, reducing Canada's vulnerability to American protectionism.

Mark Carney's rise to Canada's highest office brings a shift from Trudeau's leadership style to one deeply rooted in financial expertise and economic strategy. Under Mark Carney's leadership, Indo-Canada relations are expected to take a pragmatic and economically driven turn. He is likely to prioritise trade, investment, and economic collaboration with India. Canada may seek to expand its role in sectors such as technology, clean energy, and natural resources, aligning with India's rapid economic growth. However, political tensions, particularly surrounding issues like Khalistani separatism, could remain a challenge. Carney's diplomatic approach will likely focus on de-escalation and fostering stronger ties through economic partnerships rather than ideological confrontations. His leadership presents an opportunity for renewed negotiations on a long-pending free trade agreement, which could significantly enhance bilateral trade.

## Leaderspeak



Today, Prime Minister Navin Chandra Ramgoolam and I decided to give the India-Mauritius partnership the status of 'Enhanced Strategic Partnership'. We decided that India will cooperate in building the new Parliament building in Mauritius. This will be a gift to Mauritius from the Mother of Democracy. India and Maurities are connected not just by the Indian Ocean but by shared culture and values. We are each other's partners on the path of economic and social progress.

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA



# Delhi's bold step towards sustainability

The newly elected Delhi government is setting ambitious goals for environmental sustainability and disaster resilience, with a strong focus on cleaning the Yamuna River, pollution control, and waste management

Cleaning the Yamuna river, pollution control, garbage management, and addressing climate and disaster resilience to ensure sustainable development are among the top priorities of the newly elected Delhi government. However, these ambitious goals can only be achieved with active community participation. Raising awareness and fostering public engagement are crucial to creating a more sustainable and disaster-resilient future. In this context, a Centre for Disaster Risk Management and Environmental Sustainability, known as "Yamuna- Apda evam Jalvayu Parivartan Nyunikaran Adhishthan (YAJNA)" meaning- Yamuna - Institute for Disaster and Climate Change Mitigation, is proposed. This centre will serve as a hub for education, collaboration, and action, setting an example for other states to follow.

Delhi, the national capital of India, faces a complex web of hazards. From earthquakes and floods to human-induced crises such as severe air and water pollution, road accidents, and inefficient waste management, the city's vulnerabilities are escalating. Rapid urbanisation and a dense population further compound these risks, leading to widespread environmental degradation and public health crises. Despite existing efforts by multiple agencies, a significant gap remains in public engagement, coordination, and proactive action. A dedicated awareness centre like Yajna will bridge this gap by equipping citizens with the knowledge and tools to become active participants in resilience-building.

Disaster management museums cum knowledge centres worldwide have demonstrated their potential to drive awareness and preparedness. The Kobe Earthquake Memorial Museum in Japan and the Tsunami Memorial Museum in Thailand have played pivotal roles in educating the public on natural and human-induced hazards and mitigating the risk with better response strategies. In India, the Earthquake Museum in Bhuj, Gujarat, serves as a model for enhancing public understanding of seismic risks. Inspired by these global and national examples, the proposed centre in Delhi will not only focus on disaster risk reduction but also integrate environmental conservation, climate change mitigation, and pollution control efforts, with a special emphasis on cleaning the Yamuna River.

Yamuna, the lifeline of Delhi, has been battling severe pollution for decades. Industrial waste, untreated sewage, and rampant encroachments have turned this once-pris-



time river into a toxic water body. The newly elected government has placed Yamuna's rejuvenation at the forefront of its agenda, recognising that a clean river is fundamental to public health, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable urban development. However, government initiatives alone cannot restore the Yamuna. Without widespread community participation, even the most well-intentioned policies will fall short. The proposed centre will be crucial in mobilising citizens, educating them about the importance of river conservation, and providing actionable solutions for sustainable water management.

Environmental sustainability and disaster resilience are deeply interconnected. Poor waste management contributes to urban flooding, air pollution exacerbates respiratory diseases, and deforestation heightens vulnerability to climate-induced disasters. The centre will function as a convergence point where experts, policymakers, students, and local communities come together to find innovative and practical solutions. Through interactive exhibitions, hands-on training, and community-driven campaigns, the centre will empower people to adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives. It will promote waste segregation, composting, and recycling, significantly reducing Delhi's landfill burden. Additionally, it will advocate for green energy solutions, urban afforestation, and pollution control measures, aligning with India's commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for

Disaster Risk Reduction.

Public engagement will be at the heart of this initiative. Schools, colleges, resident welfare associations, and corporate sectors will be actively involved in awareness campaigns, training sessions, and workshops. The younger generation, in particular, will be encouraged to take ownership of environmental stewardship, ensuring long-term impact. By fostering a culture of responsibility and collective action, the centre will create a ripple effect, inspiring similar initiatives in other cities and states.

Beyond its educational role, the centre will also serve as a research and policy hub, providing scientific insights and data-driven recommendations to strengthen urban resilience. It will facilitate collaboration between various government agencies, research institutions, and civil society organisations to develop integrated strategies for disaster preparedness and environmental sustainability. With real-time monitoring of air and water quality, the centre will enable authorities to take proactive measures in pollution control and disaster risk reduction.

This initiative is not just about creating another institution—it is about transforming

Delhi into a model city for resilience and sustainability. By integrating disaster risk reduction with environmental conservation, the centre will facilitate enhancing public safety, improve air and water quality, and promote sustainable urban planning. The direct economic benefits in the form of revenue will be significant as well. Similar to the Bhuj Earthquake Museum, which has become a successful revenue-generating centre, YAJNA is expected to attract students, researchers, policymakers, and industry professionals from across the country and beyond. Educational programs, training courses, and consultancy services will generate revenue, ensuring the centre's long-term viability.

As Delhi embarks on a new chapter under the leadership of the newly elected government, the time to act is now. The commitment to cleaning the Yamuna, controlling pollution, managing waste effectively, and building climate resilience must be translated into concrete actions. This initiative offers a comprehensive and practical roadmap to achieve these goals. By bringing together the government, experts, and citizens, the centre will ensure that resilience and sustainability become embedded in Delhi's development journey. A resilient Delhi is not just a necessity—it is a responsibility we owe to future generations.

(The writer is former executive director, National Institute of Disaster Management. Views expressed are personal)



SATENDRA SINGH

## The delicate strength of relationships

### SECOND Opinion



SANJAY CHANDRA

Relationships are beautiful. However, I often view them through the lenses of the boundaries deeply ingrained during childhood and over the decades. I fail to grasp that human relationships are pure and unadulterated emotions. They cannot follow any scientific formulae. I also need to curb my tendency to judge the raw emotions and reactions of others solely based on my experiences.

I am the oldest child of my generation in the entire family. A lesson deeply ingrained into my psyche by my elders was that I needed to be mindful of the youngsters and guests came first. I discharged my responsibilities with the utmost care till I had my first setback in my early teens. A much younger cousin was playing with my sister. Like all children, they also started fighting for the same toy. It fell upon me to mediate. My sister did not say anything but burst into tears when I tried to explain that it was our responsibility to take care of the younger guest. Her tears taught me an important lesson. We have tried hard not to burden our daughters with unnecessary baggage.

A few days into my first posting in the railways, I was asked to chair the farewell meeting of a retiring staff. It was the senior-most official in the gathering at the relatively young age of 25. I was taken aback when I was asked

to speak a few words. Eloquence is not my strong suit. I prefer brevity, or even silent brooding, over a long drawn flowery speech. I remember my impromptu words even four decades later. I compared the professional journey of everyone from the time of joining till retirement to the life of a rose and the fragrance that it spreads till the end. I also compared the new life that the staff would embark upon from the next day to the blooming of a new flower. The staff had tears of gratitude in his eyes. The supervisors applauded me for words well said. It was Bengal where words spoken from the heart are also received with utmost sincerity. I had developed an instant connection and lasting relationships with them. They recognised me as a sensitive soul they could uninhibitedly approach for help. I may not always have been of much assistance, but it was enough for the person to unburden.

A young neighbour told me that she finds me unduly sensitive to certain situations. She said that she, and probably many more, look up to me for guidance. She went on to mention that I need to curb my impulsive reactions. My response was that I am an extremely sensitive and emotional person, and I have spent a lifetime worrying about others. It is now time for me to be myself. I rather flippancy concluded, "This is what I am."

This is a lesson I sometimes forget when imparting my words of wisdom to those dear to me. A long time as an

engineer has made me too rational and logical. I often find myself at the receiving end when I abruptly interrupt my wife as she starts talking about something bothering her, a situation that I may feel is beyond her control. I conveniently forget my learnings over a lifetime, till she reminds me that she is aware of the impossibility of the situation. She wants me to let her vent her frustrations. I realise there is a lot I need to work on.

In author Mignon K Eberhart's words, "The complexity of human relationships is never simple to follow; it is like intricate lacework, but lacework made of steel."

To conclude, relationships are intricate, shaped by personal experiences, emotions, and deep-seated values. My journey has been one of constant learning—understanding that relationships cannot be governed by rigid logic but by sensitivity and empathy. From childhood lessons of responsibility to professional experiences that connected me with people on a deeper level, I have realised that emotions must be acknowledged, not judged.

Over the years, I have also recognised my own need to evolve. While my rationality has served me well, it sometimes overshadows the simple act of listening. As my wife often reminds me that not every problem requires a solution—sometimes, people just need to be heard. As I continue to navigate relationships, I strive to embrace emotions without overanalysing them.

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

# Letters to the Editor

### From Goddesses to Subjugation

Madam —The editorial 'Beyond the rhetoric' should sensitise all the concerned. History presents the picture of women placed in high esteem and treated with dignity and honour. Even when men were ruling women were guiding them in the fields of diplomacy, finance and social issues. We have many women rulers who have been envied by others for their value, popularity they enjoyed, ability to rule to the satisfaction of all their subjects. It is even said that before the male God's came in the scene it was Goddesses who were actually worshipped.

However, in due course of time they have yielded to the dominance of men. Even today the society worships goddesses but keeps women in a tamed status. In spite of their fine and valuable contributions they should not learn and recite Vedas.

But women are springing up today proving themselves to be the best in every field. There are scenes of rape and denial their due rights also, which are the fallouts of the impulsive rulers' who still view the women gender as a subjugated section. Some sections justify this by calling them the dictum of the Gods.

If the government is really serious it can implement the deterrent provisions to stop the spate of rapes. Women are paraded nude in public, raped and murder in Manipur.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

### India Fights Cancer

Madam—It is with reference to the news "BJP to open 200 day care cancer centres this year. Nadda". Central government's proposal of opening 200 day cancer centres in the country in 2025-26 to provide basic facilities to cancer patients is a welcome move. It has also been planned to establish such centres in all districts in the next three years to treat cancer patients. In India, the number of cancer patients is rising and the country needs to improve access to cancer care. It is estimated that one in nine persons in India are likely to develop cancer in their lifetime.

Among the new cases breast, cervix and lung cancer are the most frequently reported. Though India has some of the most advanced cancer treatment methods and technology, there are still gaps in access and affordability. There are also shortage of cancer care facilities, manpower and training. Early detection, screening, education, health promotion and tobacco control are important to prevent and control cancer. It is estimated that by 2050, there will be an 85 per cent increase in the number of new cancer cases and deaths in the WHO'S South East Asia region. It is unfortunate.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for continued efforts from clinicians, researchers and policy makers to collaborate and find the most effective strategies to serve cancer patients in the best way possible.

P VICTOR SELVARAJ | TIRUNELVELI

### Self-Defence or Self-Reliance?

Madam —The recent report from the Stockholm Peace Research Institute which highlight the Arm Import by the countries has revealed some of the really interesting facts. The report designate India as the second largest arms importing country after Ukraine, followed by Qatar. Although, the fact is not shocking that India is the major arm importing country, because we had a long history of it. There is no such big problem in such imports, but the shocking part of the story is that India fails to implement its so called state of the art plan of Aatmnirbhar Bharat idea of domestic arm manufacturing.

Whereas, China make a drastic shift of altering its import status. It successfully managed to keep itself out of the top ten importer ranking, paving the way for domestic manufacturing of such critical arms and ammunition in their own country.

Arms are the basic need for self defence for any nation, which no country could ever think to avoid for. It is welcoming that despite India stand at the second position in the arm importing list, the import goes 9.3 per cent down in 2020-2024, compared to the arm trade figures of 2015-19.

In a bid to incline for self defence on our own, it is required that India must start satisfying its arm need on its own. We need to be self reliant for our self defence.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

### SUPREME COURT MOOTS FOR DISABLED FRIENDLY PRISONS

Supreme Court had expressed concerns over the plight of disabled prisoners which is against the Disability Act 2016 passed by the Parliament and it is worth mentionable that during that Parliament session there was pandemonium and Disability bill was passed and all parties supported the bill and the Supreme Court said a petition highlighting the trauma and inhumane conditions suffered by Professor G Saibaba and the elderly Stan Swamy raised a "serious" issue about the lack of disabled-friendly accommodation and facilities in prisons across the country.

While Stan Swamy had passed away while lodged in jail as an undertrial prisoner, Saibaba had passed away last year a few months after he was acquitted and released from jail. The Supreme Court sought the response of the Central government to a PIL seeking adequate facilities for disabled prisoners in jails.

The PIL cited the instances of treatment meted out to Professor GN Saibaba and Father Stan Swamy to highlight the severe

neglect of disabled prisoners and lack of disabled-friendly accommodation, washrooms and other facilities in jails.

While Stan Swamy passed away in 2021 while lodged in jail as an undertrial prisoner in the Bhima Koregaon violence case, Saibaba passed away last year a few months after he was acquitted and released from prison. The demise of Professor GN Saibaba, a scholar and human rights activist with disabilities, was directly attributable to his deteriorating health, exacerbated by prolonged incarceration and the inhumane conditions of his detention. Stan Swamy also struggled with disability due to Parkinson's syndrome and died while in prison. He was denied medical treatment and basic support," the petition submitted.

The PIL cited the instances of treatment meted out to Professor GN Saibaba and Father Stan Swamy to highlight the severe neglect of disabled prisoners and lack of disabled-friendly accommodation, washrooms and other facilities in jails.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

## Logistics is holding back north India's growth

India's industrial landscape is marked by a stark regional imbalance, with western and southern states surging ahead while northern states struggle to keep pace. Without urgent intervention to rationalise freight costs and improve logistics infrastructure, northern states risk falling further behind

**FIRST Column**

India's industrial growth narrative presents an alarming regional imbalance that cannot be ignored. While western and southern states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Telangana stand as formidable economic powerhouses, their northern counterparts state such as Punjab and Uttar Pradesh remain entrenched in stagnation. This disparity poses a significant threat to our ambition of achieving a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. A critical factor driving this divide is logistics. The lack of adequate access to seaports makes manufacturing in northern India prohibitively expensive, crippling competitiveness and driving away crucial investment. If we fail to rationalise freight costs, the industrial sector in landlocked states will perpetually struggle, deepening the economic chasm.

### Logistics: A Key Driver of Industrial Inequality

With a coastline stretching 4,316 km, southern and western states possess undeniable locational advantages that enable seamless exports to markets in China, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and throughout the ASEAN region. Tamil Nadu dominates India's automobile sector, while Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Telangana lead in engineering, IT, and textiles. Collectively, these five states account for a staggering 53 per cent of India's total factories, firmly establishing their dominance in industrial growth. Maharashtra's industrial sector has experienced explosive growth, achieving a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.77 per cent from FY 2021-22 to 2023-24—the highest in the nation. Tamil Nadu follows closely at 11.63 per cent, with Telangana at 11.47 per cent, Gujarat at 10.2 per cent, and Karnataka at 8.47 per cent. In stark contrast, northern states such as Haryana (7.1 per cent), Punjab (6.78 per cent), and Uttar Pradesh (4.7 per cent) are falling behind, as highlighted by the Economic Survey of these states.

The Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) for 2022-23 further underscores this imbalance. Maharashtra and Gujarat contribute nearly 40 per cent of India's industrial output, while Uttar Pradesh and Punjab generate a mere 8.5 per cent and 2.8 per cent, respectively. The exorbitant cost of transporting goods from landlocked northern states to coastal export hubs severely undermines competitiveness. This issue has dampened overall industrial sentiment, making these states far less attractive for both domestic and foreign direct investment (FDI) compared to their southern and western counterparts.

FDI trends paint a stark picture of this disparity. According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Maharashtra has emerged as the leading recipient of FDI from FY 2021-22 to 2023-24, attracting ₹5,32,429 Crore—an impressive 30 per cent of total FDI equity inflows. Karnataka follows with ₹3,89,483 Crore (22 per cent) and Gujarat with ₹2,99,624 crore (17 per cent). Together, these three



states command an astounding 69 per cent of India's total FDI, while the remaining states are left with a mere 31 per cent. This clearly illustrates how locational advantages significantly dictate industrial investment.

Export statistics serve as further evidence of this imbalance, with Gujarat and Maharashtra accounting for over 50 per cent of India's total exports, thanks to their robust seaport infrastructures. Without immediate and decisive intervention, this disparity will only continue to widen, threatening the future economic landscape of our nation.

### Seaport-Led Industrialisation: A Global Perspective

Seaports play a critical role in industrialisation. Some countries, like China, have successfully leveraged their coastal regions to expand manufacturing capabilities. In China, industrial hubs are strategically located near ports, minimising logistical costs. In contrast, India's hinterland dry ports and container depots are, on average, 1,400 km away



AS MITTAL

from seaports, leading to significantly higher export and import costs. This distance compounds competition from China, which accounted for nearly 42 per cent of India's textiles and clothing imports, 40 per cent of machinery imports, and 38.4 per cent of electronics imports in 2023-24. Why Freight Costs Matter The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reported in 2022 that India's logistics costs are already 14 per cent higher than the global average, disproportionately affecting manufacturers in landlocked northern states that rely on dry ports as critical trade gateways. Manufacturers in these areas face higher freight costs due to longer transit distances to seaports like Mumbai, Mundra, Kandla, and Chennai. Dependence on road transport is 30-50 per cent

more expensive than rail. The lack of dedicated freight corridors slows transportation efficiency and increases operational expenses. Industries in northern states not only receive raw materials from coastal regions but also send finished products to markets using the same routes.

While dry ports have been established to bridge this gap, they often function merely as booking centres rather than effective logistics solutions. As a result, northern manufacturers face a double freight burden, forcing many to relocate or shut down operations due to unsustainable costs. In contrast, industrial clusters in coastal states benefit from proximity to ports, enhancing their global trade competitiveness and generating employment.

Railway freight initiatives: The Indian Railways has successfully implemented targeted freight subsidies in select sectors. First, A 40 per cent discount is available for loading fly ash. Second, Traditional Empty Flow Directions (TEFD) rebate up to a 20 per cent reduction in costs for freight that moves along underutilised routes. Third, 157 'Kisan Rail'

services transport perishable goods and vegetables. A 50 per cent subsidy on railway freight, funded by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries under the 'Operation Greens' scheme, has significantly boosted farm exports of agricultural commodities. Fourth, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) offers a 20 per cent Transport Incentive (TI) Scheme for finished goods transported via rail or the Inland Waterways Authority of India, from the port nearest to the location of industrial units in the North-Eastern Region (NER) to the buyers' area.

### How freight subsidy could be re-structured

Based on previous initiatives, a targeted Northern States Freight Subsidy Program could be a game changer and might be structured as follows: Subsidised Rail Freight Rates:

1. Offering up to a 30-40 per cent subsidy on goods transported from northern dry ports to major coastal hubs.
- 2-Expanding Empty Flow Rebates: Extending TEFD rebates to northern states to make backhaul freight more economical.
- 3-Infrastructure Development: Investing in multimodal logistics parks and dedicated freight corridors in the northern states.

### The Way Forward:

The central government must not overlook its landlocked northern states to achieve inclusive industrial growth. Rail freight subsidies will support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), attract new investments, and create jobs.

While global trade regulations often scrutinise subsidies, the pricing autonomy of Indian Railways allows for strategic adjustments in freight costs without breaching World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules. By revising freight structures, northern manufacturers can enhance their global competitiveness. If we aspire for a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India), it is essential to ensure balanced industrial progress. To conclude, India's industrial growth is marked by stark regional disparities, with southern states while northern states lag behind. A key driver of this imbalance is logistics, as landlocked states face high freight costs that hinder competitiveness and discourage investment.

Proximity to seaports has enabled coastal states to dominate exports, attract foreign direct investment, and develop thriving industrial sectors. To bridge this gap, India must implement a targeted Northern States Freight Subsidy Program, including subsidised rail freight rates, expanded empty flow rebates, and enhanced logistics infrastructure.

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

## Explore the role of foreign investments for economic stability

India's economic trajectory under Prime Minister Narendra Modi blends rigorous analysis with bold policy moves. The BJP-led government has combined openness to foreign capital — through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Foreign Institutional Investment (FII) — with initiatives to boost self-reliance. Economists and policymakers alike recognise foreign investment as a pillar of economic stability, providing critical financing, technology, and market access across sectors. This balanced strategy favours pro-growth reforms while building domestic capacity.

### FDI AND FII: Temporary Boost For Long-Term Self-Reliance

Surging FDI inflows have strengthened India's growth and stability. Annual FDI hit a record \$83.6 Billion in FY2021-22, almost double the \$45 Billion in 2014. This reflects investors' confidence in India's reform agenda. Manufacturing FDI alone jumped 76 per cent in FY2021-22 after initiatives like Make in India, and even post-COVID FDI inflows were 23 per cent higher than pre-pandemic levels, underscoring sustained foreign trust during crises.

FII has been crucial in bolstering India's financial markets and boosting its economy. India has managed to extract maximum advantage out of FII inflows to improve market liquidity and reinforce a strong balance of payments position. Moreover, the Modi government's economic policies have inspired considerable confidence in the Indian economy among global investors leading to ever-increasing inflows of capital that have further firmed up the Indian economy. Timely and proactive actions taken by policymakers from targeted liquidity infusions during the 2020 global crisis to automatic stabilisers have mitigated volatility and supported growth momentum.

This bolstered economic momentum, with its cadre of dedicated professionals, startups, and thriving industries, has catapulted India to a challenging, productive, and sustainable global positioning of higher foreign investments.

### Transformative Impact Across Key Sectors

Liberalised foreign investment regulations have funnelled significant capital reserves into formative industries including information technology, manufacturing infrastructure, healthcare, agribusiness, and education.

Technology corporations have been top beneficiaries, with the software and hardware sector attracting approximately 25 per cent of all foreign direct investment inflows in fiscal year 2021-2022, underscoring India's emergence as a global technology leader. Manufacturing

industries have gained momentum thanks to both foreign capital and domestic incentives designed to stimulate job creation and output. The innovative Production-Linked Incentive schemes introduced in 2020 have since incentivised ₹1.32 Trillion in new investments while expanding total production value by a staggering ₹10.9 Trillion, generating hundreds of thousands of well-compensated employment opportunities.

### Strategic Reforms Boost Self-Reliance

PM Modi has aligned the overarching policy goals of self-reliance with encouraging foreign investment. Prime Minister Modi has shifted policy to turn self-reliance into both a goal and an opportunity for foreign investors. Launched in 2020 with a \$20 Trillion stimulus, the Atmanirbhar Bharat mission epitomises India's pursuit for self-reliant growth; more efficient, competitive and resilient economies that welcome foreign participation which can strengthen the domestic base.

Defence manufacturing is a case in point. The FDI cap on it was raised from 49 per cent to 74 per cent to attract joint ventures and technology transfer. On a broader scale, substantive liberalisation of FDI across all sectors (from coal mining and aviation to insurance and the internet) along with simplifying investment rules has radically improved India's investor-friendly environment. Together with the Make in India initiative, this ensures that foreign investment enters the country in forms that are consistent with national goals and strengthen the industrial foundation.

### Self-Reliant Growth

Continuing reforms and overall multi-sector growth should keep India firmly on the map as a global place for investment. Nearly constant inflows from abroad, gains in sectors besides heavy industry, and a market that has been proof of the strength of this strategy.

Consequently, strategic foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign institutional investors (FII) will continue to play important roles in India's pursuit of balanced development. By keeping up steady government policies and forming international partnerships, India can achieve economic self-reliance. This formula for success will ensure that India is a strong and resilient economic power.

### Conclusion

The challenge of balancing foreign investment with self-reliant economic growth in India has its roots in the socialist Nehruvian policies. Historically, India has oscillated between protectionist policies and open-market reforms. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the government has pursued a dual approach: encouraging Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Foreign Institutional Investment (FII) while simultaneously strengthening domestic industries. The core issue being tackled is how India can leverage foreign capital for growth without becoming overly dependent on external funding.

FDI brings in critical capital, technology, and expertise, which boost infrastructure, manufacturing, and technology sectors. Meanwhile, FII helps stabilise financial markets and improve liquidity. However, excessive reliance on foreign investments can lead to economic vulnerabilities, particularly during global downturns.

India has addressed this issue by implementing structural reforms such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and Production-Linked Incentives (PLI).

These initiatives ensure that foreign investments align with national priorities, fostering job creation, technological advancements, and industrial self-sufficiency. In essence, the problem being analysed is whether India can sustain high economic growth, attract global investments, and enhance self-reliance without compromising financial stability.

India's economic trajectory under Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflects a strategic blend of foreign investment and self-reliance.

The record-breaking inflows of FDI and FII underscore global confidence in India's reform agenda, strengthening financial markets, industrial growth, and employment generation. Initiatives like Make in India, Production-Linked Incentives, and Atmanirbhar Bharat have ensured that foreign investments align with national priorities, bolstering domestic capabilities while sustaining economic expansion.

The liberalisation of foreign investment regulations across key sectors such as technology, manufacturing, and defense has attracted significant capital and fostered innovation.

The Modi government's pragmatic policies have mitigated global economic volatility, creating a resilient economic environment that can weather crises and sustain long-term growth. India's rise as a technology and industrial powerhouse is a testament to this strategic approach.

(The author is Chairperson - National Unity and Security Council. Views expressed are personal)

## The silent crisis in education: teacher burnout

Teachers are more than just educators. They are mentors, motivators and role models who profoundly shape their students' lives. Teachers' ability to inspire, adapt, and create lasting impact makes them unique.

However, what saddens is that the fast-paced nature of education has left the teachers physically, emotionally and mentally exhausted.

Today, teacher burnout is real, and it is a growing crisis that affects not only educators but also students and the overall quality of education. Burnout, which is characterised by chronic stress, exhaustion and a loss of motivation, has led many skilled educators to leave the profession.

Several factors such as excessive workload, lack of support resources, wherein teachers work beyond their contracted hours, grading assignments, preparing lesson plans, attending meetings and handling administrative tasks, along with the expectation to constantly perform at high levels with limited time have resulted to overwhelming stress.

Many teachers, especially in underfunded schools, are facing challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching materials and inadequate support staff, which has forced the teachers to find alternative solutions, often at the cost of their time and money.

Teaching is an emotionally demanding job. Today, a teacher apart from just teaching has to support students academically and personally, often acting as mentors, counsellors and caregivers. They even have to deal with student trauma, behavioural issues and academic struggles, which, as per several studies, has taken a significant emotional toll. Studies also reveal that in many countries, teachers are underpaid when compared to other professionals with similar education levels. This has led to financial stress and has contributed to dissatisfaction and exhaustion.

Due to their demanding schedules, many teachers struggle to find time for themselves and their families. The inability to maintain a work-life balance has contributed to chronic fatigue and decreased job satisfaction, resulting in teacher burnout.

Teacher burnout has serious consequences, not only for teachers but also for the education system as a whole. It is quite certain that once the person develops chronic stress, it will lead to physical health issues such as headaches, high blood pressure and insomnia. Not only this, it will also increase the risk of anxiety, depression and emotional exhaustion. Such teachers will at the same time struggle to maintain the same level of enthusiasm, patience and creativity in their teaching, affecting student engagement and learning outcomes.

Today, many dedicated educators are leaving this noble profession due to burnout, resulting in teacher shortages and the loss of experienced professionals.

Consequently, schools are compelled to hire less experienced teachers, which impacts the overall quality of education. When teachers experience burnout, students feel less supported and motivated. A disengaged or emotionally drained teacher can create a negative learning environment, impacting student performance and well-being.

It is high time to address teacher burnout through systemic changes at multiple levels, requiring action from schools, governments and society to create a healthier teaching environment. Reducing workload by implementing manageable schedules, providing administrative support and minimising unnecessary paperwork can help alleviate stress.

Additionally, offering mental health resources, counselling services and stress management programs can support teachers in coping with emotional challenges. Increasing salaries, providing financial incentives and recognising teachers' efforts, can enhance job satisfaction and reduce financial stress.

### Conclusion

Above all, promoting work-life balance by limiting after-hours communication, ensuring adequate breaks and offering flexible schedules is crucial. Furthermore, fostering a supportive work environment through strong leadership, collaboration, mentorship programs and professional development can make teachers feel valued. Lastly, granting teachers more autonomy by reducing excessive standardised testing and allowing them to design engaging, student-centred lessons can boost motivation and fulfilment.

There is no denying that teacher burnout is a serious issue that demands immediate attention. Without proper intervention, the education system risks losing passionate and skilled educators, which will ultimately affect students' success and the future of education.

Investing in teacher well-being is not just about improving their lives, rather it is about ensuring a better future for generations to come. To conclude, teachers are the backbone of education. Yet, the growing demands of the profession have left many educators physically, emotionally, and mentally drained. Teachers have a larger responsibility towards the society. If they are emotionally, mentally and physically fit they can deliver what it takes to build a nation!

(The writer is an educator. Views expressed are personal)



MONICA B SOOD



SAKSHI SETHI

Trump says it is up to Russia to accept ceasefire deal in war with Ukraine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York / Washington

President Donald Trump said he is hopeful that Russia will agree to a 30-day ceasefire with Ukraine even as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Wednesday termed it as a positive step and said it is up to the US to convince Russia to accept it.

Senior officials from the US and Ukraine held talks in Jeddah in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday focussing on ending the over three year war between Moscow and Kyiv, which gave an indication to accept a 30-day ceasefire.

"A while ago, Ukraine has agreed to the ceasefire. Now we go to Russia and hopefully President Putin will agree to it also," Trump said here soon after the Jeddah announcement.

"If we get Russia to do it, that will be great. If we can't, we keep going on and on and people are going to get killed," he said in another video posted on his TruthSocial account.

He also spoke about meetings with Russia soon, in an apparent reference to Steve Witkoff, his special envoy, who is likely to visit Moscow to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin.

President Zelenskyy said the American side understands his country's arguments and considers their proposals and added that he is "grateful to President Trump for the constructive conversation between our teams."

"Ukraine is ready to accept this proposal—we see it as a positive step and are ready to take it. Now, it is up to the United States to convince Russia to do the same. If Russia agrees, the ceasefire will take effect immediately," Zelenskyy said hours after the announcement came from Jeddah.

"During today's talks, the US side pro-



President Donald Trump and Tesla CEO Elon Musk speak to reporters near a red Model S Tesla vehicle on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington.

AP/PTI

posed taking an even bigger first step—a 30-day full interim ceasefire, not only stopping missile, drone, and bomb attacks, not only in the Black Sea, but also along the entire front line," the Ukrainian president said in a video, text for which was posted on his official X handle too.

Asserting that Ukraine's position remains absolutely clear, he said, "Ukraine has been seeking peace from the very first second of this war, and we want to do everything to achieve it as soon as possi-

ble and in a reliable way—so that war does not return."

Zelenskyy also talked about the three key points that his team proposed during the meeting with the Americans in Jeddah: silence in the skies—stopping missile strikes, bombs, and long-range drone attacks; silence at sea; real confidence-building measures in this whole situation, "in which diplomacy is ongoing, which primarily means the release of prisoners of war and detainees—both military and

civilian—and the return of Ukrainian children who were forcibly transferred to Russia."

There has been no official reaction from Russia as yet.

Meanwhile, soon after the announcement coming in from Jeddah, the Trump government lifted its suspension of military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine, measures that were imposed a week ago in an apparent effort to push Zelenskyy for talks about ending the war.

Centre-right party wins most votes in Greenland's parliamentary election

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nuuk (Greenland)

The centre-right Demokraatit Party won the most votes in Greenland's parliamentary elections, a surprise result as the territory went to the polls in the shadow of US President Donald Trump's stated goal of taking control of the island one way or another.

Both Demokraatit — the Democrats — and the second place party, Nalaraq — "Point of Orientation" — favour independence from Denmark but differ on the pace of change.

Demokraatit's upset victory on Wednesday over parties that have governed the territory for years indicates that many in Greenland care just as much about health care, education, cultural heritage and other social policies.

"I think this is a historic result in Greenland's political history," Demokraatit party leader Jens-Frederik Nielsen said at the election party after the results.

Greenlandic newspaper Sermitsiaq wrote that Nielsen, 33, appeared to be surprised by his party's gains, with photos showing him sporting a huge grin and applauding at the election party.

The Danish Broadcasting Corporation DR reported that Nielsen said his party would reach out to all other parties to negotiate the future political course for Greenland.

"We had not expected that the election would have this outcome," Nielsen told Greenlandic Broadcasting Corporation KNR TV. "We are very happy."

Nielsen also said that Greenland needs to stand together "in a time of great interest from outside," KNR TV reported.

Prime Minister Mute Bourup Egede had called the early vote in February, saying the country needed to be united during a "serious time" unlike anything Greenland has ever experienced.

On Wednesday, after the results were known, Egede thanked voters in a Facebook post for turning out and said the parties were ready to turn to negotiations to form a government.

Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen congratulated the Demokraatit party and said the future Greenlandic government would likely have to "deal with massive pressure from US President Donald Trump," according to DR.

He added that "it's not the case that you can just take part of the Danish Realm — the future of Greenland is based on what the Greenlandic people and government want," DR reported.

Trump has been outspoken about his desire to control Greenland, telling a joint session of Congress last week that he thought the US was going to get it "one way or the other."

Greenland, a self-governing region of Denmark, straddles strategic air and sea routes in the North Atlantic and has rich deposits of the rare earth minerals needed to make everything from mobile



Electoral workers prepare to count votes during parliamentary elections in Nuuk, Greenland.

AP/PTI

phones to renewable energy technology.

Egede's Inuit Ataqatigiit (United Inuit) had been widely expected to win, followed by Siumut — two parties which had dominated Greenland's politics in recent years. A break from Denmark wasn't on the ballot, but it was on everyone's mind. The island of 56,000 people has been on a path toward independence since at least 2009, and the 31 lawmakers elected will shape the island's future as it debates whether the time has come to declare independence.

Four of the five main parties in the race sought independence, but disagreed on when and how.

Nalaraq is the most aggressively pro-independence, while Demokraatit favours a more moderate pace of change.

"What approach to independence will win the day will ultimately depend on if Demokraatit decides to form a coalition government, and if so, with which party," said Dwayne Menezes, managing director of the Polar Research and Policy Initiative.

Captain of cargo vessel involved in North Sea collision is Russian

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The captain of a cargo ship that collided with a US tanker is a Russian national who remains in UK police custody, the vessel's owner said Wednesday, as it emerged that the ship failed several safety checks last year.

The 59-year-old man, who hasn't been named by authorities, was arrested by police in northeast England Tuesday on suspicion of manslaughter by gross negligence over the collision. He hasn't been charged.

Shipping company Ernst Russ, which owns the Portugal-flagged cargo vessel Solong, said that the ship's 14 crew were a mix of Russian and Filipino nationals.

UK authorities say they have so far found no evidence of foul play in the crash. Humber Police said that detectives were conducting inquiries alongside partner agencies.

The UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch is also involved in investigating what caused the Solong, bound from Grangemouth, Scotland, to Rotterdam, Netherlands, to hit the stationary tanker, which was anchored about 16 kilometres off the English coast.

The investigation is being led by the US and Portugal, the countries where the

vessels are flagged.

Port inspection documents show the Solong failed steering-related safety checks in Dublin, Ireland, in July, with the vessel's "emergency steering position communications / compass reading" unreadable. Inspectors found a total of 10 deficiencies, including "inadequate" alarms, survival craft "not properly maintained" and fire doors "not as required."

An inspection in Scotland in October found two other deficiencies. The ship wasn't detained after either inspection.

The cargo ship collided Monday with MV Stena Immaculate, a tanker transporting jet fuel for the US military in the North Sea off eastern England on Monday, setting both vessels ablaze.

One sailor from the Solong is missing and presumed dead. The other 36 crew members from the two vessels were brought safely ashore, with no major injuries. The Solong was drifting and still on fire Wednesday, but is likely to remain afloat rather than sinking, officials said.

The 183-metre Stena Immaculate was operating as part of the US government's Tanker Security Programme, a group of commercial vessels that can be contracted to carry fuel for the military when needed.

White House pressures Columbia University as it seeks to deport pro-Palestinian activists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

The White House complained Tuesday that Columbia University is refusing to help federal agents find people being sought as part of the government's effort to deport participants in pro-Palestinian demonstrations, as the administration continued to punish the school by yanking federal research dollars.

Immigration enforcement agents on Saturday arrested and detained Mahmoud Khalil, a legal U.S. resident and Palestinian activist who played a prominent part in protests at Columbia last year. He is now facing possible deportation.

President Donald Trump has vowed additional arrests. In a briefing with reporters in Washington, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said federal authorities have been "using intelligence" to identify other people involved in campus demonstrations critical of Israel

that the administration considered to be antisemitic and "pro-Hamas."

She said Columbia had been given names and was refusing to help the Department of Homeland Security "to identify those individuals on campus."

"As the president said very strongly in his statement yesterday, he is not going to tolerate that," Leavitt said.

A Columbia spokesperson didn't immediately return a message seeking comment.

Last week, the Trump administration announced it was pulling \$400 million in grants and contracts from Columbia, accusing the school of failing to stop antisemitism on campus. As part of those cuts, the National Institutes of Health late Monday it was cutting more than \$250 million in funding, which included more than 400 grants.

X. Edward Guo, director of Columbia's Bone Bioengineering Laboratory, posted a screenshot on X of an email he received

notifying him that one of his NIH awards had been canceled. "We understand this may be shocking news," the email reads.

The university was wracked last spring by large demonstrations by students calling for an end to Israeli military action in Gaza and a recognition of Palestinians' human rights and territorial claims. The university ultimately called in police to dismantle a protest encampment and end a student takeover of an administration building.

Khalil, 30, had been a spokesperson for the protesters. He hasn't been charged with any crimes, but Leavitt said the administration had moved to deport him under a section of the Immigration and Nationality Act that gives the secretary of state the power to deport a non-citizen if the government "has reasonable ground to believe" the person's presence could have "serious adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States."

As of Tuesday, Khalil was being held at an immigration detention center in Louisiana. Civil rights groups and Khalil's attorneys say the government is unconstitutionally using its immigration-control powers to stop him from speaking out. A federal judge set a hearing for Wednesday and ordered the government not to deport him in the meantime.

Trump, a Republican, has suggested that some protesters support Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and abducting 251. Israel responded with bombardment and other military offensives that have left over 48,000 Palestinians dead in Hamas-ruled Gaza. Israel says more than 17,000 were militants.

Trump heralded Khalil's arrest as the first "of many to come," vowing on social media to deport students the president described as engaging in "pro-terrorist, anti-Semitic, anti-American activity."

US tariffs on steel, aluminum unjustified: Australia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Melbourne

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Wednesday that US tariffs on Australian steel and aluminum were unjustified, but his government would not retaliate with its own tariffs. US President Donald Trump said last month he was considering a tariff exemption for Australia, a free trade treaty partner that has traded with the United States at a deficit for decades.

A former Australian government secured an exemption with the previous Trump administration in 2018 based on arguments including that Australian steelmaker BlueScope employs thousands of workers in the US.

Albanese said he would continue to pursue an Australian exemption. The 2018 exemption took several months to

secure. "It has been foreshadowed that no country regardless of its relationship with the United States has been granted an exemption. Such a decision by the Trump administration is entirely unjustified," Albanese said.

"Tariffs and escalating trade tensions are a form of economic self-harm and a recipe for slower growth and higher inflation. They are paid by the consumers. This is why Australia will not be imposing reciprocal tariffs on the United States," Albanese added.

The US officially increased tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports to 25 percent on Wednesday. The US decision not to exempt Australia was announced days after a spat became public between Trump and the former Australian prime minister who secured the 2018 exemption, Malcolm Turnbull.

Trump tariffs disappointing but no retaliation: UK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The British government on Wednesday called the Trump administration's tariffs on global steel and aluminium imports "disappointing," but said that it won't impose retaliatory measures.

Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, however, did not rule out future tariffs on US imports and said he would "continue to engage closely and productively with the US to press the case for UK business interests."

"We will keep all options on the table and won't hesitate to respond in the national interest," Reynolds said.

Treasury Minister James Murray echoed that, telling Times Radio: "We reserve our right to retaliate."

Britain is not part of the European Union, which Wednesday announced import taxes on American goods, ranging from steel and

aluminium to bourbon, peanut butter and jeans in response to Trump's move.

Center-left UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has worked to build strong ties with President Donald Trump, in hope of avoiding the tariffs levied on many other US trading partners.

After a meeting last month at the White House, Trump and Starmer said their governments would work on sealing a long-elusive US-UK trade deal.

Reynolds said the government remains "focused on a pragmatic approach and are rapidly negotiating a wider economic agreement with the US to eliminate additional tariffs and to benefit UK businesses and our economy."

The tariffs are a new blow for Britain's once-mighty steel industry, which has shrunk dramatically from its 1970s peak and now accounts for 0.1% of the economy.

Trump halts programme that keeps aging affordable housing livable

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

The Trump administration is halting a USD 1 billion programme that helps preserve affordable housing, threatening projects that keep tens of thousands of units livable for low-income Americans, according to a document obtained by The Associated Press.

The action is part of a slew of cuts and funding freezes at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, largely at the direction of President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, that have rattled the affordable-housing industry.

Preserving these units gets less attention than ribbon-cuttings, but it's a centre-piece of efforts to address the nation's housing crisis. Hundreds of thousands of low-rent apartments, many of them aging and in need of urgent repair, are at risk of being yanked out from under poor Americans.

The programme has already awarded the money to projects that would upgrade

at least 25,000 affordable units across the country, and details of how it will be wound down remain unclear.

A spokesperson for HUD did not respond to repeated requests for comment. But an internal document reviewed by the AP said that the programme is being "terminated" at the direction of DOGE. Two HUD workers, who have knowledge of the programme and spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal, confirmed the directive to shutter it.

On its face, the over USD 1 billion Green and Resilient Retrofit Programme, passed by Congress in 2022, is intended for energy-efficiency improvements. It is distributed in grants and loans to owners of affordable housing in need of updating, including replacing or repairing heating and cooling systems, leaky roofs, aging insulation or windows, or undertaking flood-proofing.

But the money plays a much larger role in preserving affordable units.

Projects that use the funds are required



to keep their buildings affordable for up to 25 years. The money is also leveraged to pull in other investments for major repairs and renovations needed to keep the buildings livable.

It's like building a Jenga tower, where one of the programme's grants or loans — which range from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars — is a bottom block and each new block is another investment, experts said.

This money "was essential in order for the project to come together," said Mike Essian, vice president at American Community Developers, Inc., which received funding for several affordable

housing projects. "Projects will fail and these are projects that are already difficult to finance."

The news has been a jolt to Al Hase and Joan Starr, tenants in an apartment building in Vancouver, Washington, full of other low-income seniors with few or no other options — most of whom live on less than USD 33,000 a year.

The 170-unit Smith Tower Apartments, built in the 1960s, is in need of updates, including its first building-wide sprinkler system. The USD 10 million award was a financial kickstart for its nearly USD 100 million project, and is cited in applications for other investments.

The potential loss "seriously jeopardises our ability to be able to provide an upgrade to the current systems," said Greg Franks, president of the property's management company, adding that the work is "needed to sustain the livability of this building based on its age, and to keep it viable for another 60 years."

"We are depending on that USD 10 mil-

lion," he said.

So, too, are Hase and Starr, a retired couple in their 70s who have lived there for 16 years.

They fill their balcony with geraniums and petunias, count the eagles at a nearby park and live off of meagre Social Security incomes. They learned about the potential funding loss in a letter from the apartment's management company.

"It's kinda terrifying, it's almost like getting news from a doctor that something's going to take your life in six months or a year," Hase told the AP in a phone call.

"We're from an era where the wages weren't there, so our Social Security..." he said, pausing. "Sucks," pitched in Starr.

"If I'd been born a rich man," he said. Starr added: "We're just regular people."

"And we're the lucky ones because we've got two social securities coming in," she said.

But being lucky ones still doesn't count for much in today's rental market. "Prices

keep going up, I've looked, and there's no way," she said.

"It's the difference between living and not being able to live," he said.

HUD's lack of communication about the programme's future sent organisations in search of contingency plans, though roughly two dozen projects will still get funding, one HUD employee told the AP. The rest are in limbo.

"If these funds aren't reinstated, we will certainly seek other funding to fill that gap. The reality is that will take time and will inevitably make the project more expensive," Travis Phillips of the Housing Development Centre said of funding for Smith Tower.

It's the position several hundred other affordable-housing projects now find themselves in across 42 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

"In all honesty," said Michelle Arealos, Smith Tower's administrator, "if this building were not here, a lot of our folks actually probably would be homeless."

## Nearly 550 Indians rescued from scam centres near Myanmar-Thailand border

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bangkok

The Indian Embassy here in close coordination with its counterpart at Yangon in neighbouring Myanmar has ensured repatriation of 549 Indians after rescuing them from scam centres operating in areas near the Myanmar-Thailand border, officials said on Wednesday. The Indian nationals were repatriated through Mae Sot in Thailand to India on March 10 and 11 by two special flights, according to the Indian Embassy in Thailand.

"This is part of Government of India's sustained efforts to secure release and repatriation of Indian nationals who were lured with fake job offers and were made to work in scam-centres in the neighbouring countries of Thailand," the Embassy said in a post on X.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Indian Embassy at Yangon said in a post on X: "In coordination with Myanmar's Union authorities and local groups, 283 Indian nationals at scam compounds in the Myawaddy area of Myanmar were released and repatriated yesterday through Mae Sot in Thailand. Strongly reiterate our advice against such job offers."

It followed up with another post on Wednesday that pointed out how "the second batch of 266 Indian nationals from scam centres in Myawaddy were repatriated to India via Mae Sot yesterday."

The Indian Embassy thanked "the border authorities and @IndianThailand for seamless coordination and support" and reiterated: "We firmly advise against such job offers in the area."

Earlier on Monday, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi that the government of India has been making sustained efforts to secure the release and repatriation of Indian nationals lured to various southeast Asian countries, including Myanmar, with fake job offers.

"These persons were subsequently made to indulge in cybercrime and engage in other fraudulent activities in scam centres operating in regions along the Myanmar-Thailand border," MEA said in a statement on Monday.

The post by the Indian Embassy at Thailand also advised the Indian nationals to verify credentials of foreign employers and check the antecedents of recruiting agents and companies, before taking up job offers.

The MEA statement echoed the sentiment: "The government of India wishes to reiterate its caution, circulated earlier from time

to time through advisories and social media posts, about such rackets.

"Indian nationals are once again advised to verify credentials of foreign employers through Missions abroad and check the antecedents of recruiting agents and companies before taking up a job offer."

According to media reports, Myawaddy and Tachilek near Thailand-Myanmar border have been known as safe havens for criminal syndicates that have trapped thousands of people from across South Asia forcing them to run online scam centres.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

The General Public is informed that General Power of Attorney which is Executed by Sarthak Jain S/o Mr. Praveesh Jain in favour of Mr. Praveesh Jain S/o Late Mr. D. C. Jain Reg. as Docs. No. 101 Dated 22.02.2006. Has been lost only where. If anyone find this Original GPA or having any objection Regarding this GPA, Please Inform me on my given Mob No.-9911004142 within 7 days.

**Yogesh Kumar (Advocate)**

### PUBLIC NOTICE

I, RAJENDRA SINGH RANA S/O SHRI S.L.S RANA (LATE SHYAM LAL SINGH RANA) R/O H.NO 62 A PKT-D-2, JANIA FLATS KONDLI, EAST DELHI-110096 have severed of my relation and directed/ disowned/disinherited my Unmarried son ATUL RANA from my movable or immovable properties due to his bad habits, continuous irresponsible behaviour of breach of trust, not heading to my advice, it appears that he is involved in such activities detrimental to my family interest for which I shall not be responsible for any of his act, deeds done by him in future in any manner and anybody dealing with him shall be at their own risks and consequences.

**PD(1666)A**  
I, Satewan, Father of No.16020079X, Hav Sandeep Sahu, R/o- VPO- Bibipur, Teh & Dist- Jind, Haryana-126102, have changed my name from Satewan to Satywan, vide affidavit dated 12/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

**PD(1666)C**  
I, Suresh W/o- JC-472032M Sub Ajit Singh, R/o- VPO-Sultana Ahiran, Teh - Buhana, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan- 333502, have changed my name from Suresh to Suresh Devi, vide affidavit No. INDL48330590091923X, dated 11/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

**PD(1669)C**  
I, Mohanan V, F/o- JC-858077P NB/SUB(OFC) Suresh M, R/o- Vill & PO- Balamaramapuram, Teh- Neyyattinkara Dist- Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala- 695501, have changed my name from Mohanan V to V Mohanan Nair, vide affidavit dated 12/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

**PD(1670)C**



**THANKSGIVING**  
Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine  
PD(1667)C

**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I, K Thankanchan, F/o-15799374P NK(OPR) Aneesh T, R/o- Puthenchira, Thekumuri, Champakulam PO, Alappuzha, Kerala-688505, have changed my name from K Thankanchan to Thankachan K, vide affidavit dated 12/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

**PD(1671)C**  
I, Mahadik Dadaso Ramu Father of- No.14868601F Nk Mahadik Mahesh D, R/o- A/P Dhmalwadi, Tal- Koregaon, Dist- Satara, Maharashtra- 415010, have changed my name from Mahadik Dadaso Ramu to Dadaso Ramu Mahadik, vide affidavit dated 12/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

**PD(1672)C**  
I, hitherto known as Pratap Sunder Das Makhija S/o Sunder Das Makhija, R/o- 32B, Sanskriti Apartments, Sec- 19B, Dwarka, New Delhi- 110075, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Pratap Makhija.

**PD(1673)C**  
I, Dwarika Nath Ram R/o- RZ- 33/1/195, Gali No- 14 D, Durga Park, New Delhi- 110045, declare that in my service records (Lab Assistant Employee Id 20130613), my name has been erroneously recorded as Dwarka Nath Ram, whereas my correct name is Dwarika Nath Ram, which may be amended accordingly.

**PD(1674)C**

## AXIS BANK LTD.

### PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION OF PLEDGED ASSETS BEING GOLD ORNAMENTS

THE BORROWERS, IN SPECIFIC AND THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT PUBLIC AUCTION OF THE GOLD ORNAMENTS PLEDGED IN THE BELOW ACCOUNTS IS PROPOSED TO BE CONDUCTED BY THE AXIS BANK AT THE BELOW MENTIONED BRANCH. THE BELOW MENTIONED BORROWERS HAS AVAILED THE CREDIT FACILITY FROM THE AXIS BANK LIMITED AGAINST THE PLEDGE OF GOLD ORNAMENTS ("GOLD LOAN FACILITY") IN FAVOUR OF THE BANK TOWARDS THE SECURITY. THE DEMAND NOTICES WERE ISSUED TO THE BORROWERS/GUARANTORS CALLING UP THE BORROWERS/ GUARANTORS TO PAY THEIR OUTSTANDING AMOUNT TOWARDS THE GOLD LOAN FACILITY. AS THE BORROWERS/ GUARANTORS HAVE FAILED TO REPAY THE OUTSTANDING LOAN AMOUNT, THE BANK IS CONSTRAINED TO INVOKE THE PLEDGE AND PROPOSED TO CONDUCT AN E-AUCTION SALE OF PLEDGED GOLD ORNAMENTS MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED IN SCHEDULE OF PROPERTY HEREUNDER ON 24.03.2025 AT 12.30 PM TO 03.30 PM ON "AS IN WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS", "WHATEVER THERE IS" AND "NO RECOURSE BASIS". DETAILS OF BORROWERS AND OUTSTANDING AMOUNT

SR NO.	CUSTOMER NAME	LOAN A/C NO.	AMOUNT OUTSTANDING (IN RS.)	DATE OF RECALL NOTICE	GROSS WEIGHT	NET WEIGHT
<b>B.O.: ASHOK VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
1	NASREEN	XXXXXXXXXXXX3034	RS. 95,334.00	28-NOV-24	29.500	24.400
2	VINOD KUSHAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX4279	RS. 34,682.00	26-JUL-24	8.500	8.200
<b>B.O.: DARYAGANJ, DELHI [DL]</b>						
3	ARVIND DUGAWA	XXXXXXXXXXXX0597	RS. 4,51,401.00	30-JAN-25	104.800	102.100
4	KISHAN MAHTO	XXXXXXXXXXXX0741	RS. 1,33,523.00	4-AUG-24	34.500	33.000
5	RAJ KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX9868	RS. 77,685.00	8-MAY-24	12.600	10.500
<b>B.O.: DWARKA, DELHI [DL]</b>						
6	GHANSHYAM SHARMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX8208	RS. 1,98,541.00	21-SEP-24	53.200	52.700
7	JANARDHAN .	XXXXXXXXXXXX3796	RS. 1,56,542.00	20-JUL-24	26.400	20.800
8	KUMARI RACHNA	XXXXXXXXXXXX9669	RS. 1,28,401.00	4-NOV-24	42.030	38.900
9	SUBHOJIT SAH	XXXXXXXXXXXX6690	RS. 47,459.00	8-MAY-24	18.700	17.900
<b>B.O.: FARIDABAD [HR]</b>						
10	PRATIMA RAI	XXXXXXXXXXXX8122	RS. 83,262.00	8-MAY-24	11.650	11.650
<b>B.O.: GEETA COLONY, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
11	ASHISH KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX7960	RS. 4,44,099.00	30-MAY-23	105.820	93.400
<b>B.O.: GHAZIABAD [UP]</b>						
12	BALRAJ SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX3130	RS. 55,518.00	20-JUL-24	109.500	74.000
13	SANJEEV KUMAR TYAGI	XXXXXXXXXXXX6001	RS. 58,469.00	28-AUG-24	9.500	9.200
14	SANJEEV KUMAR TYAGI	XXXXXXXXXXXX3265	RS. 58,377.00	27-SEP-24	9.900	9.800
<b>B.O.: GREATER NOIDA [UP]</b>						
15	SANGITA .	XXXXXXXXXXXX7527	RS. 59,035.00	6-JAN-25	21.200	13.000
<b>B.O.: JYOTI NAGAR DEL DL</b>						
16	HEMANT GUPTA	XXXXXXXXXXXX9104	RS. 1,71,411.00	8-MAY-24	48.600	48.300
17	HEMANT GUPTA	XXXXXXXXXXXX8634	RS. 1,71,188.00	20-JUL-24	44.600	37.200
18	MOHIT KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX0448	RS. 1,02,315.00	7-JUN-24	14.300	14.000
19	MOHIT KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX3464	RS. 1,02,283.00	8-MAY-24	48.300	35.000
<b>B.O.: KALKAJI, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
20	GYAN SHANKAR SHUKLA	XXXXXXXXXXXX7020	RS. 1,81,382.00	15-FEB-24	40.390	40.210
21	SHAMSHER AHAMAD	XXXXXXXXXXXX6490	RS. 53,530.00	30-JAN-25	15.500	14.800
<b>B.O.: KAPASHERA OD DL</b>						
22	SUNEEL SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX9945	RS. 45,026.00	27-SEP-24	15.400	14.900
<b>B.O.: LAJPAT NAGAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
23	ABHINAV KUMAR SHARMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX6176	RS. 13,78,429.00	20-JUL-24	340.400	333.000
24	ASHA RAM YADAV	XXXXXXXXXXXX7816	RS. 4,44,837.90	20-NOV-24	131.500	106.200
25	LALIT SHARMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX2903	RS. 1,23,616.00	8-MAY-24	30.000	28.300
<b>B.O.: MAYUR VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
26	SANDEEP KUMAR OJHA	XXXXXXXXXXXX7851	RS. 59,321.00	27-NOV-24	13.300	12.700
<b>B.O.: NEHRU PLACE, DELHI [DL]</b>						
27	SUNIL KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX9524	RS. 44,171.00	8-MAY-24	62.300	12.500
<b>B.O.: NEW RAILWAY ROAD, GURGAON [HR]</b>						
28	ASHOK KUMAR MANDAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX2390	RS. 4,08,693.00	20-JUL-24	64.900	62.700
29	MITESH VERMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX1786	RS. 1,07,854.00	27-SEP-24	18.200	16.700
30	SACHIN TYAGI	XXXXXXXXXXXX3067	RS. 61,359.00	4-AUG-24	14.100	13.900
31	SUNIL KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX2815	RS. 44,915.00	30-JAN-25	10.000	9.800
32	SUNIL KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX3841	RS. 44,878.00	30-JAN-25	8.990	8.790
33	SUNIL KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX5263	RS. 44,533.00	7-SEP-24	9.800	8.800
<b>B.O.: NOIDA [UP]</b>						
34	NIRBHAY SHARAN	XXXXXXXXXXXX4932	RS. 92,196.00	27-SEP-24	27.800	22.000
35	SHILENDRA KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX7757	RS. 52,589.00	8-MAY-24	7.800	7.300
<b>B.O.: NOIDA EXTENSION GND UP</b>						
36	RAJAN GUPTA	XXXXXXXXXXXX4451	RS. 76,921.00	22-MAR-24	18.200	17.400
<b>B.O.: PARADISE MALL S GUR HR</b>						
37	ANKUR KUDA	XXXXXXXXXXXX4982	RS. 5,28,139.00	8-MAY-24	78.400	78.400
38	VINOD YADAV	XXXXXXXXXXXX6853	RS. 34,344.00	28-NOV-24	8.200	7.900
<b>B.O.: R MISSION, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
39	SHANNO	XXXXXXXXXXXX2336	RS. 53,293.00	20-NOV-24	22.900	10.500
40	VIKRAM SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX0544	RS. 35,938.00	7-SEP-24	8.100	8.000
41	KIRAN SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX6217	RS. 35,904.00	20-NOV-24	7.200	6.850
<b>B.O.: RAJ NAGAR, GHAZIABAD [UP]</b>						
42	SITAB SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX6140	RS. 49,552.00	27-SEP-24	20.600	20.300
43	VIKAS KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX5922	RS. 36,305.00	20-JUL-24	8.300	8.200
<b>B.O.: SECTOR 10A, GURGAON [HR]</b>						
44	ANKIT KHERA	XXXXXXXXXXXX8115	RS. 5,32,088.00	27-SEP-24	130.990	130.990
45	RUPESH KUMAR PANDEY	XXXXXXXXXXXX1037	RS. 61,915.28	20-NOV-24	12.300	11.500
<b>B.O.: SECTOR 12 NOIDA</b>						
46	SUSANTO PAUL	XXXXXXXXXXXX0545	RS. 42,154.00	30-JAN-25	9.000	9.000
<b>B.O.: SECTOR 14, GURGAON [HR]</b>						
47	DEEPAK KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX6867	RS. 2,57,509.00	30-JAN-25	59.800	58.800
<b>B.O.: SECTOR 16, FARIDABAD [HR]</b>						
48	DEEPAK	XXXXXXXXXXXX3557	RS. 2,53,226.00	7-JUN-24	39.190	38.790
49	PANKAJ .	XXXXXXXXXXXX3170	RS. 89,420.00	20-NOV-24	54.500	20.400
50	PRAMOD VERMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX9574	RS. 83,383.00	30-JAN-25	20.500	20.400
51	RITU	XXXXXXXXXXXX8890	RS. 62,909.00	20-JUL-24	26.600	20.000
52	SONU .	XXXXXXXXXXXX8219	RS. 48,381.00	2-APR-24	11.300	11.000
53	SUBHASH KUMAR SHARMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX3126	RS. 47,527.00	2-APR-24	12.000	11.200
54	SUMAN SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX3405	RS. 45,854.00	8-MAY-24	9.000	8.800
<b>B.O.: SECTOR 57, GURGAON [HR]</b>						
55	MOHINI VERMA	XXXXXXXXXXXX6010	RS. 1,02,645.00	6-JAN-25	21.600	18.700
<b>B.O.: SECTOR-22, GURG GUR HR</b>						
56	SACHIN TYAGI	XXXXXXXXXXXX9236	RS. 61,462.72	20-JUL-24	9.980	9.680
<b>B.O.: SECTOR88 FARIDA FAR HR</b>						
57	RAVINDER .	XXXXXXXXXXXX9770	RS. 65,360.00	27-SEP-24	12.690	11.990
<b>B.O.: SHAHDARA, DELHI [DL]</b>						
58	POOJA .	XXXXXXXXXXXX1022	RS. 85,525.00	27-SEP-24	13.200	13.000
<b>B.O.: SHALIMAR BAGH, DELHI [DL]</b>						
59	NAVEEN MITTAL	XXXXXXXXXXXX2490	RS. 95,235.16	20-NOV-24	17.800	17.500
60	RAMINDER PAL SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX1649	RS. 69,844.00	20-NOV-23	49.800	18.000
<b>B.O.: SWASTHYA VIHAR, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
61	AZAD	XXXXXXXXXXXX9068	RS. 3,91,462.00	28-AUG-24	106.480	96.680
<b>B.O.: VIKASPURI, NEW DELHI [DL]</b>						
62	KUNDAN KUMAR SINGH	XXXXXXXXXXXX1951	RS. 1,28,065.00	20-NOV-24	27.600	21.100
<b>B.O.: VAISHALI, GHAZIABAD [UP]</b>						
63	PRAMILA GAUTAM	XXXXXXXXXXXX1363	RS. 83,610.00	20-NOV-24	19.990	19.170
<b>B.O.: BADSHAHPUR GUR HR</b>						
64	ANKUR KUDA	XXXXXXXXXXXX9963	RS. 5,27,987.00	20-JUL-24	101.200	80.000
65	KAILASH KUMAR	XXXXXXXXXXXX2699	RS. 1,45,841.00	27-SEP-24	68.700	25.600

AXIS BANK LTD. HAS THE AUTHORITY TO REMOVE ACCOUNT/CHANGE THE AUCTION DATE WITHOUT ANY PRIOR NOTICE. ACTION WILL BE HELD ONLINE [HTTPS://GOLD.SAMIL.IN](https://gold.samil.in) BETWEEN 12.30 PM TO 03.30 PM. FOR DETAILED TERMS AND CONDITIONS, PLEASE LOG INTO GIVEN WEBSITE [HTTPS://GOLD.SAMIL.IN](https://gold.samil.in)

PLACE: DELHI, DATE: 13.03.2025

SD/-, AUTHORIZED OFFICER, AXIS BANK LTD.

### CSB Bank PUBLIC NOTICE ON AUCTION OF PLEDGED GOLD ORNAMENTS

The borrower/s in specific and interested bidders in general, are hereby informed that on account of non-payment of the Banks due by the borrowers as under despite the payment notice and recall/notice issued by the Bank, the gold ornaments pledged with the bank security by the respective borrowers for the loan availed by them will be sold in public auction on "as is where is" and "non-recourse" basis through e-auction portal <https://gold.samil.in> on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2025 at 10.30 AM. The auction may be adjourned to any other later date at the discretion of the bank upon publication of the same in the Bank's notice board. The borrowers are hereby informed that the gold ornaments will be disposed of by private sale if the public auction is not successful and if there is a further balance to be recovered thereafter, legal action will be initiated against the borrower/s for recovery of the balance amounts due to the bank. "In case of defaulted borrower, all conditions will be applicable to legal heirs."

S. No.	Account Name	Client ID	No. of Acc.	Bal. Outstanding as on 11-03-2025	Weight (grams)
<b>BRANCH NAME : ROHINI SECTOR 7</b>					
1	SURENDER SINGH NEGI	7662258	001	2,56,483.96	53.82

For more details/account wise information borrowers/interested bidders may contact respective branches and for participating in the auction, please visit/login to the e-auction portal <https://gold.samil.in>.  
NCT OF DELHI | 13.03.2025 | Sd/- Authorized Officer, CSB Bank

### STORES E-PROCUREMENT

Tender Notice No.: S/66/022/24-25; Dated: 10-03-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:-  
**SN. 1: Tender No. NJ255084; Closing/Opening Date: 31-03-2025**  
Brief Description & Qty: Traction Motor stacking as per annexure; Consignee: - SSE/D/Siliguri Jn., NFR; Qty: 10 Nos.  
NOTE:- For full details of Tender notice and tender documents, tenderer may log on to the website ([www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)) prospective bidder who intend to participate in above tenders are required to log in themselves with the above website and submit their offer electronically, if they are already registered with IREPS. In case they are not registered with IREPS, they are advised to obtain class-III Digital Signature Certificate from the certifying agencies under Govt. of India IT Act 2000 and participate in the above tenders.  
Dy. Chief Material Manager, New Jalpaiguri



"Serving Customers with a smile"

### STORES E-PROCUREMENT

E-procurement Tender Notice No. S/40/2024-25 Dated: 10-03-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works.  
**SN.1. Tender No. 40/25/0528/OT/314/2024-25**  
Closing/Opening date: 19-03-2025  
Brief Description: LED Based Emergency automatic Light Unit Type II, with 12V, 7Ah capacity Soaked Maintenance free Battery for LHB Coaches conforming to RDSO's Specification No RDSO/PE/SPEC/AC/0180-2016 (Rev.0) and RDSO Drg No. RDSO/PE/SK/TL/0181-2016 (Rev.0) Sheet 1 & 2. [Warranty Period: 30 Months after the date of delivery] [Inspection Agency: TPI, Stage Insp. No. Stages: 0] [UJAM Linking: Item Type: Goods (supply)] (i) Qty-40 Set for Pandu GSD, NFR (Assam), (ii) Qty-02 Set for New Jalpaiguri GSD, NFR (West Bengal), (iii) Qty-72 Set for Dibrugarh Town WORKSHOP DEPOT, NFR (Assam), (iv) Qty-60 Set for New Bongaigaon WORKSHOP DEPOT, NFR (Assam) P.L. No. -45151489.

**SN.2. Tender No. 37/25/0759/OT/315/2024-25**  
Closing/Opening date: 25-03-2025  
Brief Description: Constant contact polyurethane Side beater pad assembly for NLB Bogies Drawing-AAL-021101/N Alt-1. Mat. Spec-WD-38-Misc-2004 (Rev-2) [Warranty Period: 30 Months after the date of delivery] [Inspection Agency: TPI, Stage Insp.: No. Stages: 0] [UJAM Linking:] Item: 3100354, Constant Contact Side Beater for rolling stock Sub item: Constant contact side beater for CASNUB 22NLB BOGIES, Item Type: Goods (supply) 1) Qty-100 Nos for Dibrugarh Town WORKSHOP DEPOT, NFR (Assam), ii) Qty-300 Nos for Pandu GSD, NFR (Assam), iii) Qty-700 Nos for New Jalpaiguri/GSD, NFR (West Bengal), iv) Qty-

# Industrial production grows

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's industrial production growth accelerated to 5 per cent in January 2025, driven by a rebound in manufacturing activity, according to official data released on Wednesday.

The government has also revised the December 2024 industrial output figure to 3.5 per cent from the provisional estimate of 3.2 per cent released in the previous month, an official statement said.

The IIP growth in November 2024 was 5 per cent.

The pace of factory output growth stood at 5 per cent in January 2025.

The country's factory output, measured in terms of the Index of Industrial

Production (IIP), witnessed 4.2 per cent growth in January 2024.

The data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) showed that the manufacturing sector's output grew by 5.5 per cent in January 2025, up from 3.6 per cent in the year-ago month.

Mining production growth declined to 4.4 per cent from 6 per cent year-on-year.

Power output growth slowed to 2.4 per cent in January 2025 from 5.6 per cent a year ago. In the April-January 2024-25 period, the IIP grew 4.2 per cent, slower than 6 per cent recorded in the year-ago period.

As per use-based classification, the capital goods segment growth accelerated to 7.8 per cent in January 2024 against 3.2 per

cent in the year-ago period. Consumer durables (or white goods production) grew by 7.2 per cent during the reporting month against a growth of 11.6 per cent in January 2024.

In January 2025, consumer non-durables output contracted 0.2 per cent compared to a growth of 0.3 per cent a year ago. According to the data, infrastructure/construction goods reported a growth of 7 per cent in January 2025, up from a 5.5 per cent expansion in the year-ago period. The data also showed that the output of primary goods logged a 5.5 per cent growth in January 2025 against 2.9 per cent a year earlier. The expansion in the intermediate goods segment was 5.2 per cent in the month under review, slightly down from 5.3 per cent a year ago.

# Inflation falls below 4 per cent in February

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Retail inflation slipped to seven-month low of 3.61 per cent in February mainly due to easing prices of vegetables, eggs, and other protein-rich items, creating space for the RBI to go for another cut in interest rate next month.

The consumer price index-based retail inflation was at 4.26 per cent in January and 5.09 per cent in February 2024. The previous low was witnessed in July.

The consumer price index (CPI) has been in the comfort zone of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) since November 2024.

"There is a decline of 65 basis points in headline inflation of February 2025 in comparison to January 2025. It is the lowest year-on-year inflation after July 2024," the National Statistics Office (NSO) said while releasing the CPI.

Year-on-year food inflation for February was 3.75 per cent.

"A sharp decline of 222 basis points is observed in food inflation in February 2025 in comparison to January 2025. The food inflation in February 2025 is the lowest after May 2023," NSO said.

A significant decline in headline infla-

tion and food inflation during February has been mainly attributed to decline in inflation of vegetables, egg, meat and fish, pulses and products, and milk and products.

Key items having lowest year-on-year inflation in February were ginger (-35.81 per cent), jeera (-28.77 per cent), tomato (-28.51 per cent), cauliflower (-21.19 per cent), garlic (-20.32 per cent).

On the other hand, top items with highest inflation were coconut oil (54.48 per cent), coconut (41.61 per cent), gold (35.56 per cent), silver (30.89 per cent), and onion (30.42 per cent).

Data on urban inflation showed a significant decline from 3.87 per cent in January 2025 to 3.32 per cent in February. A similar decline was observed in food inflation, which decreased from 5.53 per cent to 3.20 per cent in February.

A sharp decline in headline and food inflation in the rural sector was also observed in February to 3.79 per cent from 4.59 per cent a month earlier.

The lowest inflation was in Telangana (1.31 per cent) and highest in Kerala (7.31 per cent).

The RBI, which has been mandated to ensure retail inflation remains at 4 per cent (+/- 2 per cent), has reduced the

short-term lending rate (repo) by 25 basis points last month on easing concerns on the inflation front.

The central bank is scheduled to announce the next set of bi-monthly monetary policy on April 9.

ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said the CPI inflation declined sharper than expected to a seven-month low, appreciably below the mid-point of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee's medium-term target range, led by a welcome cooling in food inflation.

"However, we believe that the sequential uptick in vegetables inflation in March 2025 is likely to prevent a further softening in the food and beverages inflation print in the month, after the substantial cooling seen over the past four months," she said.

Nayar further said the February inflation print falling well below 4 per cent has cemented the expectation of a back-to-back 25 basis points rate cut in the April 2025 MPC meeting.

This may be followed by another 25 bps repo rate cut either in the June 2025 or the August 2025 meetings, she added.

NSO collects the price data from selected 1,114 urban markets and 1,181 villages covering all states/UTs on a weekly roster.

# MRF Vice Chairman takes over as ATMA Chairman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association on Wednesday said Arun Mammen, Vice Chairman and Managing Director of MRF Ltd has been elected as its new Chairman.

Mammen takes over with immediate effect from Arnab Banerjee, MD and CEO of CEAT Ltd, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA) said in a statement.

The national industry body for the automotive tyre sector in India further said Hiroshi Yoshizane, Managing Director Bridgestone India is its new Vice Chairman.

Mammen takes over as Chairman of ATMA at a crucial juncture as the organisation is celebrating 2025 as Golden Jubilee year, it added.

On his new role, Mammen said the Indian tyre industry should have plans in place to be a major global supplier during

the decade and he would work towards policy enablers so as to make industry more competitive and technologically superior to meet the needs of developed countries.

Mammen was appointed Managing Director of MRF Ltd in 2004 and Vice Chairman and Managing Director in 2017. He is a graduate from the Madras Christian College, and also holds a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) from the Ashland University, US.

# Madhya Pradesh increases Budget

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday presented a ₹4.21 Lakh Crore Budget for 2025-26 with no new taxes while announcing new schemes for development of religious sites.

Finance Minister Jagdish Devda presented the ₹4,21,032 Crore budget, a 15 per cent increase over the last fiscal, in the legislative assembly here.

He estimated the fiscal deficit at 4.66 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product.

The budget was for "Viksit (developed) Madhya Pradesh", he said. Among other things, 'Omkareshwar Lok' will be developed on the lines of Ujjain's Mahakal Lok corridor, he said.

He allotted ₹47,296 Crore for schemes for Scheduled Tribes and ₹32,633 Crore for those for the Scheduled Castes.

A provision of ₹18,669 Crore was made for the Mukhya Mantri Laadli Behna Yojana under which monthly financial assistance is provided to eligible women.

Devda, who is the state's deputy Chief Minister, also announced a provision of ₹10 Crore for Shrikrishna Pathway Yojana.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav had earlier said religious sites associated with Lord Sri Krishna's life will be developed under the scheme.

Similarly, ₹30 Crore were allocated for development of 'Ram Path Gaman' and the town of Chitrakoot.

# Sensex, Nifty end moderately lower on selling in IT, telecom stocks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed moderately lower on Wednesday due to heavy selling pressure in IT, telecom, and realty stocks amid growing concerns over a possible global economic slowdown.

The 30-share BSE Sensex fell 72.56 points or 0.10 per cent to close at 74,029.76. During the session, it tumbled 504.16 points or 0.68 per cent to touch a low of 73,598.16.

Similarly, the NSE Nifty slipped 27.40 points or 0.12 per cent to end at 22,470.50. In the session, it fell 168.35 points or 0.74 per cent to hit an intraday low of 22,329.55.

From the Sensex pack, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Nestle India, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies, Asian Paints, Axis Bank, Zomato, Hindustan Unilever, and Bharti Airtel were among the laggards.

On the other hand, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, ITC, Sun Pharma, Bajaj Finserv and UltraTech Cement were the gainers.

The BSE Smallcap gauge fell 0.48 per cent, while the midcap index slipped 0.57 per cent.

Among the BSE sectoral indices, Focussed IT, IT, Teck, Realty, Telecommunication, Metal, Capital Goods, Services, and Industrial were among the major laggards.

In contrast, Energy, FMCG, financial services, Healthcare, Utilities, Auto, Bankex, Consumer Durables, Oil & Gas, and Power were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended on a mixed note.

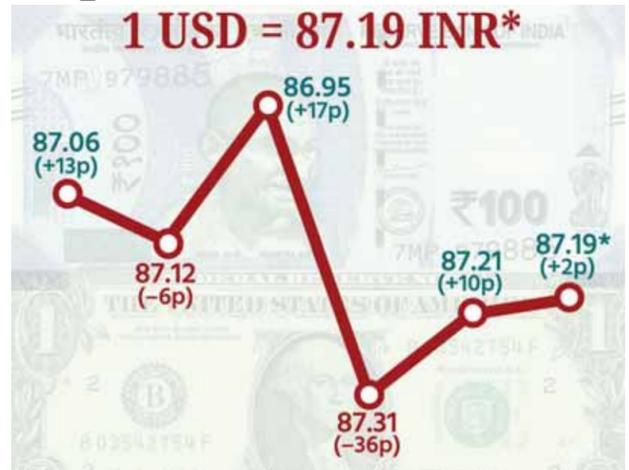
European markets were trading higher in the mid-session deals on Wednesday. Wall Street ended in the negative zone on Tuesday.

Global benchmark Brent crude oil went up 0.34 per cent to \$69.80 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) sold equities worth ₹2,823.76 Crore, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) purchased equities worth ₹2,001.79 Crore on Tuesday, according to the exchange data.

The 30-share BSE Sensex on Tuesday settled down by 12.85 points at 74,102.32. The broader Nifty of NSE advanced 37.60 points to close at 22,497.90.

# Rupee trades almost flat



NEW DELHI: RUPEE VS DOLLAR: PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee turned almost flat and traded with a marginal loss of 1 paisa at 87.22 against the US dollar in early trade on Wednesday amid volatile sentiment due to uncertainties over trade tariff. According to forex analysts, a strengthening American currency index and a recovery in crude oil prices also added pressure on the local unit, which was already weighed down due to selling in domestic equity and the continuous outflow of foreign capital.

They said, market participants were also trading cautiously awaiting cues from macroeconomic data to be released in India and the US later in the day.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.24, tumbled to 87.32 and then gained to 87.22 against the greenback in early deals, trading 1 paisa lower from its previous closing level.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.07 per cent at 103.55. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 0.66 per cent higher at US 70.02 per barrel in futures trade. Domestic equity market traded on a flat note with the 30-share BSE Sensex falling marginally by 0.28 points to 74,102.04 points and the broader Nifty sliding 10.70 points, or 0.05 per cent, to 22,487.20 points.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹2,823.76 crore on a net basis on Tuesday, according to exchange data. According to experts, the uncertainties over tariff moves intensified after President Donald Trump said the US would double the forthcoming levy on steel and aluminium to 50 per cent if they come from Canada but later hinted that he might reconsider the additional hike.

# Retail inflation eases to 3.61 per cent: Government

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Retail inflation slipped to 3.61 per cent in February mainly due to the decline in the rate of price rise in vegetables and protein-rich items, creating space for the Reserve Bank of India for second reduction in interest rate next month.

The consumer price index-based retail inflation was at 4.26 per cent in January and 5.09 per cent in February 2024.

The year-on-year inflation rate for February 2025 was 3.75 per cent, showed the data released by the National Statistics Office (NSO). "A sharp decline of 222 basis points is observed in food inflation in February 2025 in comparison to January 2025," it said.

The NSO said the significant decline in headline inflation and food inflation during February is mainly attributed to the decline in inflation of vegetables, egg, meat, and fish, pulses and products; and milk and products. The RBI, which has been mandated to ensure retail inflation remains at 4 per cent (+/- 2 per cent), has reduced the short-term lending rate (repo) by 25 basis points last month on easing concerns on the inflation front.

# Onus on states to curb illegal coal mining: Union Coal Minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Acknowledging the incidence of illegal coal mining, including rat-hole extraction, the Centre on Wednesday said it is the responsibility of state governments to stop such activities and action against mining mafia cannot be successful without their cooperation.

Replying to questions, including by Gowaal Kagada Padavi of the Congress and Nishikant Dubey of the BJP, Union Coal Minister G Kishan Reddy said in the Lok Sabha that the Centre is working in close coordination with states to lower the number of accidents in coal fields.

Asked about the recent accident and loss of lives at a coal mine in Assam where rat-hole mining was allegedly being carried out, Reddy said that he has spoken to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on the matter.

"It is the responsibility of the state government to check rat-hole mining," he said. "We need the cooperation of the state government too. I had a meeting with (Jharkhand) Chief Minister Hemant Soren and I am hopeful that we will be successful in our plans," he said.

Reddy said the Assam chief minister has conveyed to him that around 250 rat-hole mining sites have been closed down in the state and 12 people were arrested in this connection.

Replying to another supplementary question raised by Dubey on alleged illegal mining in Jharkhand, which has large coal reserves, he said the state police and government have to act against such activities as it is their responsibility.

Reddy said the central government has a zero-tolerance approach towards coal mafia and violence in coal mining activities. Dubey said an NTCP official was killed in Jharkhand and illegal mining has heightened safety concerns for public sector coal firms like BCCL, ECL and CCL working in the region.

He said his Lok Sabha constituency Godda is home to Asia's largest coal block and accused the JMM-led state government of not cooperating to curb illegal mining. Reddy said illegal mining has been going on in the state for many years and he had recently met Jharkhand Chief Minister Soren over the issue.

Safety in coal mines is a top priority for the central government and it is working to reduce accidents in coal mines.

"We have taken a number of steps to reduce accidents in coal mines and results have started coming in," he said.

Asked about the unabated underground blaze in coal mines in Jharkhand's Jharia, Reddy said the fire has been going on for over a century and the central government is working to douse it completely.

# Parliament amends law on oilfields development

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Parliament on Wednesday passed a bill that seeks to amend the existing law governing exploration and production of oil and gas as well as delink petroleum operations from mining operations to boost investment in the sector.

The Lok Sabha cleared the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024, on Wednesday. The bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha on December 3, 2024.

Replying to the discussion on the bill, Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said India is the only country in the world where in the reference period of last three years, the prices of petrol and diesel have actually come down.

"We have brought down the prices of petrol and diesel because the prime minister reduced the central excise (duty) on two occasions," Puri asserted and took a swipe at the Opposition, saying that Congress-ruled states have increased VAT (Value Added Tax) on petrol and diesel. Prices in neighbourhood countries are 15 to 25 per cent higher than in India. Equally, prices in Western Europe and US are much higher than in India, he said.

While moving the bill for consideration and passage in the Lok Sabha, Puri said it does not alter the existing level-

**We have brought down the prices of petrol and diesel because the prime minister reduced the central excise (duty) on two occasions**

— HARDEEP SINGH PURI, PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS MINISTER

playing field for both public and private sectors. "The oil bill aims to resolve one of the biggest grievances of global oil companies interested in investing in India by providing stability in operation, both in terms of tenure of the lease and the condition. The bill also does not alter the rights of the states, which will continue to give petroleum leases and receive royalties as before.

"The bill also does not alter the existing level-playing field and offers no preference to either the private or the public sector," the minister said.

Among others, the bill aims to decriminalise some of the provisions of the original Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948, by introducing "penalties, adjudication by an adjudicating authority and appeal as against the order of adjudicating authority".

Besides, it seeks to introduce 'petroleum lease' and expands the definition of mineral oils to include crude oil, natural gas, petroleum, condensate, coal bed methane, oil shale, shale gas, shale oil, tight gas, tight oil and gas hydrate,

with a view to raising domestic output and cutting reliance on imports, he said.

In his reply, Puri stressed that the government is taking a holistic approach, and that the overall strategy is to increase domestic exploration and production as well as to increase clean energy.

Elaborating further, Puri said the long-term strategy for energy security revolves around the trilemma of availability, affordability and sustainability. "So far, we have navigated all three very successfully," he noted. Currently, India is importing oil from 39 countries and in fact, also buying from a 40th country. "We will buy from wherever we have to... We do not distinguish between the sources of our supply," the minister said.

Congress leader Manish Tewari, while initiating the discussion, said the draft law "lacks vision and roadmap".

Referring to oil imports, Tewari claimed that India was not "future ready". "What is required is a roadmap to make India energy sufficient, which unfortunately is completely missing. What is the government planning to do to encourage independent oil explorers? Is there anything in the bill that incentivises them," Tewari asked.

As far as the bill is concerned, he said it makes minor changes here and there but a vision is missing. "You're not a government that was sworn in yesterday, but 11 years ago".

# IT industry to see 4 per cent to 6 per cent revenue growth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian IT companies are expected to see moderate revenue growth of 4 to 6 per cent in FY26, with hiring likely to remain subdued until growth accelerates towards the end of the fiscal year, according to credit rating agency Icr.

The agency projected attrition level to average 12 to 13 per cent over the near term.

"Icr projects its sample set of Indian IT services companies (which account for 60 per cent of the industry in revenue terms) to witness a moderate 4 to 6 per cent revenue expansion in USD terms in FY2026.

"Moreover, hiring is likely to remain low until the growth momentum picks up by the end of FY2026," it said.

Icr's sample set recorded a year-on-year revenue growth of 3.6 per cent in USD terms during the first nine months of FY2025.

This growth was part of a gradual recovery over the past three quarters, aided by a lower base from FY2024. Additionally, there was a slight increase in discretionary spending by customers in the BFSI and retail sectors in certain markets, along with investments in Generative AI initiatives that led to new orders, Icr said.

The sample set includes Birlasoft, Coforge, Cyient, HCL Technologies, Infosys, LTIMindtree, L&T Technology Services, Mastek, Mphasis, Oracle Financial Services Software, Persistent Systems, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Wipro, and Zensar Technologies.

Icr Vice President & Sector Head

Deepak Jotwani said the growth momentum for ICR's sample set of IT services companies is likely to remain muted over the near term, owing to the looming uncertainty related to the imposition of the US trade tariffs and macroeconomic headwinds across the key markets of the US and Europe.

Policy changes by the US government for key sectors catered to by Indian IT services companies as well as future interest rate trajectory will remain the key monitorables, he said.

The IT industry experienced relief due to reduced attrition rates and wage cost inflation, which were significant concerns during FY2023 and the first half of FY2024.

"ICr expects hiring to remain low in the near term until the growth momentum picks up by the end of FY2026. Lower hir-

ing activity can also be correlated with higher investments by the industry in GenAI and the expected benefits in terms of increased productivity and cost savings," the agency said.

Major Indian IT services companies have trained a significant number of their employees in Generative AI skills and are now expanding their capabilities and service offerings to provide GenAI-based solutions to their clients, it added.

"This has started to show results as the inflow of GenAI-related deals for major industry players has risen in recent quarters and is expected to pick up materially over the medium term, as overall technology adoption is more pervasive.

The healthcare and BFSI sectors remain the early adopters of AI/GenAI capabilities and continue to invest in the same," Jotwani said.

## INBRIEF

**GIRNAR FOUNDATION SPREADS LOVE AND JOY WITH MISSION (DDLJ) CAMPAIGN**

Gurugram: Gimar Foundation, the CSR arm of CarDekho Group, launched 'Mission DDLJ' (Donate and Deliver Love & Joy) to spread kindness and strengthen community bonds in Jaipur and Gurugram. The initiative impacted over 1,000 children and senior citizens through thoughtfully curated programs designed to create meaningful change.

**VIT-AP UNIVERSITY HOSTS ONLINE EDP ON SCIENTIFIC SAFETY DURING NATIONAL SAFETY WEEK**

Amaravati: As part of National Safety Week, the Department of Chemistry, VIT-AP University, in collaboration with Deccan Fine Chemicals and the American Chemical Society (ACS), is organising an Employee Development Program (EDP) on Scientific Safety from March 10 to 15, 2025.

## Manchester United to build 'world's greatest' soccer stadium

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Manchester United unveiled plans on Tuesday to build the "world's greatest" soccer stadium. A proposed 100,000-seater arena, costing around 2 billion pounds (\$2.6 billion), would be built next to United's current Old Trafford home and surpass Wembley Stadium as the biggest in the United Kingdom.

"Manchester United is the world's most favorite football club and, in my view, is the biggest and deserves a stadium fitting of its stature," part owner Jim Ratcliffe said. Work could begin as early as this year, with completion by the 2030-31 season, the club said.

Ratcliffe, who is one of Britain's richest people, said the new venue could be a tourist attraction in the manner of the Eiffel Tower.

"We have 1 billion people around the world who follow Manchester United. They will all want to visit this stadium," he said. Designed by British architect Norman Foster, the first released images of the stadium include three giant tentpoles that would be seen from 40 kilometers (25 miles) away. They support a surrounding covered area, which he describes as "arguably the largest public space in the world."

Wembley is currently the biggest stadium in the UK, with a capacity of 90,000, and is home to England's national soccer teams. Twickenham, the national rugby stadium, holds 82,500.



Old Trafford is the country's biggest dedicated soccer stadium with a capacity of just over 74,000, but is dated in comparison to the likes of the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, which regularly hosts NFL games.

Old Trafford, which was bombed during World War II, has been home to United since 1910.

Under the plans, the 20-time English champion said it would not need to relocate during the construction process. It is estimated it would take around 12 months to disassemble Old Trafford once the new stadium is completed.

Ratcliffe paid \$1.3 billion for an initial 25% stake in United last year and made a new stadium one of his priorities.

"Today marks the start of an incredibly exciting journey to the delivery of what will be the world's greatest football stadium," Ratcliffe said. "Our current stadium has served us brilliantly for the past 115 years, but it has fallen behind the best arenas in world sport."

United has not set a start date yet but Foster said building work, which could include pre-fabricated parts and a "Meccano" type construction, could mean it is completed in five years.

The timing would likely rely on government involvement in what United wants to be part of a wider project to regenerate the surrounding Old Trafford area. It said it would be worth 7.3 Billion pounds (\$9.4 Billion) to the UK Economy, and the UK Government has already voiced its support for the project.

"Our long-term objective as a club is to have the world's best football team playing in the world's best stadium," United chief executive Omar Berrada said.

Managerial great Alex Ferguson said the club "must be brave and seize this opportunity to build a new home, fit for the future, where new history can be made."

The announcement came days after thousands of United fans marched in protest against the club's ownership in the face of cost cuts, ticket price increases and ongoing failure on the field.

United is majority owned by the American Glazer family, which also owns the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Upon investing, Ratcliffe vowed to return the once-dominant club back to the summit of European soccer after more than a decade since it last won the Premier League.

But his first year in charge of soccer operations has been turbulent. United endured its worst-ever Premier League season last year and is on course to set a new low this term, with the team currently languishing in 14th position.

United has not won the league title since Ferguson's final season in 2013.

Berrada said the club was still focused on returning to the summit of European soccer. "We don't want to inhibit our ability to invest in the team, for us to continue being competitive while we are building a new stadium," he said.

Our number one goal is to get our teams winning and to get the men's team competing for all the titles consistently.

## Argentina puts Maradona's healthcare professionals on trial

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Buenos Aires

An Argentine court on Tuesday started its trial of seven healthcare professionals accused of negligence in the death of soccer great Diego Maradona, at age 60.

Maradona was under the care of those professionals when he had a cardiac arrest in a house outside Buenos Aires on Nov. 25, 2020.

Three judges will decide whether those charged, including a neurosurgeon, a psychiatrist and several medical staffers, are guilty of manslaughter. The maximum jail time for those sentenced is 25 years.

According to the prosecution, the accused professionals didn't provide adequate medical care.

Prosecutor Patricio Ferrari said he will provide evidence that, between Nov. 11-25 2020, Maradona was taken to a house in a private neighborhood in the town of Tigre, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, without being in "full use of his mental faculties" to decide on home hospitalisation. Ferrari said it was a reckless hospitalisation in which there was no control.

"After condemning him to oblivion in that house... They deliberately and cruelly decided that he should die," he said.

The prosecutor showed an image of the former soccer star lying in the bed where he was found dead with his abdomen visibly swollen.

The tearful family of the 1986 World Cup winner were present at the courtroom. Maradona's oldest daughters, Dalma and Giannina, sat in the front row near Veronica Ojeda, former partner of the footballer, and Jana, another of his daughters. Minutes before the start of the trial, Ojeda shared a video on social media of Maradona's son Diego Fernando wearing a T-shirt with the face of the football star, and the word "justice."

The trial could last up to four months and there will be three hearings per week.

The spotlight is on neurosurgeon Leonardo Luque, Maradona's personal physician for the last four years of his life. He performed surgery to remove a blood clot from the former footballer's brain just weeks before his death.

## We are doing everything to bring two sides together, says Jay Monahan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ponte Vedra Beach

PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan wants to get a deal done with the Saudi backers of LIV Golf provided it doesn't compromise what he considers the essence of the tour.

Monahan said on Tuesday that President Donald Trump's involvement makes the prospect of reunification "very real." Missing were details on how to get there, only a suggestion that the PGA Tour and the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia were at a standstill.

"We're doing everything that we can to bring the two sides together," Monahan said ahead of The Players Championship. "That said, we will not do so in a way that diminishes the strength of our platform or the very real momentum we have with our fans and our partners. So while we've removed some hurdles, others remain."

"But like our fans, we still share the same sense of urgency to get to a resolution," Monahan and Adam Scott met with Trump at the White House on February 4. The next meeting included Tiger Woods and Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the PIF governor behind LIV and its concept of

**He wants to see the game reunified. We want to see the game reunified. His involvement has made the prospect of reunification very real**

— JAY MONAHAN, PGA TOUR COMMISSIONER

team golf. It was the second meeting where progress slowed. Monahan said no other meetings currently are scheduled.

"President Trump is a lifelong golf fan. He believes strongly in the game's power and potential and he has been exceedingly generous with his time and influence to help bring a deal together," Monahan said. "He wants to see the game reunified. We want to see the game reunified. His involvement has made the prospect of reunification very real."

"When you're in the midst of complex negotiations, particularly when you may be near a breakthrough, there are ebbs and flows in the discussion."

That began a year ago when several players accompanied Monahan to the Bahamas to start the conversation with PIF. The PGA Tour last year brought on the private equity Strategic Sports Group and its \$1.5 Billion investment in a com-

mercial venture. That raised questions whether the tour even needed a deal with the Saudis. Driving the current discussion is how to repair the divide in golf, with players like Jon Rahm, Bryson DeChambeau and Brooks Koepka part of LIV Golf and banned from playing on the PGA Tour. The best players are together only four times a year at the majors.

Monahan invited more questions without providing answers when he said: "We believe there's room to integrate important aspects of LIV Golf into the PGA Tour platform."

"We're doing everything that we can to bring the two sides together." That would not appear likely for the rest of the year. LIV Golf, which began in 2022 with a schedule that avoided some of the biggest events in golf, is playing this week in Singapore opposite The Players Championship, the tour's premier event with a \$25 million purse. Monahan has said over the past month that the priority of the meetings with PIF was about reuniting all the best players more often. He declined to say what "more often" meant or even if that required a financial investment from the PIF.

## Thuram emerges as one of Serie A's leading players

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Milan

Marcus Thuram has emerged as one of Serie A's leading players this season. The Inter Milan forward is now doing it on the international stage.

Thuram scored a stunning early goal to set Inter on its way to a 2-1 victory over Feyenoord in the second leg of the Champions League round of 16 on Tuesday.

Inter advanced 4-1 on aggregate with Thuram also having scored in the first leg and will face Bayern Munich in the quarterfinals.

Thuram, the son of former Juventus defender and World Cup winner Lilian Thuram, could have added to his tally with more fancy footwork as he showed few ill effects from an ankle injury that has restricted his playing time of late.

"I've had a problem with my ankle for a month, sometimes it hurts more sometimes less," the 27-year-old Thuram said. "I'm not at 100 per cent yet."

However, he certainly seemed back to his best right from the start at San Siro.

There was less than eight minutes on the clock when Thuram received the ball midway inside the Feyenoord half and the France forward then twisted and weaved his way to the edge of the area before unleashing a powerful effort into the top right corner.

That made Thuram only the second Inter player to score in both legs of a Champions League round-of-16 tie, and the first since Dejan Stankovic did so against Ajax in 2006.

Thuram almost repeated his exploits at the start of the second half, turning deftly on the edge of the area before his strike went narrowly over the bar.

He also rattled the crossbar in the 70th minute after again dribbling his way through a maze of Feyenoord shirts.

Thuram received a standing ovation from the San Siro crowd when he was substituted shortly afterward.

Thuram, in his second season at Inter, has become one of the league's top

players. He helped the team to the Serie A title last year. Known for his assists last season, the forward has developed into a top scorer in this campaign with 13 goals plus four assists in Serie A.

However, he had only scored once in the league phase of Europe's elite club competition, against Young Boys back in October.

Inter last won the Champions League in 2010 as part of a trio of trophies under Jose Mourinho along with the Serie A title and the Italian Cup.

The Nerazzurri are again on the treble hunt as they lead Serie A and are in the Italian Cup semifinal, where they will play city rival AC Milan. They face a crucial match at Atalanta on Sunday, with just three points separating the two teams at the top of the table.

"It's not that I believe it or I don't believe it," Thuram said when asked about Inter's treble chances. "It's that at Inter we play all the games to win it. And if you do that, then at the end of the season beautiful things arrive."



## Bayern Munich victory over Bayer Leverkusen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Leverkusen

Harry Kane is one step closer to being a Champions League winner, and he wants to enjoy Bayern Munich's statement victory over German rival Bayer Leverkusen.

"To beat this team 5-0 over two legs shows the type of team that we are," Kane told broadcaster Prime Video after scoring his 10th Champions League goal of the season in Tuesday's 2-0 second-leg win. "We're in the quarterfinal now where Bayern Munich should be and we want to keep pushing," Kane said. "We just want to enjoy this because it's not easy. Especially when you play your domestic rivals, there's a lot of pressure, there's a lot of intensity that goes into it."

Kane added that Bayern hadn't wanted to protect its three-goal lead from the first leg, but instead wanted to put Leverkusen under more pressure by creating chances early on: "In the second half we knew they had to come out and try something and we punished them."

Next stop in the Champions League is a quarterfinal meeting with Inter Milan. "It will be tough," Kane said. "The San Siro's a really tough place to go but also, any team we play, we know that we can cause problems."

### Kane and Kompany

Kane's career has been defined by an abundance of individual awards and a lack of team trophies. With Bayern leading the Bundesliga by eight points from Leverkusen and into the Champions

League quarterfinals, that wait could soon come to an end.

The coach who has got the best out of Kane and the players around him wasn't Bayern's first choice last year. Vincent Kompany isn't getting carried away with success. "I won't surf on a hype wave, no chance," Kompany said after beating Leverkusen on Tuesday.

### He praised Kane's contribution

"It obviously helps when you have a top player who only wants to run and fight for the team like a youth player," Kompany said. "That energy just helps."

Leverkusen under strain. Xabi Alonso's team is no stranger to a busy schedule — Leverkusen played 53 games last season, losing only the Europa League final — but the extra strain of the Champions League has seemed to take its toll on his relatively small squad.

Both Leverkusen and Bayern lost their Bundesliga games last week after their Champions League first-leg game. That defeat in itself was a blow to Leverkusen's fading German title defense ambitions, but far worse was an injury to attacking midfielder Florian Grill, who is set to be out for several weeks.

Against Bayern on Tuesday, Alonso tried to shake up his tactics with more long balls and a starting spot for tall striker Patrik Schick, but the Czech international's main contribution ended up being an involuntary assist for Kane's goal as Leverkusen didn't have a shot on target until the 65th minute.

## Paris Saint-Germain defeats Liverpool in quarterfinals of Champions League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Gianluigi Donnarumma came through and Paris Saint-Germain defeated Liverpool in a penalty shootout to join Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Inter Milan in the quarterfinals of the Champions League on Tuesday.

PSG beat Liverpool 1-0 on the night to level the aggregate score at 1-1. Ousmane Dembélé scored 12 minutes into the second-leg match after a blunder by the Liverpool defense.

After extra time, Donnarumma stopped the penalty shots by Darwin Nunez and Curtis Jones to secure his team a 4-1 shootout win. Desire Doue scored the winning spot kick for PSG, which will face either Aston Villa or Club Brugge.

"It does not matter if we deserve the win. Both teams deserved to go through," PSG coach Luis Enrique said. "We were better in Paris and they were better here. My team showed great personality and character at Anfield." The French league leader seeking its first Champions League title had lost at this stage in five of the past eight editions. It lost to Borussia Dortmund in last

season's semifinals. "It was the best game of football I have ever been involved in," Liverpool manager Arne Slot said. "It was an incredible performance, especially if you compare it with last week. We were creating chances and then we were 1-0 down. We ran out of luck after last week."

Barcelona cruised past Benfica with Raphinha scoring twice and Lamine Yamal once in a 3-1 win at home.

The Catalan club advanced 4-1 on aggregate score after last week's 1-0 victory and will play either Borussia Dortmund or Lille in the quarterfinals.

After a 3-0 first-leg win, Bayern Munich had no trouble advancing past German rival Bayer Leverkusen. Bayern made it to the last eight a record 23 times in the Champions League era after a 2-0 win at Leverkusen to advance 5-0 on aggregate.

Inter moved on past Feyenoord with a 2-1 victory at San Siro to advance 4-1 on aggregate. Bayern and Inter will meet in the last eight.

### PSG outlasts Liverpool

A thrilling clash at Anfield saw chances come and go at both ends, with Liverpool



goalkeeper Alisson pulling off a string of saves to deny PSG, and with Liverpool substitute Jarell Quansah hitting the post in the second half.

Dembélé took advantage of mix up between Ibrahim Konate and Alisson to roll the ball into the empty net for the only goal of the game.

Premier League leader Liverpool, which did not make it to the Champions League last season, won the first leg 1-0 through Harvey Elliott's late goal in Paris last week.

Barcelona powers into quarterfinals. Raphinha's double made him the leading scorer in the Champions League this season with 11 goals. He had scored the

lone goal last week in Lisbon.

The Brazil forward put Barcelona ahead in the 11th, then Yamal added to the lead in the 27th before assisting in Raphinha's second goal in the 42nd to become the youngest player to score and assist in a Champions League match at 17 years, 241 days. "My teammates make things much easier for me," Yamal said. "It was a good goal but sometimes these things come off and sometimes they don't. For the assist, I tried to shoot and Raphinha turned it into a goal."

Nicolás Otamendi scored for Benfica in the 13th to become the third-oldest scorer in a Champions League knockout game at the age of 37 years, 27 days, according to UEFA. Yamal's goal meant he became the second-youngest.

### Kane leads Bayern

Harry Kane scored his 10th Champions League goal of the season and set up another as Bayern Munich cruised into the quarterfinals. Leverkusen never looked likely to overturn the three-goal deficit from the first leg, even before Kane bundled in the ball at a free kick in the 52nd

after Leverkusen's Patrik Schick misjudged an attempted clearance.

Kane set up Alphonso Davies for Bayern's second goal with a flicked cross in the 71st as the all-German rivalry became a one-sided contest. Bayern could have scored more as Jamal Musiala hit the crossbar with one shot and the post with another.

### Inter comfortably advances

A goal at the start of each half saw Inter easily advance, with Marcus Thuram scoring a stunning eighth-minute opener. The Inter forward received the ball midway inside the Feyenoord half and then weaved his way into the area before unleashing a powerful effort into the top right corner.

Jakub Moder leveled from the penalty spot shortly before halftime after being tripped by Hakan Çalhanoğlu.

Inter restored its advantage on the night six minutes into the second half with a penalty of its own, which Çalhanoğlu converted after Mehdi Taremi was fouled by Thomas Beelen right in the corner of the area.

# Rohit is clear about his goals: Ponting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Australia legend Ricky Ponting believes Rohit Sharma is still going strong and a sense of unfinished business was behind his decision to continue playing and leading India in the 50-over format until the 2027 ODI World Cup to be jointly hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Barring the ODI World Cup, Rohit has won all ICC titles while captaining India. He came agonisingly close to laying his hands on the 50-over world title at home in 2023, only to lose to Australia in the final.

Speaking on The ICC Review, the former Australia skipper said Rohit is pretty clear about his future goals.

"When you start getting to that point of your career, everyone's waiting for you to retire. And I do not know why, when you can still play as well as he's played (in the Champions Trophy final), I think he was just trying to put those questions to bed once and for all and say, 'no, I'm still playing well enough. I love playing in this team. I love leading this team.'"

"And I think, the fact that he said that,



to me, it means that he must have that goal in mind of playing in the next (50-over) World Cup (in 2027)," Ponting stated.

Handed the responsibility of captaincy in 2021 at the age of 34, Rohit on Sunday

clinched his second ICC title following the T20 World Cup win last year as India defeated New Zealand by four wickets to win the Champions Trophy here.

Chasing 252, Rohit, 38, led from the

front with an 83-ball 76 at the top to set the platform for a comfortable win.

In the run-up to the tournament, there were talks around Rohit's retirement from the ODI format after the Champions Trophy, as he had retired from T20Is after winning the T20 World Cup.

But Rohit simply rejected the theories at the post-match press conference following the final.

"One more thing, I'm not going to retire from this format, just to make sure no more rumours are spread," Rohit told reporters after winning the player-of-the-match award.

Ponting said the urge to win the only missing ICC trophy in his cabinet, the ODI World Cup, might be behind Rohit's mind to prolong his career.

"I think probably the fact that they (India) lost the last one and he was captain, that might be the thing that's playing on the back of his mind," the Australian said. "Just have one more crack at trying to win the T20 World Cup, the Champions Trophy, and the ODI World Cup."

"I mean when you see him play like he played in the Champions Trophy final, you wouldn't say that his time is up just yet," Ponting added.



# Masters League: West Indies defeat South Africa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Raipur

West Indies Masters rode on the brilliance of centurion Lendl Simmons and Ravi Rampaul's five-wicket haul to beat South Africa Masters by 29 runs and enter the semi-finals of the International Masters League (IML) here.

Put in to bat by South Africa Masters on Tuesday night, the Caribbeans rode on Simmons' 108, skipper Lara's 29 off 34 balls and Chadwick Walton's 38 not out to put up 200 for 5.

After a shaky start that saw Dwayne Smith (5) and William Perkins (5) depart early off Garnett Kruger, Simmons and Lara took the centre stage and forced a spectacular recovery with a 125-run partnership for the third wicket.

Simmons blazed to a 31-ball fifty, setting the tone with fearless hitting, while Lara elegantly painted his masterpiece. Lara, content on playing second fiddle early on, then launched Alvaro Petersen for a towering six and a crisp boundary in consecutive deliveries.

Simmons continued to dazzle, racing to his century in just 54 balls, dispatching Thandi Tshabalala to all parts with a six and a four before calmly taking a single to bring up a well-deserved hundred.

But just as the duo threatened to take the game away from the grasp of South Africa Masters, Ntini infused life back into the contest by ending Simmons' 59-

ball knock, laced with 13 fours and five massive sixes.

Ryan McLaren then picked up the prized scalp of Lara after the southpaw steered West Indies Masters' recovery.

Despite the setbacks, Walton was in his elements, providing the much-needed impetus to the innings with six gigantic sixes to help West Indies Masters reach the 200-run mark.

South Africa Masters' chase began in explosive fashion, with wicketkeeper Richard Levi's breezy 44 setting the tone. However, the early momentum was short-lived as the loss of three quick wickets derailed their progress, putting the Proteas on the back-foot.

Jacques Kallis and Jacques Rudolph then steadied the innings with a crucial 78-run stand, reigniting South Africa's hopes. With both batters matching each other shot for shot, the game seemed to be slipping away from West Indies Masters. But just when the Proteas looked in control, Simmons produced a game-changing moment, breaking the partnership by dismissing Rudolph for a well-compiled 39 off 34 balls, studded with four boundaries. Sensing an opportunity, Rampaul returned for a second spell, and what followed was nothing short of dramatic.

In the space of just five deliveries, Rampaul ripped through South Africa Masters' middle order, claiming the wickets of Kallis (45), Farhaan Behardien, and Dane Vilas, adding to his earlier scalp of Hashim Amla (3).

# WFI to conduct selection trials for Asian Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Its status as a National Sports Federation (NSF) restored, the WFI swung to action, announcing that the selection trials for the upcoming Asian Championship will be held at Delhi's Indira Gandhi Sports Complex on March 15.

It will be the first proper trial under the supervision of the new WFI administration as it was suspended three days after it conducted election on December 21, 2023 to pick new office bearers.

The trials will be conducted to identify the top wrestlers who will represent the country in Amman, Jordan from March 25-30.

# Mumbai Indians takes on Gujarat Giants

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Harmanpreet Kaur's ability to unflinchingly guide Mumbai Indians in difficult situations could be the clinching factor for the former champions when they take on Gujarat Giants, a team they have vanquished twice this season, in the Women's Premier League (WPL) Eliminator here on Thursday.

With Delhi Capitals already sitting snugly in the final after topping the WPL table with 10 points, the focus is now on India skipper Harmanpreet and Gujarat Giants' captain Ashleigh Gardner to guide their sides into the title round.

Mumbai Indians would certainly enjoy the home advantage as the match will be played at the Brabourne Stadium and the fact that they overwhelmed Gujarat Giants in their penultimate league game here on Monday, with Harmanpreet blazing to a 33-ball 54 in the nine-run victory.

Mumbai Indians' playing XI has largely remained unchanged with Hayley Matthews giving them flourishing starts while also tormenting the opponents with her off spin.

The West Indian all-rounder could once again prove to be the match-winner for her team following her sterling performances against the Gujarat side in their previous two meetings this season.

She broke the back of Gujarat Giants, returning with figures of 3/16 in Vododara last month and again tormented them in the return match at Brabourne, snaring three wickets. With Nat Sciver-Brunt doing the bulk of the scoring for MI, smashing four half-centuries and emerging as the top run-getter this season with 416 runs from eight matches, the onus would be on Gujarat Giants bowlers to tie down the England stalwart.

Sciver-Brunt's wicket-taking ability too cannot be underestimated, given that she along with Matthews have played a piv-

otal role in MI's successful run this season. While Harmanpreet's form has been patchy this season, she did manage a half-century against Gujarat on Monday, which would have given her enough confidence going into the Eliminator.

Gujarat Giants skipper Gardner, who took over the captaincy from country-mate Beth Mooney this season, would know that beating the inaugural edition champions in their own den wouldn't be easy.

Her form has fluctuated all season, though she still continues to be among the top-five scorers with 235 runs. She scored a duck against Mumbai Indians on Monday, one of the reasons they lost the match, which dashed their hopes of automatically qualifying for the final ahead of Delhi Capitals.

The Australian would bank on talented batter Harleen Deol to come good in the do-or-die contest and also hope that opener Mooney gives them a flying start.

# Mumbai to host PSA event from March 24 to March 28

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Mumbai will host a PSA event from March 24 to 28, pitting India's top squash players like Ramit Tandon and Anahat Singh against their overseas rivals.

The \$40,000 prize money Indian Open, to be held at the indoor courts of Bombay Gymkhana, will see participation of players from countries like Egypt, Canada, Malaysia and Japan.

Besides Tandon and Anahat, other Indian players set to take part are Velavan Senthilkumar, Veer Chotrani, and Akanksha Salunkhe. The event will mark the return of a top squash tournament in the country after 2018, when Mumbai hosted the CCI International a PSA World Tour Silver tournament, a release from title sponsors JSW Sports said.

Starting in August 2024, PSA (Professional Squash Association) replaced World Tour tournaments with new PSA World Events, comprising new tournament-tiers Diamond, Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze and Copper. The

**The level of competition is right up there, and it is a great opportunity for Indian players to test themselves against the best**

— RAMIT TANDON, SQUASH PLAYER

Indian Open will be a copper event.

A full-glass outdoor court has been set up for the quarterfinal, semifinal and final, creating a thrilling spectator experience, the JSW said.

India Number one Ramit Tandon said, "It's always special to compete at home, and having a PSA event like the Indian Open in India is a huge boost for the sport."

"The level of competition is right up there, and it's a great opportunity for Indian players to test themselves against the best. With squash making its Olympic debut at LA28, events like these are crucial in building momentum and inspiring the next generation."

PSA CEO Alex Gough welcomed the return of a PSA tournament to India.

# Buttler one of my closest friends: Samson

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson is still not over Jos Buttler no longer being part of the team, and if he had his way, he would do away with the rule of releasing players in the IPL. Samson and Buttler opened batting for Royals for seven years but they did not retain the Englishman ahead of the mega auction last year.

Buttler will play for Gujarat Titans in the upcoming IPL.

"The IPL gives you the opportunity to lead a team and play at the highest level, and it also allows you to build close friendships," Samson told Jostar.

"Jos Buttler is one of my closest friends. We played together for seven years. During this time, our batting partnership time itself is so long that we got to know each other so well."

"He has been like an elder brother to me. Whenever I had a doubt, I would talk to him. When I became captain (in 2021), he was my vice-captain and helped me become a good captain."

Samson said letting go of Buttler was one of the hardest decisions he has had to make. Royals had retained six players, including Samson, Yashavi Jaiswal, Riyan Parag, Dhruv Jurel, Shrimon Hetmyer and

**The IPL gives you the opportunity to lead a team and play at the highest level and it also allows you to build close friendships**

— SANJU SAMSON, CRICKETER

Sandeep Sharma.

"Letting him go has been one of the most challenging decisions for me. During the England series, I told him over dinner that I was still not over it. If I could change one thing in the IPL, I would change the rule of releasing players every three years," he said.

"While it has its positives, on a personal level, you lose that connect, that relation you built over years. He was a part of the family. What more can I say?"

While Buttler will not be around in Royals dugout, Samson is happy about reuniting with head coach Rahul Dravid.

"Rahul sir was the one who spotted me from the trials. He came up to me and said, 'Can you play for my team?' From there to now, with me being the captain of the franchise and he coming back - I'm very grateful, as we all are in the franchise, to have Rahul sir back," he said.

"I have played under him [at RR] as a player when he was the captain and I have

played under him in the Indian team when he was the coach. But a captain-coach relationship is very special and I'm very much looking forward to learning a lot from him."

"He is a top-notch professional and makes sure everything is done properly. I was with him last month in Nagpur at RR's sports academy. From morning ten o'clock till evening five o'clock, he was standing in the heat, watching the batsmen bat and the bowlers bowl, interacting with them, discussing with the coaches. He is absolutely involved in each and everything."

Royals signed 13-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi at the auction and that attracted a lot of attention.

Samson said the teenager is ready for the big leap.

"He looks very confident. He was sitting sixes out of the ground in the academy. So what else can I do? I think it's all about understanding his strength, backing it and being around as an elder brother."

"He looks ready. I think it's all about keeping him in the best shape and in a relaxed environment, which RR is known for, and then back him. You never know, in a couple of years he might end up playing for India as well."

# Gill wins ICC Player of the Month award

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Star India opener Shubman Gill was on Wednesday named the ICC Men's Player of the Month for February following his stellar performances, which includes his exploits in his team's title-winning Champions Trophy campaign.

Gill took home the award, beating competition from Australia's Steve Smith and New Zealand's Glenn Phillips.

In his five ODIs over the course of the month, Gill compiled 406 runs, averaging 101.50 at a strike rate of 94.19. This included a stellar outing in the 3-0 series win over England, wherein Gill registered three consecutive scores of over fifty. Gill began with a confident 87 in Nagpur and followed it up with a 60 in Cuttack. He finished in a grand style, smashing a hundred in Ahmedabad. His 112 came from merely 102 balls and included 14 fours and three sixes.

Gill was awarded player-of-the-match for this innings, and also took home the player-of-the-series award.

Continuing his golden run into the Champions Trophy, Gill hit an unbeaten 101 to lead India's chase in their tournament opener against Bangladesh.

# I do not look back, I care about wins and finishing on top, says Collin Morikawa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ponte Vedra Beach

It's hard to win on the PGA Tour, a sentiment usually heard from players when they are sitting next to the trophy and realise what it took to get there. Collin Morikawa keeps getting reminded after some painful losses.

The player who won five times on the PGA Tour in just over two years as a pro has only one title in his last 75 starts. Morikawa is Number four in the world ranking, and that's not an accident. He is playing good golf and giving himself plenty of chances.

## Small consolation

"I don't look back and be like, Man, I had a great week because I do care about the wins and I do care about finishing on top," Morikawa said Tuesday. "So there's a little bit of yes, I feel great because I know I can keep putting myself in contention, and if I just keep going that, it's going to happen. "But for me, it does suck because I do look back at the wins and I do care about winning," he said. "So that's where I kind of hurts."

He can look back to being in the final group of two majors last year. Morikawa was done in at the Masters when he took him two shots to get out of bunker on No. 9 for double bogey. He shared the 54-hole lead at the PGA Championship with Xander Schauffele at Valhalla. That requires good golf.

But remember, Morikawa won two majors, the PGA Championship in 2020, the British Open a year later, before his 40th career start on tour.

Golf felt easy back then, not so much at Morikawa has better scoring statistics now than when he was winning, but he speaks more about the freedom he felt on Sunday when he was winning with a little more regularity.



There wasn't much freedom when he took his place in the PGA Tour record book for losing a six-shot lead in the final round at Kapalua to start 2023. He played 67 consecutive holes without a bogey that week until one shot after another went wrong. Even more frustrating is losing without really doing much wrong.

Such was the case last week at Bay Hill, when Morikawa lost the lead without really losing control of his game. He was three shots ahead with five holes to play on a course with really one one birdie opportunity left. The other four holes were ranked among the top six in difficulty that day.

Morikawa had made only three bogeys in the previous 58 holes at that point. It wasn't a matter of what went wrong as much as it what went right, a lot, for Russell Henley. There was a two-shot swing on the par-3 14th, the toughest hole Sunday at Bay Hill, which at that point had yielded only one birdie. Morikawa missed the green and made bogey. Henley made his best swing of the tournament with a 5-iron to 10 feet for birdie. And then came the breaks that win tournaments. Morikawa found a

bunker off the tee at the par-5 16th (the easiest hole of the final round) and had to lay up and hit wedge to a front pin, no easy task. Henley went just over the green in rough so thick he could only see his golf ball by standing over it.

And then he chipped in for eagle, a good shot because it was on line, a massive break because it hit the middle of the pin. An inch to the right or to the left, and Henley isn't sure the ball would have even stayed on the green.

Instead, he had an eagle and the lead for the first time when Morikawa made par.

And that's the way it stayed for the last two holes until Henley held his nerve to make a pair of par putts (the combined length of those putts was 10 feet) for the biggest of his career.

Henley's words were telling when he turned his attention to Morikawa.

"Sometimes golf is just mean like that," he said. Morikawa clearly is trending with his game. The world ranking might not include LIV Golf players, but it's generally accurate at the top. The trick now is moving on, just like he had to do after Kapalua in 2023, after the Masters and the PGA Championship last year.

He was in no mood to talk Sunday and offered no apologies given how he felt in the moment.

"I don't owe anyone anything," he said to a roomful of media at the TPC Sawgrass. "No offense to you guys, but for me in the moment of that time, I didn't want to be around anyone. Like, I didn't want to talk to anyone."

He was headed up the highway that evening for The Players Championship, another chance to get in the mix, another reminder that it is coming up on 18 months since his last win, and it was two years before that since he won in Dubai to capture the European tour season title.

The game is there while the frustration mounts. Winning is hard. He needs no reminders and is getting plenty of them, anyway.

"I love being in that position. I don't take it for granted because you just never know," he

said. "But it was frustrating Sunday night. I have to get over it. ... I'm going to think about it. I know what happened. I fully am aware of how it played out. But I just have to move on and I have to learn from it. I have to keep getting better."

**DIRECTORATE OF AYUSH, ODISHA**  
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**CORRIGENDUM**  
 DAYUSH-SCH-MISC-0008-2021-2485 /DAYUSH, Dated, 11.03.2025  
 The Walk-In-Interview for filling up of vacant positions of SPMU, Odisha State AYUSH Society (OSAS) under National Ayush Mission, Odisha scheduled to be held on 17.03.2025 & 18.03.2025 vide Advertisement No. NAM-HR-O-11/2021, 1556/15.02.2025 is hereby rescheduled on 25/03/2025 & 26/03/2025.

Sl. No	Name of Post	No. of Vacancy	Honorarium Per month (in Rs.)	Date of Registration & Walk-In-Interview
1	Programme Manager	01	Rs. 48,400/-	25/03/2025
2	Finance Manager	01	Rs. 44,000/-	25/03/2025
3	Consultant - Ayurveda	01	Rs. 41,800/-	26/03/2025
4	Consultant - Homoeopathy	01	Rs. 41,800/-	26/03/2025
5	Accounts Manager	01	Rs. 41,580/-	26/03/2025
6	HMS Manager	01	Rs. 31,130/-	26/03/2025

The short-listed candidates are required to appear for registration on the scheduled date as mentioned against each post with all requisite documents by 10:30 AM.  
**Venue:** The Directorate of AYUSH, Odisha, Heads of Department Building, 3rd Floor, (Annex building), Unit-5, Bhubaneswar-751001.  
**The authority reserves the right to cancel this advertisement or modify the terms and conditions of this advertisement and the recruitment criteria at any stage of recruitment process without assigning any reason thereof.**  
 Applicants are required to visit the website of Directorate of AYUSH, Odisha regularly regarding any updates of the Walk-in-Interview. No individual communication shall be made for the purpose.  
 Director AYUSH-cum-Mission Director  
 National AYUSH Mission  
 Bhubaneswar, Odisha  
 OIPR-10056/11/0006/2425