

Riot sets Nagpur ablaze

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

A massive war of words broke out in Maharashtra on Tuesday over the communal violence witnessed in Nagpur on Monday night, with chief minister Devendra Fadnis charging that the riots were "pre-planned" and the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) blaming the BJP-led MahaYuti for the disturbances in the otherwise peaceful orange city.

On a day when the chief minister said that the recently-released film "Chhaava" had ignited people's anger against Aurangzeb, the ruling MahaYuti and MVA traded charges on the circumstances leading to the massive violence - in which nearly 40 persons, including 33 police personnel, were injured and scores of vehicles were damaged in Bhaladpura area of Nagpur.

Fadnis said that the violence - which had broken out in Nagpur on Monday over the rumours that a holy book had been desecrated during a protest demanding the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb at Khuldabad near Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (erstwhile Aurangabad) - appeared more like a "planned incident".

The violence broke out hours after the 200-odd workers of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal staged a protest near the Shivaji Maharaj statue in Nagpur demanding the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb and allegedly burnt the burnt an effigy of Aurangzeb. However, the protest sparked rumours that a holy book had been desecrated, leading to violence in Nagpur's Chitnis Park, Mahal, Kotwali and Ganeshpeth.

Making a statement in the Maharashtra Assembly, the chief minister said: "After the morning incident, there was peace in Nagpur. However, some people indulged in violence on Monday night in a pre-planned manner. We found a trolley full of stones and weapons were also found. The mob targeted specific houses and establishments. It (the attack) appears to be a premeditated conspiracy. We will not spare those behind the violence. The



A fire set by miscreants amid violence following an agitation by a right-wing group demanding removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, in Nagpur

police were trying to maintain peace but became a target of attack."

"Thirty-three police personnel, including three DCPs, have been injured severely. Five citizens were injured, while one of them was admitted to the ICU... Irrespective of their religious identity, no one involved in the attack on police officers will be spared," Fadnis said.

Deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde, while making a statement in the State Legislative Council said: "Police have said that many people came from outside. Petrol bombs were also hurled. It is unfortunate that the Police were also attacked. Strict action will be taken in this incident. I appeal to all to maintain peace."

Alluding to the recently released film "Chhaava" made on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the son of legendary Maratha warrior-king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj - starring Vicky Kaushal (as Sambhaji Maharaj) Rashmika Mandanna (as Maharani Yesubai) and Akshaye Khanna (as Aurangzeb), the chief minis-

ter said that the film had brought to the people the "real history" of Sambhaji Maharaj to the people.

"(Following the release of the film), the emotions of people are overflowing and they are showing anger against Aurangzeb. All the same, people must maintain restraint, Maharashtra is getting lots of investment. We will get the investment iff we maintain law and order. I warn every one of those who disturb the law and order will not be spared," Fadnis said.

Hitting back at Fadnis - who holds the State Home portfolio - for his allegation that the Nagpur violence was "pre-planned", Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray said: "Nagpur is the home city of the chief minister himself. It is in Nagpur that the headquarters is located. How can the BJP 'Hindu Khatre me hai in Nagpur'. If that is the case, what did you do all these years? You are alleging the Nagpur incident was pre-planned, what was your home department doing all the time? Was it sleeping? Why did you neglect the threat to law and order."

Israel pummels Gaza, killing more than 400 Palestinians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Deir Al-Balah (Gaza Strip)

Israel launched airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Tuesday, killing at least 404 Palestinians, including women and children, according to hospital officials.

The surprise bombardment shattered a ceasefire in place since January and threatened to fully reignite the 17-month-old war.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the strikes after Hamas refused Israeli demands to change the ceasefire agreement. Officials said the operation was open-ended and was expected to expand. The White House said it had been consulted and voiced support for Israel's actions.

The Israeli military ordered people to evacuate eastern Gaza, including much of the northern town of Beit Hanoun and other communities further south, and head toward the centre of



Palestinians Ali Marouf and his mother Aisha cook on fire on the roof of their destroyed house by the Israeli army's air and ground offensive in Jabaliya, Gaza Strip

the territory, indicating that Israel could soon launch renewed ground operations.

"Israel will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength," Netanyahu's office said.

The attack during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan could resume a war that has already killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza, raising questions about hostages held by Hamas.

PM Modi pens note for Sunita Williams

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Astronaut Sunita Williams is set to return to earth from space early Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has, in a letter to her, prayed for her good health and success in mission. She is expected to return at three am IST after a nine-month stay at the International Space Station (ISS).

Williams expressed her gratitude for the Prime Minister's thoughtful gesture and the support from India during her time in space.

Prime Minister Modi's letter, written on March 1 and sent through former National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronaut Mike

Massimino, was shared on social media by Union Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh.

"Even though you are thousands of miles away, you continue to remain close to our hearts. The people of India are praying for your good health and success in your mission," Modi said in

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PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

the letter. "After your return, we are looking forward to seeing you in India. It will be a pleasure for India to host one of its most illustrious daughters," the prime minister said.

PM Modi recalled meeting Williams and her late father Deepak Pandya during his 2016 visit to the US.

He said he had met Massimino at a programme in New Delhi and Williams' name came up during the conversation. "During the course of our conversation, your name came up and we discussed how proud we are of you and your work. Following this interaction, I could not stop myself from writing to you," he said.

Crime Branch to continue Naba murder probe

Law Minister rejects CBI inquiry demand

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BHUBANESWAR

Dismissing demands for a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan announced in the State Assembly on Tuesday that the Crime Branch would continue investigating the murder of former Health Minister Naba Kishore Das.

His statement came after Naba Das' wife Minati Das sought an appointment with Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi to formally request a CBI inquiry into the case.

A Crime Branch team recorded statements from Naba Das' family members in Jharsuguda on Tuesday as part of its ongoing investigation. The Law Minister assured that the probe would be conducted thoroughly and professionally to examine all possible motives and angles behind the murder.

The Jharsuguda trial court has already received a charge-sheet against Gopal Krishna Das, the prime accused, with several witnesses examined. However, dissatisfaction persists among the victim's family.

Notably, Das' daughter, former Jharsuguda MLA Dipali Das, has also publicly demanded a CBI probe, expressing concerns over the Crime Branch's handling of the case.

Meanwhile, the Congress has raised questions about the transparency of the Crime Branch investigation, suggesting that either a Special Investigation Team (SIT) or the CBI should take over the case. However, the BJP-led government has reiterated that the Crime Branch is fully capable of handling the investigation and will ensure a fair and thorough probe.

With the Law Minister's latest announcement, it remains to be seen whether Minati Das and her family will continue to press for a CBI probe and how this will impact the trial proceedings against Gopal Krishna Das.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament

PM speaks Maha Kumbh, Opposition cries stampedes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Amid protests by Opposition seeking government to speak on the stampedes, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the recent Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj was a defining moment in India's history, much like the revolt of 1857 and the Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi that inspired the nation and paved the way for independence.

Making a statement in the Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister said the Maha

Kumbh also strengthened the spirit of unity in the country and gave a befitting response to those who questioned India's collective strength to organise such a large congregation.

Opposition leaders including Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi urged Speaker Om Birla to allow the Opposition members to speak and demanded the inclusion of the stampede deaths in the statement. Lok Sabha adjourned two times due to the protest of Opposition, leading to adjourning for the day around 2pm.

Odisha plans 7 barrages on Mahanadi basin

Says Minister

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government on Tuesday announced plans to construct seven new barrages on the tributaries of the Mahanadi river to enhance water availability and management.

Panchayati Raj Minister Rabi Naik confirmed this development while addressing concerns regarding drinking water supply in Odisha in the State Assembly.

The minister stated that discussions have been held with Odisha Chief Minister regarding the initiative. Furthermore, Odisha is engaged in talks with neighbouring Chhattisgarh to ensure a smooth flow of water into the State.

"We have discussed with the Chhattisgarh Government regarding water inflow, and Odisha's Chief Minister held discussions with the (concerned)



Chhattisgarh Minister on this issue," the minister informed.

Additionally, officials from both States, including respective commissions, also conducted meetings to address the concerns, he said.

The construction of these barrages is expected to significantly improve irrigation, drinking water supply and overall water resource management in Odisha, the minister added.

Now, age norm for Class-1 admission is 6 yrs+

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In Odisha, the implementation of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 will commence from the academic session 2025-26. As part of the initiative, the age requirement for Class-1 admission has been officially set at six years or older.

The decision is expected to enhance the learning experience of children by providing them with a strong foundational education before progressing to higher classes.

Additionally, to facilitate a smoother transition and accommodate students, the government has revised the age calculation criteria. Previously, children were required to complete six years of age by March 31 to be eligible for admission.

However, considering the needs of parents and students, the deadline has been extended to September 1, informed the School and Mass Education Department on Tuesday.

The extension will provide greater flexibility to students and ensure they receive adequate early education before stepping into primary school.

The SME Department has emphasized that this decision aligns with national policies and will be implemented effectively across all schools in the State. Schools and parents have been urged to take note of the revised admission criteria and plan accordingly for the upcoming academic year.

Balangir migrant dies mysteriously in TN

Kin allege foul play, meet SP

SUDHIR MISHRA ■ BALANGIR

The family member of a migrant labourer, Buddhu Bariha (28) who died in Tamil Nadu a couple of days ago met the Balangir district SP on Tuesday and demanded an investigation into his death.

According to a petition submitted to the SP, Buddhu of village Putibahal under the Patnagarh police station had migrated to the Aapanapati

area of Tripur in Tamil Nadu three months ago to work in a factory. But he died there in mysterious conditions a couple of days ago.

"On March 15, I got a phone call that my son had met with an accident and the caller asked me for money to bring him home. However, at night I got another call about the death of my son," said the deceased's father Bhajman.

"My son had an argument with the contactor there. We believe foul play in the incident and demand a through in-

quiry," he added. "We approached the local police and labour officials earlier. But no effective steps were taken. We suspect Buddhu was killed. So, we came to meet the SP and submitted a petition", said a tribal leader, Giriraj Singh.

"The Coimbatore police are inquiring into the incident and once the postmortem report is available, the exact cause of death would be known and the dead body would be brought here," said Balangir SP Abhilash G.

BBSR Metro Rail project not to be scrapped

■ Rather to be extended up to Cuttack: Minister
■ 3-lane road to be constructed along Nandankanan stretch

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Bhubaneswar Metro Rail project would not be scrapped; rather, it needs to be expanded, said Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mohapatra in the State Assembly on Tuesday. The much-awaited metro rail project remains a subject of discussion, with the government reaffirming its necessity and feasibility. Mohapatra stated that the metro project is essential for urban connectivity. He pointed out that the previous

government had planned the metro rail service only up to Trisulia. However, he questioned the practicality of this alignment, stating, "What will people do by travelling only up to Trisulia? The route must be extended to Cuttack to serve its actual purpose." To ensure an optimal and efficient metro network, a dedicated committee is currently conducting a detailed study of the project. Based on their findings, the government would consider expanding the project's reach beyond its originally proposed limits to



make it more viable for commuters, he said. The metro rail project has entered a crucial phase with the commencement of precast construction at its dedicated facility. The Bhubaneswar Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has launched operations at its precasting workshop and coach maintenance depot, aiming to speed up infrastructure development for the 26-km-long elevated corridor. Mohapatra also reiterated the government's plan for significant infrastructure developments along the Nandankanan Road. He said, "A three-lane road will be constructed along the Nandankanan stretch, and metro rail services will also be introduced along this corridor."

Cong demands waiving of loans of farmers

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Odisha is primarily an agriculture-based State as more than 70 per cent of its total population is dependent on agriculture. Many times due to natural calamities, crop loss and debts, farmer suicides are reported, said the Congress on Tuesday. But unfortunately, the Narendra Modi government which waives off loans worth crores of rupees of industrialists and capitalists without terms and conditions does not write off a single pie of farmers. This has saddened the farmers and it has also proved the Modi's government's lack of concern for them., said Odisha Pradesh Kishan Congress president Amiya Kumar Patnaik. The Congress-led UPA Government in 2008 had waived off loans of Rs 73,000 crore of five crore debt-ridden farmers. Out of this, Rs 25,000 crore of 25 lakh farmers was written off. Presently, if a common man defaults in paying a small loan, the bank officials are confiscating his house. The Modi government's sympathy for industrialists and capitalists is not there for farmers, said Patnaik and demanded that debts worth Rs 40,000 crore of 36 lakh farmers of the State be waived off.

In city Tension as scooterist mowed down by bus

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Tension prevailed for hours in the Ghatikia area of the city on Tuesday after a bus of a private university mowed down a scooterist. Sources said the mishap took place when the youth was travelling by his scooter on Ghatikia road and the bus rammed into his two-wheeler from the rear. The deceased was identified as Soumya Ranjan Sahu, a resident of Paikraipur. While the youth died on the spot, the driver of the bus fled the spot along with the vehicle. Following the accident, irate locals blocked the roads and staged a demonstration demanding adequate compensation for the family of the deceased. On being informed, a police team reached the spot and sent the body for post mortem. The cops tried to bring the situation under control by pacifying the agitators and finally the road blockade was cleared after over four hours.

In State 2 RBTs, 12 leopards killed in last 3 yrs

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Poachers killed two Royal Bengal Tigers and a dozen leopards in Odisha in the past three years, said Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singkhuntia in the State Assembly on Tuesday. Replying to a question of BJP legislator Chakramani Kanhar, the minister also informed that the skin of six Royal Bengal Tigers and 63 leopards were seized during the period. According to the tiger census of 2023-24, 30 big cats were found in Odisha, of which 27 were in the Simlipal Tiger Reserve. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) had conducted the last leopard census in Odisha in 2022, during which 568 leopards were found. The minister informed that as per the 2024 elephant

In State 63,742 suffer from HIV; numbers rising

Despite govt measures
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Odisha has reported a steady rise in HIV cases with 63,742 individuals infected as of December 2024, according to data shared by Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling in the State Assembly on Tuesday. Despite government interventions, annual infections climbed from 2,341 in 2021 to 3,436 in 2023-24, reflecting persistent challenges in curbing the disease. The government operates 167 standalone HIV counselling centres, 1,232 facility-based testing units and seven private partnership clinics to tackle the crisis. Additionally, 52 targeted intervention projects and seven link worker programmes aim to reduce transmission among high-risk groups across 800 villages. However, the consistent year-on-year rise in cases highlights gaps in outreach or effectiveness. The State has not disclosed specific reasons for the upward trend, but limited access to education, stigma and migration-linked transmission may be contributing factors. The HIV crisis coincides with other public health burdens such as kidney disease, which has affected 15,752 people in Odisha. The State has allocated 511 dialysis beds across 68 centres to address renal care though disparities in healthcare access persist. Health experts urge the government to enhance monitoring, expand rural outreach and integrate HIV prevention with broader health initiatives. Awareness campaigns are being conducted at 11 railway stations and major bus terminals to educate travellers about prevention and early testing.



Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi pays last respects to former Union Minister Dr Debendra Pradhan during the performance of his last rites at the Swargdarw in Puri on Tuesday.

Delay in drinking water projects Govt to lodge FIR against contract firms

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Odisha Government has taken a firm stance against delays in ongoing mega drinking water projects across the State. Panchayati Raj Minister Rabi Naik on Tuesday announced in the State Assembly that contractors failing to meet deadlines would face strict action, including FIRs and blacklisting. The issue was raised in the assembly, where concerns were expressed over the slow progress of these crucial projects. BJD MLA Ramesh Behera wanted to know when every household would receive piped drinking water supply. Minister Naik stated that while 72 projects were initially targeted for completion by March, only 52 have been finished so far. However, the government is committed to completing all 72 projects by June and an additional 40 by 2026. The minister blamed the previous government for the delay, stating that contracts signed earlier had exceeded their time limits by the time the new administration took charge. In response, the new state government has already imposed fines and summoned company heads within seven days for an explanation. "If they fail to complete the work on time, they will be blacklisted," he warned.

Aus envoy visits CSIR-IMMT

To strengthen collaboration in critical minerals
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Australian Consul General, Kolkata, Hugh Boylan, visited CSIR-IMMT on Monday, engaging with Director, CSIR-IMMT Ramanuj Narayan and researchers to discuss ongoing advancements in critical minerals technology development. During the visit, Boylan toured the facilities, including the Advanced Minerals Processing Pilot Plant and the Seabed Minerals Extractive Metallurgy Pilot Plant, and participated in a tree plantation initiative on the CSIR-IMMT campus. Dr Kali Sanjay, Chief Scientist



and Head of Business Development, elaborated on CSIR-IMMT's ongoing collaborations with leading Australian institutions, including the University of South Australia, Adelaide, through the Australia-India Strategic Research Fund, and CSIRO, Australia, in advancing critical minerals research. Boylan expressed his appreciation for the growing Indo-Australian collaborations in critical minerals and emphasized the potential for further partnerships in skill development, training programmes, and commercial technology development in the sector.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE UGC, NCTE lack sync; MA in Edu students face uncertain future

The draft National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) Regulations, 2025 is in the public domain to get feedback for its improvement. The release of the draft policy has warned lakhs of MA in Education degree holders about their uncertain future in teacher education institutions (TEIs). It has also depressed thousands of faculty members (having MA in Education background) working in self-financing TEIs about their employment uncertainty. The history of conflict of MA in Education (Master of Arts in Education) and MEd (Master of Education) is more than two decades and has been verdict in the High Courts and Supreme Court. The so-called debate that MA in Education program is more theoretical and research-oriented, it is liberal and not professional has no



AJAYA KUMAR MOHANTY

values at this era of multi-disciplinary approach. The fact is the curriculum/syllabus, assessment procedures, research focus are almost same and also supportive to each other program in a multi-disciplinary institutions. MA in Education course has its presence in more than 15 States in regular, open, and online mode. Whereas

the M.Ed. courses are offered only in regular mode in NCTE recognised institutions in all the States but their number is very less. Thus, it can be concluded that students having MA in Education have a larger strength than students having MEd in our country. The NEFTE 2009 recommends the subjects in teacher education as perspective building, curriculum and pedagogy, and fieldwork. Both the programs are master degree programs and have three components but their priorities within the curriculum vary. However, that variation needs to be treated as a strength to teacher education. MA in Education is a UGC recognised course and MEd is NCTE recognised course but as far as knowledge and skill base is concerned both are relevant to school education with equal weightage. Thus there is a need of overrule of Ministry of Education on NCTE draft policy so that a bulk of future aspirants and existing faculty members of TEIs having MA in Education degree will be secured. In many universities and colleges both the courses are running and there is academic solidarity in both the programs. The draft regulation has neglected the team spirit that exists in any multi-disciplinary teacher education institutions at present. The faculty or candidates having MA in Education with BED, and PhD. in Education are also not eligible to work in TEIs due to lack of MEd degree. Even a candidate having M.A in Education with BED and 10 years of teaching experience in TEIs and two years of experiences in educational practice in any school or NGOs can not be a faculty as per Draft policy due lack of MEd degree. In the name of breaking standalone institutions to

multi-disciplinary, the NCTE itself has become standalone without recognising the platforms working for teacher education. The regulation has neglected the credibility of SWAYAM, NIOS and IGNOU courses related to pedagogical practices, designing curriculum, credible evaluation systems. It has made teacher education as a separate entity and driven by MEd. degree certification. The regulation has approved one single entry i.e. MEd and MEd is not compared with any of the degrees recognised by UGC and other platforms. If we look into the draft policy of UGC 2025 it has focused on the type of work accomplishments by the candidates instead of nomenclature of degree or certification. Here experiences in seven criteria have been regarded. But the NCTE draft regulation is completely based on certification; it does not allow the per-

sons having long and varied experiences in teacher education to opt teaching as career. The most interesting fact is the National Eligibility Test of MA in Education and MEd is conducted with same test papers. The PhD degree in Education is offered to both MEd and MA in Education candidates. Thus the differences are in nomenclature not in knowledge and skill base. The NEP 2020 is visualizing that engineering institutions, such as IITs, will move towards more holistic and multidisciplinary education with more arts and humanities. Students of arts and humanities will aim to learn more science and all will make an effort to incorporate more vocational subjects and soft skills. In this direction, NCTE draft regulations 2025 completely fails to address the need of varied aspirants, lacking the linkage with available knowledge plat-

forms and progressive modalities of teacher education and institutions. The policy does not invite experienced teacher education practitioners to work as faculty member. It also deviates from previous NCTE regulations where MA in Education incorporated as an eligibility criterion for all levels of teaching positions. To get rid of the situation the Ministry of Education should intervene and should overrule NCTE to consider MA in Education with B.Ed as equivalent to M.Ed degree. UGC needs to claim justice for MA education degree holders from NCTE. UGC and NCTE both need to develop a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for both degrees throughout the country. (Dr Mohanty is Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Ravenshaw University, Cuttack, Odisha)

In Gajapati Villagers gherao Adava PS over ganja seizure

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

Tension prevailed on Tuesday in Gajapati district as over a hundred villagers staged a protest and blocked NH-326 connecting Rayagada to Brahmapur demanding release of 11 individuals arrested in a massive ganja seizure operation.

As per reports, police led by Gajapati SP Jatin Kumar Panda had raided Hadupadar village under the Adava police station late Monday night. Police seized 15 quintals of ganja and arrested 11 individuals.

As the news of the arrests spread, enraged villagers gathered outside the Adava PS demanding their immediate release. They alleged police ex-



cesses. Simultaneously, villagers blocked NH-326, disrupting vehicular movement between Rayagada and Brahmapur.

This is not the first time such unrest has occurred in the region. A similar incident took place on September 13, 2022 when a mob of around 200 people from six gram panchayats attacked the Adava PS, vandalising property and assaulting five police

personnel after the detention of a local youth on ganja smuggling charges.

As of now, the highway blockade and police station gherao continue with villagers refusing to back down until their demands are met. Additional police forces from Mohana and Adava stations have been deployed to control the situation while senior officials are closely monitoring developments.

PPA holds multi-agency mock drill

In collaboration with NDRF

PNS ■ PARADIP

A multi-agency coordination mock drill was conducted on Monday at the Main Fire Station of Paradip Port, in collaboration with the 3rd Battalion, NDRF, Mundali.

The drill holds significant importance in enhancing post-cyclone response capabilities and refining Team PPA's preparedness for any eventuality.

The exercise covered various emergency scenarios, including building collapse, road blockage, casualty rescue, tank fire fighting, search and rope rescue operations, and emergency victim management. The drill also involved hospital services, mutual aid partners, key stake-



holders, local police and IB ensuring a holistic approach to disaster response.

Distinguished attendees and observers included the Harbour Master, Senior Marine Engineer, Additional Assistant Director, Dock Safety, along with representatives from IOCL Pipeline, IOCL Refinery, IFFCO, PPL, JSW, IOCL Terminal, BPCL Terminal, HPCL Terminal, KICT, PICT, CREW, and Adani Wilmar.

Their respective response units actively participated in the on-site emergency Mock Drill, which was preceded by a tabletop exercise at the Main Fire Station on the same day.

During the tabletop session,

NDRF Deputy Commandant Pravin Chauhan briefed stakeholders on the importance of resource mapping in emergency preparedness. CISF Commandant Akshat Patel emphasized the importance of gap analysis and commended the rope rescue and emergency management mechanisms demonstrated during the drill.

In the end, Deputy Commandant CISF BV Durga Prasad appreciated the role of mutual aid partners in handling disasters in Paradip.

The event was successfully coordinated by Company Commander, Fire Wing, Amaresh Kumar.

INBRIEF

Subarnapur ex-Tax Collector gets 2-yr RI

Cuttack: The Special Judge, Vigilance, Balangir on Tuesday convicted Sibaram Sahu, former Assistant Tax Collector of Subarnapur Municipality in a graft case and awarded him two years' rigorous imprisonment. The court also directed Sahu to pay a fine of Rs 10,000. The Vigilance police had charge-sheeted Sahu for misappropriation of government money collected towards water supply connection fees, construction fees, licence fees for cabins, weekly market fees and parking fees of the municipality from tax payers by issuing money receipts and not depositing the same in the Daily Collection Register of the municipality. Vigilance would now move the competent authority for stoppage of his pension.

Boudh police nab 3 brown sugar dealers

Boudh: In a major crackdown on Tuesday, the Boudh police arrested three individuals involved in brown sugar trafficking. The accused Prabhakar Parida, Shivanand Gahir and Pritam Dehuri were apprehended after police seized 22.76 grams of brown sugar valued at approximately Rs 2.2 lakh. Police also recovered Rs 15,920 in cash from their possession. Boudh SP Rahul Goel briefed the media on the successful operation.

BJP worker, wife killed in AP road mishap

Paralakhemundi: A BJP worker of Gajapati district, P Varaprasad Rao (60) and his wife P Vani (50) died in a road accident in Andhra Pradesh. The couple's daughter P Kethivihar (20) and two other persons T Hemalatha and I Chakravarty were seriously injured. The mishap occurred when Rao and the others were returning by a car from Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh and the vehicle hit a trailer

3 held for theft in Paralakhemundi

Paralakhemundi: The Model police in Paralakhemundi town arrested three persons on the charge of stealing of gold ornaments and cash. The police seized some gold ornaments and cash of Rs 48,000 from the possession of the accused. As per sources, one G Hema and her husband G Srinivas Rao had gone to Simanchalam of Andhra Pradesh on March 17. Taking advantage of it, the arrested trio had broke into their house and stole the gold ornaments and money.

Blood donation camp held in Phulbani

Phulbani: On the instructions of the Kandhamal SP, a blood donation camp was organised by the district police at Phulbani's Adarsh police station. Kandhamal SP Harish BC



inaugurated the camp. DSP Manas Ranjan Barik, SDPO Surajit Biswal, Phulbani Autonomous College Professor Dr Abhipsha Bala, Adarsh PS officer Swaroop Kishan, Reserve Inspector Birsingh Sabar, Phulbani Blood Bank Officer Dr Jaydeep Ghosh, Phulbani Blood Donation Committee's Prashant Kumar Behera and Team Humanity convener V Lokanath Raju were present on the occasion. Employees and students of the Phulbani ITI, Polytechnic College, Phulbani Autonomous College NCC, Red Cross, BED College, police personnel and Home Guards donated blood. A total of 126 units of blood were collected.

Man shot at by miscreants in B'swar

PNS ■ BALESWAR

A person sustained bullet injuries after he was fired at by unknown miscreants on Monday night while he was returning home.

The victim was identified as Sudhansu Sekhar Jena, a resident of Basuchakurai under the Basta police station in Baleswar district.

Reports said the victim had gone to a relative's house at Mukulsi; and while returning

home, three miscreants in two bikes chased him and intercepted him near Chakurai School. They demanded his wallet and other belongings. As he refused, one of them opened fire and a bullet hit his right leg.

He was taken to the Basta CHC and later shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital. The Basta police, after registering a case, began an investigation to identify and trace the miscreants.

JCI skating training camp in Talcher



PNS ■ TALCHER

A skating training camp was inaugurated by Junior Chamber International (JCI) Talcher branch.

MCL Jagannath Area Personnel Manager Manas Jena inaugurated the camp as the chief guest, which was held in the premises of MCL Jagannath DAV School.

He opined that the skating training programme can be very useful for the future of the students in the field of sports.

Former zone chairman of

JCI, Ashish Aggarwal and special coach Rabindra Mishal from Nagpur attended as guest of honour and highlighted the need of skating. Talcher JCI Branch president Mahesh Agrawalla presided over the programme.

Project Director Saroj Giri and ex-president Basudev Sahu managed the stage. The training camp will continue for 7 days. A road show will be organised on the final day by all the trainees. Among others, former president Kushal Aggarwal, Jiten Aggarwal were present.

95-yr-old Narana serves Vada with love in Cuttack

MANOJ KUMAR JENA ■ CUTTACK

In today's fast-paced world, everyone seems preoccupied with securing their future and double-ticking their materialistic lust. In order to quit working by 40 to lead a comfortable life, we often forget to appreciate the beauty what life offers in the present. Despite all the advice to make the most of the here and now, we remain chained to thoughts of tomorrow and materialistic possessions. Many work tirelessly with hopes of retiring early, sacrificing their health and present for a future that may never come. Then, there's Narana Sahoo, a 95-year-old man who serves up delicious Vadas and other fried snacks in Cuttack, to make both ends meet, defeating age, appreciating hard work.

Born in Angul, Narana moved to Cuttack with three friends in search of a better life. He began working as a house help, earning just Rs 7 per month for over 10 years. Driven by the dream of independence, he eventually started his own food stall. In 1960, he set up his first stall on Naya Sarak Road near the Emarti Devi Women's College. Since then, he has been serving his signature fried snacks with the help of his grandson,



working at the stall every day without fail.

What draws customers to Narana's stall isn't just the taste of the food but the remarkable speed and skill with which he works. Despite his age, he can fry Vadas with impressive speed, a testament to his decades of dedication and experience. Visitors often wonder how a 95-year-old man, without glasses or support, can work tirelessly, focused and energised as he serves up the fried snacks.

As evening approaches, Narana and his grandson set up their stall and prepare Vadas, Dahi Vadas, Pakodas and Pajees (fried onion snacks). Within minutes, the

food is ready, and people of all ages, from children to the elderly, eagerly line up to enjoy the hot, crispy treats that mark the beginning of their evening.

"I visit here two or three times a week. I've been eating here for the past 15 years, and the taste has never changed. Mause (uncle Narana) is a very loving person who once told me how life can be beautiful with fewer possessions," said Mahesh, a regular customer.

When asked how he manages to work so diligently at his age, Narana shared, "I came to Cuttack with three friends; and now, I'm the only one surviving. I arrived with

nothing; and now, I have great grandchildren. I believe that work is worship; and I'm content with what I have, a large family and a small home. I also believe, 'the more you have, the more you worry; the less you have, the less you worry'. One day, we'll all turn to ashes; and I see no point in taking material possessions with me to the afterlife. So, I'm happy with what I have and find pure joy in feeding people. I will continue doing so as long as I breathe."

Narana's story is a reminder that sometimes, happiness lies not in the pursuit of wealth or possessions but in simple acts of dedication and love for the present moment.

Malhars' mute melody

Satkosia tribals whose fortunes yet to improve

BIBHUTI PATI

They continue to live backward life far away from boons of modern development

This narrative is not a cinematic script, theatrical performance, or a travelogue. It recounts the genuine experiences of the Malhar tribe residing in the villages of Hinsaloi and Dimiripal, located near Satkosia, close to Angul, one of Odisha's wealthiest districts.

At the heart of this community, the observer has witnessed the distressing realities of child marriage among young girls and the somber existence of the tribal population.

"The previous BJD government under Naveen Patnaik, which held power for 24 years, has stifled the aspirations of approximately 75 Malhar families in the villages of Hinsaloi and Dimiripal within the Balanga panchayat of Angul block. Naveen Patnaik has shown no compassion for the struggles faced by the tribal community. A significant number of Malhar individuals still lack Aadhaar, voter, or ration cards. The practice of marrying off girls at a young age is prevalent, and the

associated suffering is evident. The tribes have been denied access to essential government support, and there is no one to address their needs. Both the local administration and the State tribal development ministry have ignored their situation," stated Bijay Kumar Swain, a local scribe.

Many members of the Malhar tribe continue to lead a nomadic life, which has been their traditional mode of existence. Their diet primarily consists of water rice (Pakhal). They prepare vegetables by either boiling or burning them, as they lack the resources to cook them properly. Cooking occurs only once in the evening, and their lives are marked by extreme poverty. Traditionally, prior to the marriage of their minor daughters, the community assesses the prospective groom's skills in climbing trees and gathering honey, as well as collecting various minor forest products such as brushwood, stumps, canes, wax, lac, medicinal plants, herbs, wild fruits, and fodder. A crucial requirement is the groom's ability to prepare date palm leaves, which serves as a significant test. The Malhar tribes take turns working in teams to venture into the forest for two months, gathering a variety of minor forest produce. They call it 'pahiaa'. Women like Yashoda and Bari talked of living such a poignant life. Upon our arrival in Hinsaloi vil-



lage, we were confronted with the distressing sight of malnourished children from the Malhar tribe. In a rundown thatched hut within the slum, Yashoda and Bari attempted to conceal their partially unclothed bodies. Their eyes and frail forms vividly expressed their dire need for basic necessities and the unfulfilled promises of government tribal development initiatives. A significant number of them lack Aadhaar, voter ID, and ration cards. Consequently, government assistance programs, such as pensions for widows and the elderly, as well as health benefits, remain mere illusions for the majority.

It is noteworthy that local political leaders constructed a tube well in Hinsaloi village during the 2024 general elections, pledging to

establish bathroom and latrine facilities. However, these plans were abandoned upon discovering that the tribal community lacked voting rights. This sentiment was poignantly conveyed by numerous Malhar women. Under the current BJP administration, it remains to be seen whether they will receive their Aadhaar, voter ID, and ration cards. A pressing question arises regarding whether Chief Minister Mohan Majhee, who is also a member of the tribal community, will enable the Malhar to live with dignity or if they will continue to endure a life shrouded in darkness.

Sarpanch Jagabandhu Sahu dismissed the issue, stating, "We have made efforts to assist them in obtaining Aadhaar and voter cards, but they prefer to maintain their



traditional nomadic lifestyle. They are often unavailable during the preparation of essential documents that the tribal community lacks.

Since these families continue to lack essential documents such as Aadhaar, this has resulted in their exclusion from government provisions, including free rice, medical care, and other benefits. Consequently, the narrative of their suffering persists. The dire conditions in Dimiripal reflect a troubling reality for the Malhar tribe, seemingly undermining the 24-year governance of Naveen Patnaik. Young married girls like Muni, Malli, and Baigani have shared their distress-

ing experiences.

With tears in their eyes, they recount their hardships, stating, "We are doubly burdened. First, we are married as minors and soon become mothers. Second, when we seek assistance from local authorities for government benefits, we are denied due to the absence of valid documentation. Even those who possess some documents are ineligible because they are minors. The much-publicized initiatives of the BJD government, such as Janani Surakshya and Biju Swasthya Yojana, do not cater to our needs. Even our infants and minor children are being denied their rights."

Describing the anguish and plight of Panu and Faguni is indeed challenging. Panu recounted, "I informed the village Sarpanch about

our difficulties and also approached the then BJD Minister and ex-Speaker Rajnikant Singh, but to no avail. We are unable to receive any government support due to the lack of necessary documents. A local BJD leader assured me that post-election, we would receive the Biju Swasthya Yojana card, enabling me to take my wife to the hospital for free treatment. However, nothing has materialized. For the same reasons, we are also excluded from the BJD government's popular schemes like Subhadra and Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Kalyan Yojana. I implore Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida to demonstrate sensitivity as a woman and address the issues faced by tribal women."

When approached regarding this pressing issue, local senior BJD leader Rajnikant Singh stated, "I have learned about this problem from you. I will certainly bring these urgent matters to the attention of the district Collector. We will collaborate with the district tribal development officers to enhance the conditions for the Malhar tribes." However, when questioned about the marriage of minor girls, Rajnikant Singh sidestepped the topic, asserting, "We have provided rehabilitation for them. Yet, the majority are unwilling to accept it. Currently, I am attending a marriage function and will address this matter later."

Rail fares lowest in region: Vaishnav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Tuesday said the railway fares in India are far less than the neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The minister said the prices in European countries are more than five times.

He asserted that railway accidents have come down by 90 per cent from the time when RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav was at the ministry's helm.

Replying to the debate on the Demands for Grants under the control of the Ministry of Railways for 2025-26, Vaishnav said the national transporter has emerged from difficulties of the Covid pandemic to meet its own expenses.

Amid noisy protests by the opposition over not being allowed to speak on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement on the Maha Kumbh, the minister said the railways has taken numerous steps for crowd control at stations and is running several special trains during festival seasons.

He asserted that with Prime Minister Modi's focus on safety, accidents have come down by 90 per cent from the time when Lalu Prasad was at the ministry's helm. "During Lalu Prasad's time, in a year about 234 accidents and 464 derailments took place, about 700 in a year.

During Mamata Banerjee's period, 165 accidents and 230 derailments took the accident tally to 395 in a year and during



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday

Mallikarjun Kharge's time, 118 accidents and 263 derailments, taking the total number of accidents to 381," he said.

Vaishnav also said that a big roll out of Kavach was being made on 10,000 locomotives and 15,000 km.

Prime Minister Modi focused on safety and brought in new technology and investment, and now it has come down to

30 accidents and 43 derailments, which is 90 per cent less from the earlier period and 80 per cent less than what it was in 2014-15, Vaishnav said.

He said the railways has not increased fares since 2020 and they have been constant since then.

"If we compare with neighbouring countries, our fares are very less. For a trav-

el of 350 km, fare in India is ₹121, in Pakistan it is ₹436, in Bangladesh it is ₹323 and in Sri Lanka it is ₹413," Vaishnav said. Hailing the Budget for Railways as "historic", Vaishnav said the national transporter faced a lot of difficulty during the Covid pandemic and it had now emerged from that to be in a healthy situation. The railways is now meeting nearly all its expenditure from its own income, he pointed out.

The minister also elaborated on the steps taken by his ministry for managing crowd, including running of special trains during the holiday period. "Last year, during the Holi period, we ran 604 special trains, 13,000 special trains were run during the last summers and 8,000 such trains were run during Diwali and Chhat.

During the Maha Kumbh, as many as 17,330 special trains were run and 1,160 special trains were run during the Holi period this year," he said.

Recalling the tragic stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station last month, Vaishnav said many permanent steps were being taken, including building in holding area in 60 stations, installing CCTV cameras, building war rooms and foot-over bridges, among other measures.

He also said India is among the top three loading countries and 1.6 Billion tonne cargo will be carried this year. Vaishnav also said five lakh people have got employment in the railways and recruitment is on for one lakh people.

'America First' policy is not America alone: Tulsi Gabbard

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

US President Donald Trump's policy of "America First" should not be misunderstood as "America alone" as it is similar to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to "India first", US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard said on Tuesday.

In an address at the Raisina Dialogue, Gabbard said the Donald Trump administration is looking at boosting ties with New Delhi including in the domain of security to confront various challenges including in the Indo-Pacific.

The top American official, however, did not mention India's concerns over activities of pro-Khalistan elements operating from American soil or Trump's announcement on imposing reciprocal tariffs from April 2 on its partners and other nations.

Gabbard, known to be a practicing Hindu, began her address with "namaste and Jai Shri Krishna", and said these words reflect the "eternal divine spirit" that exists within each of our hearts, and it's a reminder that "we are all connected, irrespective of race, caste and religion".

The US Director of National Intelligence, sounding optimistic about the future of India-US relations, said there is a "huge opportunity" to expand the bilateral cooperation in diverse areas.

President Trump's commitment to "America first" and putting the security and freedom of Americans at the forefront of his policies shouldn't be misunderstood as "America alone", Gabbard said.

This approach is similar to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to "India first" or New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon's policy of "New Zealand first", she stressed.

"This is the expectation of any leader's commitment to their people to serve them and to put their interests at the forefront of their decisions."

Trump should not be mistaken to be a president who does not understand the importance of relationships with other countries as he believes in working towards shared interests, she said.

Gabbard arrived in the national capital early Sunday on a two-and-a-half-day trip in the first high-level visit to India by a top official of the Donald Trump administration.

The American official, referring to her meetings with her Indian counterparts, said she was able to hear directly from them about the "very serious concerns that you have here for your own security interests" and to look for opportunities to build on a strong partnership.

There were also opportunities from an intelligence-sharing standpoint in the context of providing timely intelligence to the leadership, she said.

The US Director of National Intelligence said the India-US partnership is "critical" to advance mutual interests and ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

"The partnership between our two countries has been strong for decades and

under the leadership of two great leaders and two great friends, President Trump and Prime Minister Modi, and rooted in our shared values of peace and freedom, security and prosperity," Tulsi Gabbard said.

"I am confident that this partnership and friendship between our two nations and our leaders will continue to grow and strengthen," Tulsi Gabbard added.

Delving into geopolitical turmoils, Gabbard said President Trump is unwavering in securing peace with strength.

The top American official extensively focused on explaining Washington's policy towards the Indo-Pacific.

"It is a vast and critical region that's not just a geographic space, it is the geopolitical centre of gravity for the 21st century.

So, ensuring peace and stability here is essential to our collective security, our objective of economic prosperity and our ability to work together to take on the great challenges of our time," she said. "And we must tackle these challenges together.

Our ability to do so as nations, as leaders, as people is critical towards achieving our collective goals," Gabbard emphasised.

Gabbard said the Trump administration is to boost ties with New Delhi in the domain of security to confront various challenges in the Indo-Pacific

She described the Modi-Trump meeting in Washington DC as a "reconnection of two old friends".

"Obviously, that's a personal friendship, but it's one that is indicative of their approach to leadership and their priorities of listening to the needs of their respective people, setting policy and taking action towards serving their best interests," she said.

Gabbard briefly mentioned the India-US economic partnership in the context of cooperation in critical and emerging technologies.

She suggested that proposed collaboration in these areas was laid out in the COMPACT (Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce and Technology) initiative unveiled last month by the two leaders.

On Monday, Gabbard held talks with Prime Minister Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

In his meeting with Gabbard, Rajnath Singh conveyed to her India's concerns over the activities of Khalistani separatist group Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) on American soil and urged her to declare it as a designated terrorist entity.

He also apprised her about Sikhs for Justice's alleged links with Pakistani spy agency ISI as well as its "collaboration" with Babbar Khalsa militant group, and pressed for action against it, according to sources. Gabbard held extensive talks with National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval on Sunday.

Sonia Gandhi seeks ₹400 minimum wage under MGNREGA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Congress leader Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday accused the BJP-led Centre of systematically undermining of the rural employment guarantee scheme MGNREGA, and demanded raising of minimum wage under it to ₹400 per day and the number of guaranteed workdays to 150 a year.

Raising the issue through a Zero Hour mention in the Rajya Sabha, Sonia Gandhi said the UPA government under then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh enacted the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2005. "This landmark legislation has been a crucial safety net for millions of rural poor. However, it is deeply concerning that the present BJP government has systematically undermined the scheme," Sonia Gandhi said. The budget allocation (for the scheme) remains stagnant at ₹86,000 Crore, a 10-year low as a percentage of GDP, she alleged. When adjusted for inflation, the effective budget declines by ₹4,000 Crore, she said, adding that estimates suggest nearly 20 per cent of the allocated funds will be used to clear pending dues from previous years.

"Additionally, the scheme faces multiple challenges, including the exclusionary Aadhaar-based payment and the National Mobile Monitoring System, persistent delays in wage payment and wage rates not adequate to compensate for inflation," Sonia Gandhi claimed.

The National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS) app permits taking real-time attendance of workers at Mahatma Gandhi



Congress MP Sonia Gandhi speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act worksites along with geotagged photographs. The Congress leader demanded that adequate financial provisions be made to sustain and expand the scheme.

Also, the minimum wage should be increased to ₹400 per day along with their timely disbursement, she said, adding that the number of guaranteed workdays should be raised from 100 to 150 per year. The Central government had increased

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act wages by 3 per cent to 10 per cent in nominal terms for the financial year 2024-25 just before general elections were announced last year.

The wages vary from state to state and are in the range of ₹237 (Uttarakhand) to ₹300 (Andhra Pradesh) a day.

Demanding the removal of the Aadhaar Payments Bridge System (APBS) and National Mobile Monitoring System, Sonia

Gandhi said, "These measures are essential to ensure that Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides dignified employment and financial security."

This was only the second time that Sonia Gandhi raised an issue during the Zero Hour an hour where matters are raised with the permission of the Chair since she was elected to the Rajya Sabha in February last year.

ED conducts searches against OSF beneficiaries in Bengaluru

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday conducted searches against some alleged beneficiaries of Open Society Foundations (OSF) founded by US billionaire George Soros, and some linked entities in Bengaluru as part of a foreign exchange "violation" probe against them, official sources said. The premises of the beneficiaries, including those linked to some international human rights bodies, are being searched under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), the sources said.

The case pertains to alleged foreign direct investment (FDI) being sourced by OSF and the utilisation of these funds by certain beneficiaries in alleged contravention of FEMA guidelines, they said. A response to an email sent by PTI to OSF is awaited.

The ruling BJP has accused Soros, a Hungarian-American political activist, of acting against India's interests.

His utterances during the Adani-Hindenburg controversy also drew criticism from the party.

As per the OSF, it is one of the world's largest private funders of groups supporting human rights, justice and accountable government.

Its total expenditure for India during 2021 was USD 4,06,000, as per official data.

The OSF began working in India in 1999, offering scholarships and fellowships to students to pursue studies and research at Indian institutes.

"In 2014, we launched an India-specific grant-making programme, supporting local organisations that work in three areas: extending access to medicine; promoting justice system reforms; and strengthening and establishing rights, public services, and community living for people with psychosocial disabilities," the OSF said earlier.

Lokpal's jurisdiction over HC judges, SC to hear plea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The top court on February 20 stayed the Lokpal's order, saying it was "something very, very disturbing" and concerned the independence of the judiciary.

It then issued notices and sought responses from the Centre, the Lokpal registrar and the complainant.

Mehta previously said that a high court judge would never fall within the ambit of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

The Lokpal had passed the order on two complaints filed against a sitting additional judge of a high court.

On Tuesday, the complainant appeared before the apex court and said he had filed an affidavit in support of his submissions.

"I want the honour of the Lokpal and also the judiciary to be uplifted," he said.

The bench asked the complainant whether he would engage a legal aid lawyer.

The complainant refused any legal assistance and said his submissions were already mentioned in the affidavit. Pointing out a substantial question of law in the matter, Mehta said, "In my view, only one section of the Lokpal Act is to be examined."

When the bench said a counter affidavit was filed by the registrar of Lokpal, Mehta said it was almost a "reiteration of the order". There was already a mechanism in place to deal with complaints against judges, the bench observed.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who is also assisting the court, said, "The fundamental issue will be, can a complaint be ever filed outside the remit of the constitutional authority?"

Kumar, the bench said, would go through the complainant's submissions and other materials to have a holistic view of the matter before it decided the issue.

Mehta, who filed his written submissions, argued any high court couldn't be said to have been "established" by the Act

of Parliament as the Constitution of India gave rise to each high court under the mandatory constitutional scheme.

The solicitor general, therefore, sought the Lokpal order to be set aside.

All high courts, he said, ought to be treated as constitutional courts established under Article 214 of the Constitution.

Mehta said it was a settled proposition of the law that a high court judge was a holder of constitutional office and couldn't be regarded as an "employee" of the government.

"Lokpal of India has further wrongly held in the impugned order that a judge of a high court will come within the ambit of expression 'any person' in clause (f) of section 14(1) of the 2013 Act," he added.

Supreme Court to hear suo motu case over Lokpal order against sitting HC judges

Referring to an apex court verdict, Mehta said it was held that a high court judge occupied a unique position and held a constitutional office.

The Lokpal order had said judges of the apex court were not amenable to Lokpal's jurisdiction since the Supreme Court was established by Article 124 of the Constitution and not under an Act of Parliament.

"The same analogy should be applied in the case of high courts, not only because of Article 214 but also because of other provisions of the Constitution with respect to high court, which are similar to the provision with respect to the Supreme Court," Mehta said.

A high court judge, he said, couldn't come within the purview of the 2013 Act.

The high court judge was alleged to have influenced a judge of the subordinate judiciary and a judge of the same high court set to deal with a suit filed against the complainant by a private company, which was to be favoured

Over 68 Lakh cancer treatments done under PMJAY, rural areas majorly: Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

More than 68 Lakh cancer treatments worth over ₹13,000 Crore have been performed under the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme, with 75.81 per cent of them undertaken in rural areas, Union Health Minister JP Nadda said on Tuesday.

Of these, more than 4.5 Lakh treatments worth over ₹985 Crore were undertaken for "targeted therapies" against cancer, with 76.32 per cent of their beneficiaries coming from rural areas, Nadda said responding to a question in Rajya Sabha.

The benefits, he said, were accorded under the Centre's Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY).

He said an initiative for screening, management and prevention of non-communicable diseases, including cancer, has been rolled out in the country under the National Health Mission.

Under the scheme, people suspecting they have cancer can also call in for expert opinion from district and tertiary care hospitals.

In Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, treatment for several types of cancers, including breast, oral and cervical, is provided under more than 200 packages with more than 500 procedures of medical oncology, surgical oncology, radiation oncology and palliative medicine.

Of these, 37 packages are related to targeted therapies such as chemotherapy for CA Breast, metastatic melanoma, chronic myeloid leukaemia, Burkitt's Lymphoma, and CA Lung, the minister informed.

Those suffering from cancer and are below the poverty line can also avail of a one-time financial assistance of up to Rs ₹15 Lakh, provided under the Health Minister's Cancer Patient Fund (HMCPPF).

The minister said the scheme provides for the sale of generic medicines at 50 per cent to 80 per cent price of branded medicines through Janaushadhi Stores and the



Union Minister JP Nadda speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday

217 AMRIT Pharmacies. A total of 289 oncology drugs are given at half the market price. Nadda said that the government had in the budget announced it would set up 200 day care cancer centres at district hospitals in 2025-26.

Under the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NP-NCD), 770 district NCD clinics, 233 cardiac care units, 372 district day care centres, and 6,410 NCD clinics at community health centres have been set up, he said.

In addition, 19 state cancer institutes and 20 tertiary cancer care centres have been set up in different parts of the country to provide advanced cancer care. Cancer treatment facilities have been approved in all 22 new All India Institute

Of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) with diagnostic, medical, and surgical facilities, Nadda said.

Two such centres where advanced cancer treatment is provided are the National Cancer Institute in Jhajjar, Haryana, with 1,460 beds, and the second campus of Chittranjan National Cancer Institute in Kolkata, which has 460 beds.

There are 372 District Day Care Centres providing chemotherapy across the country, Nadda said.

The minister said under the Department of Atomic Energy, Tata Memorial Centre has two units/hospitals in rural and semi-urban locations, the Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital in Sangrur in Punjab, and the Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital in Muzzafarpur in Bihar.

Centre committed to Manipur's growth: FM Nirmala Sitharaman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the Central government is committed to bringing normalcy to Manipur and assured all support for the economic growth of the state.

Replying to a discussion on the passage of the Manipur Budget for the current fiscal and vote of account for the six months of 2025-26 in the Rajya Sabha, the minister also sought the support of the Opposition parties for peace in Manipur instead of engaging in the blame game.

The senior minister also hit back at the Opposition for its criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi not visiting the violence-affected state, saying none of the prime ministers in the past visited Manipur when the violence took place there. She cited the names of former prime ministers PV Narasimha Rao and IK Gujral.

She said violence in Manipur has adversely impacted economic activities in the state but expressed confidence that it will recover swiftly. Responding to the Opposition criticism of not paying the required focus to Manipur, she said the



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

PTI

Union Home Minister and Minister of State for Home visited the state as part of the Centre's efforts to bring normalcy.

"We extend the fullest support to the state. So that the recovery of Manipur will be sooner than later. We are, all of us here, committed to getting that state back to some normalcy and we want that state to grow and prosper as much as any other state," Sitharaman asserted.

Centre and the state). "Double engine, of course, double engine. That is why the Home Minister was there (for four days), and that is why MoS Home was there for more than 23 days.

"So, please do not compare how you (Congress) handled Manipur and how this government is handling Manipur. We have greater sensitivity, we care for Manipur and every state of this country," the minister said. Sitharaman informed the House that ₹913 Crore have been given under Special Assistance for State Capital Investment for 2024-25. "We have also created a Contingency Fund for Manipur with ₹500 Crore allocated to them," she said. The state is currently under the President's rule. Consequent to the Proclamation issued under Article 356 of the Constitution on February 13, 2025, the powers of the Legislature of the State of Manipur are exercisable by or under the authority of Parliament. The total receipts have been pegged at ₹35,368.19 Crore, up from ₹32,471.90 Crore in 2024-25. According to documents, the capital outlay has been increased by 19 per cent to ₹7,773 Crore over the current financial year ending March 2025.

Observing that the unrest in Manipur led to a reduction in economic activities, she said, "With improvement in law and order and consequent improvement in economic activity, I expect GSDP to show some recovery this year onwards."

The Opposition has been repeatedly questioning the Centre's stance on Manipur, and taunting BJP's slogan of 'double engine government' (government at the

Sambhal's Neja Mela denied permission

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

The annual Neja Mela, a long-standing religious event in Sambhal, will not be held this year after authorities declined permission, citing concerns over public sentiment and security risks. The fair, traditionally observed on the second Tuesday after Holi, is dedicated to Syed Salar Masood, a historical figure whose legacy has been a subject of debate due to his role in medieval invasions.

Officials said the decision to deny permission was influenced by objections from sections of the local community and the potential for unrest. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Shrish Chandra emphasised that no event commemorating individuals linked to historical invasions would be allowed.

"Public safety is our priority. Celebrations that evoke historical conflicts or communal sensitivities cannot be permitted," he stated. The controversy surrounding the event stems from Masood's association with Mahmud of Ghazni, who led multiple invasions into India. Historical accounts suggest Masood played a role in campaigns that included temple raids and territorial conquests. While some communities regard him as a revered figure, others oppose the

mela, arguing that it glorifies an era of destruction. Authorities noted that last year, efforts were made to rebrand the event as 'Sadhvna Mela' to promote harmony while maintaining religious observances. However, organisers continued to insist on using its traditional name, leading to a complete prohibition this year. "The decision is final, and any attempt to hold the event under its original identity will not be tolerated," said Sub-Divisional Magistrate Dr Vandana Mishra.

The ban has drawn criticism from the Neja Mela Committee, which argues that the gathering is a religious tradition rather than a political statement.

"For generations, we have observed this mela as part of our faith. We will seek legal recourse if necessary," said Shahid Hussain Masudi, the committee's president. The debate surrounding Syed Salar Masood continues to have political ramifications in Uttar Pradesh. His legacy remains a polarising issue, with political leaders referencing his historical role to shape narratives about regional history and identity. While his tomb in Bahraich remains a pilgrimage site, political discourse often portrays him in contrasting lights, with some emphasising his military campaigns while others highlight his cultural significance.

GMDA cracks down on encroachments in Sikanderpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

The Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) enforcement wing geared into action again after the Holi festival. After taking strict action against RMC plants on Monday, the team cracked down on the area under the metro pillars of Sikanderpur area on MG road on Tuesday.

DTP RS Bath and his team has visited the location twice and had asked the violators to vacate the area but few local people were still found to have occupied the Government land by way of renting the area or fixing their own businesses.

On Tuesday, the GMDA officers conducted the demolition drive at the furniture market near the Sikanderpur metro station where the team demolished three numbers of building material shops and even removed a lot of the material.

Further, the team also took help of towing machines and towed about five vehicles which were parked illegally under metro line.

The said area was highly encroached and residents had complained about traffic jams.

It was also found that material loaded

vehicles were entering and exiting on the main road disturbing the traffic movement. Almost 20 such vehicles were also removed. Apart from this, the GMDA enforcement team had also warned the violators to prior to the drive to remove their material within a week but they did not pay heed to the same.

Gurugram citizens also sent multiple emails for removing encroachment because MG road is a major road connected to Delhi.

Bath was assisted by ATP Satinder Arya, JE Ashish tayagi, JE Sumit Boora, Pankaj and Pawan Kumar. The Mobility towing team from GMDA was also present in the drives.

About 15 policemen were also present on spot. The team also visited surroundings of road and made shopkeepers and others aware on abstaining from encroaching public spaces.

"We won't allow this encroachment and that will first also make them aware of the issue. Still if encroachment is done we will take them to task. We are working on zero tolerance policy towards anyone illegally occupying Government land or public spaces that cause disturbance to the public at large," said DTP GMDA.

Practice of Nokku Kooli prevailing in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

The ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) in Kerala faced a major embarrassment in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attributed the industrial stagnation in the State to rampant militant trade unionism.

"It is the Communist Party of India (Marxist) tradition of Nokku Kooli that led the State backwards while other States made progress in industrialisation. Nokku Kooli is the practice of holding the entrepreneur to ransom demanding wages for no work which have been done by the party affiliated workers," said Nirmala Sitharaman, while replying to a calling attention motion by a Communist Party of India (Marxist) member representing the State.

Nirmala Sitharaman pointed out the recent statement made by Kerala Industries Minister P Rajeev that there was no Nokku Kooli in the State as on date.

"That itself proves that there was the practice of Nokku Kooli prevailing in Kerala," said the Finance Minister.

By evening the Kerala Government was on a firefighting mode, denying reports about Nokku Kooli in the State.

But the fact is that black mailing by head load workers (porters) continue unhindered in the State.

According to political commentators and former top bureaucrats trade union workers and bosses have become a law unto themselves.

"Kerala is the only State in India which has seen entrepreneurs committing suicide thanks to the high handed attitude of the head load workers and their bosses," said Rajmohan Pillai, chairman, Beta Group, who once owned many cashew nut processing units in the State.

Last week saw a popular Malayalam TV

It is the CPI(M) tradition of Nokku Kooli that led the State backwards while other States made progress in industrialisation.

— NIRMALA SITHARAMAN, FINANCE MINISTER

programme Marimayam (Malayalam for Deceit) featuring the threats and black mailing employed by militant workers and their trade union bosses. The programme was based on real life incidents that shocked the State.

Even small time traders in towns are not free from the shackles of party leaders who approach them for 'hafta'.

A shop owner was forced to cough down the airlines ticket for the local political leader for his West Asian trip to attend a seminar on the global issues haunting

working community across the world. The political leaders and head load workers who shout from rooftops for bonus and gratuity have not done any physical work throughout their life.

"There is no exaggeration or fiction in these episodes. These incidents are culled out from real life stories faced by our friends and well wishers who put their hard earned money in business enterprises," said Mani Shornur, veteran actor who is one of the central characters in the sitcom.

The Kerala Government in a release had said that the recent summit of investors held in the State saw signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to the tune of ₹1.5 Lakh Crore worth investments.

The only question being asked is whether a small state like Kerala has the potential to accommodate this much investments. One more question remains unanswered.

What happened to the Memorandum of Understandings (MoU) signed by Kerala Government in the last 20 years?" said a corporate honcho.

Nokku Kooli flourishes in the State irrespective of the claims by the Government and this keeps the investors away from Kerala.

"The message from Kerala to prospective investors is Invest at your own risk," said P Sujathan, political critic and author.

College professor flees amid sexual abuse allegations

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a shocking case from Uttar Pradesh's Hathras, police are on the lookout for Rajnish Kumar, the suspended Chief Proctor of Seth Phool Chand Bagla PG College, commonly known as 'Old Degree College'.

Kumar is accused of sexually exploiting students and recording the acts to blackmail them. The college administration suspended him following the emergence of these serious allegations.

The case came to light after an anonymous letter, received by the police nearly ten months ago, accused Kumar of coercing students into sexual acts in exchange for passing marks and job opportunities. The letter accused Dr Rajneesh, of sexually harassing female students. Following this, CO City initiated an inquiry, during which multiple individuals were questioned.

"I fear for my life, which is why I have concealed my identity. But aren't the pictures I provided enough to prove his crime?" the letter read.

The complaint letter was accompanied by around twelve photographs, some of which were taken inside the college premises. These images reportedly depicted the professor engaging in inappropriate behaviour with students.

Along with the complaint, a pen drive containing 59 explicit videos of Kumar engaging in sexual acts with students was also submitted.

The faces of the victims have been blurred to protect their identities. Reports suggest Kumar used hidden cameras to record these acts and later blackmailed the victims into submission. The complainant also accused other members of the college administration of shielding Kumar.

Following the registration of a case under sections related to rape, sexual harassment, and abuse of authority, Kumar was suspended from his position.

However, he remains absconding. The police admitted that the absence of a statement from the victim has posed a challenge in their investigation. The videos, reportedly dating back to 2023, serve as crucial evidence, but the victims fear coming forward due to social stigma and potential harassment.

Authorities are also examining whether Dr Rajneesh had accomplices or if similar incidents have taken place previously.

Meanwhile, efforts are being made to remove the explicit videos from online platforms and prevent their further circulation.

In response to the allegations, the college administration has taken disciplinary action against Dr Rajneesh.

Suwendu Adhikari plays Hindu card in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Bengal Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari on Tuesday played the Hindu card more intensely towards consolidating the Hindu votes ahead of the next year's Assembly elections, saying those who would serve the cause of the Hindus would rule Bengal because only the Hindus and none else were destined to rule Hindustan. Announcing the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) programmes to take out grand rallies of Hindus on the Ram Navami day Adhikari said there were plans being hatched by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, her police and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) to create communal disturbance during Ram Navami and said the State Government would be held liable if any untoward incident would happen as a consequence of the TMC leadership's "nefarious designs." "Hindus will rule Hindustan and none else," Adhikari said adding, "those who are trying to disturb peace of the State should appreciate the fact that only those who would serve the cause of the Hindus would finally rule Bengal."

Launching a scathing attack on Banerjee for provoking the minority community he said, "the Chief Minister and her Police are spreading the poison of communalism and hatred in the State ahead of Ram Navami, the police have been directed to take pre-

ventive steps to thwart the celebrations of the festival of the Hindus."

Alleging that the State police and the TMC men were inciting communal hatred in the society he said, how "the Chief Minister told the public from a Muslim religious congregation that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal are hatching plans to disturb the State."

This was the second year of Ram Navami celebrations after the inauguration

Those who are trying to disturb peace of the State should appreciate the fact that only those who would serve the cause of the Hindus would finally rule Bengal

— SUWENDU ADHIKARI, OPPOSITION LEADER

of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and this year has seen 66 Crore of Santani people taking holi dip in Maha Kumbha, he said asking the people to come out in lakhs to celebrate Ram Navami. Bengal would witness so many rallies this year that "it would be difficult for the Chief Minister's mischievous police force and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) goons to measure of the crowds," he said.

"The Police are trying to thwart the cel-

ebrations by imposing conditions, but I ask you not to abide by those conditions and only follow the protocols that we followed the last year before taking out the processions," he said. Attacking the Chief Minister for allowing the "jihadi forces" to spike Durga Puja and Ram Navami celebrations in various parts of the State last year the BJP leader said, "the jihadis prevented celebrations of Durga Pujas at Falakata. There were jihadi attacks on the Ram Navami processions at Rishra in Hooghly district, Shibpur in Howrah district, and Dalkhola in North Bengal but the government kept silent, and the state government spent lakhs of rupees to prevent National Investigation Agency (NIA) investigation into such attacks but failed and today 85 such jihadis are in jail. This year also they will try to do the same thing but the Hindus will have to unite and keep a strong vigil." Adhikari's statement comes a day after processions were taken out in Hooghly district with huge banners and posters reading "Hindus, Hindus Bhai Bhai, Ei baar BJP ke chai (All Hindus are brothers, so this year BJP should come to power)." Meanwhile, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) hit back at the Opposition leader wondering how the Bengal leadership was contracting Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was asking for peace and unity.

Debendra Pradhan's last rites held with state honours

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Puri

The last rites of veteran BJP leader and former union minister Debendra Pradhan were performed with full state honours at Swargadwar in Odisha's Puri on Tuesday, officials said.

On the occasion, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and other dignitaries were present there and paid their tribute to Pradhan who died on Monday morning due to age-related ailments. He was 84. "The mortal remains of Pradhan were consigned to flames at Swargadwar here with full state honours," an official said.

Amid chanting of Sanskrit slokas, Pradhan's elder son Soumendra lit the funeral pyre after the Odisha Police accorded the guard of honour to the departed leader. His younger son and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan was also present there.

"Dr Debendra Pradhan amar rahe" slogan reverberated through the air at the Swargadwar. Puri MP Sambit Patra, Yoga Guru Baba Ram Dev, several Odisha ministers and BJP leaders from the Centre and the state attended the

funeral. Debendra Pradhan was a union minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and was a three-time president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Odisha. He was also the national vice-president of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2001-2002.

Debendra Pradhan breathed his last at his son's official residence in Teen Murti Lane in New Delhi. He is survived by his wife Basanta Manjari Pradhan and two sons. Leaders of various political parties visited Pradhan's residence and paid floral tribute to the departed soul.

Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly and former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, ex-minister Bijay Mohapatra and ex-MLA Soumya Ranjan Patnaik visited Pradhan's house at Chandrasekharpur in Odisha and paid their last respects.

"Thousands of people have gathered here to pay their last respects. Dr Debendra Pradhan has done a lot for the BJP in the state. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formed government today in Odisha and Pradhan ji had laid the foundation of it in the early days. I pray that his family has the strength to bear this loss," Majhi said.

Holi clash rocks Jharkhand Assembly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ranchi

The Jharkhand Assembly on Tuesday witnessed an uproarious scene over the clash during a Holi procession in Giridih district with BJP legislators trooping into the well of the House and demanding a special debate over the state's law and order situation.

Despite repeated requests by Speaker Rabintra Nath Mahato to let the question hour function, the BJP MLAs continued to raise slogans against the JMM-led coalition government.

Unable to run the House, the Speaker adjourned proceedings till noon.

As the House assembled around 11 am after the Holi break, Leader of Opposition Babul Marandi raised the issue of the Giridih clash on March 14, in which several people were injured and many shops and vehicles were torched.

"This is appeasement politics by the government. The administration was a mute spectator when the incident happened. Now, the police have lodged an FIR against 80 people and arrested 22. A particular community has been targeted in the police action. The case should have been registered against those who created the nuisance," he alleged.

He also claimed that the state's law and order situation is in "shambles".

"Many festivals such as Ram Navami and Eid will be celebrated soon. We want a special debate on the state's law and order situation in the House. It is a serious issue," Marandi said.

Congress MLA Pradip Yadav alleged that BJP creates division in the society on religious lines.

JMM legislator Sudivya Kumar claimed that Marandi presented a one-sided story in the House.

Pakistan's Seema Haider welcomes baby girl in India

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Seema Haider, a mother of four from Pakistan who risked everything to be with her Indian lover, has now stepped into a new chapter of her life-motherhood once again. She gave birth to a baby girl at 4 am on Tuesday at Krishna Hospital in Greater Noida. Both mother and child are in good health, her lawyer AP Singh confirmed. "For those who have followed Seema and Sachin's journey, this is a moment of celebration," said Singh.

"A daughter has been born, and both mother and child are perfectly fine."

In a rare move, Seema and her husband Sachin Meena have decided to involve the public in naming their newborn.

"We invite people from across the country and beyond to suggest a name for our daughter. Social media users can send



Sachin Meena (left) along with his wife Seema Haider

FILE PHOTO

in their choices based on Indian traditions, and the name with the most votes will be chosen," Singh added. Seema Haider, originally from Sindh, Pakistan, first met Sachin Meena through the online game

PUBG. Their virtual friendship soon turned into love, leading her to take a drastic step. In 2023, she illegally entered India via Nepal, bringing along her four children from her previous marriage to Ghulam

Haider, a Pakistani national. Their love story soon came under legal scrutiny. July 2023, Seema and Sachin were arrested for her illegal entry into India but were later released on bail. Seema converted to Hinduism and married Sachin, vowing never to return to Pakistan. Back in Pakistan, her first husband, Ghulam Haider, continues to fight for her return, insisting that she was misled and that their children should be raised in Pakistan. Seema, however, remains firm in her choice. "I would rather die than return or leave Sachin. I request the Indian government to grant me citizenship," she has declared. As Seema and Sachin embrace their new journey as parents, the legal uncertainties around their case remain. But for now, the couple is focused on their newborn daughter-whose name, fittingly, will be chosen by the people.

Editor's TAKE

New vistas with New Zealand

The visit of the New Zealand Prime Minister reinforces the ties between the two nations

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon is on an official visit to India from March 16 to 20, 2025, marking his first trip to the country as Prime Minister. He is accompanied by a high-level delegation, including ministers, senior officials, business leaders, media personnel, and members of the Indian diaspora community. New Zealand happens to be one of the most friendly nations India has in the southern hemisphere. The two countries share warm and friendly relations, rooted in historical ties as former British colonies and members of the Commonwealth. The Indian diaspora in New Zealand, which numbers around 2,40,000 also plays a crucial role in strengthening bilateral ties.

This visit of New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon marks a significant step in the deepening of bilateral relations between the two nations. With discussions ranging from defence and security to counterterrorism measures, the visit underscores a growing alignment in worldviews between India and New Zealand.

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of the meeting between Prime Minister Luxon and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the signing of a comprehensive pact aimed at strengthening defence and security cooperation. This agreement reflects a shared commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, where both nations recognise the importance of collaboration in countering security threats. New Zealand supports a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific but is not part of security arrangements like the Quad.

During the bilateral discussions in New Delhi, Prime Minister Modi conveyed concerns over the activities of separatist groups that misuse democratic freedoms to promote terrorism and threaten Indian interests. In response, the New Zealand government reaffirmed its commitment to addressing such concerns and acknowledged India's perspective on these security threats. Indeed, a significant highlight of the discussions was the shared stance against terrorism. Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Luxon emphasised that terrorism in any form is unacceptable, recalling tragic incidents such as the Christchurch attack in 2019 and the Mumbai 26/11 attacks.

Beyond security and counterterrorism, the visit also provided an opportunity to explore avenues for enhancing economic collaboration. Both leaders reiterated the need for stronger trade and investment ties, with a focus on sectors like technology, agriculture, and renewable energy. The two nations recognise the importance of fostering innovation and economic growth, paving the way for deeper economic integration. New Zealand is keen on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India, but progress has been slow.

India and New Zealand have been increasingly converging on global issues, including climate change, sustainable development, and maritime security. As responsible stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific, both countries aim to uphold international norms and work towards a stable and prosperous region. Their commitment to multilateralism and global governance is reflected in their ongoing cooperation with international organizations. From defence and security to economic collaboration and counterterrorism, India and New Zealand are steadily aligning their interests and working towards a shared vision for global peace and stability. Luxon's visit reflects a concerted effort to strengthen the multifaceted relationship between New Zealand and India, encompassing trade, security, education, tourism, sports, and cultural exchanges.

Nepal's monarchy debate reignites

Former King Gyanendra Shah, backed by the royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), has launched a bold campaign to reclaim relevance. His recent high-profile return to Kathmandu has ignited political tensions

Returning to Pokhara, Nepal, during the current weather-fickle Holi season what struck me was the reignition of the debate on the revival of monarchy in a carefully orchestrated campaign driven by the royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), other royalists and former King Gyanendra Shah. Not since the republic replaced monarchy in May 2008, has the debate and movement been so intense. The Republicans have hit back in Parliament and outside it. For the royalists, RPP parliamentary party leader Rajendra Lingden, vice president RPP Rabintra Misra and sister party stalwart, Kamal Thapa along with dissident CPN UML leader Durga Parsain, joined by members of civil society are backing Gyanendra. A battle royal is brewing between the two sides.

Gyanendra returned to Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport in a helicopter from Pokhara on March 9 greeted by tumultuous crowds, according to one estimate of around 100,000 supporters. The Royal convoy took nearly three hours to reach Gyanendra's Nirmal Niwas. Earlier on Democracy Day (February 19) he broke his silence through a video message on the restoration of the monarchy. Speaking directly to his countrymen in the third person 'we', he urged for their support for the progress and prosperity of the country.

"Now we are ready to sacrifice anything for the country. We have decided to solve the national problem". Gyanendra has taken the horse by the bit.

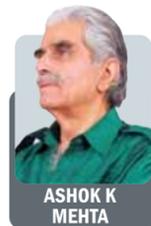
Royalists say the monarchy was removed by 'foreigners' and that the 2015 constitution was backed by 'foreigners'. One implied foreigner is India. Banners showing UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were prominently displayed on March 9. The House of Shahs, the royal dynasty began nearly 400 years ago and has an abiding connection with Gorakhnath Peeth whose founder Guru Gorakhnath blessed Prithvi Narayan Shah, founder of modern Nepal. Yogi Adityanath, is still its presiding priest and had in 2015 in Kathmandu publicly advocated the return of Nepal as a Hindu Rashtra. I am frequently asked here if India supports the revival of the Hindu state and monarchy in Nepal. I have said that India does not officially support either institution for Nepal. RPP has 14 seats in Parliament and secured 60,000 votes (out of 14 Million electorates) in the 2023 elections. Even in the local elections, their performance was below par. I met some well-wishers from Nepal at the Holi get-together in my village Anpu. Former Havaldar Durga Bahadur Gurung told me that during the monarchy, 'all the money' went to the



King's coffers; there were no 'vikas'. Now there is round development but "money goes to several ministers". But "vikas is essential and necessary". After the monarchy ended Nepal became secular, democratic and a republic enjoying the freedom of speech and people free to indulge in legitimate pursuits of happiness.

What Royalists forget is that monarchy was dismantled following a people's revolution (Jan Andolan) of 2006 — which was the culmination of the civil war, the 10-year-long Maoists insurrection that cost 17,000 lives and several thousand were victimised through disappearances and displacement. Further, Gyanendra had led a coup in 2005 dismissing Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. He deleted democracy aspiring to return to absolute monarchy. It is therefore naive to think of turning the clock back.

The debate in and outside Parliament is continuing. Former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai who has started a new party Nepal Samajbadi Party, had said after Gyanendra's Democracy Day speech, that he should be arrested. Prime Minister KP Oli has asked Gyanendra to start a political party and fight an election. The discussion in the lower



ASHOK K MEHTA

alliance government. He has also accused Gyanendra of murdering his brother Birendra and a statue smuggler. NC General Secretary Gagan Thapa has asked the government to withdraw Gyanendra's privileges. Gyanendra's alleged role in the 2001 Palace massacre has resurfaced. There are calls for a fresh enquiry into the royal tragedy; the initial enquiry was done hastily. Conspicuously Gyanendra and his notorious son Paras were among the few survivors of the tragedy.

On March 16, a royalist rally on the Durbar Marg between the main gate of the palace and

House has been civilised. Outside it, former prime minister and leader of the opposition, Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda the pathfinder of the republic, has said that the former King has found voice at this time due to the mis-governance of the ruling CPN UML and Nepali Congress.

He has also accused Gyanendra of murdering his brother Birendra and a statue smuggler. NC General Secretary Gagan Thapa has asked the government to withdraw Gyanendra's privileges. Gyanendra's alleged role in the 2001 Palace massacre has resurfaced. There are calls for a fresh enquiry into the royal tragedy; the initial enquiry was done hastily. Conspicuously Gyanendra and his notorious son Paras were among the few survivors of the tragedy.

the statue of King Mahendra (Gyanendra's father) carrying a banner demanding the return of King Gyanendra for the third time to his throne. On March 28, republicans led by smaller Left parties will stage a counter-rally. And this duel will continue until governance and delivery improve which won't be any time soon.

How will the former King's clarion call resonate in India, and how will it resurrect the political fortunes of the royalists? Only elections and time will tell. The King will be pleased with his direct call, to the Nepali Janta to help him reclaim his throne. History will record February 19 and March 9, 2025, as dates of Gyanendra's riposte to return to Narayanhi Durbar. Mr Shah will keep himself relevant to the discourse on monarchy at a time when many challenges confront Nepal not the least corruption which is at the heart of people's grievances. Unfortunately, the eight-month rule of the so-called stable alliance of two major parties has little to show to cheer Durga Bahadur.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views expressed are personal)

Gathered by love, glued by familial bonds

Opinion



ASHA IYER KUMAR

I had been a footloose solo traveller until health issues bogged me down and kept me cloistered in my home for nearly two years. In that period, I had nearly lost the innate verve to step out and see the world without being accompanied by the spouse. There was a certain blitheness to the spirit that came when I travelled alone and it was all taken away when an ailment robbed me of the confidence to wing out on my own.

Having come out of the phase for the most part, I had an opportunity to travel to India to attend a nephew's wedding earlier this month. However, I was caught between the nervousness of having to set out alone or giving the occasion a pass. The former meant steeling up to face whatever my mind and body would do to me during the time of travel. The former meant giving up a glorious opportunity to meet a horde of extended family members.

My dad came from a family of 13 siblings, most of whom have now moved on, leaving behind a sprawling clan of cousins who, over time, have built families of their own. Now with time, this family tree has grown phenomenally, with my cousins adding sons and daughters in-laws too. The invitation to the wedding meant having an enviable chance to meet many of them, and the list of people who had confirmed their attendance made me slaver. It was something I could not gloss over.

Good health or not, this was an occasion I did not want to miss because in a world that is getting polarised faster than a sneeze, one thing we need to preserve is the ties that transcend differences — the bonds of family that remind us, no matter how far we have drifted, there are roots that still hold us together.

The wedding promised to be more than just a celebration, it was a rare convergence of faces and stories I had not seen in years. A chance to relive old memories, forge new connections, and feel the warmth of belonging once again.

In the days leading up to my journey, I found myself replaying fragments of childhood spent with these cousins — the carefree gatherings on family occasions, the teasing banter that stitched us together, and the quiet comfort of knowing we belonged to the same expansive family tree. Life had since scattered us across continents, and while social media kept us loosely tethered, it was not the same as being in each other's presence — seeing familiar eyes light up, hearing voices unchanged by time, and embracing those whose touch still carried the warmth of home.

I knew this gathering would be more than just a reunion, it would be a gentle reminder that no matter how far we wander, we remain connected by unseen threads woven from shared memories, loud laughter, and the silent understanding that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. And so, with a heart both anxious and eager, I packed my bags, not just for a wedding, but for a journey back to the roots that

still held me fast. And boy, was I overwhelmed! From the first hug I received from my paternal aunt when I walked into her room through the number of embraces I got from dozens of people I was meeting after a long time, it was two days of nonstop reminders about how deeply intertwined our lives were, despite the years and distances that had come between us. Each embrace seemed to unlock a memory. Conversations flowed like an unbroken river, as if it had never stopped, carrying with them the warmth of familiarity and the quiet reassurance that some connections never truly fade.

In those two days, I found myself moving through a reel of faces and voices, yet each encounter felt personal and profound as if no time had lapsed at all. It was not just a family gathering, it was a homecoming for the heart, a reminder that love, in its purest form, doesn't need constant tending to thrive. It waits patiently, ready to embrace us the moment we return. All we need to nurture is a willingness to cruise into embraces and a bonding that are not encumbered by status, health conditions, time lapse, achievements or other highs and lows of a world that has no time to stand and share.

For this reason alone, I have resolved to attend any major celebration in the family if conditions are conducive, not just to enhance my experience of life, but also to let the bonds that time threatens to fray find their strength again, because some ties deserve to be nurtured, not merely remembered.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. She has published six books. Views expressed are personal)

Leaderspeak



I really appreciate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not bring up New Zealand's Champions Trophy loss to India, and I did not mention our Test victories in India. Let's keep it that way and avoid a diplomatic incident. During PM Modi's tenure, the men in blue have been the most dominant side in cricket, most recently winning the Champions Trophy in Dubai against my men in black. They broke many, many New Zealanders' hearts in the process, including mine.

CHRISTOPHER LUXON, PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND



Letters to the Editor

INDIA TAKES CENTER STAGE

Madam—The on air podcast episode of American podcaster and YouTuber Lex Fridman in which he had interviewed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has gone viral sensation on all the major internet platforms. Mr Fridman, who is known for interviewing the renowned personalities of the world, have so far achieved more than 1.5 Million views on his official YouTube channel for Modi's episode.

The exuberant interview of three long hours, make thought provoking discussion on so many critical issues including relationship with China, betrayal of Pakistan, his handling attempts of Godhara Riots, glimpses of his personal life, fast-food, Donald Trump and his nostalgia of Howdy Modi to express the generous humility of Trump, Russia-Ukraine, war, peace, AI, education and so on.

He presented his bold words fearlessly on many of the controversial issues of his tenure as the Indian Prime Minister for three times. It seems like, not him alone voicing out locally about India, instead 1.46 Billion people's are being centre-staged for the Lex Podcast for the world to listen the roars of India and the Indians.

The whole interview is jam-packed about the life realities of PM Modi, stories of India and Indian legacy. He mesmerised the interview with his personal touch, depicting his entire age crisp snapshot in those three hours.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

TRUMP AND PUTIN EYE 30-DAY CEASEFIRE

Madam—It is with reference to the news article "Putin Trump to hold talks about Ukraine war today" (March 18). US President Donald Trump is going to speak with Russian President Putin about 30 days ceasefire in Russia-Ukraine war field. White House officials are curiously optimistic about a proposal that would stop the fighting between Russia and Ukraine for 30 days. It is really a welcome move.

Recently Ukraine's government agreed to the US proposal of 30 days ceasefire in talks in Saudi Arabia. Putin has praised Trump's efforts to end the war in Ukraine and has agreed in principle with the US ceasefire proposal. At the same time Putin has raised so many questions that may require further discussion before the agreement could be reached. His main demand is no NATO membership be given to Ukraine and international sanctions against Russia should be ended. Also Putin wants guarantees that Ukraine would not use the pause in fighting to resupply its forces or squirrel out Ukrainian fighters to avoid capture by Russians. Putin also questioned who would monitor the deal across the front-line as well as what penalties would be for violating its terms. Ukraine has already agreed a 30 days ceasefire if Russia signs on too so that a longer peace deal can be discussed. Ukraine demands an exchange of prisoners and a return of thousands of children who had illegally be taken to Russia.

P VICTOR SELVARAJ | TAMIL NADU

SOUTH INDIA'S TRIPLE WHAMMY

Madam—In a surprising coincidence, three major issues have simultaneously bounced to centre stage causing anxiety in the southern states. These issues are the linguistic burden placed upon them by the National Education Policy 2020, the upcoming report of the 16th Finance Commission and the delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies in 2026. The explicit and implicit support for Hindi, along with its aggressive promotion, is perceived as a calibrated effort to impose the language on the non-Hindi-speaking states. The subtle manoeuvres in the Hindi heartland to replace English with Hindi, labelling the former as a colonial legacy and imbuing the exercise with nationalist sentiment, reinforce the suspicion. Ironically, India is the second-largest English-speaking nation in the world and some estimates suggest it may soon become the top nation. The percentage of people who can speak at least some English is higher in the South, where more people are now inclined to acquire proficiency. Revenue allocations from the central divisible pool to southern states have been scaled down. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent assurance to the southern states that "not even one seat is reduced pro-rata" could be considered a mollifying statement, at best. India's unity lies in addressing all regional linguistic aspirations, celebrating diverse cultures and sharing resources fairly.

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KOZHIKODE

HIMACHAL PRADESH APPLE GROWERS FEAR US TARIFF THREAT

The adverse impact of trade war will be visible in Himachal Pradesh if the apple of the United States (US) is allowed to enter in India. Here it is worth mentioning that a few years back there was proposal of entry of diary products from Scandinavian countries and strong protest was lodged by the Punjab and Gujarat because the livelihood of many is dependent on these dairy products and ultimately deal was cancelled.

Now, the apples of US will pose a serious threat to the Indian growers if the deal is matured. With import duties already slashed from 70 per cent to 50 per cent in 2023, orchardists fear another cut would flood the market with cheap, high-quality American apples, devastating domestic growers. The numbers tell a sobering story. When tariffs were hiked in 2018, US apple imports plummeted from 1.28 lakh metric tonnes to just 4,486 metric tonnes by 2022-23. But after the duty was reduced, imports surged nearly 20 times.

How the import duty can adversely impact the economy of the country it can be seen the impact on Canada where there is total fear psychosis what will happen in the near future and as per media reports many are thinking to return to own country and there is total uncertainty among the Indians settled in Canada.

All are aware that apple growers are already facing stiff competition from cheap Iranian imports and struggle with high production costs due to the rugged Himalayan terrain which makes mechanisation which ultimately adversely impact the sale in the competitive market, because the mechanisation become impossible. Whereas, the American apples benefit from highly mechanised farming and large-scale subsidies. Due to this high imbalance the India's apple industry extremely vulnerable to unregulated imports. And if the tariff is further cut without protective measures it would cripple an industry already on the edge.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

Transforming education in a globalised era

True progress lies in integrating cognitive discourse, ethical values and innovative methodologies to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary demands. By fostering inclusivity and transparency, we can cultivate responsible, knowledgeable and globally competitive individuals

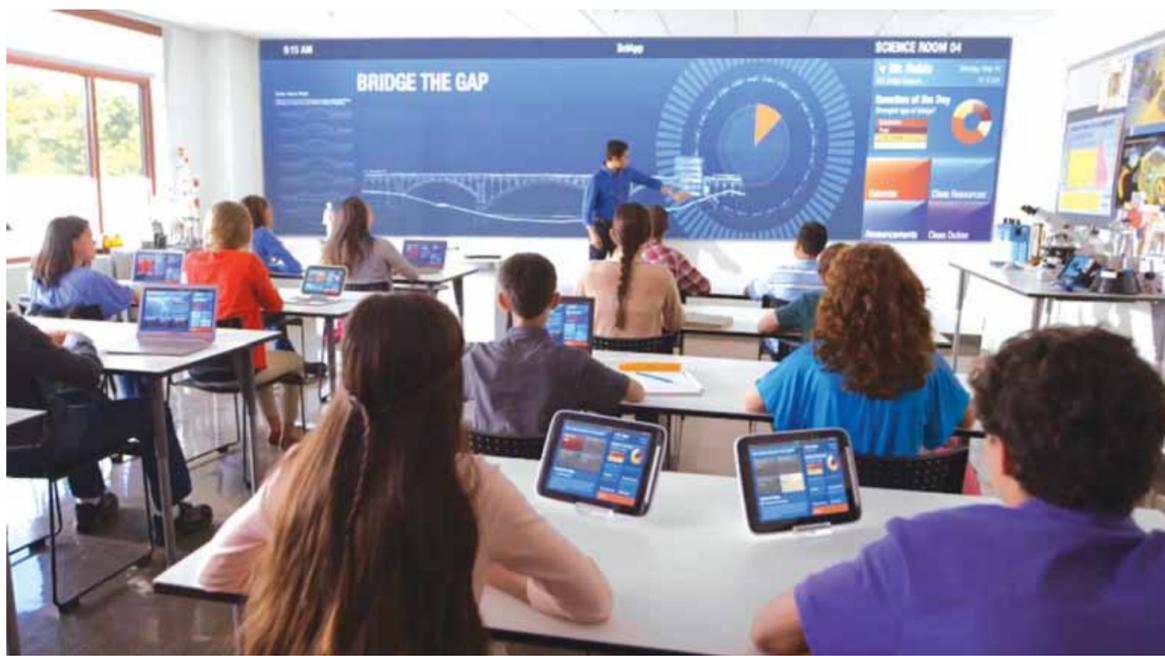
FIRST Column

The increasing liberalisation and globalisation have fostered the concept of a global village, deeply interwoven with society, markets, freedom, choice, empowerment, peace, opportunities, and political linkages. However, its far-reaching impact has also created a somewhat confusing situation. Over the years, there has been considerable debate on reforms in education. It is crucial to identify new ways to assess candidates' qualitative competence by emphasising the improvement of their analytical and observational skills. This can be achieved through cognitive discourse, exploring multiple perspectives, and formulating integrated texts and questionnaires.

Students' lives are undergoing a significant transformation, largely due to rapidly changing value systems across the globe. However, this transformation, driven primarily by acquisition rather than genuine learning, risks turning education—a highly pious institution—into a business venture, where success is measured by material possessions alone. Our traditional knowledge system has long been known for embracing values and approaches that have nurtured students' creativity for centuries. Yet, we must acknowledge the challenges posed by the increasing complexities of this transitional phase.

Despite the historical challenges posed by imperialism and colonialism, our education system has grown richer in content and more diverse in ideas. Continuous efforts have been made to expose students to the nuances of socio-economic, political, and international issues. Kudos to the Ministry of Education for consistently updating curricula, placing a strong emphasis on enhancing students' comprehension skills, and fostering their all-round personality development. The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) has provided a robust framework to upgrade, innovate, and evolve new educational methods. This ensures that our education system remains on par with the best in the world.

The inquisitiveness of the new generation is evident in their ideas and remarkable achievements globally. However, the demands of changing times and the rise of social media, coupled with its negative influences, have made students increasingly vulnerable to shortcuts, criminal activities, and anti-social elements. This has compelled policymakers to revisit the glory of our traditional education system, which is rooted in immense knowledge and wisdom. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a commendable initiative in this direction. Its mission aims to create a confluence between our rich traditional values and modern educational advancements. This can help cultivate a culture of liberal literature and



SUDHIR HINDWAN

nurture a spirit of selfless service and brotherhood.

Recent transformations in India's higher education system deserve applause. Efforts have been made to ensure equitable access and partnerships among institutions, demonstrating a strong commitment to empowering students and faculty members. Additionally, the NEP's emphasis on school, adult, and higher education, as well as the promotion of Indian languages and online learning, signifies a tremendous effort to

enhance the overall educational landscape.

The essence of these reforms is to ensure clean governance and accountability in education while maintaining synergy among various stakeholders, particularly the youth. Establishing clear norms for structuring new educational frameworks ensures affordability and promotes social justice. Many positive changes have been implemented through fresh perspectives.

Another welcome regulation is the introduction

6

STUDENTS' LIVES ARE UNDERGOING A SIGNIFICANT TRANSFORMATION, LARGELY DUE TO RAPIDLY CHANGING VALUE SYSTEMS ACROSS THE GLOBE. HOWEVER, THIS TRANSFORMATION, DRIVEN PRIMARILY BY ACQUISITION RATHER THAN GENUINE LEARNING, RISKS TURNING EDUCATION INTO A BUSINESS VENTURE

of monitoring mechanisms that assess institutions based on research output, academic excellence, industry linkages, and employability. The clear framework for decision-making regarding the establishment and closure of institutions ensures transparency.

There has been considerable debate among academicians regarding selection processes in higher education.

One of the major challenges is adapting selection criteria to the contemporary context of increasing global interdependence. Recent developments have laid the foundation for a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of politics and society.

However, modifying the examination system is crucial, without it, reforms may remain theoretical rather than practical. The strength of the higher education system lies in fostering internal dynamism and ensuring inclusive growth. Even the best systems are shaped by the people who drive change.

Tremendous efforts have been made to create a robust higher education apparatus, yet there is always room for improvement to make the sys-

tem more cost-effective and people-centric. Academicians play a vital role in this fast-changing world, which faces increasing challenges from cyber fraud, the misuse of artificial intelligence, and the influence of social media. The blurred distinction between virtual (reel) and real life is a growing concern. As beacons of wisdom and sacrifice, academicians must relentlessly pursue knowledge, contribute to society, and help students navigate the paradoxes of the transitional phase.

Students should be encouraged to engage in practical learning experiences that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications.

A constant focus on conceptualising knowledge can help students carve out a niche for themselves. Since the ultimate goal of life remains happiness and contentment, we must delve deep into the vast ocean of knowledge and retrieve the pearls of forgotten wisdom.

Conclusion

The transformation of India's education system, driven by globalisation and policy reforms, reflects a broader shift toward a more inclusive, innovative, and skill-oriented framework. While challenges persist, including the commercialisation of education, social media's negative influence, and the evolving global landscape, the efforts to modernise learning while preserving traditional wisdom are commendable.

The National Education Policy (NEP) has laid a strong foundation for enhancing analytical skills, fostering research excellence, and improving employability. A well-balanced approach—integrating cognitive discourse, ethical values, and advanced methodologies—can bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and contemporary demands.

The role of academicians remains crucial in guiding students to think critically and engage meaningfully with society. With a focus on inclusivity, transparency, and lifelong learning, India's education system is poised to create a generation of responsible, knowledgeable, and globally competitive individuals. Ultimately, education should not merely be a tool for financial success but a means to cultivate intellectual curiosity, selfless service, and a deep appreciation for knowledge.

As we continue to refine our educational policies, the goal should be to nurture individuals who contribute positively to society while upholding the rich legacy of Indian wisdom.

A holistic, student-centric approach will ensure long-term success and sustainable progress.

(The writer, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor. Views expressed are personal)

Global AI framework: Learning from nuclear arms race and climate change

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fast becoming the defining technology of our era, shaping everything from retail and finance to warfare and surveillance. Unlike run-of-the-mill general-purpose technologies, AI is truly path-breaking: it holds the power to transform the foundational structures of society, from how we work and learn to how we govern and secure ourselves. Much like nuclear technology and climate change, AI transcends national borders and individual interests. While celebrating technology's limitless potential, we must heed Geoffrey Hinton, dubbed the "Godfather of Deep Learning" and a 2024 Nobel laureate, who warns of the existential risks of rapidly advancing AI.

A few technocrats and major corporations now steer AI's development, potentially reshaping economies and societies. To ensure AI benefits humanity rather than endangering it, we must adopt a global governance framework akin to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The peril of few holding the future

Economists Daron Acemoglu and Johnson warn that a small elite controlling technological development can lock society into pathways that primarily benefit the privileged. This echoes historical moments when narrow interests drove massive decisions: for example, Ferdinand de Lesseps undertook the Panama Canal project after his success in Suez, only to misjudge engineering challenges and trigger disastrous outcomes. By analogy, big-tech leaders might have grand AI visions but overlook ethical hazards, job displacement, or societal well-being. When vision and capital become so concentrated, even a minor misstep at the top can ripple across the globe.

Moreover, this dynamic reflects what Cornell economist and India's former chief economic advisor Kaushik Basu calls the "Samaritan's Curse." Well-intentioned or philanthropic AI solutions—like free educational software from tech giants—could still undermine local autonomy and accountability.

In this scenario, communities become dependent on external providers who extract data and set the terms for entire regions. Over time, local institutions weaken, and the global majority is left beholden to decisions made just in the tech hubs. Likewise, an overreliance on purely "rational" frameworks—common in game theory—can exacerbate these inequalities. If tech elites optimize only for short-term interests or market dominance, they risk creating suboptimal outcomes that harm societal well-being—much like a Prisoner's Dilemma, in which self-interested actions lead everyone astray.

Lessons from nuclear non-proliferation

The parallels to the nuclear age are not accidental. In the early Cold War, world leaders recognised that nuclear weapons posed an existential threat, motivating treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Although imperfect, the NPT regime has provided an institutional channel for monitoring, compliance, and the promotion of peaceful nuclear uses.

AI, too, carries existential dimensions—whether from fully autonomous weapons, large-scale manipulation through algorithmic propaganda, or poorly controlled superintelligence. If major actors pursue an "arms race" mentality, each will race to deploy ever more powerful AI systems without adequate safety checks. In this Hawk-versus-Dove dynamic, those who prefer cautious regulation (the Doves) risk being overtaken by more aggressive competitors (the Hawks).

History shows that unrestrained competition with no global oversight can lead to destabilising deployments, leaving the rest of humanity at risk.

A climate governance

Meanwhile, the IPCC provides another model. By assembling scientific findings from around the world and presenting them in plain language, the IPCC has anchored climate negotiations for decades.

Although climate action remains insufficient overall, the IPCC demonstrates the value of an inclusive, science-driven body that informs international treaties and inspires national policy.

AI would benefit from a similar body—an "IPCC for AI." Such an institution could pool data, consolidate research, and highlight both the benefits and dangers of emerging AI applications. It would not, by itself, end competition or guarantee ethically deployed AI. However, it could foster a shared understanding of risks, develop transparent benchmarks for testing AI systems, and guide negotiations on international standards.

The need for equitable participation

If we want to avoid replicating the inequities of past global governance efforts, we must ensure that developing nations and historically marginalised communities have a real seat at the table. In nuclear and climate frameworks, wealthier nations often dominate the agenda, while poorer nations struggle to make their voices heard. When it comes to AI, the stakes are just as high-

if not higher—because the technology permeates jobs, education, healthcare, and human rights.

Without equitable participation, we risk a scenario in which AI is developed primarily by and for affluent societies, leaving much of the world behind. Local languages, cultural contexts, and social needs might remain unaddressed. Worse, data could be harvested from vulnerable communities without meaningful consent, reinforcing a cycle of dependency and exploitation. Moreover, if large companies or governments leverage AI to automate industries, job losses may disproportionately impact regions lacking the resources to adapt or retrain.

Towards a global architecture

A robust AI governance framework would combine elements of the NPT (agreements limiting destructive uses and encouraging responsible technology sharing) with the IPCC's approach (transparent, collaborative scientific assessment). Governments, industry, civil society, and academia should unite in a formal institution that:

1. Sets global standards for data governance, algorithmic transparency, and ethical AI usage.
2. Establishes monitoring and verification protocols to identify dangerous or manipulative AI deployments.
3. Facilitates capacity-building so that lower-income countries can develop or adapt AI ethically, rather than become passive recipients of technology shaped elsewhere.
4. Promotes open research on AI safety, interpretability, and fairness, ensuring that breakthroughs are not locked behind corporate or governmental secrecy.

Conclusion

AI's immense promise should not blind us to its potential perils as AI has already transformed the planet's strategic and economic landscape. To avoid a future shaped solely by a powerful few, we must proactively craft a global governance system.

Such an institution can harness the best of AI innovation while safeguarding against misuse, exploitation, job losses, and catastrophic misjudgments.

The lesson from nuclear arms and climate policy is clear: when technology poses risks on a planetary scale, neither laissez-faire market forces nor unilateral national approaches will suffice, instead, a cooperative international framework, informed by science and rooted in fairness, is our best hope.

(The writer is an officer of the Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers and is presently pursuing MPA at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. Views expressed are personal)

Purity and well-being: The true foundations of health

Health is Wealth is an old maxim that's relevant even today in this modern age. It's a fact that health is very essential to happy and natural living. And without good health, one does not have a feeling of stamina, suppleness and well-being. Today, nobody wants to be sick and physically distressed to spend their hard-earned money on doctors and medicines and that is why people all over the world have become more health conscious than they were a few years back.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease. Since there is an intimate connection and interaction between mind and body, most of the time a physical disease causes some symptoms of ailment in the mind and vice versa. And to treat it, there are many systems or parties as we call them. Usually, the doctors give medicine so that the symptoms of the disease disappear or, at most, the disease in its present form disappears. However, there are only very few systems that feel concerned with the eradication of the causes of the disease and with the restoration of health.

Various systems define 'disease' and its causes differently and their philosophy of health and disease is very different from that of the other systems. For example, the allopathic system of medicine is based on the philosophy that it is the virus that causes a disease and hence allopaths consider viruses as living microorganisms.

They also think that many diseases are caused by bacteria if not by viruses. So, their system attempts to kill these viruses or bacteria to help the body recover from their attack. But the hygienist school of thought or the nature curists say that viruses are not living entities and they consider viruses as the proteinaceous debris of spent cells that create a condition of intoxication, called toxemia or toxicosis. They say that which is called 'virus' is always dead, it never shows any signs of life, such as metabolism or control mechanisms.

As to the bacteria, they say that bacteria have always been with us because they are our symbiotic partners. So, according to nature curists, the real culprit is the accumulated toxic matter and hence they consider a disease not as a result of attack by viruses or bacteria but the result of the toxic matter, generated within or taken from outside, and also the result of the body attempting to throw this toxic material out of it.

So, according to them, all diseases are toxemia in origin and most diseases are a remedial effort or a struggle by the body to purify or repair itself. Now, if we consider 'disease' as the manifestation of a signal concerning the accumulated debris,

waste or toxic matter, then we will have to say that purification of the body is the mother of health. In this purification, 'purity of mind' plays a very great role because purification of the body requires fasting or less eating, avoiding toxic food, and having control over sensual pleasures that lead to waste of body-vitality.

It also means control over our behaviour and emotions, for these also lead to debility, innervation and unhealthy functioning of our nervous or glandular system. Even if we believe in the existence of viruses, bacteria or microorganisms as the causes of our disease, it would be hard to deny the fact that the main culprit is the accumulated toxic matter in our body because that provides a suitable breeding ground for the virus or the bacteria. In sum, it would be correct to say that spiritual and physical purity is the factor that promotes natural health.

Hence, without positive emotions of love, enthusiasm etc, one cannot have the vitality to maintain normal functions of all body parts because the negative emotions cause a great drain on one's vitality and debilitate the whole organism. It would therefore be proper to emphasise that purity is the main ingredient to achieve good health.

So, while doctors talk of holistic health, hypertension, psychosomatic diseases, and drug addiction, we wish that due attention is also paid to the turmoil caused by one's negative thoughts which is making the atmosphere of society polluted and unhealthy.

In conclusion, maintaining good health requires a holistic approach that encompasses physical, mental, and emotional well-being. While medical systems like allopathy focus on eliminating viruses and bacteria, natural hygiene emphasises detoxification and purification as the key to health. The debate over the causes of disease highlights the importance of keeping the body free from toxic accumulation. Furthermore, emotional health plays a crucial role in overall well-being, as negative thoughts and stress can weaken the body's vitality. True health is not just the absence of disease but a balance of mind, body, and spirit. Cultivating purity—both physically and mentally—through proper nutrition, controlled emotions, and positive thoughts is essential to achieving lasting wellness.

As society becomes more health-conscious, a shift toward preventive care and natural healing methods can help reduce dependency on medications and promote a healthier way of life. Ultimately, health is indeed wealth, and nurturing it should be a priority for all.

(The writer is spiritual teacher and a popular columnist. Views expressed are personal)



ISHOO RATNA SRIVASTAV



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Gabbard's remarks damaging, says Bangladesh govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

The interim government of Professor Muhammad Yunus refuted US National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard's remarks on the alleged persecution of minority communities in Bangladesh saying her comments were "not based on any evidence or specific allegations".

"They (Gabbard's comments) paint an entire nation with a broad and unjustified brush," the chief adviser's office said on a verified Facebook post at around midnight Monday.

It said Gabbard's statement in an Indian TV channel was "misleading and damaging to the image and

reputation of Bangladesh, a nation whose traditional practice of Islam has been famously inclusive and peaceful and that has made remarkable strides in its fight against extremism and terrorism".

The US spy chief, now in India, earlier on Monday said the "longtime unfortunate persecution, killing, and abuse of religious minorities like Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and others has been a major area of concern for the US government and President Trump and his administration".

In an interview with the TV channel, Gabbard alleged "persecution and killing" of religious minorities in

Bangladesh and that "the threat of Islamic terrorists" in the country was "rooted" in the "ideology and objective" to "rule and govern with an Islamist caliphate".

She said, "The talks are just beginning between President Trump's new cabinet coming in and the Government of Bangladesh, but this continues to remain a central focus area of concern".

But the chief adviser's office said groundlessly linking Bangladesh to the idea of an "Islamist caliphate" undermined the hard work of countless Bangladeshis and their friends and partners around the world who were committed to peace,

stability, and progress.

It said Bangladesh "strongly condemns any efforts to link the country to any form of 'Islamist caliphate'".

"Political leaders and public figures should base their statements, especially about the most sensitive issues, on actual knowledge and take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes, to fan fears and potentially even stoke sectarian tensions," Yunus's office said.

Gabbard, who arrived in New Delhi on Sunday on a three-day visit, spoke about the ideology of an "Islamic Caliphate" and how extremist elements and terror groups globally aim for



such an outcome. The Chief Adviser's office, however, said Bangladesh, like many countries around the world, faced challenges of extremism, "but it has continuously worked in partnership with the international community, including the US, to address these issues through law enforcement, social reforms, and other counterterrorism efforts".

"In support of our shared global efforts to combat extremism and terrorism, the Interim Government of Bangladesh remains committed to engaging in constructive dialogue based on facts and on respect for the sovereignty and security of all nations," the statement read.

KIND ATTENTION RAIL PASSENGERS! POST HOLI FESTIVAL SPECIAL TRAINS-2025

For the convenience of passengers Railways have decided to run several post Holi Festival Special trains from Delhi area stations, the date wise list of the same is as under:-

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 19.03.2025 (WEDNESDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

Spl. Train No.	Station From	Dept. Time	Station To	Arr. Time	Stoppages
03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
03414	Delhi Jn.	13:35	Malda Town	17:30	Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Patna Jn., Patna Saheb, Fatuha, Khusrapur, Bakhtiyarpur Jn., Barh, Mokama, Hathidah Jn., Barhiya, Luckeesarai Jn., Kiul Jn., Kajra, Abhaipur, Dharhara, Jamalpur Jn., Bariarpur, Sultanganj, Bhagalpur, Kahaigaon, Sahibganj Jn., Barharwa Jn. & New Farakka Jn. Stations
09004	Delhi Jn.	13:05	Mumbai Central	13:30	Delhi Cantt., Gurgaon, Rewari Jn., Alwar, Bandikui Jn., Gandhinagar Jaipur, Jaipur Jn., Kishanganj, Ajmer Jn., Beawar, Marwar Jn., Falna, Pindwara, Abu Road, Palanpur Jn., Mahesana Jn., Sabarmati BG, Vadodara Jn., Udhna Jn., Valsad, Vapi & Borivali Stations
02436	New Delhi	08:30	Patna Jn.	20:10	Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar & Ara Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
04068	New Delhi	14:00	Bhagalpur	13:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur, Patna Jn., Bakhtiyarpur Jn., Mokama, Hathidah Jn., Luckeesarai Jn., Kiul Jn., Abhaipur, Jamalpur Jn. & Sultanganj Stations
05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05306	Anand Vihar (T)	00:20	Chhapra	22:50	Etawah, Kanpur Central, Aishbagh, Badshahnagar, Barabanki Jn., Gonda Jn., Mankapur Jn., Babhnan, Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur, Kaptanganj Jn., Padrauna, Tamkuhi Road, Thawe Jn. & Siwan Jn. Stations

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 20.03.2025 (THURSDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

04026	Delhi Jn.	23:05	Raxaul Jn.	19:00	Ghaziabad, Hapur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Gonda Jn., Gorakhpur & Narkatiaganj Jn. Stations
03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
02436	New Delhi	08:30	Patna Jn.	20:10	Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar & Ara Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
04028	Anand Vihar (T)	23:55	Jogbani	03:00	Ghaziabad, Moradabad Jn., Bareilly Jn., Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur, Deoria Sadar, Siwan Jn., Chhapra, Sonpur Jn., Hajipur Jn., Shahpur Patoree, Barauni Jn., Begusarai, Khagaria Jn., Naugachia, Katihar Jn., Purnea Jn., Arariya & Forbesganj Jn. Stations
05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05114	Anand Vihar (T)	16:00	Chhapra	14:00	Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Burhwal, Gonda Jn., Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Padrauna, Tamkuhi Road, Thawe Jn., Dighwa Dubauli, Mashrakh & Chhapra Kacheri Stations
04018	Anand Vihar (T)	09:00	Muzaffarpur Jn.	06:00	Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Gorakhpur, Kaptanganj Jn., Narkatiaganj Jn., Sagauli Jn. & Bapudham Motihari Stations

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 21.03.2025 (FRIDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

05058	Delhi Jn.	14:00	Gorakhpur Jn.	06:25	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Sitapur Jn., Burhwal Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, & Khalilabad Stations
03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
04146	Delhi Jn.	09:30	Subedarganj	19:40	Aligarh Jn., Tundla Jn., Etawah, Govindpuri & Fatehpur Stations
04022	New Delhi	14:00	Gorakhpur Jn.	05:00	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Lucknow, Gonda Jn. & Basti Stations
03256	Anand Vihar (T)	23:30	Patna Jn.	18:35	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara & Danapur Stations
05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05204	Anand Vihar (T)	09:20	Muzaffarpur Jn.	05:00	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur, Patliputra, Sonpur Jn. & Hajipur Jn. Stations
03012	Anand Vihar (T)	00:30	Howrah	03:00	Tundla Jn., Etawah Jn., Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone, Anugrah Narayan Road, Gaya, Koderma, Dhanbad, Asansol, Durgapur, Bardhaman & Bandel Jn. Stations

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 22.03.2025 (SATURDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
09004	Delhi Jn.	13:05	Mumbai Central	13:30	Delhi Cantt., Gurgaon, Rewari Jn., Alwar, Bandikui Jn., Gandhinagar Jaipur, Jaipur Jn., Kishanganj, Ajmer Jn., Beawar, Marwar Jn., Falna, Pindwara, Abu Road, Palanpur Jn., Mahesana Jn., Sabarmati BG, Vadodara Jn., Udhna Jn., Valsad, Vapi & Borivali Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
03010	Anand Vihar (T)	00:30	Howrah Jn.	03:00	Tundla Jn., Etawah Jn., Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone, Anugrah Narayan Road, Gaya Jn., Koderma, Dhanbad Jn., Asansol Jn., Durgapur, Bardhaman & Bandel Stations
05284	Anand Vihar (T)	07:00	Muzaffarpur Jn.	04:50	Moradabad, Shahjahanpur, Hardoi, Lucknow Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Bagaha, Harinagar, Narkatiaganj Jn., Bettiah, Sagauli Jn., Bapudham Motihari, Pipra, Chakia, Mehsi & Motipur Stations
05306	Anand Vihar (T)	00:20	Chhapra	22:50	Etawah, Kanpur Central, Aishbagh, Badshahnagar, Barabanki Jn., Gonda Jn., Mankapur Jn., Babhnan, Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur, Kaptanganj Jn., Padrauna, Tamkuhi Road, Thawe Jn. & Siwan Jn. Stations

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 23.03.2025 (SUNDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05220	Anand Vihar (T)	08:00	Muzaffarpur Jn.	00:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur, Patliputra, Sonpur Jn. & Hajipur Jn. Stations
02526	Anand Vihar (T)	17:20	Kamakhyia Jn.	03:40	Aligarh Jn., Tundla Jn., Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur, Patliputra, Hajipur Jn., Barauni Jn., Begu Sarai, Khagaria Jn., Naugachia, Katihar Jn., Barsoi Jn., Kishanganj, New Jalpaiguri, New Cooch Behar, Tufanganj, Golakganj Jn., Gauripur, Bilaspur, Abhayapuri Assam & Goalpara Town Stations

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 24.03.2025 (MONDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
03256	Anand Vihar (T)	23:30	Patna Jn.	18:35	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara & Danapur Stations
02398	Anand Vihar (T)	08:20	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Son & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
03258	Anand Vihar (T)	05:00	Danapur	20:45	Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar & Ara Stations

For any kind of information & detailed time-table etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website <https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in> or NTES App.

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HK leader criticises tycoon's deal to sell Panama Port assets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hong Kong

Hong Kong's leader has waded into a controversy over a prominent conglomerate's decision to sell its Panama Canal port assets to a consortium including American investment bank BlackRock Inc., a deal that has angered China and highlights how escalating tensions between Beijing and Washington can leave the Chinese financial centre's business leaders trapped in the middle.

Chief Executive John Lee told reporters at a weekly news briefing that CK Hutchison Holdings' in-principle agreement to sell its controlling stake in a company operating ports at both ends of the Panama Canal was being discussed extensively and concerns raised about the deal deserve serious attention. He did not specify what the concerns were.

"(The) government urges foreign governments to provide a fair and just environment for enterprises," he said. "We oppose the abusive use of coercion or bullying tactics in international economic and trade relations."

Lee avoided a direct mention of US President Donald Trump and also stopped short of criticising CK Hutchison or tycoon Li Ka-shing's family, which owns a controlling stake in the conglomerate.

His comments followed a somewhat veiled backlash from Beijing. Since last Thursday, Beijing's offices handling Hong Kong affairs have reposted two commentaries by a Beijing-backed local newspaper that blasted the deal. That has raised questions over the sale.

One of the newspaper commentaries suggested the deal is a betrayal to all Chinese and disregards national interests. The other described great entrepreneurs as patriots, but suggested that businesspeople who "dance

with" predatory American politicians to reap quick profits were doomed to infamy. The articles signalled Beijing's disapproval of the deal, though its actual impact remains unclear.

Posting of the articles has been seen as an indirect attack on the conglomerate by Chinese leaders. Trump, who has alleged Chinese interference with the operations of the critical shipping lane, hailed the deal, saying his administration would "reclaim" the Panama Canal. Panama President José Raúl Mulino accused him of lying.

Lee said any business transaction must comply with Hong Kong's laws. The city will handle it according to the law, he said without



elaborating. Increasing influence from Beijing is adding to pressure on business leaders in the former British colony, that was returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

CK Hutchison did not comment on Lee's remarks or the articles. It was due to report its 2024 financial results on Thursday, but said it did not plan a news conference.

The company surprised market watchers when it announced March 4 that it would sell all shares in Hutchison Port Holdings and in Hutchison Port Group Holdings to the consortium in a deal valued at nearly USD 23 billion, including USD 5 billion in debt.

Lebanon, Syria agree to truce

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beirut

Lebanese and Syrian defence officials reached an agreement late Monday for a ceasefire to halt two days of clashes along the border, Syria's state-run SANA news agency reported.

The agreement also stipulates "enhanced coordination and cooperation between the two sides," the statement from the Syrian Ministry of Defense said. Lebanon's president earlier Monday ordered troops to retaliate against the source of gunfire from the Syrian side of the border after more deadly fighting erupted overnight along the frontier. Lebanon's Health Ministry reported that seven Lebanese citizens were killed and another 52 injured in the clashes, including a 4-year-old girl.

The fighting happened after Syria's interim government accused militants from Lebanon's Hezbollah group of crossing into Syria on Saturday, abducting three soldiers and killing them on Lebanese soil. Hezbollah denied involvement and some other reports pointed to local clans in the border region that are not directly affiliated with Hezbollah but have been involved in cross-border smuggling.

It was the most serious cross-border fighting since the ouster of former Syrian President Bashar Assad in December.

Syrian News Channel, citing an unnamed Defense Ministry official, said the Syrian army shelled "Hezbollah gatherings that killed Syrian soldiers" along the border. Hezbollah denied involvement in a statement on Sunday.

Information Minister Paul Morkos said Lebanon's defense minister told a Cabinet meeting that the three killed were smugglers.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said five Syrian soldiers were killed during Monday's clashes. Footage circulated online and in local media showed families fleeing toward the Lebanese town of Hermel.

Lebanon's state news agency reported that fighting intensified Monday evening near Hermel. "What is happening along the eastern and northeastern border cannot continue and we will not accept that it continues," Lebanon's President Joseph Aoun said on X. "I have given my orders to the Lebanese army to retaliate against the source of fire."

Aoun added that he asked Lebanon's foreign minister, who was in Brussels for a donors conference on Syria, to contact Syrian officials to resolve the problem "and prevent further escalation." Violence recently spiked in the area between the Syrian military and armed Lebanese Shiite clans closely allied with the former government of Assad, based in Lebanon's Al-Qasr border village. Lebanese media and the observatory say clans were involved in the abductions that sparked the latest clashes.

The Lebanese and Syrian armies said they have opened channels of communication to ease tensions. Lebanon's military also said it returned the bodies of the three killed Syrians. Large numbers of Lebanese troops have been deployed in the area.

King Charles III plans to meet Pope

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

King Charles III is scheduled to have an audience with Pope Francis during a state visit next month to the Vatican, suggesting the Holy See is optimistic the pontiff will be back at work by then, barring any setbacks in his recovery from double pneumonia.

The tentative audience was among details of the British monarch's visit to the Vatican and Italy released on Tuesday by Buckingham Palace. State visits are always planned in close consultation with the Vatican's secretariat of state.

The palace separately confirmed that Charles wrote privately to the pope when he was taken ill. Francis, 88, has been hospitalized since February 14. With gradual improvements, the Vatican said Monday it had suspended morning updates and is issuing less frequent medical bulletins. The next one is not expected before Wednesday.

The visit to the Vatican is symbolic of efforts to build closer ties between the Catholic Church and the Church of England, which split from Rome in the 16th century during the reign of

King Henry VIII. Charles, who is head of the Church of England, made building bridges between people of all faiths a priority since he ascended the throne 2 1/2 years ago.

Charles' three-day trip begins April 7 and it will also include events in Italy and its capital, Rome, which surrounds Vatican City.

In Rome, Charles will highlight the close links between Britain and Italy, two NATO allies, at a time when European nations are working to bolster support for Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression. The visit will include a joint flypast over Rome by the Italian Air Force aerobatic team, Frecce Tricolori, or Tricolor Arrows, and their Royal Air Force counterparts, the Red Arrows.

The king and queen will attend a reception in Ravenna, in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy, to mark the 80th anniversary of the region's liberation from the Nazis by Allied forces on April 10, 1945. The royals will also celebrate the cuisine of the Emilia-Romagna region and meet with local farmers devastated by floods that recently hit the area.

3 terrorists neutralised by Pakistan's security forces

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Peshawar

Security forces killed three terrorists during an intelligence-based operation in Pakistan's northwestern Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa...

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said security forces conducted the IBO in the general area of Tor Darra of Khyber district...

"During the conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarji [terrorists] location, as a result of which, three khwarji were sent to hell," it added.

Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from killed terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area, the ISPR added.

A sanitization operation was launched to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area as the "security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country".

Last week, the Pakistan Army thwarted a terrorist attack on a check post and killed 10 militants following a suicide attack in the Jandola area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's South Waziristan district.

The military's media wing had said that the

attempt to enter the post was effectively thwarted by the troops, forcing the terrorists to "ram an explosive-laden vehicle into the perimeter wall".

The country witnessed a sharp increase in terror attacks in January 2025, surging by 42 per cent compared to the previous month, according to data released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), a think tank.

The data revealed that at least 74 militant attacks were recorded nationwide, resulting in 91 fatalities, including 35 security personnel, 20 civilians, and 36 militants.

Another 117 individuals sustained injuries, including 53 security forces personnel, 54 civilians, and 10 militants.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained the worst-affected province, followed by Balochistan. In KP's settled districts, militants carried out 27 attacks, resulting in 19 fatalities, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and two militants.

The tribal districts of KP (erstwhile Fata) witnessed 19 attacks, leading to 46 deaths, including 13 security personnel, eight civilians, and 25 militants.

Balochistan also experienced a surge in militant activity, with at least 24 attacks, which claimed 26 lives, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and nine militants.

Canada's Carney meets with European allies as Trump targets his country's sovereignty, economy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney met with leaders of Britain and France on Monday during his first official overseas trip, seeking support from two of Ottawa's oldest allies as US President Donald Trump targets Canada's sovereignty and economy.

Canadians have criticized the leaders of the two countries that founded Canada for their muted response to Trump's attacks. The president has imposed tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum and repeatedly commented on turning Canada into the 51st state.

Carney and French President Emmanuel Macron did not take journalists' questions, and a joint news conference was not scheduled with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, either. An official familiar with the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly, said the Canadians proposed a press conference in Paris but the French declined.

Starmer has called Canada a friend and ally of the UK but has declined to directly call out Trump's talk of annexation — though he went further than he has before by stressing Canada's sovereignty.

"The relationship between our two countries has always been strong," Starmer told Carney inside the British leader's 10 Downing St. residence. "Two sov-

reign allies, so much in common — a shared history, shared values, shared king."

Carney dismissed the notion that he is seeking the support of other countries to affirm Canada as a nation. "We don't need another country to validate our sovereignty, we are sovereign," he said. "We can stand up for ourselves. The disrespect is not helpful and needs to stop before we sit down about a broader partnership." Macron did not address Trump's attacks on Canada ahead of their talks but noted that tariffs only bring inflation and damage to supply chains.

"In the current international context, we want to be able to develop our most strategic projects with our closest, more loyal partners," Macron said.

In London, Carney was received at Buckingham Palace by King Charles III, Canada's head of state, before his talks with Starmer. The monarch, wearing a red tie and an Order of Canada lapel pin, congratulated Carney on his recent victory. He was sworn in on Friday.

"Canada is fortunate to have a steadfast defender in our sovereign," Carney posted on X.

On Tuesday, Carney will travel to the edge of Canada's Arctic to reaffirm the country's security and sovereignty.

Why Paris and London?: Carney has chosen the two European capitals that shaped Canada's early existence. During his swearing-in, he noted the country was built on the bedrock of three peoples, French,

English and Indigenous.

He added that Canada is fundamentally different from America and will "never, ever, in any way shape or form, be part of the United States."

"I want to ensure that France, and the whole of Europe, works enthusiastically with Canada, the most European of non-European countries," Carney said, but vowed to "maintain the most positive relations possible with the United States."

Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal, said other leaders are "playing it safe" and making sure to avoid gaffes at a time of international tension around Trump's actions and rhetoric.

Carney's choice of itinerary emphasizes Canada's strong connection with the two former colonial powers, Béland said, and noted that "the fact that Canada never broke away from the UK in a violent fashion is a key historical and institutional difference between the United States and Canada."

The trip to London was a kind of homecoming. Carney became the first non-British governor in the Bank of England's 319-year history when he took the job in July 2013. He served until March 2020.

No Washington trip planned: Carney said he won't sit down with Trump until the U.S. is ready to have a more comprehensive discussion on trade and security. "When the US is ready to have that conversation we're ready to sit down," he said.

Last surviving pilot from Battle of Britain dies at 105

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The last surviving pilot of the battle of Britain has died, severing the last living link to the few thousand young men who fought the Nazi air force to a standstill amid fears that Britain might be forced to capitulate during the early months of World War II.

John "Paddy" Hemingway, an Irish national who enlisted in the Royal Air Force before the war began, died Monday at his home in Dublin, the RAF said.

Hemingway was just 20 years old when he and his comrades in the Royal Air Force took to the skies to fight off wave after wave of Nazi aircraft that sought to pound Britain into submission during the summer and autumn of 1940.

In August of that year, when German bombers were relentlessly targeting airfields in southern England and the outcome of the battle was still in doubt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously stood before the House of Commons to pay tribute to the young pilots who were defending Britain. "The gratitude of every home in our island, in our empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal dan-

ger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion," Churchill said. "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Britain has ever since revered "the few" for saving the country during its moment of peril. The Battle of Britain Memorial on the English Channel coast lists the names 2,941 Allied airmen who took part in the battle.

Public Notice regarding Hemant Saini's property and mortgage details. Includes contact information for Sanjeev Dwivedi (Advocate).

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Government of Haryana Tender Notice for Annual Rate Contract for purchase of centrally stored items for the financial year 2025-26.

Public Notice regarding the sale of property belonging to Mr. Anil Kumar and his wife Mrs. Asha Rani. Includes contact information for Tapan Raghav (Advocate).

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NIQ (Notice Inviting Quotations) for the purchase of centrally stored items for the financial year 2025-26. Includes contact information for Deputy Registrar (P&S) IGU, Meerpur, Rewari.

Secret Service protection for Biden's adult children ends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

President Donald Trump said Monday he was ending "immediately" the Secret Service protection details assigned to Democrat Joe Biden's adult children, which the former president had extended to July. The Republican president on social media objected to what he said were 18 agents assigned to Hunter Biden's protective detail while in South Africa this week. He said Ashley Biden has 13 agents assigned to her detail and that she too "will be taken off the list."

There was no immediate reaction from the former president's office. Former presidents and their spouses receive life-long Secret Service protection under federal law, but the protection afforded to their immediate families over the age of 16 ends when they leave office, though both Trump and Biden extended the details for their children for six months before leaving office.

While touring the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Monday afternoon, a reporter asked Trump if he would revoke the protection for the former president's son. "Well, we have done that with many. I would say if there are 18 with Hunter Biden, that will be something I'll look at this afternoon," Trump said, who added this was the first time he heard about the matter. "I'm going to take a look at that," he said.

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NORTHERN RAILWAY (E-AUCTION NOTICE) for the allotment of Automated Teller Machine/ Digital Banking Unit/ Banking e-Lobby Contracts, at following Railway Stations/ Locations.

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Office of the Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh. Email: sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

National Competitive E-Tender Notice. The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand for following works.

Table with 7 columns: Sl. No., Name of Work, Earnest Money (in Lac), Cost of Tender (in Rs.), Validity of Tender (day), Period of Completion (months), Category of Registration.

CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED. Registered Office: Aggarwal Corporate Tower, Plot No. 23, 5th Floor, Govind Lal Sikka Marg, Rajendra Place, New Delhi - 110008.

Table with 2 columns: Name of Borrower, Co-Borrower/ Guarantor(s) with address/es and Description & Owner(s) of Properties.

Table with 4 columns: Reserve Price (RP) & EMD Amount 10% of the Reserve Price & Incremental Amount, Recovery Amount as per Demand Notice, Date & Time of On-Site Inspection of Property, Date & Time of E-Auction with unlimited extensions of 5 Minutes each.

Table with 4 columns: Reserve Price (RP) & EMD Amount 10% of the Reserve Price & Incremental Amount, Recovery Amount as per Demand Notice, Date & Time of On-Site Inspection of Property, Date & Time of E-Auction with unlimited extensions of 5 Minutes each.

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Table with 4 columns: Reserve Price (RP) & EMD Amount 10% of the Reserve Price & Incremental Amount, Recovery Amount as per Demand Notice, Date & Time of On-Site Inspection of Property, Date & Time of E-Auction with unlimited extensions of 5 Minutes each.

EMD amount shall be remitted through NEFT/RTGS/Funds Transfer in favour of "Clix Housing Finance Limited", Account No. 341905000653. ICICI BANK. IFSC: ICICI00034190.

LIC to buy stake in a health insurer in two weeks: CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Life insurance behemoth LIC is confident of buying a stake in a health insurer in the next two weeks, its chief executive Siddhartha Mohanty said on Tuesday.

Without identifying the company it will be buying a stake in, Mohanty said the state-owned company is in final stage of talks and hoped that a deal gets announced before March 31.

"It is a natural choice for LIC to be in health insurance, discussion is going on at final stage," he told reporters on the sidelines of the GCA25 event here.

Mohanty said LIC will not buy a controlling stake of 51 per cent or more in the target company and the exact quantum of the stake buy depends on factors like the decision of LIC board and valuations.

At present, life insurance companies are not allowed to offer health covers which include covering up hospitalisation and other expenses for the insured. There was a suggestion for a composite licence for insurers, but no announcement was made in this regard in the Union Budget.

As per some media reports, LIC is said to be eyeing a stake in ManipalCigna in a deal pegged at ₹4,000 crore.

At present, life insurance companies are not allowed to offer health covers which include covering up hospitalisation and other expenses for the insured

In a regulatory filing issued later, the Corporation said it is in advanced talks to pick up a substantial stake in a "standalone" health insurer and no binding agreements have been signed so far. "The execution and ultimate consummation of the deal is subject to various factors, including approval of the Board, regulatory approvals and other approvals, if any, before executing any binding agreements. There can be no guarantee or assurance of the execution/consummation of the potential deal," it said.

Meanwhile, the managing director and chief executive of the largest life insurer said there has been a "slowdown" in the growth

of life insurance, particularly in terms of penetration lately.

The slowdown has happened even as there has been a focus on enhancing the principles of insurance facilitation and moving towards a principle-based regulatory framework, he said, adding that this "dual reality" calls for a "comprehensive review" of LIC's approach.

He said actuaries will play an important role in addressing such challenges by providing objective and data-driven insights into emerging risks, developing innovative solutions to address the challenges of a changing world, ensuring the financial stability and sustainability of insurance companies. In the third quarter of FY25, LIC reported a 9 per cent decline in its net premium income at ₹1.06 lakh crore, even though the standalone net profit increased 17 per cent to ₹11,056 crore.

Department of Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju said that actuaries will help reduce the premiums paid by the general public by using the most scientific ways of assessing risks. This will help increase the insurance penetration in the country, he said.

Majority of Indians are long-term investors: NSE CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Majority of Indians are long-term investors as only 2 per cent actively trade in derivatives out of the 110 million market participants, National Stock Exchange (NSE) MD and CEO Ashish Kumar Chauhan has said. This suggests the growing culture of disciplined, sustainable investment in the country. Out of 110 million market participants, only 2 per cent actively trade in derivatives. The majority are committed to long-term investing," he stated.

At a recent panel discussion in Singapore, he dispelled the notion that India's stock market is driven primarily by speculative trading.

According to a statement issued by the exchange, Chauhan provided deep insights into the evolving financial landscape, the rise of technology-driven capitalism, and the increasing complexities of global markets.

He redefined conventional perspectives on financial stability, asserting that volatility is not a weakness but an inherent feature of economic progress. Chauhan argued that market disruptions often result from geopolitical shifts

rather than purely economic factors. "Geopolitics eats economics for breakfast," he remarked, highlighting how international power struggles are reshaping financial markets in unpredictable ways.

One of the most striking themes of his address was the emergence of "Capitalism without capital." Traditionally, wealth creation depended on large financial investments, but Chauhan pointed out that technological advancements are rewriting the rules.

"With AI, blockchain, and digital platforms allowing businesses to scale with minimal capital, the economic model is shifting away from traditional capital-intensive structures," he said.

The NSE chief cited India's booming startup ecosystem and the rise of micro-IPOs as proof that wealth creation is no longer restricted to large financial institutions. He also highlighted the increasing threats posed by cyber warfare in financial markets.

He revealed that stock exchanges are under relentless attack from cyber-criminals, underscoring the importance of digital security in the financial sector.

India partners with Meta on digital consumer protection initiative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Consumer Affairs on Tuesday announced a partnership with tech company Meta to launch a consumer awareness campaign called "Be an Empowered Consumer" aimed at enhancing digital literacy and protection for online consumers.

The initiative, unveiled by Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi and Meta's Chief Global Affairs Officer Joel Kaplan, will operate under the government's existing "Jago Grahak Jago" (Wake Up Consumer) campaign framework, an official statement said. "Consumer awareness is key to a sustainable and secure digital experience," Joshi said at the launch event, adding that the collaboration would extend the department's consumer protection efforts to remote areas of the country.

The joint campaign will focus on educating Indians about recognising online threats and promoting better digital safety habits, including using strong passwords, verifying online information, and reporting suspicious activity.

During the announcement, the minister also revealed a separate AI-driven project developed with IIT Bombay and supported by Meta. The initiative leverages Meta's Llama 2 language model to create "GrahakNyay", a consumer-focused chatbot designed to improve access to information about consumer rights and streamline the complaint filing process.

Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare said the chatbot will ensure seamless complaint filing and resolution of grievances. "At Meta, we think AI can help people protect themselves and be informed. By making AI more accessible, we hope to improve consumer awareness, streamline redressal processes, and equip people with the knowledge they need to make informed choices online," Kaplan said. The partnership comes amid ongoing efforts by India's consumer protection authorities to address emerging challenges in the digital marketplace, including misleading advertisements, unfair trade practices, and consumer vulnerability in e-commerce transactions.

LG Electronics India, Innovision get SEBI nod for IPOs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

LG Electronics India Ltd, a subsidiary of the South Korean chaebol LG, and manpower and toll plaza management services provider Innovision Ltd have received Sebi's approval to raise funds through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), an update with the capital markets regulator showed on Tuesday.

LG Electronics India and Innovision filed draft IPO papers with Sebi in December and obtained the regulator's observations on March 13 and March 12, respectively.

In Sebi's parlance, obtaining the observations means its go-ahead to float the public issue.

As for LG Electronics India, it filed preliminary papers with Sebi in December for an IPO wherein the parent company will sell over 10.18 crore shares, amounting to a 15 per cent stake, as per the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP).

The company did not disclose the total issue size, but people familiar with the matter have pegged the IPO size at ₹15,000 crore.

This will be the second South Korean company to tap the Indian stock market following the listing of Hyundai Motors India Ltd in October last year.

Since the public issue is completely an offer for sale (OFS), LG Electronics India will not receive any IPO proceeds. The funds raised will go to the South Korean parent.

Last month, LG Electronics started roadshows for the upcoming IPO of its Indian unit.

LG Electronics India manufactures and sells products, including washing machines, refrigerators, LED TV panels, inverter air conditioners, and microwaves. It has manufacturing units in Noida (UP) and Pune.

Innovision's proposed IPO is a mix of fresh issuance of ₹255 crore and an OFS of up to 17.72 lakh equity shares by pro-

motors Randeep Hundal and Uday Pal Singh, according to the draft papers.

Proceeds from the fresh issuance will be used towards payment of debt, funding working capital requirements of the company and for general corporate purposes.

Innovision is in the business of providing manpower services, toll plaza management and skill development training to clients across India. As on September 30, 2024, it had operations in 22 states and 3 union territories of India.

Meanwhile, Sebi has returned the draft IPO documents of technology-driven engineering services and solutions company Neilsoft on March 10 without disclosing any reason. The preliminary documents were filed in December.

The Pune-headquartered company's proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of shares worth ₹100 crore and an OFS of 80 lakh shares by promoters and other selling shareholders, according to the draft papers.

RBI, Bank of Mauritius sign pact for bilateral transactions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Reserve Bank and the Bank of Mauritius (BOM) have signed a pact for establishing a framework to promote the use of the Indian Rupee and the Mauritian Rupee (MUR) for cross-border transactions.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra and BOM Governor Rama Krishna Sithan G C S K, the central bank said in a statement on Tuesday. "The MoU documents were exchanged in Port Louis, Mauritius in the presence of the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Mauritius Navinchandra Ramgoolam, on Wednesday, March 12, 2025," it said.

The RBI said the MoU aims to promote the use of INR and MUR in bilat-

eral trade. The MoU covers all current account transactions and permissible capital account transactions as agreed upon by both the countries. The framework would enable exporters and importers to invoice and pay in their respective domestic currencies, which in turn, would enable the development of a market in the INR-MUR pair.

Use of local currencies would optimise costs and settlement time for transactions. "This collaboration marks a key milestone in strengthening bilateral cooperation between RBI and BOM," RBI said. Use of local currencies in bilateral transactions will eventually contribute to promoting trade between India and Mauritius as well as deepen financial integration and strengthen the historical, cultural, and economic relations between India and Mauritius.

Bajaj Finserv shares dip over one per cent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Shares of Bajaj Finserv Ltd on Tuesday ended over 1 per cent lower after the financial services firm signed Share Purchase Agreements for the acquisition of 26 per cent stake owned by Allianz SE of Germany in its insurance businesses Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company and Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company.

The stock declined 1.43 per cent to settle at ₹1,845 on the BSE. Intra-day, it dropped 2 per cent to ₹1,834.

On the NSE, shares of the firm slipped 1.43 per cent to ₹1,844.65.

The stock emerged as the biggest laggard among the Sensex and Nifty firms.

Rising for the second day, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,131.31 points or 1.53 per cent to settle at 75,301.26. The NSE Nifty surged 325.55 points or 1.45 per cent to 22,834.30. The execution of the Share Purchase Agreements (SPAs) marks the end of a 24-year relationship and also the culmination of constructive and amicable discussions to ensure a seamless transfer of the stake of Allianz.

Gold continues record run

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Gold prices climbed by ₹500 to hit another record high of ₹91,250 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday driven by sustained buying by stockists and retailers amid a strong trend overseas, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

On Monday, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity rallied by ₹1,300 to hit a fresh peak of ₹90,750 per 10 grams.

The yellow metal of 99.5 per cent purity advanced by ₹450 to hit a lifetime high of ₹90,800 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹90,350 per 10 grams. "Gold extended gains on Tuesday and touched a fresh record high in the international market as well as the domestic market."

"The precious metal remains an attractive option for safe-haven flows due to uncertainties surrounding US President Donald Trump's policies, fears of a US recession, and geopolitical uncertainty," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Further, the recent weaker US macro data has also bolstered expectations that the US Federal Reserve (Fed) will cut interest rates multiple times this year, further supporting the non-yielding yellow

metal, Gandhi added.

However, silver prices traded flat at ₹1,02,500 per kg, also a historic high.

Meanwhile, gold futures jumped by ₹649 or 0.73 per cent to establish a fresh peak of ₹88,672 in the afternoon trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

"Gold continues its upward momentum in MCX. The overall sentiment remains uncertain amid heightened geopolitical tensions, with President Trump vowing to persist with US strikes on Yemen's Houthis unless their Red Sea attacks cease," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said. This instability in the Middle East, coupled with China's plans for additional economic stimulus, has further fueled safe-haven demand for gold, Trivedi said.

On the global front, spot gold increased to hit a fresh high of \$3,028.49 per ounce. Similarly, Comex gold futures quoted higher to hit a record peak of \$3,037.26 per ounce.

"Gold prices have surged to a record high as mounting recession fears grip the US economy, with investors keenly awaiting the Fed's policy decision for further clarity," Chintan Mehta, CEO, of Abans Financial Services Ltd, said.

Rupee settles 25 paise higher against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee appreciated for the third consecutive session and registered gains of 25 paise to close at 86.56 against the US dollar on Tuesday, amid positive domestic equity markets and a weak American currency.

Forex traders said the US dollar declined on disappointing economic data from the US. Moreover, the strength of the Asian currencies also supported the rupee. However, a surge in crude oil prices capped the gains.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee witnessed high volatility. It opened at 86.71 then touched the intraday high of 86.54 and the low of 86.78 against the greenback.

The unit ended the session at 86.56 against the dollar, registering a gain of 25 paise from its previous closing level.

On Monday, the rupee had appreciated 24 paise to close at 86.81 against the US dollar. On Thursday, the rupee surged 17 paise to settle at 87.05 against the US dollar. Forex market was closed on Friday on the occasion of Holi festival.

This is the third straight session of gain for the rupee, during which it has added 67 paise. "We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias on positive global



provided substantial support to the domestic currency. "In the near-term, the USD-INR spot rate has immediate support at 86.42 and resistance at 86.90. The technical outlook is becoming increasingly favourable for rupee bulls."

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.04 per cent lower at 103.32.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 1.31 per cent to USD 72 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, India's trade deficit fell to a three-and-half-year low but the point of concern was exports contracting sharply, Bhansali said, adding that imports too witnessed the most significant decline in 20 months driven largely by a fall in oil imports and gold imports.

Additionally, US President Donald Trump's plan to impose broad reciprocal tariffs and sector-specific trade restrictions on April 2 could create further pressure on the rupee, traders said.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex surged 1,131.31 points, or 1.53 per cent, to settle at 75,301.26, while the Nifty advanced 325.55 points, or 1.45 per cent, to close at 22,834.30 points.

Sensex jumps over 1,100 points; reclaims 75,000 mark

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The BSE benchmark index Sensex jumped 1,131 points to revisit the 75,000 level on Tuesday, and the NSE Nifty surged 1.45 per cent, tracking a bullish trend in global equities and intense buying in market majors ICICI Bank, L&T and M&M counters.

Besides, lower crude oil prices in the international markets and a weak dollar against major currencies overseas also bolstered sentiment, traders said.

Rising for the second day on the trot, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,131.31 points or 1.53 per cent to settle at 75,301.26. During the day, it soared 1,215.81 points or 1.63 per cent to 75,385.76.

As many as 2,815 stocks advanced while 1,221 declined and 123 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty surged 325.55 points or 1.45 per cent to 22,834.30.

"Buoyancy across global equities boosted the confidence of local investors, which translated into value buying across the sectors. As markets were in a bearish mode over the past few weeks and valuations had become a bit attractive, investors seized opportunity in the beaten-down sectors.

"But the recovery would be difficult to hold on due to global challenges and fears of slowing domestic growth due to



Trump's threat to impose tariffs on key economies including India," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

In the Sensex pack, Zomato emerged as the biggest gainer with over 7 per cent jump, followed by ICICI Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Titan, Kotak Mahindra Bank and State Bank of India were among the gainers.

In contrast, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel,

Tech Mahindra and Reliance Industries were the laggards.

Shares of Bajaj Finserv declined over 1 per cent after the financial services firm signed share purchase agreements to acquire a 26 per cent stake owned by Allianz SE of Germany in its insurance businesses Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company and Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company.

The BSE small-cap gauge soared 2.73 per cent, and the midcap index jumped

2.10 per cent. "Broad-based buying across all sectors elevated investor sentiment, pushing all sectoral indices into positive territory. The Nifty Media, Realty, and Financial Services sectors led the charge, each advancing by more than 3 per cent," Devarsh Vakil, Head of Prime Research, HDFC Securities, said.

All BSE sectoral indices ended higher, where realty surged 2.95 per cent, industrials (2.79 per cent), consumer discretionary (2.76 per cent), capital goods (2.44 per cent), auto (2.42 per cent), power (2.27 per cent), financial services (2.09 per cent) and bankex (1.98 per cent).

Among Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

European equity markets were trading with gains. US markets ended higher on Monday.

"The benchmarks witnessed a strong recovery, driven by favourable global trends and domestic tailwinds. Improved retail sales data from the US and China boosted investor confidence, while mid and small-cap stocks outperformed, with all major sectors registering gains.

"The anticipated rebound in domestic earnings, along with a recent decline in the dollar index and lower crude prices, is expected to support this recovery," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

IN BRIEF

IP UNIVERSITY SIGNS MOU WITH ST PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS

New Delhi: IP University has signed an MoU with St Petersburg State University of Economics here today. The MoU was signed online by the Registrar of IP University Dr Kamal Pathak and Rector of the Russian university Prof Igor A Maximtsev.



SPECIAL LECTURE ON PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE OF PHILOSOPHY HELD AT GNDU



Amritsar: Under the able guidance of Prof (Dr) Karamjeet Singh, Vice-Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, and Dr Manjinder Singh, Head of the School of Punjabi Studies, the Sardarni Balbir Kaur Brar Memorial Lecture was organised by the School of Punjabi Studies on the topic "Philosophy of Language and Language of Philosophy." Dr Palwinder Singh, Dean of Academic Affairs, presided over the event.

SPRING FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS, PLANTS AND RANGOLI KICKS OFF AT GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY

Amritsar: The colorful Spring Festival of Flowers, Plants and Rangoli was commenced at Guru Nanak Dev University taking place in front of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Bhawan of the University. This exciting event is organised by the Department of Landscape in collaboration with the Dean College Development Council and the Department of Botanical and Environmental Sciences.



PGTI introduces Kapil Dev Grant Thornton Invitational

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Aiming to revolutionise golf in a manner akin to T20 cricket, PGTI has introduced a groundbreaking mixed format at the ₹2 Crore Kapil Dev Grant Thornton Invitational, where India's top male and female golfers will compete together for the first time.

Co-sanctioned by the Professional Golf Tour of India and the Women's Golf Association of India, the third edition of the tournament will be held at the Prestige Golfshire in Bengaluru from April 23 to 26.

"It is something new that is happening. We want to do something like T20. More thrills in a short time," Kapil, who is the PGTI president, told reporters on Tuesday. "We can bring more people to the golf course and more sponsors. The golfers need more opportunities. Today cricket reached at this stage because cricket board has given them the opportunity to play at the highest level."

"I think it is very important for the



golfers also to enjoy something new. Because they are playing day in day out, same type of game. The world is moving and we have to move with the times."

The tournament will begin with a practice round on April 23, followed by a three-day, 54-hole championship in which 60 men and 12 women professionals will compete for the same prize purse.

The event will also feature three Pro-Am rounds in a rotational format, with 48 professionals teeing off in the morning, while the remaining 24 pair up with 72 amateurs in the afternoon session.

Each Pro-Am team will comprise one professional and three amateurs, with scores combining the pro's stroke play and the amateurs' scramble format.

Prize money will be awarded to the top three professionals in the Pro-Am standings, making this tournament a thrilling blend of high-stakes competition and camaraderie.

Defending champion Karan Pratap Singh, who had a standout season on the PGTI in 2023 with two wins, is hoping for a turnaround in his fortunes when he tees

off at Prestige Golfshire next month.

"I had a rough patch after 2023. I was looking to improve myself and made a few swing changes in April last year and it backfired. But I have now changed back to my old swing and I feel I am not too far away," Karan said.

"I have missed out almost every event this year but this tournament is close to my heart, this is the second event that I won as a professional and I think I can get my game up in this event."

Tvesa Malik, who was also present at the event, was excited to compete alongside the country's top male golfers.

"It's incredible to play alongside with the best golfers in the country and the extra money is also great," said Malik.

"I had a good start last season, I had a low patch before that, so it was a good feeling that I still have it. I learnt so much and the game is good but I feel I am learning every week. I am really excited this season." The event was also attended by Vishesh C. Chandio, CEO, Grant Thornton Bharat, and Amandeep Johl, CEO, PGTI.

Coco Gauff heads home to Miami Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

Coco Gauff shrugged her right shoulder and chuckled a bit at the notion that she seems to illicit concern from others when she goes through a two or three-match losing streak a rough patch in the course of a long season. "Sometimes when I don't do well, people think there's something personally wrong with me," Gauff said on the eve of the Miami Open, where the women begin main-draw play on Tuesday and the men get started Wednesday.

Bow out early at one event or two or drop a trio of outings consecutively, as she did at the Australian Open, Qatar and Dubai in January and February and fans or former players will ask the 2023 US Open champion, who just turned 21 last week, whether she's OK.

"I'm like, I just lost a couple of matches! I'm chillin'," said Gauff, who has a first-round bye because she is seeded Number 3 at the hard-court Masters 1000 event and will get started by taking on another past Grand Slam champion Petra Kvitová or Sofia Kenin in the second round later in the week. "I'm obviously not happy with those past results, but it's

one of those things that, in the history of my career, I've had ups and downs. I still feel like I have a couple more years ... (to reach) that point where every week is a great week, I guess," said Gauff, who is based not far from where the Miami Open is played. "I'm also in the middle

I'm obviously not happy with those past results, but it's one of those things that, in the history of my career, I've had ups and downs.

— COCO GAUFF, TENNIS PLAYER

of changes in my game; it's been difficult." She's spoken frequently about those switches, which began with adjusting her coaching staff after last year's US Open and also included adapting her serve with a particular eye on shoring up second serves so as to avoid double-fault issues and her forehand.

It's been clear ever since she burst onto the scene as a 15-year-old qualifier at Wimbledon in 2019, beating seven-time major champion Venus Williams along the way to reaching the fourth round, that Gauff's backhand is nothing if not elite, while her forehand is the shot that oppo-

nents tend to go after.

The American's most recent match was a three-set loss to Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Belinda Bencic at Indian Wells, California, in the fourth round last week. Afterward, Bencic spoke about what her thinking was at 4-all in the final set.

"I felt like she was more tense," Bencic said about Gauff, "so I felt like that was the right time to go for her forehand."

Gauff called the event held over the next two weeks at the stadium used by the NFL's Miami Dolphins as her "home tournament." She's 6-5 in Miami and has not made it beyond the fourth round there.

No matter what others might say to her, or about her, after setbacks, Gauff doesn't like to harp on it too much even if she expects more from herself, too.

That's what comes with being ranked as highly as she is. And with having won Grand Slam titles in singles and doubles, along with the season-ending WTA Finals last year. "I will say that it is tough, sometimes, when everyone is (saying), 'Oh, (lost) two matches in a row', and things like that," she said Monday. "Because if I wasn't a top-five player it wouldn't, probably, be a conversation. That comes with being at the top."

KIPG is lifting standards, making us more competitive, says Harvinder Singh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Eager to compete at the second edition of the Khelo India Para Games (KIPG), Paris Paralympic gold medalist archer Harvinder Singh lauded the selection process and competition standards, stating that they inspire athletes to perform at their best.

The KIPG is scheduled to be held across three venues in New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Indira Gandhi Stadium, and the Dr Karni Singh shooting range from March 20 to 27 and will feature six sports archery, athletics, badminton, powerlifting, shooting, and table tennis.

"The top 16 athletes at the national level are selected for the Khelo India Para Games. It motivates all athletes to win medals at the national level," the 34-year-old Harvinder told SAI Media.

"If an athlete is unable to win a medal, then they try their best to finish in top 16 to be eligible to compete in the KIPG."

"This kind of procedure and system inspires athletes to perform to the best of

their abilities. This is the second edition of KIPG 2025, so it feels good to see para sports growing in India."

Harvinder finished first in the rankings stage and went on to win the gold medal in the inaugural edition of the Khelo India Para Games, which took place in December 2023.

After his remarkable performance, he went on to become a double Olympic medalist in Paris last year, adding a gold medal in individual recurve open, the same event in which he had won the bronze medal at the Tokyo Paralympics.

"I was very happy that a tournament of this level is organised. Last time when I competed in KIPG, it felt like we were in an international level event. The set-up,

I was very happy that a tournament of this level is organised. Last time when I competed in KIPG, it felt like we were in an international level event

— HARVINDER SINGH, ARCHER

schedule and the arrangements were of the highest quality.

"Since then, I knew that India is capable of hosting any international tournament. This time around, I am expecting a similar scale and I am eager to return to the field," Harvinder said.

The World Para Athletics Grand Prix 2025 concluded recently in New Delhi, which will also host the World Para Athletics 2025 in August.

Reflecting on the surge of domestic tournaments and the government's support for para sports, Harvinder said: "The top schemes of the government are putting focus on para sports. There is also growing interest in para athletes among private organisations. They are supporting para athletes and society is becoming more inclusive."

"India is now adopting and recognising para sports and our performances. In tournaments such as KIPG 2025, the participation of athletes is constantly increasing, which is a sign that India is developing overall in the sports sector," he said.

BCCI set to form organising committee for Women's ODI World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

BCCI will form the organising committee of the Women's ODI World Cup besides taking a call on the venues for the ICC event it will be hosting later this year at its Apex Council emergent meeting in Kolkata on March 22. The meeting will take place ahead of the IPL opener between defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the Eden Gardens.

The BCCI last hosted a Women's ODI World Cup back in 2013. The exact schedule of the tournament slotted in October is yet to be worked out.

According to the agenda accessed by PTI, there will be a "discussion on formation of LOC for Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 and discussion regarding venues for Women's Cricket World Cup 2025".

India have made two finals of the 50-over event but fell short at the final hurdle. Harmanpreet Kaur's team will be

aiming to end the long ICC trophy wait at home.

The Apex Council will also finalise the structure for the 2025-26 domestic season. As part of the home season, India are scheduled to host West Indies and South Africa and therefore, the members are likely to decide on the venues for the Test series. With a new set of office-bearers in place, an approval for change in signatories to the bank accounts operated by BCCI will also be taken.

Following government's directive, BCCI set to ban tobacco sponsorship

Earlier this month, the health ministry instructed the BCCI to ban all forms of tobacco and alcohol promotions, including surrogate advertisements, during the IPL beginning March 22.

The Apex Council will take up that matter in the meeting, including sponsorships related to tobacco as well as crypto currency. "Discussion regarding sponsorship from tobacco and crypto brands," read item No.9 on the agenda.

Lionel Messi out of World Cup qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi will miss Argentina's World Cup qualifiers against Uruguay and Brazil over the next eight days because of an injury to his adductor.

The 37-year-old Messi was not included in the 25-man squad announced on Monday by coach Lionel Scaloni.

Later Monday, Inter Miami said Messi the reigning Major League Soccer MVP underwent an MRI "to assess the extent of the discomfort in his adductor region," an injury that the team said occurred in Sunday's win over Atlanta United.

"The examination's findings confirmed the presence of a low-grade injury in the adductor muscle," Inter Miami said. "His clinical progress and response to treatment will determine his availability for competition."

Argentine media initially reported Messi suffered a sore left thigh on Sunday during Inter Miami's 2-1 victory. Argentina, which leads South America, will visit second-placed Uruguay on Friday and host fifth-placed Brazil four



days later at Monumental Stadium in Buenos Aires. Messi was not the only absentee for the two matches that could seal Argentina's qualification. Also ruled out were Paulo Dybala, Gonzalo Montiel and Giovanni Lo Celso.

Scaloni also dropped Alejandro

Garnacho and Claudio Echeverri from the larger squad announced on March 2.

Messi, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner who captained and led Argentina to the 2022 World Cup title, has been sidelined several times by Inter Miami this season because of injury concerns.

Time for India to win hockey World Cup gold again, says Ashok Kumar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

World Cup-winning striker Ashok Kumar, son of the legendary Major Dhyani Chand, on Tuesday said it is high time India reclaimed hockey's top prize to commemorate the golden jubilee of its historic 1975 World Cup victory.

Fifty years ago, on March 15, India won their first and only hockey World Cup in Kuala Lumpur under the captaincy of Ajitpal Singh with Kumar scoring the winning goal.

Kumar, 75, feels Indian hockey is back to its best after two back-to-back bronze medal wins in the Olympics (Tokyo and Paris). "It was different when we used to play hockey. We played on natural grass but now the game is played on astro-turf. So the dynamics have changed but the skill set remains the same," Kumar said during a book launch function to celebrate 50 years of India's World Cup-winning feat.

"After 1980, our last and eighth gold medal in the Olympics, the game changed drastically when astro-turf was introduced." Titled 'March to Glory: The Story of India's 1975 World Cup Triumph', the book was co-authored by hockey historian K Arumugam and veteran journalist Errol D'Cruz.

"In 1990s and 2000s we had some very good players who kept the game alive although we continued to adjust to astro-turf. But now we have back-to-back Olympic bronze medals, we are also dominating Asian hockey," Kumar said.

"So it would be fitting if we can celebrate the 50 years of the only world title by winning the crown again next year."

The next men's World Cup will be jointly held in Wavre, Belgium and Amstelveen, Netherlands from August 14 to 30, 2026.

Besides the only gold, Kumar was also part of India's bronze and silver medal winning teams in 1971 and 1973 World Cups. He had also won a bronze medal in the 1972 Munich Olympics.

But Kumar still recalls he was never satisfied with second and third place finishes and had never had the courage to show that medals to his illustrious father and uncle Roop Singh, who had won two Olympic gold medals.

"I still remember I never had the courage to show my Olympic bronze or World Cup silver and bronze medals to my family especially my father," Kumar recollected. "In my heart, I was thinking 'I can't show these medals to my family. I was not satisfied till I won a gold.'"

Rory McIlroy takes drama out of playoff to win The Players Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ponte Vedra Beach

The playoff was only three holes. Rory McIlroy needed only three swings. And yet his victory over JJ Spaun in The Players Championship revealed so much about the state of his game and the cruel nature of the notorious TPC Sawgrass.

McIlroy delivered an early knockout against JJ Spaun with his best drive of the week that set up a simple birdie, followed by a three-quarter 9-iron into a cold, cackling wind that found land on the island green at the par-3 17th.

"By no means did I have my best stuff this week," McIlroy said after becoming the eighth multiple winner of The Players. "But I was still able to win one of the biggest tournaments in the world. That's a huge thing." It's the first time in his career he has won twice going into the Masters, the major that for more than a decade has kept him from joining golf's most elite group with the career Grand Slam.

Spaun thought he had the perfect answer until he saw his 8-iron sail over the island on the second playoff hole, ending his hopes of the biggest win of his career.

"Can I watch this?" Spaun said as he sat at a table, his eyes trained on a television in the back of the media center showing a replay of his tee shot on the 17th. It was his first time seeing where the ball landed just beyond the wooden frame and into the water. He had heard only groans from the gallery. And he still couldn't believe it. "I never thought it was long," he said



quietly. "I never thought it was long."

So ended a memorable week at golf's richest tournament, where thousands of spectators showed up in the cold and wind for 47 minutes of golf between McIlroy among the most celebrated players who now has 39 worldwide wins and Spaun,

a 34-year-old with one PGA Tour title who until this week had never broken 70 on the TPC Sawgrass.

McIlroy said he woke up at 3 a.m. And couldn't get back to sleep. Whether this was about trying to win or trying not to lose he had a three-shot lead with five

holes to play in the final round Sunday did not matter. He worked on his tee shot with the same helping wind off the right. To practice in the right wind for the 17th, McIlroy turned and hit balls from the range toward the third green.

McIlroy had been spotty off the tee all week, missing nearly half of his fairways. He set the tone with his best of the week, a 336-yard blast right down the middle that set up a pitching wedge from 176 yards into the par-5 16th for a two-putt birdie from 35 feet.

"I thought if I could get the ball in the fairway there, it sort of puts a little bit of pressure on JJ," he said. "To step up and make that swing was awesome."

And then it effectively ended on the 17th. "When my ball was in the air, I was telling it to get down," McIlroy said. Spaun hit his 8-iron with a higher trajectory into a hurting wind off the right, and his first instinct was to yell, "Get up."

"It just looked like it was going to be short," Spaun said. "I was stunned. I couldn't believe it was long. I'm happy with the swing I put on it I am. The wind must have just laid down just a little too much, and it just went through the wind. Wasn't my time." The first three-hole playoff in 10 years at The Players was caused by a four-hour rain delay on Sunday. McIlroy had to make a 4-foot par putt on the 72nd hole. Spaun had a 30-foot birdie putt for the win that stopped inches short.

McIlroy, disappointed and having lost a three-shot lead on the back nine, looked ahead to the playoff by saying, "Make five good swings tomorrow morn-

ing and get this thing done."

Turns out he only needed three the driver and wedge on No. 16, the 9-iron on No. 17 to beat Spaun and claim the \$4.5 million prize from the \$25 million purse.

It was reminiscent of a 2008 playoff between Sergio Garcia and Paul Goydos, back when the 17th was used in sudden death. Garcia hit the green. Goydos came up short and into the water, and there is no lonelier walk than to the drop zone knowing it's over.

Spaun wound up three-putting from 45 feet for triple bogey. McIlroy ran his 30-footer well past the hole for a bogey, giving him a three-shot lead. Both hit drives well right on the 18th. McIlroy took a safe bogey and Spaun didn't bother putting the 10-footer he had left for bogey.

Any mention of The Players being the fifth major or even resembling one is not where McIlroy wants to go right now because he knows the real one the big one is a month away at Augusta National. The trick now is to keep his game in good stead. He also won the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am last month. He plans to add one more start in Houston or San Antonio before the Masters.

"Everything feels like it's in good working order at the minute," he said. "Just keep practicing and doing the right things and practicing the right habits, and day after day, week after week, they all add up to days like today."

Spaun won \$2,725,000 for his runner-up finish and moved to No. 25 in the world ranking, high enough that he is assured a spot in the Masters.

I always knew my strengths, abilities: Shreyas Iyer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

He fought perceptions about a so-called technical shortcoming, was 'typecast', and had his contract torn up within months of being a World Cup hero but Shreyas Iyer was indefatigable through it all, trusting his sincerity and uncomplicated mind to steer him through.

The result of the perseverance has been pleasing, to put it mildly. The 30-year-old has built himself into one of India's most consistent number four batters in recent times and was declared a "silent hero" by his captain Rohit Sharma after the team's Champions Trophy triumph a few days ago. "Maybe, the perception was created or maybe I was typecast. But I always knew my strengths, my abilities and (there was also) the belief (that) I had in myself," Iyer said in an interview when asked about his perceived lack of ability to play the short ball that became a talking point in the last couple of years.

The numbers back him. In the last eight ODIs, including the home games against England and the subsequent Champions Trophy, Iyer has averaged 53 batting at number four and had only one low-scoring outing in eight knocks.

"An athlete needs to constantly evolve as the sport keeps changing its dynamics. I am glad I kept a positive frame of mind, and trusted my process," he said.

Last year, he sustained a back injury during the home Tests against England and



then lost his central contract after showing up for his then IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders' training instead of Ranji Trophy duties after his recovery.

He was stripped of his central contract as BCCI set out to assert the importance

of domestic cricket by seemingly punishing him. Iyer kept his head down and led Kolkata Knight Riders to the IPL trophy weeks later before forcing his way back into India's 50-over set-up.

His was a classic case of performance

doing all the talking for him.

"I kept my process simple. Tried not to over-think the situation and to continue doing my work honestly. I always had the belief that my performance and my sincerity will bring back the opportunity," said

the prolific batter, who will be captaining Punjab Kings this IPL season.

The difficult time also made him a better learner. "It allowed me to learn a lot, reassess the situation and prepare a routine to add additional skills in my armoury."

"Looking back, I am happy with the outcome, the way I managed the situation and importantly, belief in my abilities. Lots and lots of hard work went behind it.

"From my coach Pravin Amre sir to my trainer Sagar, everyone worked around my needs. The two of them really helped me create power and the force which you see in my batting now," he recalled.

Number 4 is where I belong

The right-hander, who averages close to 50 (48.22) after 70 ODIs, said ever since his impressive run in the 2023 World Cup, in which he scored 530 runs, he has felt comfortable batting at number four.

He was also India's top-scorer in the Champions Trophy, finishing with 243 runs in five games.

"I feel I belong to the No.4 position. Whether it was in the 2023 World Cup or now in the Champions Trophy, I enjoyed the most coming as Number 4. It gives me a sense of belonging and that's where I am able to flourish."

Iyer had one of the most tricky jobs during the Champions Trophy and that was to manoeuvre the strike against spinners in the middle overs. And he did it quite well, proving himself to be as good a play-

er of spin as his stroke-making skipper on the slightly slow surfaces of Dubai.

"Well, basically the foundation needs to be stronger and thankfully in my case, having played in Mumbai where wickets are grassless, it helps. Besides, I think early in the career, I learned that the footwork has to be strong to play on such tracks," he explained.

Iyer said he was quite pleased with how he executed his plans during the marquee event and "provided a sense of consistency in the middle order throughout the campaign." "I will tirelessly repeat it to provide that balance in the middle order, whenever I represent India," he promised.

And to ensure that his obsessive desire to perform does not become an all-consuming routine, Iyer likes to tune out every once in a while. "...I feel it's needed, to not over-think and burn yourself out. There is life beyond cricket with family and friends, hobbies and magic tricks, and I enjoy these breaks in between," he revealed.

A limited-overs giant in the making he might be but Iyer has a decent Test record too. In 14 Tests that he has played, Iyer averages around 37 which includes a hundred and five half-centuries.

Does he think that he has a chance of making it to the squad that will tour England in June-July for a five-Test series?

"I prefer not to over-think and complicate my current process. For now, I am living in the moment to fulfil my roles and responsibilities with Punjab Kings," he concluded.

India face Maldives in Asian Cup qualifier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Shillong

The returning Sunil Chhetri will be the cynosure of all eyes as India face Maldives in an international friendly here on Wednesday, the match serving as a dress rehearsal for the all-important AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Bangladesh at the same venue in less than a week's time.

The 40-year-old Chhetri came out of his international retirement earlier this month to help the team successfully navigate the qualifiers for the continent's top football tournament, starting with the March 25 clash.

The preparatory match for Manolo Marquez's side marks a historic moment as the Blue Tigers will play in the football-crazy hill town for the first time.

It will also be India's all-time top scorer Chhetri's first match since announcing his return to international football.

The main team needs to win games. And if we need to win games, we need to call players who are in better shape

— MANOLO MARQUEZ, HEAD COACH

In the pre-match press conference on Tuesday, Marquez said, "It is the first time we are playing here, but I have worked with a lot of coaches and players from here. I knew it's a very nice place. 'I remember when I watched the Durand Cup in Shillong last year, I said, 'Wow, the ground, crowd, atmosphere, everything is nice.' I'm not joking, I said it'd be great if one day, the national team could play here."

Defender Mehtab Singh concurred with the Spaniard. Mehtab said, "We feel great to be in Shillong. It's the first time our national team will be playing here. The north-east is known for its football fan following. Football is the biggest sport here. Taking football

to diverse regions is a great thing for Indian football."

For Marquez, his first competitive match since becoming India's head coach in July 2024 is a week away, and the friendly presents a great opportunity to fine-tune his team before the crucial fixture. The Indian team, though, remains winless under Marquez with the side ending the year with a 1-1 stalemate against Malaysia in November in Hyderabad. "It's a friendly game to prepare for the Asian Cup qualifier. Obviously, we want to win. We know that the target during the previous FIFA windows was to arrive in the best possible condition for the first competitive match against Bangladesh next Tuesday. 'I don't think we will play with the same team against Bangladesh that will play tomorrow. Obviously, you can't change all 11. Some will repeat on Tuesday. I'm confident in all my players. It has to be a good game and a good preparation for Bangladesh."

Marquez also confirmed Chhetri's involvement in the friendly match that will mark his 152nd cap for India. "For sure, Sunil will play some minutes. I don't know whether as a starter or from the bench. We can use six substitutions, so 17 players can play, and I think Sunil will be one of them.

"He is the Indian player with the most goals this season. It doesn't matter if a player is 20, 40, or my grandfather at 87. If they are in better shape, they will be here. The national team is not about developing players. 'Developed players have to arrive here. The main team needs to win games. And if we need to win games, we need to call players who are in better shape,'" said Marquez.

Chhetri had earlier hung his boots in June 2024 after a glorious international career after making his India debut in 2005. But he showed he remains a force to reckon with, in the 2024-25 ISL which has turned out to be Chhetri's most prolific season.

Runner Archana Jadhav gets four-year ban

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's long-distance runner Archana Jadhav was on Tuesday banned for four years owing to a failed dope test in January, the findings of which she did not contest despite repeated reminders, prompting World Athletics to deem her actions as acceptance of guilt.

According to World Athletics' Athletes Integrity Unit (AIU), Jadhav's sample, which was collected at the Pune Half-Marathon in December last year, contained prohibited substance Oxandrolone. This synthetic anabolic steroid promotes protein production and muscle building in the body.

The ban came into effect from January 7. Jadhav has been under provisional suspension for the duration. On February 25, she had replied to the violation charge in an e-mail to the AIU stating "I am extremely sorry sir...I welcome your decision." The AIU said its understanding of this communication was that Jadhav did not require a hearing and was "content" to get a decision from the body.

The AIU said Jadhav was nonetheless informed that she had time till March 3 to admit that she had committed the Anti-Doping Rule Violations, and was reminded of the same by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) on February 28. The AIU, however, did not get any response from Jadhav.

Jadhav's sample, which was collected at the Pune Half-Marathon in December last year, contained prohibited substance Oxandrolone

— WORLD ATHLETICS' ATHLETES INTEGRITY UNIT

The AIU said Jadhav has also not demonstrated that the Anti-Doping Rule Violations were "not intentional".

"...The Athlete is deemed to have committed the Anti-Doping Rule Violations..." the AIU stated.

As a result, "a period of ineligibility of four years" commences on January 7.

In addition, her results on and since December 15, 2024 stand disqualified. She will have to forfeit all awards,

medals, points, prizes and appearance money for the period. The AIU said Jadhav did not exercise her right to a 'B' sample test despite expressing a desire to do so in early communication.

She responded well past the stipulated date of January 17 to state that she was hospitalised owing to illness.

This was after she was told about the procedure and the cost involved in getting a test. The AIU said it had provided an extended deadline to the athlete.

"...On 22 January 2025, the AIU wrote to the Athlete and provided her with an extended deadline by which to make the full payment of the costs of the B Sample analysis to World Athletics..."

Jadhav was required to confirm her availability by no later than January 24.

The AIU said Jadhav once again failed to respond or make the full payment.

She had last competed in the Delhi half marathon in October 2024 in the elite Indian women's race, finishing fourth with a time of 1:20.21 behind winner Lili Das, Kavita Yadav and Priti Lamba.

Pakistan origin cricketer dies after collapsing on field

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Adelaide

Junal Zafar Khan, a club-level Pakistan-origin cricketer, has died after collapsing on the ground during a local match played in extreme heat at the Concordia College here. In his 40s, Khan was representing Old Concordians Cricket Club in a match against Prince Alfred Old Collegians last Saturday, news.Com.au reported. After fielding for 40 overs and batting for seven, Khan collapsed around 4pm Australian Central Daylight Time (ACDT). South Australia has been in the grip of extreme heat over and according to data from the Bureau of Meteorology, temperatures here were still above 40 degrees Celsius at the time. Adelaide Turf Cricket Association rules state that games are cancelled if the temperature climbs above 42 degrees Celsius.



New Zealand beat Pakistan by five wicket in T20 match

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dunedin

Tim Seifert blasted 45 from 22 balls and Finn Allen hit 38 from 16 as New Zealand cruised to a five-wicket win over Pakistan on Tuesday in a rain-shortened second Twenty20 (T20) cricket international.

Captain Salman Ali Agha made 46 as Pakistan reached 135-9 in a match reduced to 15 overs per innings after a delay for wet outfield. Shaheen Shah Afridi then bowled a maiden to start New Zealand's innings. But Seifert and Allen hit seven of the next 12 balls for sixes as New Zealand launched an assault which helped them clinch the match and a 2-0 series lead with 11 balls remaining.

Seifert and Allen hit five sixes apiece as New Zealand sped towards its target. After the scoreless opening over Allen cleared the boundary on the first, third and sixth balls of the second over, then Seifert struck sixes from the first two and the last two deliveries of the next over as New Zealand raced to 44-0.

New Zealand began its innings needing 136 runs from 90 balls. By the end of the five-over power play that target had been reduced to 70 runs from 60 balls. New Zealand was 87-2 when Allen followed Seifert to the pavilion in the seventh over.

"There's not too much conversation out there to be fair," Seifert said.

"It's just about backing our skills and putting pressure on the bowlers when we can." Mitchell Hay made an unbeaten 21 to steer New Zealand home and Bracewell hit a four-off Jahandad Khan for the winning runs. New Zealand won the toss and was eager to bowl first on a pitch at the University Oval which had been covered and looked fresh with patches of grass.

Jacob Duffy, who took 4-14 in the series-opener which New Zealand won by nine wickets on Sunday, removed Hasan Nawaz with the fourth ball of the match.

The New Zealand bowlers were too full at first and Pakistan reached 19-1 before Ben Sears came on in the fourth over and dismissed Mohammad Haris with his first delivery. Sears, who missed the Champions Trophy with injury, used bounce effectively and Haris sliced his first delivery to Duffy at third man.

Pakistan was 36-2 after the five-over power play. Salman took 12 runs including a 75-meter (yard) six from the sixth over bowled by Jimmy Neesham, lifting Pakistan to 48-2. But spinner Ish Sodhi dismissed Irfan Khan (11) and Khushdil Shar (2) with the fourth and sixth balls of the seventh over as Pakistan slipped to 52-4.

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
MINOR IRRIGATION DIVISION, JASHIPUR
GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
"E" PROCUREMENT NOTICE
BID IDENTIFICATION No: 09 MID (JSP/2024-25)

A-1222

- Name of the Inviting Officer-Superintending Engineer, Minor Irrigation Division, Jashipur
- Name of the Work:- Renovation of MIPs in Jashipur Block of Mayurbhanj District.
- No. of Works:- 2 (two) Nos.
- Tender Amount Varies From:- 16.78 lakhs to 20.93 lakhs
- Date and Time of Availability of BID Document in the Portal
for online Bidding from:- 10.00hrs Dt.21.03.2025 to 17.00hrs Dt.02.04.2025
- Last Date and Time of receipt of Bids in the Portal:- 17.00hrs Dt.02.04.2025
- Last Date and Time for clarification up to:- 17.00hrs Dt.02.04.2025
- Date of opening of Bid:- 11.00hrs onwards Dt.03.04.2025

The detail tender call notice can also be seen in the DOWR website: <http://dowrorissa.gov.in>

Name & Address of the OIT : Superintending Engineer, M.I. Division, Jashipur, At/PO-Khairi /Dist: Mayurbhanj PIN-757091, E-Mail:-ceemijashipur@yahoo.com

Further details can be seen from the : <http://tenderorissa.gov.in>

e-Procurement market place.

- Subsequent corrigendum/addendum if required shall be available in the above portal.
- The tender inviting authority reserves the right to reject/cancel any or all tenders without assigning any reason thereof.

Superintending Engineer
M.I. Division, Jashipur
OIPR-32282/11/0010/2425

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER OF HORTICULTURE (NORTHERN ZONE),
AT/PO- FARM ROAD, SAMBALPUR-768002 (email: eenzsbp@gmail.com)
Notice No.: 256 / EE / Hort / NZ Dated: 18-03-2025
Bid Identification No. 03 / Hort. / NZ / 2024-25 Dt. 18-03-2025

01	Total Nos. of works :	: Eight
02	Estimated cost	: Rs 504221.84/- to Rs 4049078.60 /-
03	Period of completion	: 60 days to 180 days
04	Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal	: From 10.00 Hrs. of 20-03-2025 to 17.00 Hrs. of 29-03-2025
05	Last date & time of dropping of copies of uploaded documents, draft, affidavits, Schedules etc. in the tender box at the office of the undersigned at Farm Road, Sambalpur - 768002.	: From 11.00 am of 02-04-2025 to Before 17.00 Hrs. of 05-04-2025
06	Date & Time of Opening of bids	: 10.30 AM of 08-04-2025 onwards
07	Name and Address of the officer inviting bid	: Executive Engineer (Agril.), Northern Zone, Horticulture, At/PO -Farm Road, Sambalpur, Pin-768002.

Further details can be seen from the web site www.tendersodisha.gov.in

Executive Engineer, (Agril.)
Northern Zone, Horticulture, Sambalpur
OIPR-01465/11/0006/2425

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS DIVISION-II, JAIPUR rdvdivision_jaraka@yahoo.co.in
"E" PROCUREMENT NOTICE NO. RWD-II/JJPR-17/2024-25 DTD

- Name of work : Building works in the District of Jaipur for the year 2024-25
- Total No of Work : 02nos. of works.
- Estimated Cost(Approx.) : As indicated against each work in the NIT
- Period of Completion : As indicated against each work in the NIT
- Class of contractors : As indicated against each work in the NIT

Other details as follows:

- Procurement officer : Superintending Engineer Rural Works Division-II, Jaipur at Jaraka
- Availability of tender online & submission of bid : 27.03.2025 at 11.00 AM to 05.04.2025 upto 5.00 PM
- Last date & time of seeking of tender clarification : 04.04.2025 upto 5.00 PM
- Opening of Tender : 07.04.2025 at 11.30 AM

Further details can be seen from the Govt. website www.tendersodisha.gov.in

Executive Engineer
Rural Works Division-II
Jaipur at Jaraka
OIPR-25080/11/0033/2425

Kohli to focus on playing smart cricket: AB De Villiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

South African batting great AB de Villiers believes Virat Kohli should focus on playing smart cricket and continue controlling the game this season as RCB possess immense firepower with Phil Salt expected to ease the pressure on the Indian superstar.

Despite being one of RCB's most consistent performers, Kohli's strike rate was a topic of discussion past two seasons. However, with the Bengaluru franchise acquiring the English duo of Salt and Liam Livingstone, along with Australian Tim David and West Indian Romario Shepherd all fearless strikers of the ball de Villiers feels Kohli can play with more freedom.

"Virat seems to be enjoying his cricket. I don't think he's going to have to up his strike rate batting with Phil Salt," de Villiers said on JioStar Press Room on Tuesday. "Salt is one of the most attacking players we've ever seen. I think he's going to take a lot of pressure off Virat. Virat needs to continue what he's been doing for so many years...Control the game, play smart cricket. He's got the best instinct of any player out there. He knows when to up the ante a bit and when to lower it."

The South African, who played for RCB for 11 seasons, said Kohli needs to ensure there are no batting collapses. "Virat needs to be the captain of the

batting department in this tournament and really just keep things together, play smart cricket to make sure they don't find those collapses in the batting order."

The former Proteas skipper feels that Kohli has been subjected to "unnecessary criticism over the last few seasons".

"There's no doubt some of the outside noise has maybe influenced him a bit. He's only human, he's definitely got those doubts in his head.

"But the one thing about Virat is that he's always had the ability to, when it matters most, when he crosses that line for his team, block everything out and it's business time." With Faf du Plessis' departure, RCB enters the season with a new captain in Rajat Patidar.

De Villiers opined that Patidar's biggest challenge would be dealing with self-doubt while stepping into the shoes of past captains like du Plessis and Kohli. "His biggest challenge will be insecurity, stepping into the big boots of the past captains like Faf and Virat.. Having Virat around and constantly almost doubting yourself.

"He needs to stay true to who he is and not try to captain like Virat or like Faf. And use the experience of Virat, use the experience of Andy Flower and some of the other players."

RCB will be on the road consistently throughout the season, frequently alternating between home and away fixtures.