

# CAPITAL GAINS ₹ONE LAKH CRORE

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Terming it 'historic' Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday presented her first Budget of ₹ One Lakh Crore (₹ One Trillion) for the year 2025-26 marking a 31.5 per cent increase from the previous year, with 10 focus areas. They include Yamuna cleaning, economic empowerment of women, infrastructure, water and connectivity, asserting that it is a roadmap for making the national capital self-reliant. The last Delhi Budget was presented by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in March 2023 with an allocation of ₹76,000 Crore.

In her 138-minute speech, Gupta called the maiden Budget of the BJP-led Delhi government "historic", for a "Viksit Dilli" (developed Delhi), emphasising that the era of "corruption and inefficiency" was over and Delhi is entering a new era of Traffic-Free Expressways, Seamless Connectivity, Elevated Corridors and Smart Surveillance System.

"The Budget Estimates in 2025-26 of ₹One Lakh Crore is 31.5 per cent more than the Budget estimates 2024-25 of ₹76,000 Crore and 44 per cent higher than the revised estimates 2024-25 of ₹69,500 Crore.

The proposed Budget of ₹ One Lakh Crore for the year 2025-26 is to be financed from the Tax Revenue of ₹68,700 Crore, Non-Tax Revenue of ₹750 Crore, Small Savings Loan of ₹15,000 Crore from, Central Road Funds of ₹1,000 Crore from, Centrally Sponsored Schemes of ₹4,128 Crore, Grant in Aid from Government of



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta presents the Budget 2025-26 PHOTO: RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

KEY TAKEAWAYS	
• ₹19,291 crore (19.29 per cent) in Education Sector	
• ₹12,893 crore (12.89 per cent) in Health Sector	
• ₹12,952 crore (12.95 per cent) in Transport Sector including roads and bridges	
• ₹10,694 crore (10.69 per cent) in Housing & Urban Development Sector	
• ₹9,000 crore (9.00 per cent) in Water Supply & Sanitation Sector	
• ₹10,597 crore (10.59 per cent) in Social Welfare & Social Security Sector	
• ₹3,843 crore (3.84 per cent) in Power Sector	
• ₹1,758 crore (1.76 per cent) in Agriculture, Rural Development & I&FC	
• ₹4,642 crore (4.64 per cent) in Repayment of loan	
• ₹2,246 crore (2.25 per cent) in Interest payment	

India of ₹7,348 Crore and the remaining amount from the opening balance. Of them 72 per cent of the proposed Budget 2025-26 has been allocated for revenue expenditure and 28 per cent for capital expenditure," said Rekha Gupta while presenting the Budget.

The Chief Minister said that corruption and inefficiency in the government will be weeded out and they will make efforts to utilise all Budget provisions, as well as the central aids and grants that it receives.

This is the first Budget presented by a BJP-led government in Delhi after 27 years, following the party's victory over the AAP. Highlighting the focus on infrastructure development in the city, the Chief Minister announced the government has doubled capital expenditure to ₹28,000 Crore in its 2025-26 Budget as against AAP government's ₹15,000 Crore, saying days of corruption, inefficiency are over now.

# 12 Cong MLAs suspended from Assembly for 7 days

■ For allegedly disrupting proceedings  
 ■ Irate legislators sleep in House in protest

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a dramatic turn of events, 12 of the 14 Congress MLAs were suspended for seven days from the Odisha Assembly on Tuesday for allegedly disrupting proceedings. The suspension, proposed by the Chief Whip of the ruling party, was enforced citing repeated vio-

lations of legislative decorum. The suspended MLAs include Ramchandra Kadam, CS Rajan Ekka, Dasarathi Gamango, Ashok Das, Satyajit Gamango, Sagar Das and Prafulla Pradhan.

The Congress MLAs, however, said they would sleep in the Assembly in night in protest against the action. The action was taken fol-



lowing the Congress legislators resorting to beating gongs and cymbals inside the House to draw attention to their demand for stronger measures to ensure women's safety in the State.

Adding to the political turbulence, the BJD MLAs also staged a protest inside the House.

Minister Krushna Mahapatra defended the decision, stating, "For several days, the opposition has been disrupting House proceedings. Despite repeated requests from the Speaker,

they remained uncooperative. The people of Odisha are witnessing this."

Suspended Congress MLA Dasarathi Gamango criticised the move, calling it undemocratic. "This government is failing to uphold democracy. We were protesting in a unique way to highlight key issues."

He reiterated the Congress' demand for a House Committee on women's safety.

BJD MLA Arun Sahoo also blamed the BJP-led government for the crisis, say-

ing, "The Congress MLAs were protesting using cymbals and other instruments. Instead of handling the situation wisely, the ruling party escalated matters. The demand for a House Committee should have been considered."

BJP MLA Babu Singh, however, criticised the Opposition's actions, stating that each day of Assembly proceedings costs the government Rs 70 lakh. "Instead of addressing crucial public concerns, the Opposition is deliberately stalling discussions," he remarked.

## Jatni Municipality EO in Vig net

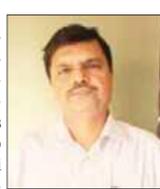
3 flats, 2 buildings, 11 plots detected  
 PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Vigilance police on Tuesday conducted simultaneous raids at 10 different locations linked to Surjyamani Pattajoshi, Executive Officer of Jatni Municipality in Khordha district, over allegations of possessing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income.

The Vigilance found one flat at Stalwart Pravati Mansion, Jagamara in Bhubaneswar, one 2 BHK flat at Sriram Mansion, Unit-III, Kharavel Nagar in Bhubaneswar, advance of Rs 56.04 lakh paid by Pattajoshi to Harshapriya Construction Pvt Ltd to purchase one 4.5 BHK flat in name

of his wife Deepika Mohapatra at Delta Square in Bhubaneswar, one four-storied building (under construction) with area of 5,500 sqft at Ankuli in Brahmapur, one double-storied building with area of 3,360 sqft at Panakalapalli in Brahmapur, 11 high-value plots in Jatni, Bhubaneswar and other parts of Ganjam district, cash of Rs17 lakh, gold of 150 grams, one four-wheeler, three two-wheelers, 20 bank accounts, postal deposits, insurance and other investments in the names of Pattajoshi and his family members.

The measurement and valuation/assessment of the above buildings, flats and plots are being carried out by Vigilance Technical Wing. Further investigations are ongoing.



## In State Global e-auction of red sandalwood on Apr 9

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government is set to conduct the fourth phase of a global e-auction of red sandalwood logs on April 9. The auction will be carried out through an e-tendering process, allowing international buyers to participate in the sale of this valuable wood.

This information was disclosed in a response by Forest and Environment Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia to a question by MLA Arun Sahoo in the State Assembly on Tuesday.

Odisha has a total of 4,539 red sandalwood trees, out of which 2,071 have grown naturally while the remaining 2,468 were planted as part of afforestation efforts.

Recognising the economic and ecological significance of red sandalwood, the Odisha



Government sought permission from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry. As a result, an export restriction on 810.1894 metric tonnes of red sandalwood has been lifted, permitting its sale until September 6, 2025.

Following the approval, the Odisha Forest Development Corporation (OFDC) has initiated steps to sell 809.7,844 metric tons of red sandalwood logs through a global e-auction and e-tendering process. The process has been divided into multiple phases, and so far, three phases have already been completed.

A total of 38,7082 metric tonnes of red sandalwood logs have been sold. These sales have fetched a revenue of over Rs 13,70,07,279.

Ensuring the security and proper upkeep of the red sandalwood stock is a costly affair. The annual expenditure for maintenance and monitoring of these logs amounts to over Rs 1 crore.

With the e-auction on April 9, Odisha is expected to generate substantial revenue while ensuring the legal and sustainable trade of this highly valuable wood.

## 'Mukyamantri Bus Seba' in State soon

Says Minister in Assembly  
 PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government would launch 'Mukyamantri Bus Seba', which would operate across all routes in the State, said Transport Minister Bibhuti Bhusan Jena in the State Assembly on Tuesday.

Jena said the previous BJD government had introduced the LAccMI bus service to influence elections. However, the current government would ensure that the Mukyamantri Bus Seba runs across all routes in the State.

As part of this initiative, senior citizens, women and students would receive a 50-per cent fare concession. Addi-

tionally, the government would introduce 12 new super-premium deluxe buses to its fleet.

This move aims to enhance public transportation and provide better connectivity for commuters across Odisha.

Earlier in January, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had inaugurated a series of new bus services aimed at enhancing public transportation and boosting tourism across the State.

This initiative introduced five double-decker buses, ten hop-on-hop-off buses, and twenty-five electric buses, focusing on improving connectivity within key cities such as Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Puri.

## Man-animal conflict 799 lives lost in wildlife attacks in State in 5 yrs

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The rising incidents of human-wildlife conflict in Odisha have claimed 799 human lives over the past five years. Apart from fatalities, 1,962 individuals have sustained injuries in attacks by elephants and other wild animals during this period, informed Forest and Environment Minister Ganesh Ram Khuntia in the State Assembly on Tuesday.

The statistics were disclosed in response to a question raised by MLA Padmalochan Panda, shedding light on the increasing threat posed by wildlife intrusions into human settlements and the urgent need for better management and conservation efforts. The conflicts primarily involve elephants, which frequently stray into villages in search of food, damaging crops, property, and, in many cases, leading to

the loss of human lives. Among all districts, Dhenkanal has been the worst hit by these attacks, recording 147 deaths, the highest in the State. The region has seen frequent elephant movement due to habitat destruction and shrinking forest cover, forcing these majestic creatures to venture into human-dominated areas.

The data also revealed a disturbing trend in wildlife mortality across the State. Over the past two years, Odisha has recorded the deaths of 832 elephants, tigers and other wild animals. Shockingly, 806 of these deaths were due to poaching. Poachers continue to target endangered species for their tusks, skin and other valuable body parts.

Experts emphasise the importance of strengthening wildlife corridors to facilitate the free movement of animals without them straying into human habitats.

## In Sambalpur PEO, husband held taking bribe

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

The Vigilance police on Tuesday detained a woman Panchayat Executive Officer of Gyan gram panchayat of Padampur in Bargarh district and her husband while taking a bribe of Rs 5,000 from a person.

The PEO Nupur Seth and her husband Bed Prakash



Biswal (private person) had demanded the bribe from the complainant to shortlist his name in the PMAY beneficiary list.

The poor complainant, despite being eligible, was asked to pay Rs. 10,000 to shortlist him in the PMAY. When the complainant pleaded, showing his inability to pay, the PEO reduced the amount to Rs 5000.

As the complainant was poor, he approached the Vigilance which apprehended her after she received the bribe of Rs 5,000 through her husband.

Following this, searches were carried out at two locations linked to Seth and further investigation was ongoing.

## In Puri 20 kg gold, huge cash seized from woman

PNS ■ PURI

Police while investigating into a financial fraud case in the Chandanpur area in Puri district seized over 20 kg of gold and a huge amount of cash from the house of a woman on Tuesday.

The accused was identified as Tilottama Pradhan, who was arrested following the seizure.



Report said that during an investigation into the financial fraud case, police discovered a trolley filled with Rs 500 currency notes and a large quantity of gold.

The seizures included more than 20 kg of gold ornaments, including gold statues of elephants.

The police arrested Pradhan and are interrogating her to determine the source of the wealth. Officials are investigating how she acquired such a vast amount of cash and gold.

It was suspected that the case may be linked to an illegal money circulation scheme, 'Hanuman Paisa'.

"We have arrested Tilottama Pradhan and forwarded her to court. Besides, we have recovered the blank cheques and frozen her bank accounts. Further investigation into the matter is on," said Chandanpur police station IIC Bhuban Samantaray.

# Govt to axe inefficient officers

Chief Secretary orders strict action

RAJEEV RATHAN  
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government has taken a strong stance against corrupt and inefficient officials, warning that those failing to perform will face premature retirement.

In a directive issued on Monday, Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja reminded all government departments to strictly enforce the Premature Retirement Policy. The rule calls for the removal of officers and employees with dubious integrity or poor performance. Government employees who are found to be ineffective will also be retired.

The government has ob-

served that many departments have been ignoring these instructions, allowing unfit officials to remain in service, damaging public trust and governance. The Chief Secretary's letter has made it clear: this negligence will no longer be tolerated.

To ensure strict implementation, mandatory review meetings will now be conducted, and department heads

have been directed to take swift action against non-performing employees. There will be no room for incompetence.

Notably, on September 24, 2019, the then Principal Secretary of the GA Department had written to all Secretaries about weeding out corrupt and inefficient officers after completion of 30 years of service or upon attaining the age of 50 and 55 years.

# 4 get lifer for killing youth in Jatni

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Court of Khordha Additional District Judge-II on Tuesday sentenced four persons to life imprisonment in the Anup Behera murder case, which took place in the Jatni area of Khordha district in March 2017.

The court convicted Halu Behera, Mrunal Behera, Gopinath Behera and Nalu Behera in the case as it found the four guilty of killing Anup

with sharp weapons and iron rods.

Anup was beaten to death for opposing a relationship between his sister Pinki and a person of the same locality. Days before the incident, Anup, being upset over the matter, had thrashed Pinki and the person.

In a bid to take revenge, the person, along with his father and brothers, attacked Anup with wooden sticks and iron rods, which led to his death.

# Govt reviews urban sanitation measures

Proposes digital monitoring system

RAJEEV RATHAN  
BHUBANESWAR

A high-level meeting on improving sanitation measures in Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) was held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Housing and Urban Development Minister Dr Krushna Chandra Mahapatra. The meeting focused on reviewing sanitation initiatives, expediting waste management projects and enhancing community participation in urban cleanliness efforts.

The status of Compressed Biogas (CBG) plant establishment in five Municipal Corporations, the Puri-Konark Cluster and the Boudhgarh-Sonepur Cluster was reviewed with the minister urging officials to accelerate the process. He also proposed setting up integrated waste processing complexes in Municipal Corporations and select municipalities, incorporating various waste treatment plants, including CBG plants, to optimise transportation and infrastructure costs.

The minister directed officials to prioritise the renova-

tion and refurbishment of all non-functional old toilets and e-toilets under Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation. He also instructed them to expedite the processing of accumulated garbage at the Temporary Transfer Station (TTS) near Sainik School, Bhubaneswar, and ensure immediate operationalisation of the mega waste processing centre at Palasuni.

To enhance sanitation monitoring, the minister suggested development of a digital application for all Municipal Corporations and selected municipalities, modelled after the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation App. He further recommended integrating these digital platforms into the SUJOG portal of the Housing and Urban Development Department for centralised monitoring.

Housing and Urban Development Principal Secretary Usha Padhee proposed sharing a model agreement with ULBs to facilitate the execution of sanitation projects with Self-Help Groups (SHGs) responsible for maintaining public toilets and urban services. It was decided to increase community involvement in sanitation improvement efforts across all ULBs.

# Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament' held at Assembly



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A two-day State-Level Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament was inaugurated at the Odisha Legislative Assembly by Speaker Surama Padhy on Tuesday. The event, aimed at engaging youths in discussions on governance and democracy, witnessed enthusiastic participation from young minds across the State.

The inaugural session was attended by Deputy Speaker

Bhabani Shankar Bhoi and Higher Education, Sports, and Youth Affairs Minister Suryabanshi Suraj. Speaker Padhy highlighted the crucial role of youths in nation-building, urging them to actively contribute to policy discussions and democratic processes.

As part of the event, students from different schools were given a special opportunity to observe the proceedings of the Assembly and interact with legislators. The

discussion sessions focused on key national and State-level governance issues.

The conference hall in the Assembly premises provided an ideal setting for this dialogue with officials, students and youth representatives actively engaging in deliberations. The event also featured a panel discussion, during which leaders and officials shared insights on the importance of youth participation in policymaking.

# In State Forest fires ravage over 3,000 hectares in 3 months

54,000 hectares destroyed in 4 years

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha has witnessed massive destruction of forest cover due to rampant wildfires. In just the last three months, nearly 3,000 hectares of forest have been destroyed by fire while over the past four years, a staggering 53,820 hectares of forest cover has been completely charred.

The alarming data was pre-

sented in the State Assembly by Forest and Environment Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia on Tuesday. The Minister provided a detailed report on the extent of forest fires over the past few years:

In 2021, as much as 28,569 hectares of forest cover was lost to wildfires. In 2022, the damage was reduced to 8,438 hectares, but the problem persisted. In 2023, the burnt area again surged to 9,711 hectares.

Environmentalists and opposition leaders have raised concerns about the lack of ef-

fective fire prevention strategies. Experts suggest that rising temperatures, human encroachment and illegal activities could be contributing factors to the increase in forest fires.

Minister Khuntia stated that the government is working on enhanced fire prevention measures, including deployment of advanced surveillance systems to detect and control fires early, strengthening fire management teams and increased patrolling and community engagement.

# GI tag to unique culinary heritage 'Pakhal' sought

Host of organisations write to Prez, CM to take steps

RAJESH BEHERA  
KENDRAPADA

Several socio-cultural organisations, including Utkalmani Yubak Sangha, have written a letter to the President of India and the CM of Odisha, demanding Geographical Indication (GI) status for Pakhal (soaked rice), a traditional and culturally significant dish of Odisha.

According to Utkalmani Yubak Sangha president Goutam Behera, the word "Pakhal" is derived from the Pali word 'Pakhaliva' or the Sanskrit word 'Prakhalana', which signifies washing or soaking. This is deeply linked to the food customs of Lord Jagannath, further proving Odisha's historical and cultural connection with Pakhal.

"Odisha is the birthplace of Pakhal rice, which has been consumed for centuries due to



the region's hot and humid climate. Pakhal is not only a staple dish in Odia households but is also gaining popularity in several Asian and African countries, where rising temperatures have increased the demand for cooling, probiotic-rich foods," stated Sri Jagannath Charitable

Trust president Daman Mohanty.

Odisha has also preserved its rich culinary heritage through other Pakhal-based dishes like Abadhha Pakhal, Chipuda Pakhal, Tanka Torani, Kanji, and Khudapita, stated Utkalmani Yubak Sangh president Behera.

Pakhal, particularly Basi Pakhal, is a natural probiotic, containing Lactobacillus, a beneficial bacteria that produces lactic acid, increasing calcium, potassium, sodium, and iron absorption. Pakhal boosts immunity along with Vitamins B6 and B12. It enhances digestion, metabolism,

and body hydration, prevents heatstroke, strengthens bones and muscles, and reduces fatigue. It balances the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) in Ayurveda. Torani (fermented rice water) is a natural remedy for indigestion, stomach pain, and constipation, the letter stated.

Granting the Geographical Indication (GI) status to Pakhal rice of Odisha will preserve Odisha's culinary heritage and protect it from misappropriation. Besides, it will promote rural farmers by increasing the demand for locally grown rice varieties and enhance global recognition, making Pakhal an international health food, they said.

Given its unique origin, cultural significance, and health benefits, they demanded necessary steps to recognize Pakhal under the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999. This will ensure the protection, promotion, and global recognition of the essential part of Odisha's food heritage, they claimed.

# PSA observes World Water Day



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Paribesh Suraksha Abhijan (PSA), Bhubaneswar in collaboration with the Centre for Agri Management, Utkal University observed the World Water Day.

Dr Pramod Kumar Panda, Principal Scientist, Indian Institute of Water Management, Bhubaneswar, was chief speaker.

PSA president Dr Pradeep

Kumar Rath delivered the welcome address while giving introduction of guests. PSA general secretary Raghunath Prusty spoke about the significance of the World Water Day with specific reference to this year's theme 'Glaciers' preservation'.

Dr Benudhar Bhuyan, Advisor to Agri Management Centre, underlined the need for rational use of fresh water having regard to its scarcity.

Dr Panda, the expert on the subject, discussed the importance of fresh water, its sources of availability, its scarcity and the need for judicious management of this limited life-sustaining resource. This assumes greater significance considering the effect of climate change which is severely affecting water cycle and its availability. PSA vice-president Prof Dr Kalyani Mohanty gave a vote of thanks.

# BBSR New Rly Stn set for significant commercial growth

Rs 250 cr to be spent for infra dev with malls, corporate offices

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The East Coast Railway is on the cusp of a major development project aimed at transforming the Bhubaneswar New Railway Station into a bustling modern hub. The ambitious Rs 250 crore initiative, plans to mirror the development seen at the existing Bhubaneswar station, with the intent to harness the potential for growth in the area.

On March 11, crucial discussions took place between railway officials and State government representatives regarding the station's modernisation. An East Coast Railway spokesperson stated, "The project is futuristic as Bhubaneswar New Station has huge potential."

To enhance access, the Rail-



ways has requested the Bhubaneswar Development Authority to construct a 100-foot wide approach road. This road will connect Nandankanan Road to the station, facilitating its role as a terminal for originating and terminating trains and supporting commercial endeavours. Although the station is equipped with seven

platforms, its current utility is hampered by insufficient access, leading to few train stoppages.

The State government has given preliminary approval for an additional road that will link Raghunathpur to the Bhubaneswar New Station. Situated strategically 12 km from Bhubaneswar and 17 km from Cuttack, the station is set

for significant commercial expansion.

The projected development could yield around 10 lakh square feet of commercial space, with considerations underway for dedicating half of it to commercial usage. Upon the project's completion, it is expected to relieve congestion at the current Bhubaneswar and Cuttack

stations. With a current footfall of 18,000 daily, the new station is poised for substantial growth, thanks to the road and facility enhancements.

Bhubaneswar station, which currently sees a daily footfall of 100,000, is expected to handle up to 175,000 per day following its development, eventually scaling up to 400,000.

# Legal row over new recruitments not yet over State varsities grappling with serious faculty shortage

- Almost 60% posts vacant
- Perform poorly in national rankings

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Over 60 percent of faculty posts in Odisha's universities are vacant, raising educational quality concerns. Legal disputes have stalled recruitment for nearly five years. This shortfall extends beyond the academic staff to administrative roles.

Odisha's universities are facing a severe shortage of faculty members, with more than 60 percent of the teaching posts remaining unoccupied, sources said.

This issue has raised concerns in the State Legislative Assembly, highlighting the challenge of delivering quality education without sufficient staff. Due to the ongoing legal disputes, recruitment has been at a standstill for nearly

the past five years.

Currently, of the 2,027 sanctioned teaching positions across 17 universities in the State, only 674 are filled, leaving a significant gap of 1,353 vacancies. Vacancies in non-teaching roles have also surged, with just 798 of the sanctioned 2,879 posts filled.

This shortfall extends beyond the academic staff to administrative roles, as nine out of 17 universities lack a permanent Vice-Chancellor.

In the past, recruitment efforts were centralised through Odisha Public Service Commission (OPSC), but legal challenges over non-compliance with the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines have resulted in a halted process now awaiting the Supreme Court's decision.

Government degree colleges

under the State Higher Education Department are similarly affected, with 436 teaching positions and 731 non-teaching roles lying vacant out of a sanctioned total of 2,407 and 1,711, respectively.

Academic experts caution that these staffing shortages may adversely affect research activities and impede the delivery of quality education.

The situation could impact the national and institutional standings of Odisha's universities. Newly established institutions in less developed districts are particularly vulnerable, posing risks to the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and overall student performance.

"Since 2020, recruitment against faculty vacancies has been stalled. We are always remaining answerable to NAAC and NIRF authorities for this. Due to the vacancies in faculty positions, universities in the State are often securing lesser ranks," Vice-Chancellor of FM University, Santosh Tripathy said.

Controversial DD Univ OSD faces contempt case

RAJENDRA K SAHU ■ KEONJHAR

P K Mohanty and Narendra Kumar Sahoo, OSD and Registrar of DD University respectively, have been directed to appear on March 28 in the Orissa High Court over a contempt of court case.

Sources said that prior to this, the High Court in its earlier order dated 09.01.2024 had issued notice to both Mohanty, OSD and Sahoo, Registrar, to file their show cause reply in a previous writ petition case filed against

them but they neither filed the show cause reply themselves nor engaged any advocates to appear on behalf of them.

In response, the petitioner again filed a contempt case No - 4564 / 24 in the High Court showing that Mohanty, OSD, OP No - 1 and Sahoo, Registrar, OP No - 3 have not implemented the court order although a notice has been duly served to them and prayed the court for action against them as it is matter of contempt of court.

Accordingly after hearing

the contempt case, the High Court on 07/ 03/ 2025 had directed the State Counsel to inform the concerned IIC, Town PS to facilitate the duo's appearance on March 28, failing which the Superintendent of Police will cause production of both in the court.

Mohanty who is already in news for his many alleged dubious activities and allegation of corruption against him, this latest High Court order has further damaged his image as the OSD of a university.

In Salpur Gold, cash worth Rs 80L robbed

Victim had kept valuables for daughter's wedding

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Miscreants robbed valuables worth lakhs of rupees kept for a wedding in Salepur town of Cuttack district on Monday night.

The victim, identified as Bijay Mohanty, a resident of Jahangirabad in Salepur, had kept the money and orna-

ments for his daughter's marriage.

As per the complainant, four robbers barged into the house of Mohanty and looted the valuables, including cash of Rs 30 lakh and jewellery worth Rs 50 lakh, by threatening the family at gunpoint.

Later, Mohanty lodged a complaint with the Salepur police. A case has been registered and police have launched a hunt to trace and nab the accused.

Mandis cross targets Still many Boudh farmers uncertain about paddy sale

Seek intervention of admn

MAHESH SATPATHY ■ BOUDH

The situation in Boudh regarding the paddy mandi is indeed alarming. Many farmers are still struggling to sell their paddy, while several mandis have already met their targets, leaving farmers uncertain about whether they would be able to dispose of their paddy and get their fair price in return.

It is widely known that Boudh is a primarily agricul-



tural district with reliance on rice crops heavy. The farmers only way of making an earning is by selling paddy at fair and remunerative prices. However, when mandis are uncertain about procurement of paddy over and above the targets, the farmers are at the receiving end.

In such a context, the administration need to be pro-

active to provide better support to the farmers. Farmers are facing numerous challenges beyond their control, including unpredictable weather patterns, rising costs of labour, fertilizers, and pesticides. However, their greatest concern comes at harvest time, when they struggle to sell their produce at a fair price, adding to their financial woes.

It's crucial for the government to take immediate action to ensure fair opportunities for farmers to sell their produce, which is the backbone of their livelihoods, said many here.

Ganjam immersed in devotion as Danda Jatra begins



RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

The ancient and revered Danda Jatra, one of Odisha's most sacred folk festivals, has commenced in Ganjam with grandeur, devotion and traditional fervour. Thousands of devotees, known as Danduas, clad in saffron, are undertaking rigorous penance and performing ritualistic acts in dedication to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali.

This year, the festival witnessed a massive turnout, with participants engaging in various ritualistic performances and acts of endurance to seek divine blessings. The festival, marked by intense

spiritual discipline, includes rituals like Pani Danda, performed while standing in water, Dhuli Danda, where devotees roll on the ground as an act of penance, and Agni Danda, the fire-walking ritual demonstrating unwavering faith. Processions filled with rhythmic drumbeats and religious chants moved through different parts of Ganjam, creating an atmosphere of spirituality and devotion. The sacred event will continue for 21 days, culminating in the grand Meru Yatra, which marks the completion of this deeply revered ritual.

Danda Jatra, believed to be over a thousand years old, is

a symbol of spiritual endurance and cultural heritage in south Odisha. The participants observe strict discipline, fasting and perform rigorous rituals to showcase their faith and devotion. Unlike conventional festivals, Danda Jatra does not involve idol worship but instead focuses on self-purification and seeking divine grace through penance.

Religious leaders and cultural enthusiasts have emphasised the need to preserve and promote this unique tradition, which stands as a testament to Odisha's rich folk culture and spiritual resilience.

Meagre allocations in govt budgets for working class: INTUC

Union to join Cong's Assly gherao on Mar 27

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

There is neither adequate budget provision in the Union Budget 2025 nor in the current State Govt Budget for the workers class though they constitute 57.03% of the total population in India and Odisha has 1.50 crore workers in different sectors, said INTUC State president Dr RC Khuntia in a special meeting here.

1 crore workers from Odisha are migrants and only Rs 373.22 crore in State Budget 2025 is a mere mockery, he said. He lamented that there is no allocation for the Unorganized Workers Welfare Board or for job creation for bringing back the migrant workers.

Former Finance Minister Panchanan Kanungo as the chief guest said labourers and workers will get more benefit of budget if more allocations



would be made for health, education and social security.

Senior journalist Pradyumna Satpathy demanded that the budgetary allocations should be made considering the interests of cross sections of population, including youth, students, workers and journalists and general public.

General secretary INTUC Kishore Jena gave the welcome address and vice president Madan Mohan Dhal gave vote of thanks.

Others who participated, included Prasant Mohapatra, Bidyadhar Mohanty, Debasis Ghosh, Santosh Bhol, Satyabrata Nayak, Pranati Mishra, Satyananda Sahoo, Pradipta Kumar Das and

Dharanidhar Swain.

The demands enlisted in the meeting included increase in EPF pension to minimum Rs 9,000, restoration of the old pension scheme (OPS), Rs 5,000 crore for the Welfare Board of unorganised workers and Rs 10 crore for the job creation for migrant workers. The committee also approved the decision of all central trade unions to go for general strike on May 20 for withdrawal of the 4 labour codes.

The INTUC committee also strongly condemned the inaction of the State Government to protect the women and girl children and called upon all workers to join the Assembly gherao by Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee on March 27.

SU hosts Viksit Bharat Yuva Sansad



To empower youth leaders

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

Sambalpur University hosted a two-day selection programme for the Viksit Bharat Yuva Sansad on Sunday. The programme was jointly organised by the National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK), Sambalpur, aimed at identifying dynamic youth leaders from Sambalpur and Jharsuguda districts.

Following directives from the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, around 150 nominated participants engaged in a thought-provoking debate competition on the theme "One Nation One Election - Guiding Path for Viksit Bharat."

Inaugurating the programme, Vice-Chancellor In-Charge Prof Tushar Kanti Das underscored the role of youth in nation-building. "Youth are the backbone of a vibrant democracy. Their active participation ensures a progressive and united India," he said.

Guest of honour, Registrar Dr Nriparaj Sahu encouraged the students to be proactive contributors to India's development. "It is imperative for young minds to contribute towards the vision of a developed India by upholding democratic values and social responsibility," he emphasized.

The event concluded with certificate distribution to all participants, recognizing their leadership potential and inspiring them to further engage in civic and social duties.

Foundation Day of CYSD 'Protect tribals' rights through inclusive, equitable approach

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Tribals in India have long been the stewards of their land and forests. However, during British colonial rule, they were subjected to a legal and administrative structure that was alien to their way of life, leading to large-scale displacement and loss of their land to non-tribals, said former Judge of the Supreme Court Justice AK Patnaik while delivering the 43rd Foundation Day Lecture of the Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) here on Monday.

The lecture, titled "Tribal Development in India: Focus on the State of Odisha," underlined the historical context and contemporary challenges in the development of India's tribal populations, especially in Odisha.

Justice Patnaik delved into the challenges that tribals face due to the policies that often prioritise revenue generation over the welfare. He pointed out that, "Although develop-



ment projects such as mining and industrial development have brought economic benefits to the country, they have often failed to deliver tangible benefits to the tribal communities. The gap between tribals and non-tribals has remained either the same or widened in many areas."

Justice Patnaik praised the efforts of CYSD under the mentorship of its co-founder Jagadananda, in championing the cause of tribal development in Odisha for over four decades. Highlighting CYSD's work with 23 out of the 62 tribes in Odisha, Justice

Patnaik said, "CYSD's commitment to improving the lives of tribal communities through livelihood, education and skill development went a long way in catalysing social change."

Justice Patnaik raised concern that, "Despite provisions in the Constitution for reservations, tribes remain underrepresented in government services due to inadequate access to quality education and resources."

He lamented that despite the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, which aims to rectify historical injus-

tices against tribals, forest dwellers still struggle to secure their rightful land titles.

The lecture concluded with a call for improved public investments in tribal development, both from the Central and State Governments. He urged for establishment of more Tribal Research Institutions (TRIs) across India to conduct research tailored to the unique needs of tribal populations through localised research, and every State with a significant tribal population should have a dedicated institution to formulate policies that truly benefit these communities."

In Dhenkanal 3 mowed down by truck during road work

Locals block contractor's negligence

PNS ■ DHENKANAL

Tension prevailed near Rekula village under Kamakhyanagar police station Dhenkanal district on Monday night after a hyva truck rammed into a pickup van leaving three three persons dead and one critically injured.

Among the deceased was Khirod Sahu, an employee of the Works Department. The identities of the other two victims were yet to be ascertained.

The mishap occurred while road construction was in progress, leading to widespread anger among locals, who alleged that the contrac-



tor violated all safety norms.

Following the accident, locals accused the contracting agency of negligence in the road work leading to the mishap. Residents claimed that the construction activities were being carried out at night without adequate safety measures, creating hazardous conditions for commuters.

"Early in the morning, there was one accident as the contractor had not barricaded the repair area or placed any

warning signs. We asked them to stop the work, but they continued till late night without any visible signs or barricades leading to this fatality," said a local resident. In protest, angry residents set tires on fire and blocked the Dhenkanal-Kamakhyanagar highway, causing severe traffic jam, which stranded hundreds of vehicles. Later, police reached the spot and pacified the locals following which the road blockade was lifted.

'Stamp out caste system for betterment of society'

AMOFI holds seminar on 81st B-Day of its founder

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A State level seminar on the topic, "Imperative Need for Social Reforms Throughout India" was held under the chairmanship of AMOFI president Manas Jena here on March 17, to mark the 80th Birth Anniversary of B Ramchandra CST Voltaire, who founded the social reform organisation, AMOFI, on December 10, 1980. His objective was breaking the caste system through the instrumentality of priestless love marriage and removing poverty and malnutrition through one-child family.



Former Finance Minister Panchanan Kanungo, eminent columnist-cum-writer Prof Biswaranjan, writer Dr Bidhuprava Rath, atheist leader Prof Dhaneswar Sahoo, free thinker Debendra Sutar, Freethought Party of India VP Harishchandra Kar and Dr Kartik Prasad Jena participated in the Discussion and demanded that the system of caste that propels inequality and the blind beliefs must be outlawed at the earliest.

At the start of the seminar

AMOFI Book No. 17 : "Swarga Nahin, Narka Nahin, Debapeetha Jiba Kahin?" was formally released by the guests and same was distributed among the members of the audience.

Chief guest Kanungo felicitated Dr Bidhuprava Rath and Prabeer Mohanty, Editor of Dekhajay, for writing books on social reform activities carried out by the AMOFI. He also honoured former presidents of AMOFI, namely, Prof Biswaranjan,

Bipin Bihari Tripathy and John Omprakash for their exemplary work in popularizing casteless dowryless priestless love marriage in the State of Odisha.

Two Staff members of AMOFI, namely, Roji Anupama and Bijay Kumar Swain were also felicitated for their devoted work in organising Prem Sadis.

While participating in the seminar Prof Biswaranjan highlighted the need for having "Surnameless names" all over the country to end caste prejudices.

Prof Dhaneswar Sahoo who has translated Dr Ambedkar's Book, Annihilation of Caste, in Odia emphasized the need to remove all blind beliefs that have been in vogue by spirited social reform Activities.

Debendra Sutar gave a call

for secularization of all academic activities throughout the nation. Madhusudan Yadav, BSP leader, pointed out that without courage and dedication or fearlessness no social reform would be possible.

Dr Kartika Prasad Jena thanked AMOFI for organising his anti-caste marriage with Prof Satya Narayan Rath in the chair. FPI VP Harishchandra Kar opined that all students all over India should sing the song: "We Shall Overcome", "Hum Hoyenge Kamiyab Ek Din" before the start of their regular classes. He said that no useful purpose is being served by singing the song: Ahe Dayamaya Biswa Bihari...

Co-founder of AMOFI Madam Swapna Bijayini proposed the vote of thanks. Voltaire was felicitated by the guests on his 81st Birthday.

Dreaded ganja mafia nabbed in J'pore

340.400 kg contraband seized

NISHAN PATTANAIK ■ KORAPUT

In a major success in its fight against ganja smuggling, the Koraput police arrested a dreaded ganja mafia following an exchange of fire at Jeypore sadar area early on Sunday in Kanjeimaliguda area.

Police said the arrested criminal was identified as Ranjit Bagh. Along with him police also nabbed 8 others, all of whom are residents of Umuri, under Jeypore Sadar police limits.

According to police, while on morning patrolling near Kanjei Maliguda area in Jeypore, the patrolling team of Jeypore Sadar PS noticed that four vehicles were coming at a high speed from Boipariguda side. On suspicion, the patrol-

ling party tried to stop them. During the time, they opened two rounds of fire on the patrolling party vehicle in order to escape from the spot.

Subsequently, the police were able to chase them and stopped the vehicles. The police team could able to seize four vehicles ,two country made pistols along with five live ammunitions ,10 mobile phones and 340.400 kg ganja from their possession.

In a Press conference SP Koraput Rohit Varma said police operation against ganja trade will be further intensified and more criminals involved in the crime will be nabbed soon.

SDPO Jeypore Parth Kashyap, ASP Koraput Manoj Kumar Pujhari, IIC Jeypore town Iswar Tandi and IIC Sadar Sachindra Pradhan were present.

# TN gets more MGNREGS funds than Uttar Pradesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Tamil Nadu has been given more funds than Uttar Pradesh under MGNREGA in one fiscal although its population is seven crore as against the northern state's 20 Crore, Union Minister Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani informed Lok Sabha on Tuesday, inviting strong protests from DMK MPs.

The Union minister of state for rural development said the Central government has never discriminated against any state in the release of funds under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) that guarantees 100 days of employment to eligible rural households.

Pemmasani also said during Question Hour that there were several instances of alleged misappropriation of funds provided to West Bengal under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Replying to a question about the scheme's implementation in West Bengal, he said "multiple things went wrong" in the state. First, there was "misappropriation" of funds and there were instances when works were split and given to contractors on a nominated basis, he said.

"We sent an audit (team). They found 44 works where there were irregularities. They made full recovery in 34 cases. Still, 10 other works need to be completed. The financial misappropriation was to the tune of ₹5.37 Crore.

Out of this, they have recovered ₹2.39 Crore. Some of the things still need to be taken care of," the minister said.

Pemmasani said as soon as these things are taken care of, the Union rural development minister (Shivraj Singh Chouhan) will sit with the state minister and resolve the issues. When DMK MP Kanimozhi said that Tamil Nadu had been waiting the release of ₹4,034 Crore under MGNREGA for the past five months, the minister said the scheme is demand-driven, and if payments are delayed by over 15 days, they must be paid with interest to workers.

Pemmasani pointed out that the MGNREGA was enacted by the previous UPA government and stipulates that delays beyond 15 days incur a penalty of 0.05 per cent as interest.

"According to the law, if there is a delay, the state government initially pays the amount and the central government reimburses it. Tamil Nadu has already received ₹7,300 Crore (this fiscal).

"Earlier also, with a population of seven

crore, Tamil Nadu received over ₹10,000 Crore in comparison to Uttar Pradesh, which has a population of 20 Crore and got close to ₹10,000 Crore. There is no question of bias," he said, evoking strong protests from the DMK members.

Pemmasani's senior minister Chouhan also defended the government, saying, "Be it Tamil Nadu or West Bengal, the Modi government has never discriminated against any state. The pending MGNREGA dues, including material costs, will be released soon.

"Under UPA, from 2006-07 to 2013-14, only ₹111 Crore was allocated for person-days in West Bengal, while under the NDA, we have created 239 crore person-days and allocated ₹54,515 Crore," he said.

Upset with the minister's reply, DMK and Trinamool Congress MPs entered the well of the House, staging strong protests. Members belonging to Congress and Samajwadi Party joined the protests too, rising from their seats in solidarity with some of them standing near the Well.

Speaker Om Birla urged them to return to their seats, but they did not budge. Following this, the House was adjourned for about 15 minutes till 12 pm. Birla urged the Opposition not to "politicise" the questions raised during the Question Hour.

# Avalanches recurring phenomenon in high-altitude areas: Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Avalanches are a recurring natural phenomenon in high-altitude areas such as Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh, the government is aware of the significant risks they pose to human lives and property, Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday.

Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said automated weather stations and doppler radars have been installed in vulnerable regions to improve forecasting capabilities.

He said that the Defence Geoinformatics Research Establishment (DGRE) has installed 72 snow meteorological observatories and 45 automated weather stations (AWS) are operational, 100 (AWS) are under testing and 203 (AWS) are under installation.

The data is regularly received from snow observatories at three hour intervals and at one hour interval from AWS at DGRE. This output and the expert opinion is used to draw avalanche forecast for different areas at least 24 hour in advance, Rai said in a written reply to a question.

He said the government is aware of the hazard of avalanches in the Himalayan regions, which poses significant risks to human lives and property.

"Avalanches are a recurring natural phenomenon/disaster in high-altitude areas such as Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh," he said.

The minister said the government effectively deploys technologies for improved early warning and forecasting of avalanches in the hazardous zones.

Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is a national level agency for avalanche forecasting and is involved in the daily Operational Avalanche Forecasting for Defence users, he said.

Rai said the Defence Geoinformatics Research Establishment, Chandigarh under the Defence Research and Development Organisation is also the nodal agency for studying and developing avalanche mitigation technologies.

The methodologies include aerial reconnaissance/ground surveys, which are further used as an input to prepare avalanche hazard maps.

Regular operational avalanche warning is issued by Defence Geoinformatics Research Establishment to the Army and civilian population in the snow bound regions of north-west Himalayas. Additionally, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) supplies six-hourly weather updates to enhance situational awareness, Rai said.

# UP reports highest number of ragging complaints in medical colleges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Uttar Pradesh reported 33 the highest number of ragging-related complaints in medical colleges in 2024 followed by Bihar with 17, Rajasthan with 15 and Madhya Pradesh with 12, Minister of State for Health Anupriya Patel told the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

The National Medical Commission (NMC) has taken stringent measures against such incidents which include regular monitoring and follow-up through video conferences with Deans and Principals of medical institutions, Patel said in a written reply.

Additionally, the National Medical Commission mandates the submission of annual Anti-Ragging reports by these institutions to ensure they are adhering to anti-ragging protocols. Non-compliance is met with strict penalties, which may include the withdrawal of recognition or other punitive actions to maintain a safe and supportive academic environment, Anupriya Patel said. Several measures have been implemented by the government to create a zero-tolerance environment against ragging and ensure a safe and harassment-free academic atmosphere in medical colleges, Patel said.

Measures include implementation of the Prevention and Prohibition of Ragging in Medical Colleges and Institutions Regulations, 2021, outlining institutional responsibilities and preventive measures, Patel stated.

Besides specific information about anti-ragging measures are incorporated in admission brochures, prospectuses, and booklets.

Also, CCTV cameras have been installed in vulnerable areas of the campus, including colleges, hospitals and hostels, and anti-ragging posters and hoardings are displayed in different locations within the institutions.

Every student and their parent/guardian submits an online undertaking through the University Grants Commission's online portal.

The National Medical Commission has set up a portal where students can lodge complaints related to ragging. Besides, Patel also mentioned the operation of the NMC Anti-Ragging Cell, which actively monitors and addresses complaints through email (antiragging@nmc.org.in) and the UGC helpline (antiragging.ugc.ac.in) also mentioned the operation of the NMC Anti-Ragging Cell, which actively monitors and addresses complaints through email.

# Survival in today's battlespace about those who can adapt: CDS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Survival in today's battlespace is not about being the fittest, but about those who adapt, transform and position themselves and seize emerging opportunities," said Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Tuesday at College of Defence Management (CDM), Secunderabad.

He made this assertion while addressing future strategic leaders undergoing Higher Defence Management Course HDMC-20 on the challenges of navigating the complex security landscape of the 21st century, according to defence ministry here.

General Chauhan highlighted the importance of adaptability, resilience and visionary leadership amidst rapidly shifting global power dynamics, non-traditional threats and technological advancements, characterised by fast paced Artificial Intelligence disruptions, to address contemporary and emerging security challenges effectively.

The CDS impressed upon the need for a whole of nation approach towards syn-

ergetic response and underscored the role of Indian Armed Forces in shaping the country's national security strategy.

The CDS, in his talk on National Security Architecture and Change Management in the Year of Defence Reforms, gave a deep insight into the functioning of the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and the transformative drive towards fostering jointness, integration and synergy in the armed forces.

He provided a nuanced perspective of the roadmap for year of transformation marked by articulation of Vision 2047 for the armed forces, joint doctrines, defence and military policies along with efforts towards finalisation of Integrated Capability Development Plan, while elaborating upon the Atmanirbharta initiatives undertaken by the DMA. During the visit, General Chauhan engaged with faculty members and course participants, including officers from friendly foreign countries, sharing his insights on the importance of fostering innovation, experimentation and collaboration within the defence establishment to stay ahead in an evolving environment.

# There could be repercussions for what you say: Kangana on Kamra row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Disgracing anyone in the name of comedy is in bad taste, actor and MP Kangana Ranaut said on Tuesday as she weighed in on the ongoing controversy over comic Kunal Kamra's remarks on Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's political career.

The actor also said it was wrong to compare the incident at the comedy club with the demolition of her Mumbai office by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) back in the 2020 incident following her spat with the Shiv Sena-led Maharashtra government. "Demolition of my office was a completely illegal activity, this is absolutely legal. They can't be clubbed together," MP Kangana Ranaut added. Ranaut, a BJP MP from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi, was speaking to reporters outside the Parliament here.

"You may be anyone but disrespecting anyone is not good." You are disgracing someone in the name of comedy, you are



BJP MP Kangana Ranaut stands outside Parliament during the Winter session in New Delhi

disregarding what all he has done.

Shinde ji used to drive an auto rickshaw a while ago. "Today he has made it till here on his own. What are his (Kamra's) credentials? Who are these people who haven't done anything in life? If they can

write, I'd say write literature or comedy scenes in films. Abusing in the name of comedy, mocking our scriptures in the name of comedy, making fun of people, mothers and sisters (is not right)," MP Kangana Ranaut said.

Kamra recently performed a parody of a popular Hindi song from the film "Dil Toh Pagal Hai," apparently referring to Shinde as a "gaddar" (traitor). He also made jokes about recent political developments in Maharashtra, including the Shiv Sena and NCP splits.

On Monday, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis commented on the row, saying Kamra should apologise for his "low level comedy".

Echoing Fadnavis' remarks, MP Kangana Ranaut said: "These people call themselves influencers. Where is society headed for this 2-minute fame? We need to think about this."

Like Fadnavis ji said we have to take some responsibility for what we say. There could be repercussions. Would you stand by that when you are questioned legally?"

# BJP cites book on Bofors to demand Sonia, Rahul's resignations as MPs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday cited a book by a journalist, who is credited with exposing the alleged Bofors scam, to attack Congress leaders Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, and demanded they quit as MPs till they make a full disclosure about their relations with alleged Italian middleman Ottavio Quattrocchi.

BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia claimed the "huge revelations" made by Chitra Subramaniam in her book 'Bofors Gate' are worrisome, and alleged that Quattrocchi used his proximity to the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and his wife Sonia Gandhi to pull strings in finalising defence deals.

There was no immediate reaction from the Congress to the BJP's allegations and the demands made at the press conference. It has long been alleged that Quattrocchi, who is no more, enjoyed warm ties with Sonia Gandhi, who is also of Italian origin, and used it to his business advantage in India.

He was one of the accused in the CBI's long-winded probe into the alleged bribery in the Bofors gun deal after the kickoff was first reported by the Swedish state radio in 1987.

Subramaniam subsequently did a number of stories on the unfolding development. Bhatia alleged that defence files during the Rajiv Gandhi's term would be taken to Quattrocchi so that he could change them to favour companies of his choice.

He said the current Congress leadership, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge, should answer if it was no violation of oath by Rajiv Gandhi.

The Bharatiya Janata Party leader alleged that Quattrocchi's bank accounts were defrozen by the CBI in 2005 during the Congress-led UPA rule at the behest of Sonia Gandhi.

Citing these incidents, he asked if this did not amount to betrayal to the country and claimed that the Rafale defence deal also could not be finalised during the UPA's term as the Gandhi family wanted a cut.

"Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi should resign from their position till they make a full disclosure about their family's relations with Quattrocchi. Till then, they have no right to remain MPs," he said. Will Kharge stand with the country or "corrupt" Gandhis, he said.

# Finance Bill 2025 offers unprecedented tax relief



Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the Finance Bill 2025 provides unprecedented tax relief, and the 13.14 per cent projected growth in personal income tax collection is "realistic" and supported by solid data. Replying to the discussions on Finance Bill 2025 in the Lok Sabha, Finance Minister also said the customs duty rationalisation announced in the Budget will support manufacturing units, domestic value addition, promote exports, facilitate trade and also provide relief to the common people.

In the 2025-26 Budget, the government has hiked income tax rebate to ₹12 Lakh per annum from ₹7 Lakh earlier. For the salaried class, this rebate will be ₹12.75 Lakh per year after taking into account the standard deduction.

The hike in I-T rebate will lead to tax foregone to the tune of ₹1 Lakh crore in FY26.

Sitharaman said the Budget also provides "marginal relief" under the Income Tax law for those taxpayers whose income exceeds ₹12 Lakh per annum by a small margin. "The Finance Bill provides unprecedented tax relief to honour taxpayer. We have recognised the contribution of the middle class," she said.

Collections in personal income tax have shown considerable buoyancy in the last few years and they have been increasing around 20 per cent year-on-year, the minister added.

"For the year 2025-26, the personal income tax collection is projected at ₹13.6 Lakh Crore. The Revised Estimates for 2024-25 is ₹12.2 Lakh Crore. So, ₹12.2 Lakh Crore is going to be ₹13.6 Lakh and this is done with a certain realistic calculation," Sitharaman said.

The personal I-T revenue is projected to grow by 13.14 per cent in FY26, after taking into account a 7 per cent dip after factoring in the ₹1 Lakh Crore revenue foregone.

# Par panel recommends calendar-based budgeting system for culture ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A parliamentary panel has recommended the government develop a cultural calendar-based budgeting system for events that takes into account cyclical landmarks such as Kumbh Mela for long-term financial planning. The report on the 'Demands for Grants (2025-26) of Ministry of Culture' by the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture was presented in Parliament on Tuesday.

The panel said in its report it observed a "pattern wherein the Ministry relies heavily on mid-year budgetary adjustments, seeking substantial increases at the RE (Revised Estimates) stage instead of ensuring that BE (Budget Estimates) accurately reflects financial needs".

In the opinion of the Committee, this approach introduces uncertainty into long-term financial planning and may disrupt the timely execution of projects.

A more accurate and predictive budget estimation process is required to minimise dependency on adjustments during the stage of revised estimation, it said.

"The Committee recommends that the Ministry strengthen its engagement with the Ministry of Finance to establish a more flexible, needs-based budget allocation framework, one that will ensure funding provisions are more effectively met with practical expenditure requirements," the report said. Also, the ministry should establish a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) engagement cell to facilitate partnerships between businesses and cultural projects, capitalising on the 100 per cent tax exemption available

under Section 80G (ii) of the Income Tax Act. The Committee observed that there is a significant reduction in the ministry's total budget from ₹3,406.90 Crore (actual) in 2023-24 to ₹3,260.93 Crore (Revised Estimate or RE) in 2024-25, and an increase to ₹3,360.96 Crore in the budget allocation for 2025-26. The panel observed the reduction in 2024-25 can be attributed primarily to the one-time expenditures related to the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM).

The AKAM celebrations saw a "substantial increase" in expenditure, with a revision of the Budget Estimate (BE) from ₹185 Crore to ₹335 Crore during 2023-24, resulting in an expenditure of ₹334.39

**India may adopt a cultural calendar-based budgeting system to improve long-term financial planning for events like Kumbh Mela**

Crore, which was more than 80 per cent over and above the original BE allocation, the report said. The Committee, in its report, also noted that the budget formulation process for 2024-25 "did not adequately account" for key national cultural commitments, including the Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj and the Republic Day tableau, leading to an additional request for funds mid-year. The omission of such significant expenditures at the BE stage does seem to indicate "deficiencies" in financial forecasting and contingency planning, it said.

"The Committee recommends the implementation of a comprehensive

MYBF for the Ministry of Culture that extends beyond the annual budget cycle," it said. This framework should incorporate a "five-year rolling budget projection" with annual revisions to accommodate changing priorities while maintaining long-term vision; categorisation of expenditures into core recurring activities, planned development initiatives, and special events or commemorations with separate budgetary provisions for each category, the panel said. The committee also said it "strongly recommends" the development of a cultural calendar-based budgeting system that maintains a comprehensive five-year cultural events calendar, identifying recurring festivals, commemorations, and international engagements with historical budget requirements. It should integrate cyclical cultural events such as the Kumbh Mela (which occurs every 12 years) into "long-term financial planning through a dedicated cultural events fund, it said.

The panel also recommended establishment of a 'Budget Stabilisation Reserve' of approximately 5 per cent of the total annual allocation to account for unforeseen cultural activities or emergencies, preventing mid-year fiscal disruptions. "This approach would mitigate the abrupt budgetary fluctuations witnessed between 2023-24 and 2024-25, and provide greater stability for cultural institutions dependent on government funding," the report said. The panel also suggested developing an "AI-assisted forecasting model" that analyses historical expenditure patterns and predicts resource requirements for upcoming cultural activities based on past event costs, inflation factors, and attendance projections.

# XR Creator Hackathon revolutionises India's immersive technology

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Creator Hackathon, Organized under the leadership of Wavelaps as part of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's flagship WAVES initiative. It is revolutionizing India's immersive Technology sector. This competition is providing emerging XR innovators with a platform to showcase their talent on a global scale. Wavelaps, a pioneering solutions provider in India's immersive technology industry and an industry partner

of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It is offering technological and consulting guidance to finalist teams throughout the hackathon.

Team members Mr. Mohit Kumar Sharma and Mr. Aneesh Doble, hailing from different states of India. They share a common vision. They are establishing India as a global leader in XR and immersive technology. Mr. Mohan said, "His ambition extends beyond gaming, they aim to integrate immersive technology into Defence and Military training."

"We want our technology to transform not just the gaming industry but also contribute to national security and military training", He added.

Team YouthBuzz has achieved a new milestone in the VR gaming industry by securing a place in the top 40 with their project. Immersive Warfare Simulator - The Game of Dimensions, Chapter 1.

This is not a VR Game, but a unique innovation bridging the gap between mobile and VR Gaming. The game allows two teams to play simultaneously. One

using VR headsets and the other on mobile devices. Each team will have four players, completely transforming the multiplayer gaming experience.

Under this project, Team YouthBuzz developed a 'Made in India Haptic Gun. This game based on a 1:1 scale model of a real gun.

This gun will give players an immersive feeling similar to actual warfare. Additionally, the team is developing a haptic vest. Currently, it's in the prototype stage and designed to take the gaming

experience to the next level.

XR communities such as Bharat XR and XDG have played a crucial role in taking this competition nationwide. These communities have played an important role in providing XR innovators with the right platform and spreading immersive technology on a larger scale.

Teams like YouthBuzz and platforms like the XR Creator Hackathon are demonstrating that India is not only developing technology but is also ready to give the world new experiences.

# Wife, lover kill husband in Uttar Pradesh

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a shocking case of betrayal and murder, a newlywed woman in Uttar Pradesh's Auraiya district plotted her husband's killing just 14 days after marriage, echoing the recent Meerut case, where Muskan and her lover Sahil conspired to murder her merchant navy husband Saurabh.

The 22-year-old accused, Pragati Yadav, and her longtime lover, Anurag Yadav, had been in a relationship for four years. However, their families disapproved and forced Pragati to marry Dilip on March 5. Unable to stay apart, the couple decided to eliminate Dilip and hired a contract killer, Ramaji Chaudhary, for Rs 2 lakh to carry out the murder.

On March 19, Dilip was found severely injured with bullet wounds in a field. He was rushed to multiple hospitals in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, but succumbed to his injuries on March 21.

Police investigations revealed that Ramaji and his associates lured Dilip to a secluded area, brutally beat him, and shot him before fleeing. CCTV footage led to the arrest of Pragati, Anurag, and Ramaji, with police recovering two pistols, four live cartridges, a bike, mobile phones, and cash.



Police personnel escort accused Pragati, her lover Anurag, and contract killer Ramu after their arrest for allegedly conspiring to murder Pragati's husband, Dilip Yadav in Auraiya

A manhunt is underway for the remaining accused.

This cold-blooded crime, just like the Meerut case, exposes a rising trend of contract killings fueled by illicit relationships,

where love turns deadly.

During police interrogation, Pragati revealed that after her family discovered her love affair, they arranged her marriage with her elder sister's brother-in-law,

Dilip. Unhappy with this forced alliance, she conspired with her lover to eliminate her husband. To execute the plan while keeping herself out of suspicion, she hired contract killers for Rs 2 lakh. She admitted to paying them Rs 1 lakh in advance, using money she received as gifts during her wedding rituals.

Since the incident, tears have not stopped flowing from the eyes of Pragati's maternal family. They expressed deep regret, stating that if they had even the slightest hint of her intentions, they would never have agreed to her marriage with Dilip. They demand that Dilip's killers face the strictest punishment, including the death penalty.

Pragati's brother, Alok, refuted claims that she was forced into the marriage, calling such allegations baseless. He condemned her actions, stating that she is now considered dead to the family.

"The marriage happened with mutual consent. If we had any suspicion, we would never have allowed it," Alok said. He urged the judiciary to ensure the harshest punishment for all those involved in Dilip's murder, including his sister Pragati. He also stated that he would personally submit a written complaint to the authorities demanding justice.

# Bengal believes in building bridges, not walls: CM

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has appealed to the British businessmen and the Indian Embassy in Britain to work towards enhancing business ties and social and cultural relationship between England and Bengal and not least restoring a direct flight from Kolkata to London.

The Chief Minister who was speaking at a programme at the Indian Embassy said that though London was not far from Kolkata she took 18 hours to reach the British Capital as there was no direct flight between the two of the biggest cities of the erstwhile Raj.

Banerjee on Tuesday told a British delegation that attended the programme at the Indian Embassy in London said, "London is not far away from Kolkata. We need a direct flight from London. It took 18 hours for me to reach here. It could be easier." The Chief Minister also said that she was looking forward to strengthen ties between Bengal and England. "Bengal has always believed in building bridges and not walls," she said.

Later Banerjee said that her discussions with the visiting dignitaries that included some industry captains and a British delegation centred around "deeper cultural and business cooperation ... enhancing economic partnerships and strengthening people-to-people ties."

Banerjee is on a six-day trip to England where she is to deliver a lecture at a private college on Thursday besides meeting some possible investors. The Chief Minister is also likely to take part in a Government-to-Government (G2G) programme on Wednesday.

Banerjee who was earlier seen jogging inside the Hyde Park off Buckingham Palace on her characteristic saree and trademark sleepers told businessmen she met, how Bengal had "a huge trained labour force and they are intelligent and ready for the market." Her activities inside the park, particularly jogging on a saree and a pair of sleepers instantly became an object of "likes" "dislikes" and "comments" in the social media.

Banerjee is accompanied by Chief Secretary Manoj Pant and her senior party colleague Kunal Ghosh.

# BJP's 'Dharma' vs TMC's 'Karma' funds

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

With the Bengal Assembly elections just about a year away and State Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari ceaselessly bombarding the Mamata Banerjee Government on the issue of Muslim appeasement the Trinamool Congress has gone on a counter offensive with its time-tested weapon of alleged central deprivation of the State.

Hours after TMC general secretary set the tone for anti-BJP tirade claiming that unlike the TMC the saffron party had failed to learn from its mistake and continued to deprive Bengal which would in the long run be electorally counterproductive for them senior party MP Kalyan Banerjee launched a scathing attack on the Union Government for depriving Bengal of its rightful dues.

Slamming Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chowhan for acting as an agent who worked in the interest of the rich and deprived States like Bengal, Serampore MP said "Shivraj Chowhan is a 'dalal' (agent) for the rich. He does nothing for the poor which is why he was

removed from as the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh."

The TMC MPs in Parliament on Tuesday demonstrated against the Centre for holding back the State's funds for 100-days' scheme. "Bengal has been demanding its rightful dues that have been stopped for the past several years ... central funds due to Bengal should be given to us ... it is taxpayers' money ... it is not their personal money ... Shivraj Chowhan is not clearing the dues because he tried to form a Government there but the people rejected them ... now they are taking revenge ... and if they go on doing this ... if they continue to withhold funds then they will never be able to come to power in Bengal," Kalyan Banerjee.

His statement came hours after Abhishek Banerjee slammed the BJP for allegedly failing to learn its lessons from its acts.

"The BJP has failed to learn its lessons... unlike the TMC ... in 2019 they won 18 seats and the TMC got 22 ... but the TMC rectified its mistakes and learnt from it but the BJP went on committing them ... still they are repeating

their mistakes and depriving Bengal of its rightful dues ... the Centre has withheld Rs 2 lakh crore that belongs to the State of Bengal ... despite repeated reminders and despite repeatedly coming to Delhi with tomes files they have refused to clear the State's funds ... but this is strategy is counterproductive ... this was proved in 2021 Assembly elections when the TMC roared back to power with a thumping majority and the BJP stopped at 77 seats," the junior Banerjee who is also the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said.

Reacting to the TMC's allegations the BHP however said that the Centre had never withheld the State's funds. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been equally cooperative with all the States ... but the problem lies somewhere else ... the State has been asked to account for the previous funds allocated in MNREGA and PM housing and other schemes ... but they have failed to do so as their leaders have devoured hundreds of crores belonging to the poor man ... the BJP Government cannot allow the TMC leaders to be enriched at the cost of the poor," senior leader Dilip Ghosh said.

# Portuguese-era cannonballs found at Goa heritage site

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Panaji

The Goa government on Tuesday announced that it was temporarily putting on hold the work on the proposed tourist amenity centre at Old Goa heritage site after the ASI found some Portuguese-era cannonballs.

The work won't continue until clearance is granted by the Archaeological Survey of India and church authorities approve it again, Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte told the Assembly, two days after some citizens protested against the project claiming "a mall is being constructed at Old Goa, a UNESCO protected heritage site".

The tourist amenity centre is coming up near a church, under the central government's PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) scheme to facilitate tourism activities. This issue was raised in the House through a calling attention motion by BJP MLA Rajesh Phal Desai and St Andre MLA Viresh Borkar. The legislators

raised concerns after some citizens on Sunday protested against the project claiming "a mall is being constructed in Old Goa, which is a protected heritage site by UNESCO".

"The project work is currently put on hold after ASI found cultural deposits in the form of cannonballs while cleaning the proposed site," Khaunte said.

He stressed that the facilitation centre construction work started only after securing approval from ASI and consulting church authorities.

The minister said the proposed facility houses a building with a lower ground floor and a ground floor with facilities created for tourists.

Speaking about the protests, the minister pointed out that various works of Rs 300 crore were undertaken in Old Goa during the recently-held exposition of relics of St Francis Xavier. "Nobody opposed the implementation of works earlier. The current facilitation centre is coming up at the same place where the exposition secretariat was built," he said.

# ADC directs departments to ensure strict action against mining mafia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

The Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) of Gurugram, Adesh Kumar Meena directed the Mining, Police, Forest, and Regional Transport Authority (RTA) departments to ensure strict action against the mining mafia in the Aravali range by running a joint campaign.

He told the officials to identify the areas of illegal mining in the district and take effective action to prevent it by preparing an action plan. He also directed that the officials of the Mining Department should ensure that mining is not done in any area or place other than the lease prescribed in the district. This direction comes after the ADC was presiding over the meeting of the District Level Task Force Committee of the Mining Department on Tuesday here in Gurugram.

In the meeting, DC has given instructions to form special monitoring teams to strictly deal with illegal mining activities in the district. These special teams will keep a watch on the vehicles involved in illegal mining activities on various roads in the district and ensure departmental action against them as per the prescribed rules. "SDM, Sohna, and the officials of the District Mining Department are to make a joint visit and continuously monitor the illegal activities related to mining in the Aravalli area and ensure a ban on them," he told the officials.

The ADC said that in the upcoming meeting, a detailed report should also be presented on what action has been taken so far on the FIRs lodged in connection with illegal mining in the last three months. During the meeting, Assistant Mining Engineer Surender Solanki said that the Mining Department has seized 50 vehicles in the current financial year in Gurugram district.

He said that 14 FIRs have been registered during this period and a total fine of ₹66.13 Lakh has been imposed. Giving information about the date-wise vehicle checking done in the month of March, he said that so far in this month, 123 vehicles have been checked and necessary action has been taken.

# AHCBA goes on indefinite strike over Justice Varma's transfer

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

The Allahabad High Court Bar Association (AHCBA) on Tuesday launched an indefinite strike to protest the proposed transfer of Delhi High Court Justice Yashwant Varma to the Allahabad High Court.

Leading the protest at Gate Number 3 of the high court, Bar Association President Anil Tiwari emphasised that the agitation was not directed against any court or judge but against what he described as a betrayal of the judicial system. "Our fight is against corruption and a system that lacks transparency. We demand a reconsideration and withdrawal of the transfer order," he said.

The association had reiterated its opposition to Justice Varma's transfer and subsequently decided to cease work indefinitely. Tiwari asserted that the lawyers were prepared for a prolonged battle. "From the very beginning, there has been an attempt to cover up this matter. Lawyers across India are now fighting this battle. Until a resolution is

reached, we will not resume work, regardless of the consequences," he declared.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court collegium on Monday reaffirmed its decision to recommend Justice Varma's transfer to his parent Allahabad High Court. This followed allegations that a large sum of cash was found at his official residence in Delhi after a fire broke out on March 14. Following the incident, judicial work was withdrawn from Justice Varma, and the Delhi High Court, under Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, issued directives on the matter.

Justice Varma has strongly denied any involvement in the alleged cash discovery, calling it a conspiracy to malign him. "Neither I nor any of my family members placed any cash in the storeroom. I unequivocally denounce the suggestion that the alleged cash belonged to us," he stated.

With the Bar Association firm on its stance, the standoff over Justice Varma's transfer is expected to intensify in the coming days.

# Chhattisgarh: Naxalite killed in encounter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dantewada

A Naxalite carrying a reward of ₹25 lakh on his head was among three ultras killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on Tuesday, police said. The gunfight took place at around 8 am in a forest along the border of Dantewada and Bijapur districts when a team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Superintendent of Police Gaurav Rai said.

Personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Bastar Fighters, both units of the state police, were involved in the operation launched on the basis of inputs about the presence of Maoists in forests of Girsapara, Nelgoda, Bodga and Ikeli villages under Geedam police station limits, he said.

After the exchange of fire stopped, bodies of three male Naxalites were recovered from the site, the official said.

An Insas rifle, a 303 rifle, explosive materials and items of daily use were also recovered from the spot, he said.

Prima facie, one of the three Naxalites killed in the gunfight, identified as Sudhir



Security personnel return after an encounter in which three Naxals were gunned down in Dantewada district

alias Sudhakar alias Murlu, resident of Warangal in Telangana, was active as a member of Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee - the strongest formation of Maoists, the official said.

He was carrying a bounty of ₹ 25 lakh, the official said. The identity of the two other cadres was yet to be ascertained, he said. Search operation was still underway in the area, he added.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently said the Narendra Modi government is moving forward with a ruthless approach against Naxalites and is adopting a zero-tolerance policy against those Maoists who have not surrendered despite facilities being offered to them, ranging from inclusion.

He said the country will be Naxal-free by March 31, 2026.

# HM's assertion on eliminating LWE is awe-inspiring

SURYA SARATHI RAY ■ New Delhi

Home Minister Amit Shah's forceful assertion in Parliament last week that Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) will be eradicated from the country by March 2026 has caught many by surprise, while others are in awe.

Why surprise? Naxalism, starkly opposed to the country's democratic framework and the biggest unequals in the Indian context, has been a dreaded menace for decades. Based on building a classless society through the barrel of a gun, the very idea of Naxalism or Left-Wing Extremism is flawed. Wild. However, the damage it has caused to the Nation and its democratic fabric is immeasurable.

For decades together, Naxalism has deprived vast swathes (Red Corridor) of land across West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Odisha, inhabited by eight crore people, mostly tribal, of the goodness of development and equal opportunity for progress. Thousands of lives were lost. Often upturning internal security measures and development initiatives, LWE runs with the nefarious intention of perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty and deprivation by inhibiting businesses from setting up and performing and, ultimately, delaying the mainstreaming of the peo-

ple in the country's Red Corridor.

What has it done to the country and its hapless tribal populations? Between 2004 and 2014, 1,858 security personnel died in 16,463 violent incidents, which also caused 4,766 civilian deaths. There were 126 Naxalism-affected districts in the country by 2014 and, in contrast, just 66 fortified police stations. Loss of moveable and immovable properties will also run in a few thousand crores.

Quite naturally, when someone of the stature of Home minister speaks about eliminating the dreaded menace, and that too on the floor of the Parliament, many are surprised. But, they might be in awe knowing today's ground reality. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guidance, the Home Department has achieved the unthinkable.

Tackling a menace of this magnitude is never easy. Home Minister Amit Shah's meticulous planning and multifaceted strategy to quell the discontent holistically by dispersing the seeds of development to turn problems into prospects and responding with an iron fist where an Olive Branch fails to melt the ice have yielded astounding results. How did this happen?

Immediately after taking over, the government was hell-bent on eradicating naxalism. To holistically address the LWE menace, the government approved the 'National Policy and Action Plan to

address LWE' in 2015, envisaging a multi-pronged strategy involving security-related measures, development interventions, ensuring the rights and entitlements of local communities, etc.

**There were 126 Naxalism-affected districts in the country by 2014 and, in contrast, just 66 fortified police stations. Loss of moveable and immovable properties will also run in a few thousand crores**

The resolute implementation of the policy has resulted in a consistent decline in violence and constriction of geographical spread. However, during the Modi government's tenure from 2014 to 2024, the number of violent incidents decreased by 53 per cent, dropping to 7,744. Similarly, the number of security forces' casualties decreased by 73 per cent, from 1851 to 509, and the number of civilian casualties decreased by 70 per cent, dropping from 4766 to 1,495.

The number of Naxal-affected districts has now come down to 12, while the number of fortified districts has increased to 612. In the past 5 years, a total of 302 new security camps and 68 night landing helipads have been established. These were never in existence before the

Modi regime.

HM's professional, layered, and strategic approach to LWE involved accelerated plugging of security vacuums and eliminating information-dark areas that served as major headwinds in the battle against insurgency. In the last 10 years, the LWE-affected regions' mobile connectivity towers have increased from 0 to 6,000. This single move had a game-changing impact at the grassroots level by instilling a sense of security among the people and bridging the gap between them and the government for the first time.

There was a fierce offensive against Left Wing Extremism, dealing crushing blows to terror outfits every time. If the number of eliminations, arrests, and surrenders are any marker of the triumph of the security forces in this battle against the menace, then Indian security forces deserve a pat on the back.

Over the last ten years, security spending in LWE-affected areas nearly tripled to over ₹3,000 crore. Over the past four years, an additional ₹1,285 crore has been released to LWE-affected states under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme, reinforcing their ability to combat insurgency.

Social infrastructure—roads, schools, and healthcare facilities—has been built in abundance. Banking services have been made accessible to all.

# Mayawati charts strategy to bolster BSP's OBC support base

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati held a pivotal meeting on Tuesday with leaders from the Other Backward Classes (OBC) community, aiming to enhance the party's influence at the grassroots level.

The discussions, which took place at the BSP headquarters, centered on expanding the party's organizational reach, strengthening its OBC vote bank, and refining strategies for upcoming elections.

A large contingent of OBC leaders and party workers attended the meeting, signaling the BSP's renewed focus on consolidating support among backward communities. With elections on the horizon, the party is intensifying efforts to reconnect with its traditional voter base and revitalise its presence in rural and semi-urban areas.

Addressing the gathering, Mayawati underscored the necessity of direct engagement with OBC voters, urging party cadres to amplify outreach initiatives and effectively communicate the BSP's commitment to their welfare. She emphasised that strengthening ties with marginalised sections would be key to the party's resurgence.

"To regain the trust of the people, our

workers must engage at the grassroots level, understand public concerns, and spread awareness about the BSP's vision for social justice and empowerment," she said.

The meeting also served as a platform to assess the party's recent electoral performance and discuss corrective measures. Leaders were instructed to launch community interactions, door-to-door campaigns, and awareness drives, particularly in areas where the party has witnessed a decline in support.

A major point of discussion was countering misinformation about the BSP and reinforcing its core message of inclusive governance. Special attention was given to issues such as reservation, economic opportunities, and social welfare, which hold significant weight among OBC voters.

Mayawati's renewed outreach underscores the BSP's strategy to reassert its relevance in Uttar Pradesh's political landscape. Party leaders were urged to work cohesively, ensuring that the BSP's ideological foundations and policies resonate strongly with the electorate.

The meeting concluded with a call for unity and grassroots mobilisation, as the party prepares for the upcoming electoral challenges.

Editor's TAKE

## Turkey in turmoil

Ekrem Imamoglu's arrest could pose a serious challenge for President Erdogan

Democracy is increasingly under attack across the world. Turkey is the latest case in point where the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is out to weed out any opposition and would not mind even if it irks the people at large. Turkey is facing one of its most intense political crises in years following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, a key Opposition leader and major rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The arrest has sparked mass protests across the country, raising concerns about Turkey's democratic future and stability. Imamoglu was arrested on corruption-related charges, including running a criminal organisation, bribery, extortion, bid-rigging, and illegal data collection.

His supporters argue that the charges are politically motivated and are part of Erdogan's broader strategy to sideline a formidable contender for the 2028 presidential race. The Turkish government, however, denies any political interference, insisting that the judiciary remains independent. The timing is particularly significant, as it coincided with the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) holding a symbolic primary election to endorse him as their presidential candidate.

The arrest has triggered widespread protests across Turkey, particularly in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Riot police have responded with water cannons, tear gas, and plastic bullets, while demonstrators have fought back with stones. Despite the government's vow to crack down on what it calls "street terror," the protests continue to gain momentum. The opposition sees Imamoglu's detention as an attack on democracy.

In response to the government crackdown, the CHP has set up nationwide ballot boxes for non-members to cast 'solidarity votes' in support of the embattled mayor. The international community has reacted strongly to Imamoglu's arrest. The Council of Europe has condemned the move and called for his immediate release. Political analysts suggest Erdogan is attempting to eliminate his strongest opposition ahead of the next elections. Domestically, the case has rattled Turkey's financial markets. Investors are increasingly wary of the country's political instability, which could further impact Turkey's struggling economy. This is not Imamoglu's first legal battle. In 2022, he was convicted for allegedly insulting Turkey's Supreme Electoral Council. More recently, a university nullified his degree over alleged irregularities, effectively barring him from running for president.

His political ascent has been a major challenge for Erdogan. He secured a surprise victory in Istanbul's 2019 mayoral elections, defeating Erdogan's ruling AKP in a major blow. A rerun of the election only solidified his popularity, making him one of the strongest opposition figures in Turkish politics today.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has increasingly exhibited authoritarian tendencies, undermining Turkey's democratic institutions. Over the years, he has consolidated power by curbing judicial independence, restricting press freedom, and suppressing political opposition. His government has jailed journalists, academics, and activists critical of his rule, while elections have been marred by allegations of unfair practices, media censorship, and crackdowns on rival parties.

The transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system in 2018 granted Erdogan sweeping executive powers, weakening checks and balances. Furthermore, his handling of protests, such as the Gezi Park demonstrations and the post-2016 coup purges, has drawn widespread criticism for human rights violations. These actions have significantly eroded Turkey's democratic credentials, pushing the country toward an increasingly autocratic rule.

## Leaderspeak



Rishabh Pant is an intelligent cricketer, and he will have picked up valuable insights regarding his batting and captaincy. I believe we will see him improve his performance. Additionally, when a captain scores runs or takes wickets, it significantly boosts their confidence in making bowling changes and setting the field. Once he gets some runs under his belt, I expect his captaincy to become even more assured.

SUNIL GAVASKAR, INDIAN CRICKETER



# A historic return from space

Sunita Williams safe return has sparked pride across India and the world, with leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, celebrating her achievement

NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, of Indian descent, is in the news this week. Her team has returned safely to Earth after spending nine months in space. They initially planned to be in space for eight days, but technical problems extended their mission. The spacecraft returned without them in September. This week, they landed in a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule alongside Nick Hague and Alexander Gorbunov.

After landing near Tallahassee, they were taken on stretchers for health checks. Her return is a moment of immense pride for leaders in India and across the globe, marking a significant leap in space exploration. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote an emotional letter to the "illustrious daughter of India," inviting her to visit India after her return.

Notable figures who praised her include Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, among others. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed her joy: "Our daughter of India returns to us, and we are deeply, deeply happy and elated. We are profoundly happy for Butch Wilmore as well. Hail their courage, hail their return, hail human glory!" Mamata also called for a Bharat Ratna for Sunita in a post on X.

Sunita Williams, 59, is a former US Navy captain. She was born in Ohio to a Gujarati father, Deepak Pandya, from Jhulasan in Gujarat, and a Slovenian mother, Ursuline Bonnie Pandya. Sunita practices Hinduism and took a copy of the Bhagavad Gita and a Ganesh idol to space. She feels proud of her Indian heritage and said, "Everywhere I have lived, I have had Ganesh with me, so he had to come with me to space. The last time, I brought a small copy of the Upanishads."

The NASA astronauts will now undergo standard protocols to mitigate the physical challenges posed by prolonged weightlessness in space. They have been sent to the Johnson Space Center in Houston, where they will undergo recovery and return to normal life after some time.

According to Newsweek, Sunita has spent 322 days in space across several missions. She previously held the record for the most spacewalks by a female astronaut, with nine spacewalks, until Peggy Whitson broke the record in 2017. Sunita joined NASA in 1998 and has helped test new space technologies and conduct research on the International Space Station (ISS). She has been married to former police officer Michael J Williams for



over 20 years.

What began as an eight-day mission became a remarkable testament to the astronauts' resilience.

Their extended stay included over 4,500 orbits and a staggering journey of more than 121 Million statute miles.

Experts worry that spending a long time in microgravity can cause health problems for astronauts when they return to Earth's gravity. NASA maintains that transitioning from one gravity field to another is more challenging than it sounds.

"It affects spatial orientation, head-eye and hand-eye coordination, balance, and locomotion, with some crew members experiencing space motion sickness," the US agency stated.

The rehabilitation program includes daily two-hour sessions to help improve mobility, build muscle strength, and increase endurance. Life on the ISS follows a set routine, focusing on dealing with weightlessness, fluid shifts in the body, and the loss of bone density. Their extended stay has provided valuable scientific insights into space exploration. Their endurance in the face of balance issues, dizziness, and muscle weakness common due to the legs and back not supporting body weight is commendable.

Although both astronauts have completed their mission, adjusting to life on Earth

will take time.

Former US President Donald Trump has turned the issue of the stranded astronauts into a political matter. He blamed former

President Joe Biden for not helping them. The White House's official X account stated, "PROMISE MADE, PROMISE KEPT: President Trump promised to rescue the stranded astronauts while criticising Joe Biden."

Trump mentioned Sunita, referring to her as "the woman with wild hair" in his

comments. Trump explained why he has not yet invited the NASA astronauts to the White House. "They have to get better. You have no pull in your muscles and gravity when you are up there (in space). You can lift a thousand pounds like this," the former US President told Fox News.

Sunita and her crew's return is a key success in space exploration. This mission will provide valuable data for future space travel and help improve spacecraft technology. The mission was critical in understanding

the effects of prolonged space travel, aiding NASA and other space agencies in planning future missions, including sending humans to Mars.

### Conclusion

Sunita Williams' safe return from her extended mission in space marks a significant milestone in human space exploration. Despite the unforeseen technical setbacks that prolonged their stay, the mission has contributed valuable scientific data that will aid future space endeavors, particularly in understanding the long-term effects of space travel on the human body. Leaders and citizens alike have celebrated her achievements, with calls for national recognition reinforcing her status as a symbol of perseverance and excellence. As Sunita and her fellow astronauts undergo rehabilitation, their experiences will continue to shape the future of space travel. With missions to Mars and beyond on the horizon, their insights into endurance, adaptation, and survival in microgravity will be invaluable. This mission underscores the evolving challenges and triumphs of human spaceflight, reminding us of the limitless possibilities that lie ahead in the quest for exploration beyond Earth.

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

## Green infrastructure for sustainable cities

### SECOND Opinion



HARI SOMALRAJU

According to UN reports, approximately 55 per cent of the global population lives in urban areas, but this percentage is expected to reach 68 per cent by 2050. Rapid urban growth surpasses effective urban and transport planning, resulting in worsening air and noise pollution, urban heat islands, and limited green spaces. These challenges contribute to significant health risks, including increased mortality rates for city dwellers.

However, with strategic urban planning and sustainable transport solutions, cities can mitigate these harmful effects and create healthier, more liveable environments.

One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through active transportation. Cities that invest in pedestrian-friendly pathways and bike lanes encourage physical activity while also minimising reliance on cars.

By ensuring safety and convenience, such infrastructure makes walking and cycling more appealing to residents, reducing vehicle congestion and emissions.

Public transport also plays a critical role in sustainable urban mobility. Expanding metro networks, bus services, and other mass transit options can significantly ease traffic congestion and lower pollution levels. For example, Paris is enhancing its transit system with new routes to offer viable

alternatives to car travel, encouraging a shift toward greener commuting habits.

Technology is another powerful tool for improving urban transport. Smart traffic systems that analyse real-time road conditions can optimise signal timings, reducing unnecessary idling and emissions. Adaptive traffic control strategies lead to smoother traffic flow, minimising pollution and enhancing efficiency.

The transition to electric vehicles (EVs) is a key component of sustainable transport. By investing in EV charging stations, cities make it easier for residents to adopt cleaner transportation options. Many municipalities are prioritising this shift to align with long-term sustainability goals. Green urban planning extends beyond transport infrastructure. Parks, green roofs, and urban forests help combat the heat island effect while providing essential recreational spaces. Brisbane, for instance, has been actively designing cooler, walkable urban spaces, setting a precedent for other cities worldwide. Sustainable road construction materials further contribute to environmental benefits. The use of recycled asphalt and permeable concrete minimises resource consumption and improves stormwater management, making roads more resilient while reducing their ecological impact.

The advantages of sustainable urban transport planning are far-reaching. Reduced vehicle usage leads to lower carbon emissions and improved air quality. Access to green

spaces and active transport options fosters healthier lifestyles, reducing the risk of lifestyle-related diseases. Efficient public transport and smart traffic systems ease congestion, enhancing the daily lives of commuters. Additionally, investments in sustainable infrastructure create job opportunities and attract responsible businesses, stimulating economic growth.

Despite these benefits, several challenges must be addressed. Implementing sustainable infrastructure requires significant initial investment, but the long-term savings in public health improvements, reduced environmental damage, and economic development make it a worthwhile endeavour. Strong policies and regulations are essential to drive these initiatives forward, ensuring that sustainable urban development remains a priority. Community engagement is also crucial—when residents are actively involved in planning, projects are more likely to meet local needs and gain public support. The journey toward sustainable cities is both necessary and achievable. By prioritising active transport, public transit enhancements, smart traffic solutions, and green infrastructure, urban areas can minimise their environmental footprint while improving the quality of life for their residents. While challenges exist, the long-term benefits of a low-carbon, people-centric urban environment far outweigh the obstacles, paving the way for a greener and healthier future.

(The writer is managing director of Systra Group India. Views expressed are personal)

## Letters to the Editor

### RESERVATION HAS BECOME A SLOGAN FOR HARNESSING VOTES

It has become a routine process to raise the issue of reservations whenever an election is near as now Bihar elections will be held after six months and political parties know that the issue will be challenged in the court and will be rejected by the judiciary and till then keep this alive for vote bank. In the Parliament elections, Opposition parties were to flare up the issue of reservations and due to this reason BJP could not get the absolute majority in the Lok Sabha, and it is a great weapon in the hands of Opposition. Now the Karnataka government has declared four per cent reservation for Muslims in allotment of contracts, and it is also true that the state has already provided similar reservation for SCs and STs and OBC contractors. Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution of India mandate that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth but authorises governments to "make special provisions for the

advancement of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes."

The Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurements (Amendment) Bill, 2025, which the state Assembly passed the other day reserving for Muslims four per cent of contracts in civil works valued up to ₹2 Crore, and goods or services procurement contracts up to ₹1 Crore, hence, hardly qualifies for constitutional protection. The government would argue that the measure is designed to address the acute unemployment among the communities.

But the fact remains that the Constitution has designed reservation as a policy to ensure that communities which have been kept off the mainstream get a chance to be part of it. Economic disadvantages are an issue that have to be addressed separately.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

### Trump's Greenland gambit

Madam—President Donald Trump's renewed interest in acquiring Greenland has intensified geopolitical discussions and raised concerns among Greenlandic and Danish officials. In December 2024, Trump described the acquisition of Greenland as "an absolute necessity" for US national security, building upon a similar proposal from his first term that Denmark had previously declined. The situation escalated with the planned visit of a US delegation to Greenland, including National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, Second Lady Usha Vance, and Energy Secretary Chris Wright. This visit, coinciding with local elections, was labeled "highly aggressive" by Greenland's Prime Minister Mute Egede, who viewed it as unwelcome pressure amid Trump's controversial annexation plans.

Despite significant opposition from Greenlandic lawmakers and the Danish government, the Trump administration has continued its efforts. In January 2025, Trump's son, Donald Trump Junior, visited Greenland's capital, Nuuk, distributing "Make America Great Again" hats and engaging with locals, actions perceived by many as attempts to sway public opinion.

The US delegation's visit included cultural engagements such as attending the Avannaata Qimussersu dogsled race and touring historical sites.

### Clamour for Justice Varma's impeachment

Madam—Apropos of the headlines 'Bar demands Justice Varma's Impeachment' (March 25), amid heightened reactions from the Bar Associations and the public ire, it is imperative that the case should be handed over to the Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) and it should be first ascertained whether the unaccounted cash of ₹500 currency notes were demonetised.

The investigation should be taken to a logical end as early as possible lest the agitation of Allahabad Bar Association takes an ugly turn. Even for impeachment, the investigation is mandatory.

The Union Government and media have been much disciplined in handling matter of the unusually stashed cash found at the Delhi High Court Judge. But the Collegiums' approach manifests reluctance and delay. The public is not convinced by the action in the matter. It should also be borne in mind that just one High Court Judge implicated in alleged recovery of huge unaccounted cash at home does not put the entire judiciary under fire.

But for this, the Supreme Court should have taken prompt action as they do in similar cases. Many a time, the High Court and Supreme Court benches held midnight hearings in very urgent cases and took decisions even taking cognisance suo moto. This time, their inertia is not convincing.

### MPs' get a salary hike of 24 per cent

Madam—Parliament is the cornerstone of democracy, where the nation's fate is decided. The representatives sitting there should be committed to public service, yet reality paints a different picture.

While farmers take their own lives under the weight of debt, laborers struggle for fair wages, and youth remain unemployed, MPs focus on increasing their own salaries and privileges. This stark contrast mocks the very spirit of democracy.

Recently, Indian MPs' salaries were increased by 24 per cent, raising their monthly pay to ₹1.24 Lakh. Along with numerous perks such as travel allowances, medical benefits, and housing facilities, their total monthly benefits exceed ₹3 Lakh. Meanwhile, an unskilled worker earns around ₹20,358 per month, a highly skilled worker only ₹26,910—nearly 10 times less than an MP. This vast disparity questions the fairness of our democratic system.

In neighbouring countries, MPs' salaries are significantly lower. In Pakistan, it is ₹1,59,246, in Bangladesh ₹40,000, in Nepal ₹43,000, and in Sri Lanka merely ₹15,000. Given India's economic challenges, should MPs receive such high salaries and benefits while millions struggle for basic survival? Supporters argue that higher salaries ensure honesty in politics, but corruption and nepotism continue to flourish.

# The ailing discoms need structural changes

India's power distribution companies (discoms) remain trapped in a cycle of mounting losses. Can the government's latest 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD) aims to curb inefficiencies and improve their financial health

FIRST Column



The power distribution companies (discoms) stand at the core of the power supply and distribution network in the country. Mostly owned and controlled by State Governments, they buy electricity from the generating companies (gencos) and supply it to the consumers. Yet, invariably, the financial health of discoms has been a matter of serious concern.

According to a report by the Lok Sabha's Standing Committee, the accumulated losses of discoms increased from ₹545,000 Crores in financial year (FY) 2020-21 to ₹584,000 Crores in 2021-22, ₹647,000 Crores in 2022-23 to ₹692,000 Crores in 2023-24. The government has sought to address these losses under a 'Reforms-Linked, Result-Based Scheme for Distribution' (RLRBSD). The Scheme was unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech for FY 2021-22.

Involving an outlay of ₹300,000 Crore for five years (FY 2021-22 to FY 2025-26), the RLRBSD was aimed at trimming discus Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses to pan-India levels to 12-15 per cent and gradually narrow the ACS-ARR gap (ACS stands for an average cost of purchase, transmission and distribution of electricity whereas ARR stands for the average revenue realized from its sale) by March 2026.

It has two components: (i) providing financial support for compulsory prepaid and smart metering to be implemented across the power supply chain, including in about 220 Million households and up-gradation and strengthening of the distribution infrastructure (ii) training and capacity building.

As reported in the Standing Committee, the Ministry of Power (MoP) has sought an extension of the Scheme by two years through FY 2027-28 to complete the envisaged targets.

## Can the scheme deliver?

Before answering this question, we need to analyze the fundamental causes behind discoms losses. AT and C losses are a sophisticated nomenclature for leakage from the system or power theft. During FY 2015-16, these were 20.7 per cent. When, out of say 100 units of electricity that leave the generating stations or power dispatch centre, 20.7 units are stolen and hence not paid for, this is bound to have a debilitating effect on the discom operations.

The discoms could charge more on the sale of the balance 79.3 units to compensate for the 'nil' revenue on the 20.7 stolen units. But this is theoretical. So, the discoms would end up making a loss to the extent of revenue lost on stolen units. There is another potent factor that



UTTAM GUPTA

exacerbates their losses.

The Electricity Act (2003) and the Guidelines issued by the MoP require the discoms to fix the electricity tariff supplied to consumers in a manner such that the ARR from its sale is equal to the ACS.

Yet under diktat from the State Government, either they don't bill certain households (HHs) at all (on consumption up to 200 or 300 units a month in Delhi or Punjab) or give a flat subsidy of ₹800 on monthly consumption (between 201 and 400 units a month in Delhi), besides free

supply to farmers as in Punjab.

The discoms seek to make up for the resulting under-recoveries by charging more from industries and businesses for which the tariff can go up

to a high of ₹16 per unit as in Delhi (there being no more than two-three discoms in any jurisdiction hence an oligopolistic situation, they have no option but to pay). Moreover, the States not fully compensating discoms for the under-recoveries, despite making loud promises, further adds to the discom losses.

The twin problems of AT and C losses and under-recoveries on sale to HHs or farmers have existed for close to a quarter century. Since the beginning of 2000, the Centre has come up with four financial restructuring packages (FRPs) to help discoms.

While, the first two (2002, 2012) merely sought to condone their losses, the third namely the Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) launched in November 2015 required discoms to set their house in order and achieve certain milestones in exchange for financial assistance.

Under UDAY, discoms' mammoth debt of about ₹400,000 Crore was condoned. Instead of this, they were required to reduce AT and C losses from 20.7 per cent during FY 2015-16 to 15 per cent by FY 2018-19. Further, they were to reduce the ACS-ARR gap from ₹0.59 per unit of electricity during FY 2015-16 to 'zero' by FY 2018-19. But, the discoms failed to deliver.

During FY 2019-20, AT&C losses were 18.9 per cent against the 15 per cent target for FY 2018-19. The ACS-ARR gap during FY 2019-20 stood at ₹0.42 per unit against a target of 'zero' for FY 2018-19. During FY 2020-21, AT and C losses zoomed to 22.3 per cent and the ACS-ARR gap scaled up to ₹0.69 paise per unit. In the following years, despite some improvement, the AT and C losses still stood at a high of 16.87 per cent during FY 2023-24. No wonder, discoms were grappling with cumulative loss of ₹692,000 Crore in

FY 2023-24.

The RLRBSD launched in FY 2021-22 talks of lowering AT&C losses to 12-15 per cent by the end of FY 2025-26, a level that should have been reached in FY 2018-19. As for the ACS-ARR gap, it merely talks of 'gradually narrowing' the gap forgetting the 'zero' target that UDAY sought to achieve by FY 2018-19. Now, the MoP has shifted the goalpost to the end of FY 2027-28.

The Scheme seeks to address discoms losses by up-grading the distribution infrastructure, pre-paid and smart metering, training and capacity building and so on. Out of ₹300,000 Crore outlay proposed for implementing it, the Centre was to provide gross budgetary support (GBS) of close to ₹100,000 Crore and funding by Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) under irrevocable State Government guarantee. The fund's release is subject to discoms meeting the pre-qualifying criteria and achieving the basic minimum benchmark in reforms.

As for the follow-up action, in reply to a question in Parliament given by then Power Minister RK Singh in December 2023: "Till today, detailed project reports (DPRs) having totaa l outlay of ₹120,000 Crore has been approved for loss reduction works and ₹130,000 Crore for smart metering works." Further, as of January 2024, the total loan disbursed by PFC-REC was ₹112,000 Crore for 16 States, against the sanctioned amount of ₹133,000 Crore.

As for the GBS, the release of funds by the Centre during FY 2023-24 was a mere ₹6,000 Crore against the budget allocation of ₹12,000 Crore.

During FY 2024-25, as of February 10, 2025, 96 per cent of the ₹12,665 Crore allocated for the scheme was utilised as per the revised estimates for 2024-25. So, the money spent (GBS plus loans from PFC-REC) has been less than half of the intended outlay. But, more worrisome is the outcome.

Till last year, 'against the sanctioned smart meters of around 220 Million, only about 0.8 Million had been installed.' During the current FY, till February 10, 2025, 20.8 million smart meters have been installed.

That takes the total to 21.6 million. This is less than 10 per cent of the target. The scheme merely addresses the 'technical' side of the problem. It barely touches the fringe. The real problem has to do with free or heavily subsidised power and theft assured or facilitated by the political brass just to win elections. For this, it rides piggyback on discoms. Till this is addressed, discoms will continue to remain under serious financial stress.

(The writer is a policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

## Importance of Himalayan glaciers and risks posed by climate change

Himalayan glaciers are not just frozen reservoirs of water; they are the lifeblood of South Asia. These colossal ice masses feed major river systems, including the Ganges, Indus, and Brahmaputra, directly impacting over a billion people. However, these glaciers are vanishing at an alarming rate, putting millions of lives, biodiversity, and entire ecosystems at grave risk.

Among them, the Gangotri Glacier stands out, supplying water to the sacred and economically crucial Ganges River. The glacier's retreat is not just an environmental concern but a looming humanitarian crisis, threatening water security, agriculture, energy production, and even cultural heritage.

The Gangotri Glacier is just one part of a larger crisis, other Himalayan Glacier including Yamunotri, Pindari, Milam and Sunder Dhunga Glaciers are also Shrinking impacting tributaries such as the Yamuna, Kali and Ramganga rivers. This accelerating glacier retreat is disputing the delicate balance of the Ganga River system.

The Himalayas are warming at nearly twice the global average, causing glaciers to melt at an accelerated pace. Several studies, including those conducted by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), confirm that Himalayan glaciers have lost over 20 per cent of their ice mass in the last four decades.

The Gangotri Glacier, which feeds the Ganges, has retreated by approximately 1,500 meters since 1935, with an annual recession rate of 10-22 meters. Scientists warn that by 2050, many smaller glaciers feeding the Ganges may completely disappear, leading to severe water shortages across northern India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

The situation is dire for other glaciers as well for example Yamunotri Glacier (source of the Yamuna River) is shrinking, affecting water supply to Delhi and surrounding regions. Pindari, Milam, and Sunderdhunga river area depleting, impacting tributaries such as the Kali, Ramganga. Chorabari Glacier (Kedarnath region) is receding, increasing the risk of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), similar to the catastrophic 2013 Kedarnath floods.

The retreat of Himalayan glaciers will severely impact freshwater availability. The Ganges, which supports more than 400 Million people, is at risk of reduced flow in the dry season. This would devastate agriculture in the Indo-Gangetic plains, one of the most fertile regions on Earth. Without adequate glacial meltwater, farmers will face severe droughts, reducing crop yields and leading to food shortages.

As glaciers melt, rivers swell, leading to devastating floods. Initially, increased meltwater boosts river flows, but as glaciers deplete, erratic water patterns emerge, alternating between excessive flooding and extreme drought.

There are over 2,500 glacial lakes in the Himalayas, with more than 200 classified as dangerous and among them 50 glacier lakes in the Himalayas as "very highly hazardous". These lakes, formed by melting glaciers, can burst due to landslides or earthquakes, triggering catastrophic floods downstream.

As a result of glacial melting and heavy rainfall, the flash floods killed over 6,000 people, in Kedarnath in 2013 washing away entire villages. A chunk of the Nanda Devi Glacier collapsed, leading to floods that killed over 200 people and destroyed two hydroelectric projects in Chamoli in the year 2021.

The melting of permafrost (frozen ground) destabilizes mountain slopes, triggering landslides and rockfalls. Roads, villages, and even major infrastructure projects like dams and tunnels are at constant risk.

Uttarakhand Tunnel under construction in the Himalayas collapsed, trapping dozens of workers due to unstable, melting permafrost and excessive rainfall.

Entire villages in Himachal Pradesh, Nepal, and Arunachal Pradesh are being abandoned as the land underneath them becomes unstable.

Glacial meltwater is the primary source of many South Asian rivers. If glaciers continue to retreat at the current rate the Ganga will dry up during summer months, leading to severe water shortages and the Indus and Brahmaputra Rivers will also suffer reduced flows, threatening millions in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh and Salinity levels in coastal Bangladesh will rise, destroying freshwater ecosystems.

Himalayan forests depend on glacial-fed rivers. As river flows decrease, many plant species will perish. Endangered species like the snow leopard, Himalayan brown bear, and black-necked crane are at risk as their habitats shrink.

Even the fisheries in the Ganges and Brahmaputra will collapse due to erratic water temperatures and reduced oxygen levels in the rivers.

As glaciers melt, ancient pathogens trapped in ice for thousands of years may resurface. Scientists warn that melting permafrost in the Arctic and Himalayas could release deadly viruses and bacteria.

Rising temperatures also increase the spread of waterborne diseases like cholera and dysentery due to contaminated water sources.

For millions, the Ganges is not just a river but a sacred entity. Hindu beliefs hold that the

Ganges descended from the heavens to cleanse humanity's sins.

The Gangotri Glacier, the river's source, is thus considered divine. The retreat of the Gangotri Glacier represents not just an environmental disaster but a spiritual crisis.

Many believe that a receding Ganges is a sign of moral and ecological imbalance. The river is celebrated in countless hymns, scriptures, and festivals, yet today, it is polluted, shrinking, and at risk of vanishing. Air pollution is accelerating glacial melting. Black carbon (soot) from vehicles, industries, and crop burning settles on ice, reducing its reflectivity. As a result, glaciers absorb more heat, melting 50 per cent faster than they would naturally.

A study by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) found that black carbon contributes to nearly 30 per cent of the total glacier melting in the Himalayas.

The burning of fossil fuels in India, Nepal, and China is significantly worsening the problem.

Regional and Global Consequences like Hydropower projects in Nepal, which rely on glacial meltwater, are at serious risk due to erratic water flow.

The cities like Kathmandu face severe drinking water shortages, impacting millions and in the Tibetan Plateau, known as the "Water Tower of Asia," is drying up, affecting the Mekong, Yangtze, and Yellow Rivers. China's water security is under threat, leading to geopolitical tensions.

The Ganga-Brahmaputra Delta is experiencing severe water shortages and rising sea levels. Salinity intrusion in coastal areas is making agricultural land unusable, displacing millions.

Glacial melt from the Himalayas contributes to rising sea levels, threatening coastal cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka, and Karachi. The global sea level is rising by 0.13 inches per year, with estimates suggesting a 10-32 inch rise by the end of the century, endangering low-lying islands and coastal megacities.

The melting of Himalayan glaciers is an existential crisis. This is not just about losing ice-it is about losing water security, agriculture, biodiversity, and entire cultures. The crisis threatens the livelihoods of millions, disrupts ancient river systems, and accelerates natural disasters.

If the current trends continue, South Asia faces an unprecedented humanitarian disaster. The melting glaciers of the Himalayas are a warning-one that the world cannot afford to ignore. Urgent global action is needed to mitigate climate change and protect the lifeline of over a billion people before it is too late.

(The writer is a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India. Views expressed are personal)

## The art of stress-free management

Most of the people working in the corporate field would agree to the fact that in the fast-paced world of modern business, stress seems to be an unavoidable companion for every manager. This is mainly because the pressure to meet deadlines, satisfy stakeholders, and navigate through uncertain environments creates a constant state of tension.

And that is why the topic of "Management Without Stress" has become very popular and nowadays it is being discussed in all corporate seminars and plenaries that are held all over the globe. It's a known fact that the world over, corporations spend millions and, in some cases, even billions to find that magical technique of management without any kind of tension.

But still, no company has found that magical technique. Why? After a lot of mind churning and keeping a pragmatic approach, it can be said that the art of tension-free management is mainly about using the 8 M's, 7 P's, 6 S's and lastly 5 T's in an organised way and useful, profitable and peaceful manner and to the maximum possible satisfaction of and justice to all concerned.

The 8 M's are: men, money, materials, machines, marketing, mutual connections, mutual relations and means. The seven P's. These are: productivity and performance, price and profitability, planning ahead of time, pecuniary discipline, publicity, public relations and politeness, punctuality and personal commitments. The six S's are: skills, standards, strategies and speed, salesmanship, systems and structures social good and finally the 5 T's are: time and time sense, technology or techniques, teamwork, treatment of each other, thanks giving habits.

Now, to be a good manager, one has to have a good judgement of men, materials, movements and moments and one has to have the abilities of innovation, intuition, entrepreneurship and enthusiastic efforts. One has also to have the qualities of farsightedness, global thinking, humility, integrity and lastly humour.

Since this is the era of increasing competition, rapid changes in technology and trends and doing things in ever new ways and at a great speed, one must have the abilities of resilience and feel relaxed in the face of all these and many more pressures, else one would lose one's health and happiness and temper and tranquillity.

If one plans, organises and manages the above factors properly and has the essential abilities and qualities, some of which have been mentioned above, one can sustain an atmosphere of growth and can achieve success for himself and all the members of the team, else one is bound to be a failure in life, business and industry or administration and organisational work.

Now, to attain success in achieving the goal of

one's life, we must add 2 M's, P's, S's and T's, to the above list viz: moral values, meditation, purity, peaceful personality, spiritual study, soul-consciousness, truthfulness and trusteeship.

"If we practice Meditation, there would be no mental tension" and that is why it is generally explained to managers and administrators that one must spend some time daily in meditation to do management without tension. But one thing that is being very much neglected today is that, in many places, there is tension without management.

Since there is neither any planning, nor any fixed priorities, neither fit personnel nor any fixed protocol, neither any sincerity nor any spirit of cordiality, neither any impartial judgement nor any mutual understanding, there is a great mental tension. Finally, leading by example is perhaps the most powerful way to promote stress-free management.

Managers who prioritise their well-being, practice effective stress management techniques, and cultivate a positive work culture set the tone for their team members to follow suit.

By modelling healthy behaviours and attitudes, managers can inspire their team members to prioritise self-care, communicate openly, and embrace flexibility, ultimately fostering a more resilient and productive work environment.

It should also be remembered that meditation and management have an intimate connection. One who can manage well can also meditate well and vice versa of it also is true.

So, while there is tension in many places because there is management without meditation, there is tension in many places because there is no proper management at all and, in the disturbed atmosphere, many find it difficult to meditate also. There is thus the need to follow good principles of management to be able to facilitate good and easy meditation at workplaces. This would automatically bring in a stress-free environment and stress-free life for everyone.

A stress-free work environment is crucial in today's corporate world, where managers face relentless pressures.

Adding moral values, meditation, and self-awareness further enhances efficiency. Ultimately, leading by example, fostering open communication, and prioritising well-being create a productive, stress-free atmosphere.

Integrating meditation with management ensures mental clarity and balance, proving that structured leadership and inner peace go hand in hand for lasting success.

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



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

# Palestinian director attacked by Israeli settlers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jerusalem

Israeli settlers beat up one of the Palestinian co-directors of the Oscar-winning documentary film "No Other Land" on Monday in the occupied West Bank before he was detained by the Israeli military, according to two of his fellow directors and other witnesses.

The filmmaker Hamdan Ballal, was one of three Palestinians detained in the village of Susiya, according to attorney Leah Tsemmel.

Police told her they're being held at a military base for medical treatment and she said she has not been able to speak with them.

Basel Adra, another co-director, witnessed the detention and said around two dozen settlers, some masked, some carrying guns, some in Israeli uniform, attacked the village. Soldiers who arrived pointed their guns at the Palestinians, while the settlers continued throwing stones.

"We came back from the Oscars and every day since there is an attack on us. This might be their revenge on us for mak-

ing the movie. It feels like a punishment," Adra said.

The Israeli military said it detained three Palestinians suspected of hurling rocks at forces and one Israeli civilian involved in a "violent confrontation" between Israelis and Palestinians.

The military said it had transferred them to Israeli police for questioning and had evacuated an Israeli citizen from the area to receive medical treatment.

"No Other Land", which won the Oscar this year for best documentary, chronicles the struggle by residents of the Masafer Yatta area to stop the Israeli military from demolishing their villages.

Ballal and Adra, both from Masafer Yatta, made the joint Palestinian-Israeli production with Israeli directors Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor.

The film has won a string of international awards, starting at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2024. It has also drawn ire in Israel and abroad, as when Miami Beach proposed ending the lease of a movie theatre that screened the documentary.



Hamdan Ballal, Palestinian co-director of Oscar-winning documentary 'No Other Land' detained by the Israeli military

Adra said the settlers entered the village on Monday evening, shortly after residents broke the daily fast for the Muslim holy month of Ramzan.

A settler, who according to Adra frequently attacks the village, walked over to Ballal's home with the military, and soldiers shot in the air. Ballal's wife heard her hus-

band being beaten outside and scream "I am dying", according to Adra.

Adra then saw the soldiers lead Ballal, handcuffed and blindfolded, from his home into a military vehicle. Speaking to the AP by phone, he said Ballal's blood was still splattered on the ground outside his own front door.

Some of the details of Adra's account were backed up by another eyewitness, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of reprisal.

A group of 10-20 masked settlers with stones and sticks also assaulted activists with the Center for Jewish Nonviolence, smashing their car windows and slashing tires to make them flee the area, one of the activists at the scene, Josh Kimelman said.

Video provided by the Centre for Jewish Nonviolence showed a masked settler shoving and swinging his fists at two activists in a dusty field at night. The activists rush back to their car as rocks can be heard thudding against the vehicle.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, along with the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem. The Palestinians

want all three for their future state and view settlement growth as a major obstacle to a two-state solution.

Israel has built well over 100 settlements, home to over 500,000 settlers who have Israeli citizenship.

The three Million Palestinians in the West Bank live under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule, with the Western-backed Palestinian Authority administering population centres.

The Israeli military designated Masafer Yatta in the southern West Bank as a live-fire training zone in the 1980s and ordered residents, mostly Arab Bedouin, to be expelled.

Around 1,000 residents have largely remained in place, but soldiers regularly move in to demolish homes, tents, water tanks and olive orchards and Palestinians fear outright expulsion could come at any time.

During the war in Gaza, Israel has killed hundreds of Palestinians in the West Bank in wide-scale military operations, and there has also been a rise in settler attacks on Palestinians.

# US President hits Venezuela oil buyers



President Donald Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

President Donald Trump said he would be placing a 25 per cent tariff on all imports from any country that buys oil or gas from Venezuela, as well as imposing new tariffs on the South American country itself.

In a Truth Social post, Trump said Venezuela has been "very hostile" to the US and countries purchasing oil from it

will be forced to pay the tariff on all their trade to the US starting April 2. The tariffs would most likely add to the taxes facing China, which in 2023 bought 68 per cent of the oil exported by Venezuela, according to a 2024 analysis by the US Energy Information Administration. Spain, India, Russia, Singapore and Vietnam are also among the countries receiving oil from Venezuela, the report shows.

But even the United States, despite its

sanctions against Venezuela, still imports oil from that country. In January, the United States imported 8.6 Million barrels of oil from Venezuela, according to the Census Bureau. And on Monday, the Treasury Department issued an extension for US-based Chevron Corp's lease to pump and export Venezuelan oil until May 27. The extension, known as a general license, exempts the country from economic sanctions and allows it to continue to pump oil.

In February, Trump had announced an end to the Chevron-Venezuela relationship, in what became a financial lifeline for the South American country. Trump's latest threat suggests the administration may be willing to take bolder moves against China in its efforts to rewrite the guidelines of the global economy. The Trump administration has already levied universal 20 per cent tariffs on imports from China as an effort to crackdown on the illicit trade in fentanyl, but another 25 per cent import tax could further escalate tensions between the world's two largest economies.

Trump said Venezuela will face a "secondary" tariff because it is the home to the gang Tren de Aragua. The Trump administration is deporting immigrants that it claims are members of that gang

who illegally crossed into the United States. The US president told reporters during a public portion of a Cabinet meeting Monday that the tariffs related to Venezuela were "long in the making," as he promised forthcoming import taxes on autos and pharmaceutical drugs that he has pledged will lead to more investment and factories inside the United States.

Trump has labelled April 2 as "Liberation Day" based on his still unclear plans to roll out import taxes to match the rates charged by other countries, as well as fully levy 25 per cent tariffs against Mexico and Canada, the two largest US trading partners. The Republican president has also increased his 2018 tariffs on steel and aluminium to 25 per cent for all imports. Trump told reporters on Friday that there would be "flexibility" in his tariffs even as he has opposed granting exemptions to his import taxes.

The US stock market had been climbing on Monday as investors expect the tariffs to be more targeted. Still, the S and P 500 index is down so far this year that a trade war could hinder economic growth and increase inflationary pressures. Trump said his social media post on Monday would serve as notification of this policy to the Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement agencies.

# Trump's portrait to be taken down at Colorado Capitol

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Denver

A painting of Donald Trump hanging with other presidential portraits at the Colorado state Capitol will be taken down after the US president claimed that it was "purposefully distorted", according to a letter.

House Democrats said in a statement that the oil painting would be taken down at the request of Republican leaders in the Legislature. Colorado Republicans raised more than \$10,000 through a GoFundMe account to commission the oil painting, which was unveiled in 2019.

Senate Minority Leader Paul Lundeen, a Republican, said he requested for Trump's portrait to be taken down and replaced by one "that depicts his contemporary likeness". "If the GOP wants to spend time and money on which portrait of Trump hangs in the Capitol, that's up to them," the Democrats said.

The portrait was installed alongside other paintings of US presidents. Before the installation, a prankster placed a picture of Russian President Vladimir Putin near the spot intended for Trump.

Initially, people objected to artist

Sarah Boardman's depiction of Trump as "nonconfrontational" and "thoughtful" in the portrait, according to an interview with Colorado Times Recorder from the time. But in a Sunday night post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said he would prefer no picture at all over the one that hangs in the Colorado Capitol. The Republican lauded a nearby portrait of former President Barack Obama, also by Boardman, saying "he looks wonderful".

"Nobody likes a bad picture or painting of themselves, but the one in Colorado, in the state Capitol, put up by the governor, along with all other presidents, was purposefully distorted to a level that even I, perhaps, have never seen before," Trump wrote. The portraits are not the purview of the Colorado governor's office but the Colorado Building Advisory Committee. The ones up to and including former president Jimmy Carter were donated as a collection. The others were donated by political parties or, more recently, paid for by outside fundraising.

The Legislature's executive committee, made up of both Democratic and Republican leadership, signed a letter directing the removal of Trump's portrait.

# Perpetrators of crimes against peacekeepers must be brought to justice: India at UNSC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

Asserting that peacekeeping is not a zero-risk effort, India told the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that peacekeepers have to contend with the presence of non-state actors, armed groups and terrorists and in an era of complex conflicts and threats, perpetrators of crimes against peacekeepers must be brought to justice.

These remarks were made by India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, during the UN Security Council Open Debate on Advancing Adaptability in UN Peace operations on Monday.

"UN Peacekeepers today have to contend with the presence of non-state actors, armed groups, terrorists, as well as transnational criminal networks. Technological advancements have created new challenges in the form of mis/dis/mal-information and hate speech, new-age weapons, including drones, IEDs etc. These are but a few new realities that peacekeepers are up against," he said.

"Safety and security of peacekeepers must remain paramount. In an era marked by complex conflicts and asymmetric threats, we must ensure that those who risk their lives for peace are adequately protected and that perpetrators of crimes against peacekeepers are brought to justice," he said. He stressed that troop or police-contributing countries need to focus on enhancing the capabilities of their personnel to address emerging challenges to operate effectively in hostile environments.

"India is willing to curate and offer courses that address specific demands of

modern peacekeeping at our Centre for UN Peacekeeping (CUNPK), which has been training national and international peacekeepers for over two decades," he added. Underlining that the use of advanced surveillance, communication and data analytic tools should be integrated into peacekeeping operations to improve situational awareness and rapid response capabilities, Harish said that India stands ready to share its expertise as a tech-

**India ranks among the top contributors to UN peacekeeping missions with 5,384 personnel, including 153 women, across 10 missions as of September 2024. Nearly 180 Indian peacekeepers have made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty**

nology enabler in this regard.

He said that countering modern challenges to peacekeeping demands that Peacekeeping Missions are adequately funded and resourced. Resources need to be commensurate with the mandate.

"The current state of uncertainty over funding and the mandate-resource mismatch is neither sustainable nor comforting nor desirable, particularly for countries from the Global South who contribute the lion's share of troops."

Earlier this month, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced the "UN80 Initiative" aimed at improving efficiencies at the 80-year-old world organisation and making it more cost-effective

as he voiced concern over shrinking resources and liquidity crisis amid an environment of "uncertainty and unpredictability".

The UN General Assembly approved a \$3.72 Billion budget for the United Nations for 2025. The US is the single largest financial contributor to the UN, paying 22 per cent of the regular budget and 27 per cent of the peacekeeping budget. The approved budget for UN Peacekeeping operations for the fiscal year 1 July 2024 - 30 June 2025 is \$5.6 Billion and at 26.95 per cent, the US is largest contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

US President Donald Trump, in his second term in the White House, had announced that America will withdraw from and end funding to certain UN organisations. India ranks among the top contributors to UN peacekeeping missions with 5,384 personnel, including 153 women, across 10 missions as of September 2024. Nearly 180 Indian peacekeepers have made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty, the highest number by far from any troop-contributing country.

Harish said that adapting peace operations to new realities cannot happen unless those on ground, the troop-police-contributing countries, are made part of the mandate formulation process at every stage. He further said that the rationalisation of peacekeeping missions is essential for the efficient allocation of resources.

"Redundant missions that continue on political life support without operational rationale only for propaganda purposes divert resources from urgently required peacekeeping missions and undermine the credibility of the UN."

# Wildfires force evacuation in Andong

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

Officials in the South Korean city of Andong on Tuesday advised residents to evacuate to safe areas as firefighters struggled to contain wildfires that have ravaged southern regions since last week, forcing thousands to flee and destroying dozens of structures, including a 1,300-year-old Buddhist temple.

Thousands of firefighters in South Korea were battling at least nine wildfires across the country as of Tuesday afternoon, after the blazes fuelled by dry winds burned more than 36,300 acres of land in the past five days.

Officials in Andong, a city in the country's southeast, and the nearby town of Uiseong ordered residents in several villages to evacuate to temporary shelters, including an elementary school and indoor gymnasium, as a blaze that began in Uiseong continued to spread from strong winds.

The blaze in Uiseong destroyed Gounsa, a Buddhist temple built in the seventh century, according to officials from the Korea Heritage Service.

There were no immediate reports of injuries, and some of the temple's national treasures, including a stone Buddha statue, were evacuated before the fire reached the wooden buildings. The Korea Forest Service raised its wildfire warning to the highest "serious" level nationwide, requiring local governments to allocate a larger workforce for emergency response, tighten entry restrictions for forests and parks, and recommend that military units withhold live-fire exercises.

South Korean officials said earlier on Tuesday that firefighters had extinguished most of the flames from the largest



Houses burn in a village after being engulfed by a wildfire fueled by strong winds in Uiseong, South Korea

wildfires in the country's southern regions, including Uiseong, the neighbouring town of Sancheong, and Ulsan city. However, the ongoing dry and windy weather now appears to be causing setbacks.

Four firefighters and government workers were killed in Sancheong on Saturday after being trapped by fast-moving flames driven by strong winds.

At least 11 other people have been injured by wildfires around the country since last Friday that forced more than 5,400 to evacuate from their homes and damaged or destroyed more than 150 buildings, according to the Ministry of the Interior and Safety.

The national government designated

the hardest-hit south eastern regions as disaster zones to focus resources and accelerate recovery efforts.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, serving as the country's acting leader following President Yoon Suk Yeol's impeachment over a December martial law decree, vowed an all-out effort to contain the wildfires during a government meeting on Tuesday.

He also urged public vigilance as dry spring weather persists.

Government officials suspect that several of the recent wildfires, including those in Uiseong and Ulsan, were caused by human error, possibly due to the use of fire to clear overgrown grass in family tombs or sparks from welding work.

# United States-Russia negotiations on Ukraine likely to continue, says Kremlin official

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

Further contacts between United States (US) and Russian officials on achieving a proposed ceasefire in Ukraine are likely to follow a round of talks Monday, a Kremlin official said on Tuesday, but no concrete plans have yet been made. The American and Russian negotiators held talks throughout the day on Monday in the capital of Saudi Arabia to hammer out details on a partial pause in the three-year-old war in Ukraine, a day after US officials held separate talks in Riyadh with a team from Kyiv.

It has been a struggle to reach even a limited, 30-day ceasefire, which Moscow and Kyiv agreed to in principle last week with both sides continuing to attack each

other with drones and missiles and disagreement over what kinds of targets would be included in a pause on strikes.

On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the outcome of the talks in Riyadh "has been reported in the capitals" and was currently being "analysed" by Moscow and Washington, but that the Kremlin has no plans to release any details of what was discussed to the public.

"We are talking about technical negotiations, negotiations with immersion in details," Peskov said, adding that while there are currently no plans for US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin to speak, such a conversation could be quickly organised if the need arises. "There is an understand-

**The American and Russian negotiators held talks on Monday in capital of Saudi Arabia to hammer out details on a partial pause in the three-year-old war in Ukraine**

ing that the contacts will continue, but there is nothing concrete at the moment," Peskov said. He added that there are no plans to hold a three-way meeting between Russia, the US and Ukraine.

Moscow and Kyiv have taken differing interpretations of what a possible partial ceasefire would look like, even after Trump spoke with the leaders of both

countries to advance a pause. While the White House said a partial ceasefire would include ending attacks on "energy and infrastructure", the Kremlin declared that the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he would also like to see sites like railways and ports protected.

Senior Russian lawmaker Grigory Karasin, who took part in the Russia-United States talks in Riyadh on Monday, told Russian state news agency RIA Novosti that the conversation was "very interesting, difficult, but quite constructive". "We were at it all day from morning until late at night," Karasin was quoted by the agency as saying on Tuesday. Speaking about the war in Ukraine,

Karasin said Moscow's and Washington's positions don't always align, but that the two parties will continue to look for ways to cooperate, as there is now an understanding that cooperation is necessary to resolve the conflict.

The lawmaker added that talks between expert groups from Russia and the United States could continue.

**Injuries rise in missile strike on Ukrainian city**

The number of people injured Monday in a Russian missile strike on the centre of the Ukrainian city of Sumy rose to 101 people including 23 children, according to the Sumy regional administration. The strike on Sumy, across the border from Russia's Kursk region which was partially

occupied by Ukraine since August, hit residential buildings and a school, which had to be evacuated due to the attack.

Meanwhile, Russian forces launched one ballistic missile and 139 long-range strike and decoy drones into Ukraine overnight, according to the Ukrainian air force. Those attacks affected seven regions of Ukraine. Two people were injured after drone debris fell on a warehouse in the Poltava region, administration head Volodymyr Kohut wrote on Telegram Tuesday, while two people were injured outside the city of Zaporizhzhia, according to the head of the region.

One man suffered injuries after a Russian drone attack in Kherson, city administration head Roman Mrochko wrote on Telegram on Tuesday.

# UK sanctions Sri Lankans for 2009 war abuses

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

The United Kingdom (UK) has imposed sanctions on four Sri Lankans, including three former military commanders who led the campaign that crushed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009, for human rights violations.

A UK foreign office statement on Monday said General Shavendra Silva, former head of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces,

Wasantha Karannagoda, former Navy Commander, and Jagath Jayasuriya, former Commander of the Sri Lankan Army, were among those sanctioned and subjected to UK travel bans and asset freezes.

The statement said the UK government also sanctioned Vinyagamurthy Muralidaran, the deputy leader of the LTTE who later turned a rebel of the group and became a deputy minister in the national parliament.

"The UK government has imposed

sanctions on 4 individuals responsible for serious human rights abuses and violations during the Sri Lanka civil war, including extrajudicial killings, torture and or perpetration of sexual violence," the statement said. Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, David Lammy, said: "The UK government is committed to human rights in Sri Lanka, including seeking accountability for human rights violations and abuses which took place during the civil war, and which

continues to have an impact on communities today." He said the sanctions would ensure that those responsible for past human rights violations and abuses were held accountable. "The UK government looks forward to working with the new Sri Lankan government to improve human rights in Sri Lanka, and welcomes their commitments on national unity," Lammy said. The UK government's sanctions on General Silva follow a similar action against him by the US State Department

in 2020. In 2023, Canada sanctioned the two former presidents, Mahinda and Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The two Rajapaksa brothers led the military campaign which crushed the LTTE, ending their three decades of armed struggle to create a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east regions. General Silva and Karannagoda were key commanders in the three-year campaign. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ran a parallel state in the north and east regions of Sri Lanka in their

bid to set up a separate homeland for the minority Tamils claiming discrimination at the hands of the Sinhalese.

On May 18, 2009, the Sri Lankan Army declared victory with the discovery of the body of the dreaded LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. According to Sri Lankan government figures, over 20,000 people are missing due to various conflicts, including the three-decade war with Tamil militants in the north and east, which claimed at least 100,000 lives.



Rescue authorities inspect a sinkhole at an intersection in Seoul, South Korea

# Motorcyclist found dead in Seoul sinkhole tragedy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

A motorcyclist who fell into a cavernous sinkhole that opened on a Seoul street was found dead after an overnight search, officials in South Korea's capital said on Tuesday.

The roughly 20-metre-wide, the 20-metre-deep sinkhole appeared at an intersection in the Myeongil-dong neighbourhood in eastern Seoul on Monday afternoon, swallowing the motorcyclist and injuring a woman whose van was passing over the site, according to safety and emergency offices.

The motorcyclist, who was in his 30s, was found before noon on Tuesday, emergency

officer Kim Chang Seob told a televised briefing.

Kim said the man was found wearing a helmet and motorcycle boots, and that rescue workers found his Japanese-made motorcycle and mobile phone before reaching his body. Kim said rescuers used excavators, shovels and other equipment to find him.

Kim said the injured woman didn't fall into the sinkhole and she sustained minor injuries. The cause of the sinkhole was under investigation.

Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon visited the site on Monday night and asked authorities to find why the sinkhole happened and prevent recurrences of similar incidents.

# Awaiting India's response to Yunus-Modi meeting: Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh on Tuesday said it was awaiting a response from India to its proposal for a meeting between Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit in Bangkok next week.

"From our side, we are fully ready for the meeting. Now, we await a positive response from India," Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin said at a media briefing here, outlining the Chief Adviser's forthcoming visits to China and Thailand.

Dhaka earlier sent a letter to India proposing a meeting between Yunus and Modi amid a strained bilateral relation after the August 5, 2024 regime change in Bangladesh when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 16-year Awami League regime was toppled and she virtually fled to India.

Modi and Yunus are likely to visit Thailand to attend the BIMSTEC summit. Dhaka has proposed their meeting on the sidelines of the event. Jashim Uddin acknowledged the existing "strain" in bilateral relations but said this could be overcome if a bilateral meeting is held between the two leaders.

Last week in Delhi, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said he had no update on any planned meeting between the two leaders.

with Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visit during which the trans-border Teesta River reservoir issue might be discussed.

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

Name of Work and its location: 30-Elect-73-T-2024-25-E3 Comprehensive AMC of Johnson make lifts installed at NDLS (02 Nos. PF No.2/3 & 10/11 FOB 2), DEE(01 No. PF No.1), DSA(02 Nos. PF No.2/3 & 4) and HN2M (01 No. PF No.2/3) stations over Delhi Division, Total 06 Nos. For three years.

Approx cost of the works in: Rs. 19.80 lacs

Address of the office: Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.

Earnest Money: Rs. 39200.00

Date & time of submission of tender: 30.04.2025, 12.00 Hrs.

Opening of tender: 30.04.2025, 12.00 Hrs.

Website & notice board: www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 923/25

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**  
**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

Name of work and its location: 30-Elect-71-T-2024-25-E3 Comprehensive AMC of Johnson make escalators installed over Delhi Division (02 Nos. at DSA PF No.3, 02 Nos. at NDLS PF No. 14-15 FOB-III) for three years.

Approx cost of the works in: Rs. 23.10 lacs

Address of the office: Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.

Earnest Money: Rs. 46200.00

Date & time of submission of tender: 30.04.2025, 12.00 Hrs.

Opening of tender: 30.04.2025, 12.00 Hrs.

Website & notice board: www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 924/2025

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

**Public Notice regarding cancellation of property**

This Public Notice is from M/S JKG Construction Pvt Ltd for Ms Payal D/O Mr N K Bisht and Mrs Shashi Bisht W/O Mr N K Bisht bearing unit no. D-603 at JKG Palm Court, Plot No. GH-01D, Sector 16C, Greater Noida West, Uttar Pradesh-201009.

We have forfeited possession of your allotted unit in May 2021, basis which we have shared final demand notice of unit D-603 on 13.12.2021, 29.06.2022, 15.10.2022, 02.06.2023 and 15.01.2025 but you failed to make the payment as per final demand notice. Hence we have cancelled your allotted unit via cancellation intimation letter dated 07.02.2025. Neither got any response from your end nor we have received any payment so far which tantamount to your tacit acceptance that you are no more interested in taking possession of the said flat.

Hence your allotted flat D-603 is being cancelled on 20.02.2025, as such the allotment has become null & void and you have no claim on the dwelling unit and your deposited amount shall be refunded as per BBA Claus.

For M/S JKG Construction Pvt Ltd

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Known to all that my client Sh. Gaurav Sh. Bantu Sharma and Sh. Arun purchase property from Smt. Geeta Bansal vide Notarized G.P.A. and will dated 30.12.2024 Now Sh. Gaurav, Sh. Bantu Sharma and Sh. Arun wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

**AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION**  
Ch. No. 769 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75  
Mobile :- 9899013918

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Be it known to all that I, R. P. Ghildiyal S/O Sh. Rameshwar Prasad R/o Flat No. 93, Venus Apartments Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110087 have applied for Freehold Conversion of my Flat No. 93 Venus Apartments Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-87. Original Share Certificate No. 30, Block No. D76 of the above flat is lost. Report vide LR No. 2633685 Dated 03/03/2025 has been lodged. Any person(s) claiming right, interest, having any objection or found the original document, please contact above named person at phone No. 997198345 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice.

Person claiming any right, interest, objections this property can inform or write to Dy. Director (G+H) C Block, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

To be known to all that I, Raksh Kumar, S/O Krishna Lal Arora, R/o Flat No. 152, Sec-A, Pkt B&C, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070. The Original Documents i.e Demand Letter, Possession Letter, nor for Electricity Connection, Possession Slip, Bank Challan and Other Documents of the Shop No. 1, Sec-A, Pkt-C, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070, of vide DDA file no 23/7/97/IMP. Has been Lost/Misplaced somewhere and not traceable my best efforts. An FIR of this has been lodged in Police Station Crime Branch, Delhi vide LR No. 2521612025 on 24/07/2025. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 971773433. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to Dy. Director, Commercial Estate or Director Commercial Estate, A-Block, 2nd Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110023.

**PROVISION OF SMART ENERGY METERING SYSTEMS WITH CASHLESS/ ONLINE PAYMENT FACILITY**

**E-Tender Notice No. : EL/29/05-2025/K/1386; dated: 18-03-2025.** E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Tender No: 05\_2025; Name of work: Provision of Smart Energy Metering Systems with Facility of Cashless Payment/Online Payment over Katihar Division (Phase-IV).** Tender Value: ₹ 4,33,05,074/-; Earnest Money: ₹ 3,66,600/-; E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs on 15-04-2025 and Opened at 15:30 hrs on 15-04-2025. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 15-04-2025 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
"Serving Customers with a smile"

**CHANGE OF NAME**

I, hereto known as Raj Sachdeva w/o. Sh. Narinder Kumar Sachdeva, R/o. BK-2/5, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-110088 changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Raj Rani for all future purposes.

PD(1742)A  
I, JC-702167P Sub Maj(Pharm) Ganesh Singh Bora, R/o- Vill-Ladhra, PO- Merthi, Teh-Didihat, Distt- Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand), declare that in my service documents, my mother's name is wrongly written as Hari Devi, whereas her correct name is Haruli Devi, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(1744)C  
I, JC-708629M Nb/Sub Sushil Kumar Yadav, R/o- Vill- Manpur, Post- Nawabganj, Dist- Unnao, U.P- 209859 declare that Vandana Singh is my wife, in my service document's her name is wrongly written as Vandana Singh Yadav whereas her correct name is Vandana Singh, vide affidavit dated 25/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1745)C  
I, Kamal W/o Ramesh Kumar R/O House No-38, Block-D, Vipul World, Sector- 48, Gurugram, Haryana-122018 have changed my name to Kamal Devi for all future purposes.

PD(1746)A

**CHANGE OF NAME**

I, Susma Singh W/o Shri Amit Kumar Singh R/o-Flat No. 10037 Tower Rose Woods 10th Floor, Mahagun Mywoods Sector-16C, Gaur City - 2, Noida West District Gautam budh nagar declare that my name has been mentioned in my daughter Shivangi's High School marksheet as Priyanka Singh instead of Susma Singh. My correct name is Susma Singh.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Known to all that my client (1) Sh. Amit Kumar, (2) Sh. Dabu Singh & (3) Sh. Gaurav Rawat owner of the PLOT NO. 129 AREA 42 SQ YARDS KHASRA NO. 3/14, AND 3/15, RAZAPUR KHURD, VIKAS VIHAR (WEST) UTTAM NAGAR NEW DELHI-110059 and (1) Sh. Amit Kumar, (2) Sh. Dabu Singh & (3) Sh. Gaurav Rawat purchase property from Smt. Madhu Bala vide Notarized G.P.A. and will dated 21.12.2023 New (1) Sh. Amit Kumar, (2) Sh. Dabu Singh & (3) Sh. Gaurav Rawat wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

**AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION**  
Ch. No. 769 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75  
Mobile :- 9899013918

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Be it known to all that my Client Namey Singh S/o Mr. Chandra Pal Singh and Mrs. Sharda Devi, W/o Mr. Ram Singh, R/o G-127, Sangam Vihar, Mehrauli, South Delhi-110062, have discovered their Son Kapil, S/o Mr. Ram Singh, R/o G-127, Sangam Vihar, Delhi, South Delhi-110062, from all their movable and immovable properties and have severed relations relationships with him due to his disobedience. They have debarred him from inheriting their properties movable and immovable. My clients shall not be responsible for any of his acts, deeds and things. Henceforth they shall not be responsible for any of the acts and deeds of their above-named son and anyone dealing with him, in any manner, shall be deemed as his own responsibility.

**Lovedeep Raghav (Advocate)**  
Enroll. No. D/8497/2018

**STATE CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION 'A' BLOCK 1ST FLOOR, VIKAS BHAWAN, I.P. ESTATE, NEW DELHI-110022**

No.-C-200/22 DATED 27/02/2025  
**IN THE MATTER OF: AIRKOMM MEDIA PVT LTD.....COMPLAINANT VERSUS STELLANTS ICT INDIA.....OPPOSITE PARTY(IES)**

3. SAHL AUTOMOBILE PVT LTD. E-5657, MAIN ROHTAK ROAD, INDUSTRIAL AREA, SONEPAT-131001

4. LANDIMAR JEEP-GURGAON G-4 THE SOLITAIRE PLAZA B1, MEHRAULI GURGAON ROAD, GURGAON, HARYANA-120002

Whereas a complaint has been made against you (Copy Enclosed) before this Commission. The claim is stated in the Complaint served with this summons.

In order to defend against this complaint, you must respond to the complaint by filing an Answer (writing statement) stating your defense in writing and serving copy to the complainant within a period of 30 days (Thirty days), as provided under Section 38 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, after the service of this summons, excluding the day of service.

You are further summoned to appear in this Commission in person or by a pleader or an authorized agent duly instructed and able to answer all the material question in relation to the complaint on 28/03/2025 at 10:30 a.m. sharp.

Please take note that default of your appearance on the said date the matter will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of this Commission on this 27/02/2025

Registrar  
State Commission

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Be it known to all that, my clients Mr. Ram Singh S/o Mr. Chandra Pal Singh and Mrs. Sharda Devi, W/o Mr. Ram Singh, R/o G-127, Sangam Vihar, Mehrauli, South Delhi-110062, have discovered their Son Kapil, S/o Mr. Ram Singh, R/o G-127, Sangam Vihar, Delhi, South Delhi-110062, from all their movable and immovable properties and have severed relations relationships with him due to his disobedience. They have debarred him from inheriting their properties movable and immovable. My clients shall not be responsible for any of his acts, deeds and things. Henceforth they shall not be responsible for any of the acts and deeds of their above-named son and anyone dealing with him, in any manner, shall be deemed as his own responsibility.

**Lovedeep Raghav (Advocate)**  
Enroll. No. D/8497/2018

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**

Tender Notice	
Name of Work and its location:	30-Elect-73-T-2024-25-E3 Comprehensive AMC of KONE make lifts installed at Railway Officers Colony, Chelmsford Road, New Delhi for three years.
Approx cost of the works in:	₹ 15.16 lacs
Address of the Office:	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi
Earnest Money:	Rs. 30300.00
Date & time of submission of tender:	30.04.2025, 12.00 Hrs
Opening of tender:	30.04.2025, 12.00 Hrs
Website & notice board:	www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi
Serving Customers With A Smile 925/2025	

**BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, New Delhi**

**TENDER NOTICE** Date: 25.03.2025

Sealed tenders under two parts (Un priced & priced) are invite for the supply of following materials from all bidders:-

Sl. No.	Item Description	Estimated Cost (₹)	Cost of EMD (₹)	Due Date & Time of Submission	Date & Time of Opening
1	CMC/BR/25-26/ FK/PR/RJ/1264	SUPPLY OF SF6 FREE RMU WITH FRTU IN BRPL	1.10 Crores	15-04-2025 15:00 HRS	15-04-2025 15:30 HRS

Cost of each Tender Document :- ₹ 1180/-

For any query call on 011-49107235 or e-mail on [BidEuction@relaincoda.com](mailto:BidEuction@relaincoda.com)

For details in respect of Equipment/BOM/Services, Qualifying requirements, Terms & conditions, purchase/submission of tender documents etc. please visit our website [www.bsesdelhi.com](http://www.bsesdelhi.com)

Head (Contracts & Materials)  
Regd. Off.: BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, BSES Bhawan, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019 | Corporate Identification No.: U40109DL2001PL116127  
Telephone No.: +91 11 4910 7235 | Website: [www.bsesdelhi.com](http://www.bsesdelhi.com)

**Ministry of Women and Child Development Govt. of India**

**NOTICE**

This is for the information of the General Public that the process of receiving applications for the PRADHAN MANTRI RASHTRIYA BAL PURASKAR (PMRBP) will commence on 01.04.2025 on the National Awards Portal (<https://awards.gov.in>). The awards are given to children who deserve recognition at the national level in the fields of Bravery, Sports, Social Service, Science & Technology, Environment, and Arts & Culture.

Any child above the age of 5 years and not exceeding 18 years (as on 31st July, 2025), who is an Indian Citizen and residing in India is eligible for the awards.

Nominations from any citizen will be received only through the National Awards Portal on <https://awards.gov.in>. Self-nomination & recommendations for the awards, both shall be considered. The last date for receipt of online applications is 31.07.2025

For more details, please visit the National Awards Portal (<https://awards.gov.in>).

CBC 46101/11/0013/2425

**ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOL, SRINAGAR**  
**BB, CANTT, BATWARA (J&K)- 190004**  
Website: [www.apssrinagar.co.in](http://www.apssrinagar.co.in)

**TENDER NOTICE**

1. On behalf of the Chairman APS, Srinagar sealed two bid quotations separately i.e Technical and Commercial bids are hereby invited from experienced vendors for supplying and installation of five units of one and half ton Hot and Cold Air Conditioner in the classrooms of Foundation Wing Army Public School, BB Cantt, Srinagar alongwith stabilizer and full electric wiring complete job duly fitted with main electric board of school.

2. The vendors are requested to visit the site mandatory before submitting their quotation in order to see the actual site and scope of work for the electric fitting work & complete installation process. The school reserves the right to cancel the call for quotation without assigning any reason. The last date for submission of quotations is 04 Apr 2025. For any query contact during all working days between 10.00 A.M. to 02.00 P.M at 0194-2468224.

Sd/- Principal

**CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED** Registered Office: W2/14, 1st Floor, West Patel Nagar, Delhi, 110008

**E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(e) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002**

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/ charged to the **Clix Housing Finance Limited (CLIX)** (Secured Creditors), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of **Clix Housing Finance Limited (CLIX)**, Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis on 11.04.2025, for recovery of amount as mentioned below, due to the Secured Creditors from following Borrower(s), Guarantor(s) and Corporate Guarantor(s). The reserve price and earnest money to be deposited is mentioned below respectively

Name of Borrower, Co-Borrower/ Guarantor(s) with addresses	Description & Owner(s) of Properties
1. MOHD NASIR S/O BUNDI KHAN, 2. MRS. ISRAT JAHAN W/O MOHD NASIR, BOTH RESIDING AT- KHASRA NO. 157 GALI NO.9, SHAHEED BHAGAT COLONY NORTH DELHI, DELHI-110094, ALSO AT- D-298, GALI NO.7, MUKUND VIHAR 30 FT ROAD, KARAWAL NAGAR NEW DELHI-110094, ALSO AT- C-A-4, GROUND FLOOR-2, LIC FRONT SIDE RAIL VIHAR, LONI, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH, ALSO AT- FLAT NO. FF-2 (FIRST FLOOR) REAR SIDE, LIC PLOT NO. B-138 IS 300 SQUARE FEET, LOCATED IN RESIDENTIAL COLONY RAIL VIHAR VILLAGE SADULLABAD PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, DELHI-110094, LOAN NO. - AC2019011136167 (Along with future interest and charges accruing after 28.03.2024 till the total realization of the loan amount)	ALL THOSE PIECE AND PARCEL OF ONE KITA RESIDENTIAL PLOT NO. A-4 KHASRA NO. 211 IN FLAT NO. GF 2 GROUND FLOOR (LIG) WITHOUT ROOF RIGHT AREA 315 SQUARE FEET I.E. 29.26 SQUARE METERS SITUATED IN RAIL VIHAR HABDAST VILLAGE SADULLABAD TEHSIL LONI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD (COMPLETE DETAILS OF WHOSE CONSTRUCTION IS ATTACHED MAP) THE ABOVE FLAT IS SITUATED AT A DISTANCE OF MORE THAN 200 METERS FROM THE MAIN ROAD. THE SAID FLAT HAS ONE BEDROOM, ONE DRAWING ROOM, ONE KITCHEN AND BATHROOM, AND THE LIVING ROOM IS 200 METERS.
Reserve Price (RP) & EMD Amount 10% of the Reserve Price & Incremental Amount	Recovery Amount as per Demand Notice
Rs. 6,50,000/- & Rs. 65,000/- & Rs. 10,000/-	Rs. 9,81,465.97/- as on 28.03.2023
Date & Time of On-Site Inspection of Property	Date & Time of E-Auction with unlimited extensions of 5 Minutes each
10.04.2025 From 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	11.04.2025 - 10 Am to 12 Pm
1. VIPNANDER PRATAP S/O SURJAN SINGH PLOT NO. 2/9, GROUND FLOOR, RAMA VIHAR, KARNAL VILLAGE DELHI-110086, ALSO AT- PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, ALSO AT- MALLIKA GRAPHICS SHOP NO.11 RISAL COMPLEX SHIVA MARKET REAR SIDE, LIC (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) IS II, PTAMPURA NEW DELHI-110034, ALSO AT- PLOT NO.50A, BLOCK-B, BUDH VIHAR, VEER SINGH COLONY VILLAGE-POOTHBUILT ON PLOT NO. B-138, WHOSE AREA IS KALAN, SULTANPURI BLOCK, NORTH WEST, DELHI-110086, 2. SHALU W/O VIPNANDER PRATAP PLOT NO.2/9, GROUND FLOOR, 27.87 SQUARE METERS, WHOSE SUPER AREA IS 300 SQUARE FEET, LOCATED IN RESIDENTIAL COLONY RAIL VIHAR VILLAGE SADULLABAD PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, ALSO AT: H-146 RESIDENTIAL COLONY RAIL VIHAR VILLAGE SHARMA COLONY, PHASE-2 BUDH VIHAR, SULTANPURI, C-BLOCK NORTH DELHI, DELHI-110086 LOAN NO. - AC2019041877676 (Along with future interest and charges accruing after 15.04.2024 till the total realization of the loan amount)	ALL THOSE PIECE AND PARCEL OF ONE KITA RESIDENTIAL PLOT NO. 2/9, GROUND FLOOR, RAMA VIHAR, KARNAL VILLAGE DELHI-110086, ALSO AT- PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, ALSO AT- MALLIKA GRAPHICS SHOP NO.11 RISAL COMPLEX SHIVA MARKET REAR SIDE, LIC (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS) IS II, PTAMPURA NEW DELHI-110034, ALSO AT- PLOT NO.50A, BLOCK-B, BUDH VIHAR, VEER SINGH COLONY VILLAGE-POOTHBUILT ON PLOT NO. B-138, WHOSE AREA IS KALAN, SULTANPURI BLOCK, NORTH WEST, DELHI-110086, 2. SHALU W/O VIPNANDER PRATAP PLOT NO.2/9, GROUND FLOOR, 27.87 SQUARE METERS, WHOSE SUPER AREA IS 300 SQUARE FEET, LOCATED IN RESIDENTIAL COLONY RAIL VIHAR VILLAGE SADULLABAD PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, ALSO AT: H-146 RESIDENTIAL COLONY RAIL VIHAR VILLAGE SHARMA COLONY, PHASE-2 BUDH VIHAR, SULTANPURI, C-BLOCK NORTH DELHI, DELHI-110086 LOAN NO. - AC2019041877676 (Along with future interest and charges accruing after 15.04.2024 till the total realization of the loan amount)
Reserve Price (RP) & EMD Amount 10% of the Reserve Price & Incremental Amount	Recovery Amount as per Demand Notice
Rs. 5,50,000/- & Rs. 55,000/- & Rs. 10,000/-	Rs. 85,769.73/- as on 15-Apr-2024
Date & Time of On-Site Inspection of Property	Date & Time of E-Auction with unlimited extensions of 5 Minutes each
10.04.2025 From 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	11.04.2025 - 10 Am to 12 Pm

EMD amount shall be remitted through NEFT/RTGS/Funds Transfer in favour of "Clix Housing Finance Limited", Account No. 341905000653, ICICI BANK, IFSC-ICICI0003419. Last date for deposit of EMD and uploading Bid Documents: 10-04-2025 Till 12.00 PM at [www.bankauctions.com](http://www.bankauctions.com)

The balance 25% of final purchase price minus EMD Amount shall be deposited by the successful bidder, later in the next working day by way of RTGS/ NEFT in the E-Auction account maintained by the Authorized Officer. To the best of knowledge and information of the Authorized Officer, there is no encumbrance on the properties. However, the intending bidders should make their own independent inquiries regarding the encumbrances, title of properties put on auction and claims/rights / dues/ affecting the properties, prior to submitting their bid, in this regard, the a-Auction advertisement does not constitute and will not be deemed to constitute any commitment or any representation of Clix. For any details with respect to any help, procedure and on the training in respect of auction process please visit [www.bankauctions.com](http://www.bankauctions.com) and E-mail ID - [delhi@clixindia.com](mailto:delhi@clixindia.com). For any details regarding the property interest, please contact Mr. Amit Aggarwal (917792407), Mr. Amit Aggarwal (917792407), it may please be noted that in case of any discrepancy/ inconsistency between auctions notices published in English and in Hindi then the contents of the notices published in English shall prevail. The Authorized Officer/ Secured Creditor shall not be responsible in any way for any third party claims/ rights/ dues. The sale shall be subject to rules/ conditions prescribed under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and the SARFAESI Act, 2002.

Place : Ghaziabad, Date: 26.03.2025

Authorized Officer, Clix Housing Finance Limited

**कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, भोपाल**  
केन्द्रीय कर्मशाला (मैके. शाखा)  
द्वितीय निविदा सूचना

क्र. 239/के.कर्म./2025 भोपाल, दिनांक 25.03.2025

नगर निगम भोपाल केन्द्रीय कर्मशाला के द्वारा 125 कुशल वाहन चालक से सेवाएं लिये जाने हेतु ऑनलाईन निविदा निम्नानुसार आमंत्रित की जाती है।

क्र.	निविदा क्र.	सामान का विवरण	अनुमानित लागत	घरोर राशि	निविदा फार्म का मूल्य	प्रदाय अवधि
1.	2024 UAD 382045_2	Engagement of Agency For Deployment Of Mobility Resources (Second Call)	32313288/-	161566/-	15000/-	मौज अनुसार

BID SUBMISSION END DATE- 17.04.2025 TIME- 05:30 PM  
BID OPENING DATE- 08.04.2025 TIME- 05:30 PM

निविदा से संबंधित अन्य विस्तृत जानकारी वेबसाइट [mptenders.gov.in](http://mptenders.gov.in) पर देखी एवं केन्द्रीय कर्मशाला (मैकेनिकल) से कार्यालयीन समय में प्राप्त की जा सकती है।

अपर आयुक्त, परिवहन शाखा,  
नगर निगम भोपाल

नि.क्र. 1570/024/025

# India losing three per cent of GDP annually: Gadkari

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India is losing three per cent of its GDP due to around five lakh road accidents annually in the country, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Tuesday.

The Minister for Road, Transport and Highways made the remarks while addressing AMCHAM's Technology Interventions For Road Safety: US-India Partnership in the national capital.

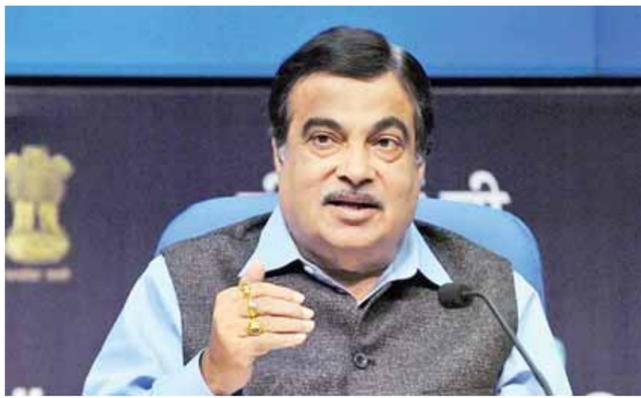
The most important problem for the country is road accidents, Gadkari said, noting that every year India sees 4,80,000 accidents, which lead to 1,88,000 deaths of people aged between 18 and 45 years.

The minister raised concerns that 10,000 deaths are of children below 18 years.

Gadkari said, "It is one of the major public health issue and the most important thing is also, we are losing three per cent of GDP because of road accidents."

The Union minister cited poor detailed project reports (DPRs) as one of the key reasons for accidents.

"DPR consultants are the main culprits who are responsible for the road accidents. (They prepare DPRs) sometimes because



Union Minister Nitin Gadkari

PIONEER PHOTO

of cost saving, other different reasons and non-serious approach," he said.

Gadkari further said that to promote helping of accident victims, the government has decided to provide an award of ₹25,000. "We have taken the decision that any third person who is going to

help to the victim of an accident, we will give him an award of ₹25,000.

Also, if any patient, by accident or after accident, is admitted to any hospital, we can give him ₹1,50,000 maximum or seven years expenditure for his treatment from the doctor," he said.

# Government recovers ₹416 crore under PM-KISAN scheme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government has recovered ₹416 crore from ineligible farmers under the flagship scheme PM-KISAN since its launch in 2019, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan told Lok Sabha on Tuesday. Chouhan, in a written reply, said the central government has disbursed over ₹ 3.68 Lakh Crore to farmers in 19 installments since inception.

Under the PM-KISAN scheme, launched in February 2019, a financial benefit of ₹6,000 per year is transferred in three equal instalments, into the Aadhaar-seeded bank accounts of farmers through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode. "An amount of ₹416 Crore has been recovered from the ineligible beneficiaries so far across the country," he said. The minister explained that the PM-KISAN scheme initially started on a trust-based system, where beneficiaries were registered by the states on a self-certification basis.

Initially, Aadhaar seeding was also relaxed for some of the states, he said.

Later on, to address this, several technological interventions were introduced, including integration with PFMS, UIDAI, and the Income Tax Department.

In order to ensure that benefits are released only to the eligible beneficiaries, land seeding, Aadhaar-based payment and eKYC have been made mandatory. Chouhan said the benefits of the farmers, who did not meet these mandatory criteria, were stopped. "As and when these farmers complete their mandatory requirements, they will receive the benefits of the scheme along with their due installments, if any," he said.

Further, states and Union Territories have been mandated to recover any amount transferred to ineligible farmers marked due to higher income groups such as income tax payees, employees of PSUs, state and central government, Constitutional post holders, etc.

The minister informed that Aadhaar is one of the key parameters for establishing identity of the farmers in scheme and the benefits of the scheme are transferred to only Aadhaar authenticated farmers. At present, 100 per cent of PM KISAN beneficiaries' database is Aadhaar-seeded, authenticated and e-KYC verified. From the 15th installment cycle of the scheme (August 2023 - November 2023), Aadhaar-based e-KYC has also been made mandatory under the scheme.

# 12,957 new cooperatives registered in past two years: Shah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A total of 12,957 new multi-purpose primary agricultural credit societies, dairy and fishery cooperative societies have been established across the country in past two years, Cooperation Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday in Parliament.

Shah, in his written reply to the Lok Sabha, said the government had in February 2023 approved the plan for strengthening cooperative movement in the country and deepening its reach up to the grassroots.

The plan entails establishment of new multipurpose Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (M-PACS), Dairy, Fishery Cooperative Societies covering all the panchayats/villages in the country over a period of five years.

As per National Cooperative Database, a total of 12,957 new PACS, Dairy and Fishery Cooperative Societies have been registered across the country as on January 27, 2025, Shah added.

Out of which, 1,995 new cooperatives have been registered in Rajasthan, 1,535 in Odisha, 1,464 in Uttar Pradesh and 1,118 in Jammu and Kashmir, he said.

# REC transfers four transmission SPVs to Power Grid, IndiGrid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

REC on Tuesday said its subsidiary, RECPDCL, has handed over four project-specific special purpose vehicles (SPVs) — three to Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd and one to IndiGrid 2 Private Ltd.

Transmission asset, namely Ratle Kiru Power Transmission Ltd, has been handed over to IndiGrid 2 Private Ltd, REC said in a statement.

It involves the construction of a 150-km, 400 kV transmission line between Samba (J&K) and Jalandhar (Punjab), along with a 35-km, 400 kV line between Kishenpur (J&K) and Samba. The project also includes other associated works. The estimated cost of the project is around ₹1,407.44 Crore.

The Banaskantha Transco Ltd project, handed over to Powergrid, covers the augmentation of transformation capacity at the Banaskantha (Raghnesda) Pooling Station. This includes the installation of two 500 MVA (megavolt amperes) 400/220 kV ICTs ( Kilovolt interconnecting transformers and associated works, at an estimated cost of ₹143.35 Crore. The Kurnool-IV Transmission Limited project involves the establishment of a Pooling Station near Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh.

It also includes 765 kV transmission lines spanning 375 km from Kurnool-IV to Bidar and 127 km from Kurnool-IV to Kurnool-III, along with other associated works, with an estimated cost of ₹ 4,727.05 Crore.

The Rajasthan V Power Transmission Limited project covers the establishment of a transmission system for immediate evacuation of power from the Sirohi substation (2 GW) and a transmission system for common evacuation of power from Sirohi PS (2 GW) and Merta-II PS (2 GW). The estimated cost of this project is ₹4,736.23 crore.

# Government rolls out fix quality norms for hinges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government has issued mandatory quality norms for hinges to curb the import of sub-standard goods and boost domestic manufacturing of these goods, according to a notification. The Hinges (Quality Control) Order, 2025 was issued in this regard by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) on March 21, this year.

Under these orders, items cannot be produced, sold, traded, imported and stocked unless they bear the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) mark.

The notification said this order would not apply on these goods manufactured domestically for exports; and up to 200 articles imported for the purpose of research and development by manufacturers of hinges per year with the condition that such items would not be sold commercially.

"Any person who contravenes the provisions of this order shall be punishable under the provisions of the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 2016," it said, adding the order will be implemented from July 1, 2025.

Violation of the provision of the BIS Act can attract imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of at least Rs 2 lakh for the first offence.

In case of second and subsequent offences, the fine will increase to a minimum of Rs 5 lakh and extend up to 10 times the value of goods or articles.

Various initiatives, including the development of QCO, are being undertaken by the department to develop quality sensitisation among users and manufacturers alike.

Mandatory QCOs help curb the import of sub-standard products, prevent unfair trade practices and ensure the safety and wellbeing of consumers as well as the environment.

# CM Rekha Gupta announces education boost with ₹19,291 crore allocation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

In a major push for education and entrepreneurship, Delhi Chief Minister and Finance Minister Rekha Gupta on Tuesday announced a slew of initiatives, including CM Shri schools, language laboratories, modern computer labs and startup support centres.

The government has allocated ₹100 Crore to set up new CM Shri schools and ₹500 Crore for an education hub in Narela, aiming to strengthen Delhi's education infrastructure.

Talking about the AAP government's education policy, the Delhi CM accused it of manipulating student performance data. "The AAP government has failed many students in 9th and 11th standard so that their 10th and 12th results appear better," she alleged.

The Chief Minister, during the press conference, said that the education sec-

tor has got a major boost as the government has increased allocation of ₹19,291 Crore, a 17% rise from the previous year's Budget of ₹16,396 Crore.

While presenting Delhi's annual budget of FY26, the chief minister highlighted the government's commitment to digital learning by announcing free laptops for 1,200 Class 10 students, and set aside ₹7.5 Crore for the initiative.

For the development of multilingual skills, 100 new language labs named after Dr APJ Abdul Kalam will be established, offering courses in French, German, English, Spanish, and other languages. The project has been allocated ₹21 Crore. The chief minister also introduced a new scheme, 'New Era of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Vision', designed to instill business mindset in students, and allocated ₹20 Crore to support this initiative.

Additionally, several startup support

centres will be set up across Delhi to help young entrepreneurs with financial assistance and guidance.

Recognising the need for modern infrastructure, Rekha Gupta announced the establishment of 175 new computer labs and smart classrooms, with an investment of ₹50 Crore.

"In many of Delhi's existing schools, computer systems are outdated, and this initiative aims to upgrade facilities for students," she said.

The budget also emphasised on technical education, with a fund of ₹230 Crore for institutions such as Delhi Silk Entrepreneur University, ₹57 Crore for Netaji Subhas University of Technology, ₹42 Crore for Delhi Technological University, and ₹68 Crore for Industrial Training Institutes.

"₹886 Crore has been allocated for training and technical education programmes," the CM announced.

# India, Singapore join hands for Green and Digital Shipping Corridor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India and Singapore on Tuesday signed a Letter of Intent (LoI) for Green and Digital Shipping Corridor (GDSC), with a focus on digitalisation and decarbonisation.

The Singapore-India GDSC, when established, will enhance collaboration from both countries and help accelerate the development and uptake of zero or near-zero GHG emission technologies and the adoption of digital solutions, a joint release from Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore and Ministry of Ports, Shipping said.

The minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said his

visit to Singapore with a high-level marine sector delegation will strengthen the long-standing relationship.

Moreover, the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" will deepen and broaden cooperation between the two countries, he noted.

Sonowal is on a three-day visit to Singapore and is attending the maritime week which is expected to see participation from 20,000 delegates and exhibitors from around the world.

Under the LoI, both sides will collaborate on maritime digitalisation and decarbonisation projects, including identifying relevant stakeholders who could contribute to the effort, and work towards formalising the partnership through a

memorandum of understanding on a Singapore-India GDSC.

The LoI was signed by R Lakshmanan, Joint Secretary in the MoPSW and Waterways and Teo Eng Din, Chief Executive of the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore.

The LoI signing in Singapore was witnessed by Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State of Sustainability and the Environment of Singapore and Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal.

Since 2022, the GDSC has grown to include over 28 stakeholders across the maritime, energy and finance value chains. The maritime week is being held from March 24-28, 2025.

# NorthEast Frontier Railway achieves 100 per cent electrification of Alipurduar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is advancing steadily in its electrification efforts, supporting Indian Railway ambitious vision of achieving 100 per cent electrification and net-zero carbon emissions. A major milestone has been reached with the successful electrification of the Alipurduar Division (APDJ), while electrification efforts in the Tinsukia Division (TSK) continue at a steady pace, said NFR said in a statement.

"In APDJ, the electrification of the Fakiragram-Golakganj section, spanning 46Route Kilometres (RKM)/ 50.536Track Kilometres(TKM), marks the final step toward full division electrification, ensuring greater efficiency and sustainability. Similarly, the electrification of New Coochbehar-Dinhata-Bamanhat sections, covering 49.81 RKM / 55.71 TKM, further reinforces the progress of

railway electrification in NFR. This achievement features major upgrades including SCADA implementation, Trip Unit Rating supply at stations and successful electric loco trials. Notably, the electric loco trial commenced at 19:16 hours, with the loco arriving at Fakiragram (FKM) at 20:11 hours, demonstrating the successful implementation of electrification," NorthEast Frontier Railway.

"With these advancements, the Northeast Frontier Railway remains committed to modernizing railway infrastructure and actively contributing to the Government of India's "Mission Electrification" initiative. By prioritising sustainability and efficiency, NFR is paving the way for a greener more reliable and future-ready railway network, seamlessly connecting the Northeastern states with the rest of the country," said Kapinjal Kishore Sharma, Chief Public Relations Officer of NorthEast Frontier Railway.

# India needs to turn to beer to reduce alcohol, hooch tragedies



VINOD GIRI

India has grappled with tragedies related to alcohol including hooch mishaps. While such tragedies also happen elsewhere in the world, the frequency of such events in India is definitely way above the rest of the world. Banning alcohol is not the solution as one has seen in Bihar where hooch tragedies have jumped after prohibition. A more pragmatic solution therefore lies somewhere else.

WHO estimates that 25.5 per cent of global alcohol is "unrecorded" (illicit + legal homebrew and community alcohol). Some of it is what local communities and tribals have made for generations and while the product quality may be open to debate, there has been no health scare there. The bulk (81 per cent) of the global illicit market is actually distilled alcohol, also called spirits or liquor. This is a serious public health, social, and financial problem.

The reason is simple, distilled spirits are easy to make even in the backyard, unlike products like beer which need large investment and expertise. So, in a society

where spirits are the dominant form of alcohol, like India is, the fear of alcohol-related tragedies is always around the corner.

The answer therefore lies in shifting consumers to milder forms of alcoholic drinks like beer and wine, which has become a norm in the West. This is also what the WHO suggests — "the most effective approach to taxation with a view to improving public health and reducing this harm is to tax the volume of alcohol through a specific system of taxation. Such a system may be most effective at improving health if it has higher rates of taxation for stronger products."

Beer, a low alcohol product, accounts for 68 per cent of all alcoholic beverages consumed globally. But in India, it accounts for just about 35 per cent, and a whopping 64 per cent is the distilled spirits or the "hard liquor". It is pure economics that drives this 'bang for buck' behaviour by consumers in India, making them consume maximum amount of alcohol at the minimum possible cost. And this is delivered by "hard liquor". A product with 43 per cent alcohol priced is more attractive than a similar priced product with 5-7 per cent alcohol.

The humble 180 ml bottle called "pauwa" (nips), priced ₹140 on an average and with 42.8 per cent alcohol content delivers 77 ml of pure alcohol at a cost of ₹1.8 per ml. On the other hand, the milder and less damaging beer delivers half the alcohol at twice the price. A 650 ml beer bottle, with an average 7 per cent alcohol content, and priced at ₹160 on an average delivers 45 ml of alcohol at ₹3.6 per ml, twice the price as compared to hard liquor. Mind you, we are not talking

about the country liquor ("desi daru") which, considering its price is not even worth comparing.

This is exactly what the WHO warns against, "Such a system may be most effective at improving health if it has higher rates of taxation for stronger products for two reasons: first, drinkers can consume a greater volume of alcohol more quickly through stronger products, and such products may therefore be more closely associated with heavy episodic drinking and intoxication and second, production and distribution costs may be lower, at least in some cases, for stronger products, meaning that the same volume of alcohol can be sold more cheaply in higher ABV products even at the same rate of specific duty."

Primary reason behind this pricing anomaly which makes liquor more attractive is the fact that unlike in most part of the world, in India the excise policies that do not differentiate between a hard liquor and the milder versions like beer or wine. All alcoholic beverages are often taxed at similar rates irrespective of the amount of alcohol they contain.

This defies logic. Alcohol and water are added in different proportions to make an alcoholic beverage. Around 95 per cent of the beer in a bottle contains water. Taxing it same as liquor which has just 50-55 per cent water is wrong, because doing means that the consumer is being made to pay tax on the high water content in beer, thus being penalised for drinking a product with less alcohol.

Taxation based on alcohol strength is the best way to improve public health outcomes. Another WHO study conducted in Europe revealed that policies shifting

consumption away from high-strength alcohol beverages toward lower-alcohol beverages were associated with improving multiple public health indicators. While any beverage containing alcohol can be abused, independent research supports a conclusion that beverages with a low concentration of alcohol, like beer, are less tied to population health risks like alcohol poisoning.

Many developed countries, particularly in Europe, now recalibrate their tax structures and policy initiatives in favour of milder alcoholic beverages. In 2023 the UK rationalised its tax structure for alcohol which is based on ABV content of alcoholic beverages. So, higher the actual alcohol content, higher the tax.

Similarly, the majority of OECD countries now have a tax structure which is based on actual alcohol content a beverage has. Studies show that it has helped in reducing consumption of actual alcohol and alcohol related harms in these nations. Experts are now calling for this practice to be implemented more consistently across countries.

It is high time that the state governments in India also go in for a policy overhaul in favour of milder versions of alcoholic beverages. Taxation on an alcoholic beverage needs to be linked directly with the amount of alcohol it contains.

Also, beer and wine licenses need to be liberalised so that consumers prefer beer and wine over "hard liquor". Unless the state governments and our policymakers realise this, it is impossible to meet the target set by the WHO to reduce alcohol consumption by 10 per cent in 2030 over 2010. To do so we need to shift from "hard liquor" to beer and wine.

## IN BRIEF

### IPF BIHAR COUNCIL CELEBRATES BIHAR DIWAS IN SHARJAH, UAE WITH GRANDEUR AND CULTURAL SPLENDOUR

New Delhi: The IPF Bihar Council successfully organised a grand celebration of Bihar Diwas at Hotel Crystal Plaza, Sharjah, bringing together more than huge number of attendees, primarily from the Bihar diaspora in the UAE. The event was a vibrant tribute to Bihar's glorious heritage, culture and contributions to India and the world.



### RECPDCL HANDOVERS RATLE KIRU POWER TRANSMISSION LIM, TRANSMISSION PROJECT, TO INDIGRID TWO PRIVATE LIMITED



REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), a wholly owned subsidiary of REC Limited, the Maharatna CPSU under the aegis of Ministry of Power, handed over project specific SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) of ISTS Transmission Project under TBCB route viz, Ratle Kiru Power Transmission Limited to IndiGrid 2 Private Limited on 24th March 2025 at Gurugram.

### GNUD BUDGET ESTIMATES OF 764 CRORE 35 LAKH AND 59 THOUSAND FOR YEAR 2025-26 APPROVED

Amritsar: The Senate of the Guru Nanak Dev University approved the Budget Estimates of 764 crore 35 lakh and 59 thousand for the year 2025-26. University would spend 46.27 per cent amount on further improvement in Teaching, Allied Teaching, Research and Education. Prof Karamjeet Singh, VC presided over both the Syndicate and Senate meetings which were held here today in the Syndicate and Senate hall of the University.



# New stadium for Brisbane 2032 Olympics unveiled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Brisbane

Sailing the Whitsunday islands. Surfing an iconic Gold Coast break. Rowing in a crocodile-inhabited river in Rockhampton.

Extra tourism-focused venues and a new 60,000-seat Olympic stadium to be built in inner-city parkland have been unveiled as part of a major overhaul of planning for the 2032 Brisbane Games.

David Crisafulli, the third premier of Queensland state in the almost four years since the International Olympic Committee awarded the 2032 Games to the capital of Queensland state, announced the latest plans on a rainy Tuesday.

He said it's not going to be like last year's Paris Olympics or the 2028 Summer Games in Los Angeles, promising instead it'll be uniquely-Queensland.

It's been more than 1,340 days since that IOC decision in 2021, and local organisers still haven't started the Olympic venue construction program.

"The time has come to just get on with it — get on with it, and build," Crisafulli said, marking his 150th day in office.

"We are going to start immediately. We've got seven years to make it work — and make it work we will."

A 25,000-seat aquatics centre has also been proposed in an Olympic precinct that

includes the new main stadium at Victoria Park, a former golf course near downtown Brisbane. The 11 years that Brisbane had to prepare is now down to seven, and leaders at federal, state and local levels agree it's time to stop squabbling over venues and start building them.

Newly elected IOC president Kirsty Coventry, who oversaw the initial planning stages as head of the IOC's coordination commission, has been updated on the changes by Andrew Liveris, chairman of the 2032 organizing committee.

"The stage matters," Liveris said.

"We've still got 7½ years to go, and we have a plan. This is a go-get-it-done plan." Brisbane was the first Summer Games host picked in a new process to put a preferred candidate into exclusive, fast-track talks without facing a rival bidder in a vote. With it, the IOC aimed to cut the cost of campaigning and building venues.

A croc, or not? Domestic media earlier this week raised concerns about crocodiles at the Olympic rowing venue when it emerged that events would be staged on the Fitzroy River.

Crisafulli confirmed the Fitzroy River venue at Rockhampton, on the central Queensland coast, and said a "multitude" of events had been staged there — including Australia's pre-Olympic rowing camps. He said local kids swam and paddled in



the river and crocodiles wouldn't be a problem. Sarah Cook, the head of Rowing Australia, said the crocodile concerns were overblown in the media. But she raised some issues about the river current and its suitability for Olympic competition.

Liveris, who said World Rowing would visit the venue in May, also wasn't worried about crocs.

"There are sharks in the ocean and we still do surfing ... This is can do, not can't

do, please flip the mindset here," he said. "Creatures below the water .. That's a bit kind of Hollywood-ish."

**False starts**

It's been a year since local organisers scrapped initial plans to demolish and rebuild the Gabba, an iconic cricket ground, as the Games centerpiece when a previous review panel appointed in 2023 recommended a new stadium in city

parkland. The costs soared and the concept lost the support of the Australian Olympic Committee.

The premier at the time, Steven Miles, rejected the recommendations of that review led by former Brisbane Mayor Graham Quirk. Miles instead planned to use a rugby stadium to host the ceremonies, and to renovate the aging facility built to host the 1982 Commonwealth Games.

Crisafulli went to a state election late last year promising no new stadiums, but then instituted another independent review quickly after taking power for the Liberal-National coalition. His cabinet went through the recommendations of the 100-day review and approved new plans Monday.

**Opposition**

A group of protesters gathered outside the riverside location where Crisafulli confirmed the revised venue plan. Dozens more protestors converged on Victoria Park, holding up "Hands OFF Victoria Park" signs and shouting "shame" while listening to news of the announcement.

The Save Victoria Park community group is fundraising for a legal challenge in a bid to prevent the stadium being built in the hilly, 64-hectare (158-acre) park. Regions and legacy

Brisbane organisers plan to host Olympic sports in coastal cities and sites from the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coasts in the south to Cairns in Queensland's far north and to the gateway of the Outback at Toowoomba, where an equestrian hub will be built.

The state and federal governments initially agreed a 50-50 funding split on a venue budget of just over 7 billion Australian dollars (USD 4.4 billion).

The bulk of federal money was for an indoor arena adjacent to the city centre that was initially set to host Olympic aquatics in a drop-in pool and later be transformed to host the National Basketball League and concerts.

That project has been scrapped, with Crisafulli's government aiming to spread the federal funding around other venues and seeking private-sector funding to build a similar arena on state-owned land near the Gabba, outside the scope of the Olympics.

Under the new plan, the Gabba is set to be demolished after the 2032 Games and replaced with housing. The main existing tenants — the Brisbane Lions in the Australian Football League and Queensland Cricket — have endorsed the plan to relocate them to the Victoria Park stadium that will have a post-Olympic and Paralympic capacity of 63,000.

## England beats Latvia in World Cup qualifier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Reece James scored a brilliant free kick and Eberechi Eze grabbed his maiden international goal as England beat Latvia 3-0 in a World Cup qualifier at Wembley Stadium on Monday.

James, making his first start in 2 1/2 years, curled a 25-meter free kick into the top corner after 37 minutes. The goal was his first in 18 England appearances and broke down a stuffy Latvia side.

Midway through the second half, with the home crowd starting to get restless, young midfielder Morgan Rogers combined well with Declan Rice to pave the way for a Harry Kane tap-in.

Then Eze cut in from the right and his shot hit the back of the net after taking a slight deflection.

England is the hot favorite to win Europe Group K and qualify for the 2026 World Cup. New coach Thomas Tuchel, in just his second game in charge, was content with the result if not the performance against a side 136 places behind it in the FIFA rankings.

The German praised the returning James, a player he knows from his time managing Chelsea, and said he was

happy with the way things have gone in his first two matches.

"I know Reecey and the quality the boy has is amazing," Tuchel told broadcaster ITV. "He has every right to be proud and happy with his performance. He is in excellent shape. He looks sharp, in shape and the quality there can be no doubt."

**He has every right to be proud and happy with his performance. He looks sharp, in shape and the quality there can be no doubt**

—THOMAS TUCHEL, COACH

"It was not an easy match. We saw a lot of good things, created good chances. We needed a free kick to unlock it. I'm happy with the attitude, energy and desire. We will get there."

Albania record first winIn the same group, Albania bounced back from losing to England 2-0 on Friday by beating Andorra 3-0 at home. Rey Manaj scored twice in the first half and Myrto Uzuni added a third in second-half stoppage time.

In Group G, Poland won for the second time in three days thanks to two goals

from Karol Swiderski against Malta. Swiderski scored in each half.

Earlier, Finland gave up a two-goal lead in Lithuania and drew 2-2, missing the chance to maintain a 100 per cent record.

Kaan Kairinen put the Finns ahead after four minutes and Joel Pohjanpalo doubled their lead from the penalty spot 13 minutes later.

But Armandas Kucys pulled a goal back for Lithuania just before halftime and Gvidas Gineitis equalised with a 30-meter strike in the 69th.

Poland tops Group G with six points, two ahead of Finland, one of the teams that has never before qualified for the World Cup.

Bosnia wins againIn Group H, Bosnia and Herzegovina beat Cyprus 2-1 at home to stay perfect.

Ermedin Demirovic put the Bosnians 1-0 up midway through the first half and Ioannis Pittas headed home an equalizer for Cyprus on the stroke of halftime. However, Haris Hajradinovic fired into the top corner early in the second half to add to their opening win over Romania last week.

Romania got its first points after winning at San Marino 5-1.

## Do not know how I won last year, says Nakajima

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Gurugram

Gearing up to defend his title at Hero India Open, Keita Nakajima says he still doesn't know how he has won in the previous edition but feels patience will be key to retaining the crown, as he seeks to join his Japanese peers on PGA Tour next year.

The 24-year-old registered a four-stroke win here last year to secure his maiden DP World Tour title.

Nakajima is also hoping to emulate fellow Japanese Kenji Hosoishi, who is the first player to win the India Open title back-to-back in 1967 and 1968.

Since then, Jyoti Randhawa (2006 and 2007) and SSP Chawrasia (2016 and 2017) have also achieved the feat.

"Last year, winning here was so great. It gave me a lot of confidence in my first season and also I was able to play all the way to the Tour Championship in Dubai," he told reporters ahead of the prestigious event beginning on Thursday.

"This is a tough course and I don't know how I won last year but I will just

stay patient this year.

"Excited to play again in this tournament and honoured to be back as a defending champion. So, of course I want to win. It is a tough golf course all right but I will play and just commit to one shot at a time."

Nakajima, who won the 2023 Order of Merit with the help of three of his four wins on the Japan tour, had taken a break after the Olympics to recover from a back pain. "I had back pain after the Olympics and then I stopped playing. Started playing again like one month, so I would like to say thank you to the team, family and also agents. So I restarted in Japan in 2025. That was great moment for me."

He played five tournaments this year and found success last week, finishing second at the Porsche Singapore Classic.

"Last week at Singapore, the performance was great. I had five or six weeks off, but I was prepared for this Asian swing. Yeah, I finished in second place but I was playing great and I still feel positive this week," said the Japanese, a former Asia-Pacific Amateur champion.

## Atlanta Drive takes 1-0 lead in TGL finals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Palm Beach Gardens (US)

Patrick Cantlay came up clutch with the putter again by making a 6-foot birdie putt to give the Atlanta Drive a 6-5 victory over New York and a 1-0 lead in the best-of-3 finals of the TGL indoor golf league's inaugural season. Xander Schauffele had a chance to sent the match to a shootout with a 6-foot birdie putt, but it caught the right edge and lipped out. The second final match of high-tech league is Tuesday night, followed immediately by a third match, if necessary. The score was tied at 2 after nine holes of alternate shot.

Cameron Young made a 9-foot eagle putt to give New York a 4-2 lead because Atlanta challenged with the hammer, making the hole worth two points. Billy Horschel of Atlanta returned the favor, making an 11-foot birdie putt when New York threw the hammer. Young won the 13th hole when Justin Thomas of Atlanta made bogey, only for Horschel to hit his tee shot on a par 3 to 5 feet for a conceded birdie.

## Edinaldo Rodrigues re-elected as Brazil soccer president

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian soccer boss Edinaldo Rodrigues was re-elected as president on Monday, 12 days after his main rival Ronaldo Nazário gave up his bid. Rodrigues received all 67 votes, a first in the history of the Brazilian Football Confederation. The celebratory speech by the 71-year-old Rodrigues described "unparalleled unity that exists within Brazilian soccer today." He will be in charge of the confederation when Brazil hosts the 2027 Women's World Cup.

Rodrigues' second mandate at the CBF will officially start in April 2026 and run till 2030. He first took the job as interim president in 2021. Ronaldo, the two-time World Cup champion, gave up on his bid on March 12, saying he lacked the support of soccer executives to challenge Rodrigues. Rodrigues' management has been under fire among fans and former players, though he continues to enjoy high approval among soccer executives.

## Targeting top-20 finish: Marcel Siem

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Gurugram

Two years ago, a win at the Hero Indian Open kickstarted his career, and though he is happy with his fitness and form, Germany's Marcel Siem doesn't want to get greedy.

He is keeping a reasonable target of a top-20 finish. The 44-year-old had ended an eight-year wait when he clinched the crown in 2023. However, he couldn't compete to defend his title last year due to an injury and is now on the comeback trail after recovering from a hip injury. "For me, I have to be careful that I don't get greedy with my expectations," Marcel, who has six victories on the European Tour, said.

"If I put my expectations too high, it never works with me. That's why I'm saying top 20 and inside the top 20 is the will included, it's a soft will to win the golf tournament."

Marcel had endured a winless phase since winning the BMW Masters in 2014, but the Hero Indian Open title brought him back into the winner's circle as he went on to claim the Italian Open in June last year.

"I need to stay like this. I started with this in 2020 when I lost my card, just doing baby steps. It's not easy, even though I finished 14th and 9th in the last two weeks, I didn't move in the world rankings. So consistency is the key for me now," he continued.

"I need to play well in the bigger tour-

**When I just arrived here, all the memories came back. I had a long stretch where I didn't win a tournament, and it meant a lot to me**

—MARCEL SIEM, GOLFER

naments. These are things I put my focus on now," Marcel said he remembers each shot from his win two years ago and is relishing the prospect of taming the challenging conditions at the DLF Golf Course here. "When I just arrived here, all the memories came back. I had a long stretch where I didn't win a tournament, and it meant a lot to me. And yeah, kick-started my career again in a way. So I'm very happy to be back," he said.

"The last two weeks, I started to play better again. That hip injury took me a

long time. I think since two months, my hip is not hurting at all anymore. I can do normal stuff in the gym. I don't have to worry about it anymore. So now the focus is back on having consistent top 20s every week."

Reflecting on the tournament, Marcel said: "For me, it feels like a title defense, to be honest. I was crying in Mauritius last year, not being able to defend my title. So I'm fitter than ever. I'm trying to live healthier. The lifestyle in Mauritius helps me a lot to work hard on my game, on my fitness, mental strength as well. So I'm happy where I am right now. My form curve is good to come into this week. That was my main goal."

Talking about the golf course and strategy, the German said: "I know the golf course. I have my strategy already. I can remember literally every shot from two years ago."

"My caddy walked the course today, checked out the grain on the greens. The greens look very firm and the grain change on the plateaus is very important when you hit irons into it. So he did his homework. He thinks it's a bit more difficult than 2023."

## Brazil predicts end to winless run in Argentina in World Cup qualifier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Buenos Aires

Brazil has not won in Argentina for 16 years and hasn't scored in Argentina in 10 years. That didn't put off Brazil striker Raphinha, who kicked off the hostilities on Monday by promising to score against the World Cup holder in Buenos Aires on Tuesday in a 2026 qualifier. Raphinha also spoke about "kicking them" ... "on and off the pitch if needed" in a podcast with 1994 World Cup winner Romário. Argentine media reproduced his comments broadly.

Defender Marquinhos piled on by saying Brazil was set to break its 16-year winless streak in Argentina. "It is our time to win now. It has been a while," Marquinhos said in a press conference on Monday.

"It won't be easy, we will fight. We will have to be at our best both physically and mentally." Argentina, leading South America, can clinch a World Cup berth by drawing with third-placed Brazil with four rounds to spare. The teams will meet in Monumental de Nunez Stadium without injured stars Lionel Messi and Neymar, and

minus several other players due to suspension or injury. They last met in 2023, when Argentina won 1-0 in a qualifier at Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro.

Brazil is one point ahead of Uruguay and Paraguay. Colombia has the sixth and final direct qualification position.

Fourth-placed Uruguay will have a chance against Bolivia to recover from Friday's 1-0 home defeat to Argentina. If the Bolivians fail to beat the Uruguayans, Argentina will qualify for the World Cup even if it loses against Brazil.

Colombia takes on Paraguay. Ecuador will travel to 10th-placed Chile. Venezuela will host ninth-placed Peru.

**Injuries and suspensions**

Argentina also won't have injured Lautaro Martínez and the suspended Nico González. After the 1-0 away victory against Uruguay, three players appear to have the confidence of coach Lionel Scaloni: Midfielders Leandro Paredes and Giuliano Simeone and striker Thiago Almada, who scored the winner. They are expected to play against Brazil, too.

## Sepp Blatter, Michel Platini acquitted again at second trial of financial wrongdoing at FIFA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Muttentz (Switzerland)

Sepp Blatter and Michel Platini won again in court on Tuesday and now lead 2-0 in trial verdicts against Swiss federal prosecutors.

The former FIFA president and former UEFA president were acquitted for a second time on charges of fraud, forgery, mismanagement and misappropriation of more than \$2 million of FIFA money in 2011. Blatter, now aged 89, gave little reaction listening to the verdict of three cantonal (state) judges acting as a federal criminal appeals court. Sitting in the row in front of Platini, Blatter alternately tapped his fingers on his desk or held his left hand over his mouth.

Platini sat with his arms folded or rubbing his hands as he listened to a translator sitting beside him relating the court's verdict in German into his native French.

The attorney general's office in Switzerland had challenged a first acquittal in July 2022 and asked for sentences of 20 months, suspended for two years. The indictment alleged the payment "damaged FIFA's assets and unlawfully enriched Platini."

"Michel Platini must finally be left in peace in criminal matters," his lawyer Dominic Nellen said in a statement. "After two acquittals, even the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland must realize that these criminal proceedings have definitively failed."

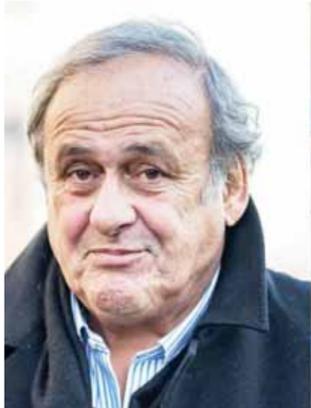
A further appeal to the Swiss supreme court can be filed by prosecutors.

Decade-long caseBlatter and Platini have consistently denied wrongdoing in a decade-long case that swung on their claims of a verbal agreement to one day settle the money in question.

Blatter approved FIFA paying 2 million Swiss francs (now \$2.21 million) to France soccer great Platini in February 2011 for supplementary and non-contracted salary working as a presidential advisor from 1998-2002.

The latest win for Blatter and the 69-year-old Platini came exactly 9½ years since the Swiss federal investigation was revealed and kicked off events that ended the careers of soccer's most powerful men.

That September 2015 day in Zurich, police came to interrogate them at FIFA after an executive committee meeting when Platini was a strong favorite to succeed his one-time mentor in an



upcoming election.

Corruption crisesThough federal court trials have twice cleared their names, Blatter's reputation likely always will be tied to leading FIFA during corruption crises that took down a swath of senior soccer officials worldwide.

Platini, one of soccer's greatest players and later Blatter's protégé in soccer poli-



tics, never did get the FIFA presidency he often called his destiny.

Neither Blatter nor Platini has worked in soccer since they were suspended by the FIFA ethics committee in October 2015. They were later banned and failed to overturn the bans in separate appeals to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in 2016.

"The criminal proceedings have had not

only legal but also massive personal and professional consequences for Michel Platini, although no incriminating evidence was ever presented," Nellen said, suggesting further legal action "against those responsible for the criminal proceedings."

Platini's ban expired in 2019 and Blatter was given a subsequent ban by FIFA in 2021 months before his first was due to end. Blatter is exiled from soccer until late in 2028 — when he will be 92 — because of an ethics prosecution of alleged self-dealing in eight-figure management bonuses paid for successfully organizing the men's World Cup in 2010 and 2014.

Gentleman's agreementThe verdict was given Tuesday in a low-key provincial courthouse where a four-day trial was held three weeks ago.

Blatter and Platini have claimed at five different judicial bodies — twice at FIFA, then the Court of Arbitration for Sport and now two Swiss federal criminal courts — that they had a verbal "gentleman's agreement" to one day settle the unpaid and non-contracted salary.

Platini was a storied former captain and coach of the France national team when he worked to help Blatter get elected to lead

FIFA in Paris on the eve of the 1998 World Cup he organized.

The two men said Platini agreed to be a presidential adviser on an annual salary of 300,000 Swiss francs (now \$340,000) through 2002. They claim there was a verbal deal to later get the balance of 1 million Swiss francs for each year that FIFA could not pay at the time.

Platini started asking for the money early in 2010, citing seven-figure payments made to senior Blatter aides who left FIFA which showed the soccer body could afford to pay him. The payment was finally made in February 2011.

Details of the payment only emerged in the crisis that hit FIFA in May 2015 when U.S. Federal investigators unsealed a sweeping investigation of international soccer officials. Swiss authorities made early-morning arrests at hotels in Zurich before seizing FIFA financial and business records.

In 2015, Swiss federal prosecutors already were handling a criminal complaint filed by FIFA. That was about suspected financial wrongdoing linked to votes in December 2010 that picked Russia and Qatar as future World Cup hosts.

# KKR, RR eye batting, bowling overhaul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Guwahati

Outmuscled in their previous matches, title-holders Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals will eye a quick course correction in every aspect when they face each other in an IPL match here on Wednesday.

The Knight Riders were beaten by seven wickets by Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the tournament-opener while the Royals were given a 44-run drubbing by Sunrisers Hyderabad.

The common theme in those defeats was how the seemingly powerful batting and bowling units of KKR and RR failed to fire.

While the Rajasthan outfit might offer the excuse of playing on a Hyderabad bowling front for the malfunction of their bowling unit, the Kolkata side do not have any such cover.

Apart from Sunil Narine, none of the KKR bowlers were able to contain free-flowing RCB batters, and in that the demotivation of mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy might just worry them a bit.

Even on an Eden Gardens pitch that had some grip, Chakravarthy was given a towelling by Phil Salt and Virat Kohli.

The KKR camp now hopes that the spinner will find his stride on a Guwahati pitch that generally has some bite.

They will also keep an eye on the fitness of Anrich Nortje, who is recovering from



a back strain. If the South African gets a green signal from the physios, then he will walk in for Spencer Johnson.

Similarly, KKR's middle-order batting crumbled spectacularly after skipper Ajinkya Rahane and Narine gave them a blistering start, eventually settling for a sub-par score.

Their batting pivots such as Venkatesh Iyer and Andre Russell got out, playing pre-determined cross-batted shots, and KKR will hope that they will show more game awareness in Guwahati.

The Knight Riders will also hope that Rinku Singh regains his hitting prowess

down the order. It is crucial in converting a good total into something more intimidating in nature.

His recent T20 form is not that encouraging and in his last five international outings, Rinku has logged scores of 11, 9, 8, 30, 9 along with a 12 in the IPL opener.

Rinku and his top-order colleagues in KKR will hope that the Rajasthan bowlers would once again struggle to find their groove here.

The likes of Jofra Archer, who bowled the most expensive spell in the history of IPL against SRH, Fazalhaq Farooqi and Maheesh Theekshana were rudderless

against the onslaught of Travis Head and Ishan Kishan. Archer had leaked 76 runs from his overs at the Uppal.

But they have an opportunity in Guwahati to regain their form.

It will also be a blot on stand-in skipper Riyan Parag who, at times, looked perplexed on the field about the decisions to be made. The Rahul Dravid-coached side will eye sharper and more intuitive leadership from Parag against KKR.

## Teams

**Kolkata Knight Riders:** Ajinkya Rahane (captain), Rinku Singh, Quinton de Kock, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Rovman Powell, Manish Pandey, Luvnity Sisodia, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Moeen Ali, Ramandeep Singh, Andre Russell, Anrich Nortje, Vaibhav Arora, Mayank Markhande, Spencer Johnson, Harshit Rana, Sunil Narine, Varun Chakravarthy, Chetan Sakariya.

**Rajasthan Royals:** Riyan Parag (stand-in captain), Sanju Samson, Shubham Dubey, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Kunal Rathore, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Nitish Rana, Yuvvir Singh, Jofra Archer, Maheesh Theekshana, Wanindu Hasaranga, Akash Madhwal, Kumar Kartikeya Singh, Tushar Deshpande, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Kwena Maphaka, Ashok Sharma, Sandeep Sharma.

# We are not too worried about first game loss: Coach Arun

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Guwahati

Defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders are not too worried about their opening match defeat in the Indian Premier League and are hoping to bounce back in their clash against Rajasthan Royals here on Wednesday, said bowling coach Bharat Arun.

The Knight Riders lost by seven wickets against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the tournament opener on March 22 while the Royals were given a 44-run drubbing by Sunrisers Hyderabad the following day.

"As a team, we are not too worried about it (first game). It's always good to win the first match, you gain the momentum. But there were a lot of positives from the first game, some lessons to be learnt from there," Arun said at the pre-match press conference on Tuesday.

"Just being game number one can happen, we could have capitalised, we could have got more runs had we not lost wickets towards the end of our batting. Whatever you do there is always an opportunity to bowl better. But this team is not too worried about it, we will learn from what happened in the last game and try to get better."

Arun is also not bothered about big

hitters Andre Russell and Rinku Singh not contributing much in KKR's total of 174 for 8, which RCB overhauled with 22 balls remaining.

"Sport is about failing. You fail more often, then you succeed. Of course, champions like Russell, I think it must be weighing in his mind that he failed last game and he is out to prove every single game. We are also hoping that he will really come good in tomorrow's game."

"Rinku has bated beautifully in the games leading up to the tournament. We are not too worried about his form."

He also felt that every team in the IPL is well-balanced and the ones which do better in crucial moments of the game will win.

"Every team is batting well, getting and chasing 250-plus scores. You can't say this team is better than the other team. Every team is evenly balanced, batting and bowling pretty well."

"Teams that snatches those crucial moments at any given point of time is going to win. How challenged you are to snatch those crucial moments of the game is important."

"All teams have some really fantastic batters. There is no point targeting one, we have to look at the whole team and devise a strategy accordingly. Our game plan is to win."

# Whole year I focussed, visualised about finishing games, says Ashutosh Sharma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Visakhapatnam

Ashutosh Sharma says he spent the whole year visualising the finishing line after pulling off a miraculous heist for Delhi Capitals against Lucknow Supergiants in Visakhapatnam.

Ashutosh attracted attention with his exemplary finishing skills last season when he turned up for Punjab Kings. However, he did not leave the season a fully satisfied man as he did not meet his own expectations.

It is early days in IPL 2025 but the 26-year-old, who plays for Railways in domestic cricket, was pleased with his stellar 66 not out off 41 balls that brought Delhi Capitals back from the dead on Monday night.

Ashutosh was quick to highlight the role played by IPL debutant Vipraj Nigam as the duo changed the course of the game after Delhi Capitals found themselves

down and out at 113 for six chasing 210.

It was the contentious Impact Player rule that allowed Ashutosh to play the innings of his life.

**Last year was really good but that's history for me. I have taken the positives from there and worked on myself, to improve whatever weaknesses I had**

— ASHUTOSH SHARMA, DC PLAYER

He changed gears dramatically after collecting 20 runs off the first 20 balls he faced.

The last 11 balls he faced yielded 46 runs as he finished the game with a six over the bowler's head and the majority of his five sixes came down the ground.

"Missed out on finishing the game on a couple of occasions in the previous season. The whole year I focussed and visualised it. Had the belief that if I play till

the last over, anything can happen.

"Well played to Vipraj. I asked him to keep hitting. He was very calm under pressure. Want to dedicate this award to my mentor Shikhar (Dhawan) paaji," said Ashutosh.

Ashutosh and Shashank Singh made a name for themselves with their exploits for Punjab Kings before the franchise released the former ahead of the auction.

To become part of a serious discussion in the context of Indian cricket, Ashutosh knew he could not sit on past performances.

"Last year was really good but that's history for me. I have taken the positives from there and worked on myself, to improve whatever weaknesses I had. I'm applying what I did in domestic cricket."

With number 11 on strike in the 20th over and six runs needed for a famous win, it is natural to be nervous but Ashutosh remained confident.

# Dhoni not convinced about Impact Player rule in T20

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was not quite convinced about the need for the Impact Player rule (IPR) when it was first introduced in the IPL but now sees it as a part of T20 cricket's evolution.

The 43-year-old, who remains a talismanic figure for the Chennai Super Kings despite relinquishing captaincy last year, said he does not consider himself an Impact Player as he remains the first-choice wicketkeeper of his side.

"When this rule was implemented, I felt it wasn't really needed at that time. In a way, it helps me, but at the same time, it doesn't. I still do my wicket-keeping, so I am not an impact player," Dhoni told 'JioStar'.

"I have to be involved in the game. A lot of people say the rule has led to more

high-scoring games. I believe it's more due to the conditions and the comfort level of players," he added.

The rule has been criticised by the likes of India's Test and ODI skipper Rohit Sharma and star all-rounder Hardik Pandya, both of whom believe that it can affect the growth of all-rounders as teams tend to choose big-hitting batters for this role.

Dhoni said the rule does give teams the comfort of an extra batter for crunch situations.

"The number of runs being scored isn't just because of an extra batsman. It's about the mindset, teams now have the comfort of an extra batter, so they play more aggressively," he said.

"It's not that all four or five extra batters are being used, it's just the confidence of having them. This is how T20 cricket has evolved," he added.

# We have to 'mix and match' until we get our players back: Lance Klusener

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Visakhapatnam

LSG assistant coach Lance Klusener says his injury-hit team has no option but to "mix and match" until it starts getting players back.

Injuries to as many as four fast bowlers — Avesh Khan, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan and Akash Deep — have dealt a big setback to LSG. They failed to defend 209 against Delhi Capitals on Monday night with dew also playing a part.

"At the moment, we don't have a lot of reserves with the ball, so we're going to have to just probably mix and match until we start getting players back," Klusener said at the post-match media interaction.

"But that's just the nature of it. We're going to have to stand up and stand tall with the bat in Hyderabad [venue of their next game] as we saw in the first game."

"We're looking forward to that, but as I said, it's an opportunity for some youngsters as well, getting their first opportunity. I was really happy for Shardul Thakur (injury replacement) - two wickets in the first over," he added.

Though skipper Rishabh Pant felt LSG had enough runs on the board, Klusener felt they were 20 to 30 runs short.

"If I have to put a finger on it, I would like to say we've probably left 20 or 30 runs with the bat out there. That was probably why we ended up being under pressure with the ball. "I thought they [DC] finished well with the bat, but the reason why we're in that position is because we didn't score enough runs, which we should have."

"I thought when the bowlers got it right, there was a little bit of spin, so I thought it was a very good wicket. There was a little bit in there for everybody."

Ashutosh Sharma played a blinder for Delhi Capitals to pull off a famous one-wicket win.



# If not cricketer, I would rather be a pilot, says Glenn Phillips

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

When he is done taking superhuman catches on a cricket field, Glenn Phillips, a man of multiple interests, would love to fly planes for a living. After all, flying has always been his passion and if he had all the money in the world, the New Zealand and Gujarat Titans all-rounder would rather be a pilot than a cricketer.

Speaking to PTI ahead of his maiden season with Gujarat Titans, Phillips also detailed how he uses his experience of playing a variety of sports in cricket, the hard work behind his gravity-defying catches, how playing in India has made him a better player of spin and why his fourth team in the IPL has already become his favourite one. But Phillips was most animated when asked about his love for flying, not very surprisingly either.

"Yeah, it's a huge passion of mine. If I wasn't playing cricket and I had all the money in the world growing up, I probably would have ended up being a pilot, to be fair. I love being in the air," said Phillips.

"I love all the procedures around being a pilot, the radio communications, but obviously the handling of the plane itself. And I don't really know why I love it so much, but I think anybody who's into aviation doesn't really know either."

"Obviously, the feeling of flying is something that humans have wanted all the time. So, I guess I'm no different from all those people." The 28-year-old South African-born player, who plays all three formats for New Zealand, still has a lot of cricket left in him and if he has not made enough money by his retirement, he would happily take up the pilot's job.

"I guess if it comes down to wanting to do something that I enjoy after cricket. Ideally, I'd like to be able to go into the mountains and have absolutely no need for work and do all my hobbies."

"But if push comes to shove, it means that I still need to work, piloting would be my first option on the list," said Phillips, who has flown the two-seater Cessna 152 aircraft. With cricket now taking most of his time, his flying time is limited to simulators. Blend of natural talent and hard work has made me the flier that I am.

Phillips' remarkable reach and agility on the field can be attributed to genes and his stint as a gymnast in his growing up days.

His jaw-dropping catches, most recently seen in the Champions Trophy, are also a result of his dedication to fielding aspect of his all-round game.

"I think there is definitely a huge piece of it that comes down to genetics from a speed and agility perspective. So, I guess you can say a little bit naturally gifted, but at the end of the day, talent and natural gifts can only get you so far."

"So, the other half of it is working my butt off to try and be able to cover all my bases, to go out in the middle and understand that I've done the work. So if I do drop catches, it's not because I haven't put the effort in," said the Blackcaps all-rounder. His left-handed grab to dismiss Mohammad Rizwan and his right-handed stunner to get rid of Shubman Gill in the Champions Trophy are fresh in the minds of cricket followers but they don't feature in Phillips' top-three catches.

"I would probably say Marcus Stoinis at the SCG in the T20 World Cup (2022). That one was pretty good, covered a lot of ground, full dive. And then I've taken a catch for Gloucester in the T20 Blast out at deep backward point."

"That was a full dive to my left after a full sprint. And that was pretty cool. And then I'm probably going to say Ollie Pope at Hagley Oval at Gully (during a Test), just because I literally couldn't get any further than that. That was the max limit I've been able to dive at," he recollected.

He never saw Jonty Rhodes go about his

# Smriti, Deepti retain spots in ICC rankings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana and all-rounder Deepti Sharma held on to their third positions respectively in the latest ICC Women's T20I batter and bowlers' rankings issued here on Tuesday. Besides Mandhana, no other Indian is in the top-10 with skipper Harmanpreet Kaur placed 11th position, Jemimah Rodrigues ranked 15th and Shafali Verma a rung below.

The batters' list is led by Australia's Beth Mooney, followed by teammate Tahlia McGrath.

Mooney increased her lead at the top following scores of 75 not and 70 against New Zealand. Phoebe Litchfield gained three places to move to 22nd overall following an innings of 32 in the second clash with the White Ferns.

Star all-rounder Melie Kerr gained two places on the list for T20I batters following her innings of 40 in the second match

**Besides Mandhana, no other Indian is in the top-10 with skipper Harmanpreet Kaur placed 11th position, Jemimah Rodrigues ranked 15th and Shafali Verma a rung below**

of the series against Australia, while fellow New Zealander Georgia Plimmer improved 20 spots to move to 50th on the back of some consistent innings at the top of the order over the last month.

Deepti continued to occupy her third spot among bowlers behind England's Sophie Ecclestone and Sadia Iqbal of Pakistan.

The plaudits continue to arrive for Annabel Sutherland as the Australian all-rounder reached a new career-high rating on the latest ICC Women's T20I bowling rankings.

Sutherland, who has featured in the

ICC Women's ODI Team of the Year in the last two years and won the ICC Women's Player of the Month award twice in 2024, reached a new personal best rating for T20I bowlers and leaped two places to the fourth spot after her four-wicket haul against New Zealand in Mount Maunganui.

The right-arm collected four wickets as Australia bowled the White Ferns out for just 122 in reply to their massive total of 204/3 and in the process opened up an unassailable 2-0 advantage in the three-game series.

Darcie Brown, meanwhile, moved 12 spots to reach 18th overall following figures of 2/23 against New Zealand in the second game of their series.

Kerr remains in second place behind West Indies' Hayley Matthews in the rankings for T20I all-rounders, with McGrath (up three runs to 18th) and Sutherland (up one spot to 21st) among the biggest movers this week.

# ICC retains Nitin Menon in Elite Panel of Umpires

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday included Allahudien Palekar of South Africa and England's Alex Wharf in the ICC Elite Panel of Umpires which features Nitin Menon as the only Indian, while Jayaraman Madangopal has been promoted to the Emerging Panel.

Michael Gough and Joel Wilson will make way for the two new entrants in Palekar and Wharf. According to BCCI sources, the 50-year-old Madangopal has been promoted to the Emerging Panel which makes him eligible to officiate in overseas Tests and ODIs. Former Tamil Nadu player Madangopal has so far officiated in one Test, 22 ODIs and 42 T20Is.

Meanwhile, Menon is ranked second behind Richard Illingworth in the Elite Panel of Umpires. Palekar, a former first-class cricketer from South Africa, has officiated on-field in four Tests, 23 ODIs and 67 T20Is in men's international cricket and a total of 17 women's international games — having also officiated at major ICC tournaments such as men's T20 World Cup 2024, and the Under-19 men's Cricket World Cup 2024.

Wharf brings a wealth of experience from his 16-year first-class career, having also featured in 13 ODIs for England.

Wharf has officiated on-field in seven Tests, 33 ODIs, and 45 T20Is in men's international cricket, and has stood at the recent ICC men's and women's World Cups, the respective men's and women's T20 World Cups in 2024 and the men's Champions Trophy in 2025.

ICC chairman Jay Shah gave his warm wishes to the two new entrants, Palekar and Wharf, while also thanking the outgoing umpires, Gough and Wilson.

"By definition, being an elite official brings with it scrutiny and pressure, but we are confident that both Allahudien and Alex possess the temperament, experience and skill to deliver consistently at this very top level," Shah said in a statement.

"On behalf of the ICC, I wish them all the best for the upcoming season as well as for the future. We would also like to place on record our sincere thanks to both Joel and Michael for their services to the world game, over a number of years." Palekar expressed his gratitude for the promotion and acknowledged the support of his mentors, colleagues, and family.

"This is a significant moment in my umpiring career. It's an honour to be named in the elite panel, and I look forward to reposing the faith shown in me. Being on this panel brings both pride and responsibility, but I am confident that my experience officiating across formats will stand me in good stead," he said.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family, friends, coaches, mentors, the ICC, and Cricket South Africa for backing me and all my colleagues who supported me over the years."

**AFFIDAVIT**

By virtue of an affidavit made before Executive Magistrate, Talcher, I, Birmala Mahapatra aged about 30 years w/o Surendra Jyotish of Vill-Banabasapur, Po/Ps- Gopal-prasad, Dist-Angul declare that my name has been mentioned in my Adhaar card as Sonali Mohapatra W/o Jitendra Jyotish wrongly. That Birmala Mahapatra W/o Surendra Jyotish and Sonali Mohapatra, W/o Jitendra Jyotish is one and same person for all purposes.

Sd/-  
Himanshi Sharma

**OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED AREA COUNCIL, KODALA**  
C-1981 Odisha, Pin -761032, e-Mail: - nackodala@gmail.com

It. No. 563 / Dev / 2025 Dated:- 24/03/2025

**e- NOTICE**

**BID IDENTIFICATION No. KOD-NAC-05/2025-26**

On behalf of the Kodala NAC, on-line e-tender Percentage Rate Bids in two bid system (Part-I General & Technical Bid and Part-II-Price Bid or Financial Bid) invited by the Executive Officer, Kodala NAC from the intending and eligible class/category of bidders in conformity with the Detailed Tender Call Notice for execution or the works mentioned in the DTCN. Contractor; validly registered/empanelled under Kodala NAC are also eligible to participate for the works.

1. Name of the Work	:- Civil Works
2. Number of Work	:- 01 Nos.
3. Estimated cost	:- As per DTCN
4. Period of Completion	:- As per DTCN
5. Date and Time of availability of Bid Document in the Portal	:- From 10.00AM of Dt. 26/03/2025 to 5.00PM of Dt. 19/04/2025
6. Last date and time for receipt of Bid in the Portal	:- 5.00PM of Dt. 19/04/2025
7. The bid received online shall be opened on	:- 11.00 AM of dttd. 21/04/2025
8. Name and Address of the Officer inviting Bid:	:- Executive Officer, NAC, Kodala.

Further details can be seen from the Procurement Portal: [www.tendersorissa.gov.in](http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in)

Executive Officer,  
Kodala NAC

OIPR-13203/110034/2425