



# Sunita Williams touches down on Mother Earth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Cape Canaveral

Stuck in space no more, NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams returned to Earth on Tuesday, hitching a different ride home to close out a saga that began with a bungled test flight more than nine months ago.

Their SpaceX capsule parachuted into the Gulf of Mexico in the early evening, just hours after departing the International Space Station. Splashdown occurred off the coast of Tallahassee in the Florida Panhandle, bringing their unplanned odyssey to an end.

Within an hour, the astronauts were out of their capsule, waving and smiling at the cameras while being hustled away in reclining stretchers for routine medical checks.

It all started with a flawed Boeing test

flight last spring. The two expected to be gone just a week or so after launching on Boeing's new Starliner crew capsule on June 5. So many problems cropped up on the way to the space station that NASA eventually sent Starliner back empty and transferred the test pilots to SpaceX, pushing their homecoming into February. Then SpaceX capsule issues added another month's delay.

Sunday's arrival of their relief crew meant Wilmore and Williams could finally leave. NASA cut them loose a little early, given the iffy weather forecast later this week. They checked out with NASA's Nick Hague and Russia's Alexander Gorbunov, who arrived in their own SpaceX capsule last fall with two empty seats reserved for the Starliner duo.

Wilmore and Williams ended up spending 286 days in space - 278 days longer than anticipated when they launched. They



NASA astronaut Sunita Williams gives a thumbs-up after being helped out of a SpaceX capsule onboard the SpaceX recovery ship

circled Earth 4,576 times and traveled 121 million miles (195 million kilometers) by the time of splashdown.

"On behalf of SpaceX, welcome home," radioed SpaceX Mission Control in California. "What a ride," replied Hague, the capsule's commander. "I see a capsule full of grins ear to ear."

Dolphins circled the capsule as divers readied it for hoisting onto the recovery ship. Once safely on board, the side hatch was opened and the astronauts were helped out, one by one. Williams was next-to-last out, followed by Wilmore who gave two gloved thumbs-up.

Wilmore and Williams' plight captured the world's attention, giving new meaning to the phrase "stuck at work" and turning "Butch and Sunita" into household names. While other astronauts had logged longer spaceflights over the decades, none had to deal with so much uncertainty or see the

length of their mission expand by so much.

Wilmore and Williams quickly transitioned from guests to full-fledged station crew members, conducting experiments, fixing equipment and even spacewalking together. With 62 hours over nine spacewalks, Williams set a record: the most time spent spacewalking over a career among female astronauts.

Both had lived on the orbiting lab before and knew the ropes, and brushed up on their station training before rocketing away. Williams became the station's commander three months into their stay and held the post until earlier this month.

Their mission took an unexpected twist in late January when President Donald Trump asked SpaceX founder Elon Musk to accelerate the astronauts' return and blamed the delay on the Biden administration.

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## Gujarat village goes over the moon

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mehsana

Residents of NASA astronaut Sunita Williams' ancestral village Jhulasan in Gujarat's Mehsana district on Wednesday celebrated her safe return by bursting firecrackers, distributing sweets, dancing and offering prayers to the local deity.

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel also extended congratulations through X to "our very own Sunita Williams" and said people in India take immense pride in her connection to "our" land, celebrating her as a "shining example of our shared heritage and aspirations".

As soon as a SpaceX capsule carrying Williams and astronaut Butch Wilmore splashed down near the Florida coast in the US after their nine-month stay at the International Space Station (ISS), the villagers erupted in joy, bursting firecrackers, dancing and chanting "Har Har Mahadev".

The villagers had organised a 'yagna'

praying for Williams' safe return. They said their happiness knew no end and hoped to see Williams visit her ancestral village soon and inspire school students who are already filled with curiosity and following in her footsteps.

Students of the local government school gathered to celebrate the occasion by performing garba, a traditional Gujarati folk dance, and took out a procession with Williams' photo to the nearby temple of goddess Dola Mata.

As the procession made its way from the school premises to the temple of goddess Dola Mata, the students danced and sang and distributed sweets on their way.

School teachers and locals said the goddess heard their prayers and brought Williams home safely. The procession, and the prayer that followed at the temple, was a way to thank her for her blessings, they said.

Principal of the primary school, Vishal Panchal, said that the entire village is ecsta-

tic and filled with pride upon Williams' return.

"The daughter of our village is the pride of the world. She stayed in space for such a long time and came back safe. We performed garba, burst firecrackers and distributed sweets. Our happiness knows no end," he said.

When Sunita Williams left for ISS on June 5 last year and her mission was delayed, the villagers came together to light up an 'Akhand Jyot' here on June 27 and took out a procession carrying the eternal flame to the temple of Dola Mata, praying for her safety, said a local resident.

"We are very proud and happy that she is back on earth. We are from the same family. Sunita is a great inspiration for the children, who all want to become like her," he said.

Villagers chanted prayers by placing Williams' photo near the temple goddess and distributed sweets as 'prasad', the offering to the goddess.

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## Earth missed you: Prime Minister Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge joined celebrities, politicians and others on Wednesday to celebrate the return of NASA astronaut Sunita Williams to Earth after nine months, terming her an inspiration for generations to come and lauding her determination. The Prime Minister said "the Earth Missed You."

The President said in a social media post India's daughter and her fellow astronauts have inspired everyone with their perseverance, dedication and never-say-die spirit.

"Congratulations to the entire team behind the safe return of NASA's Crew 9 mission on Earth! Their historic journey is a tale of determination, teamwork and extraordinary courage. I salute their

unwavering resolve and wish them excellent health!" she said.

"Welcome back, #Crew9! The Earth missed you," the prime minister said in his post. "Theirs has been a test of grit, courage and the boundless human spirit... Their unwavering determination in the face of the vast unknown will forever inspire millions. Space exploration is

**Congratulations to the entire team behind the safe return of NASA's Crew 9 mission on Earth! Their historic journey is a tale of determination, teamwork and extraordinary courage**

PRESIDENT DROUPADI MURMU

about pushing the limits of human potential, daring to dream, and having the courage to turn those dreams into reality.

"Sunita Williams, a trailblazer and an icon, has exemplified this spirit

throughout her career. We are incredibly proud of all those who worked tirelessly to ensure their safe return. They have demonstrated what happens when precision meets passion and technology meets tenacity," the prime minister said.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) termed Williams' extended stay in space a "remarkable achievement".

"A testament to NASA, SpaceX, and the USA's commitment to space exploration! Your resilience and dedication continue to inspire space enthusiasts around the world," ISRO said.

"The successful splashdown of #Crew9, accomplishing a challenging space expedition, is a testament to the power of human resilience. It is an inspiring demonstration of how even the toughest hurdles can be overcome with sheer courage, patience, and dedication," Home Minister Shah said.

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Police personnel deployed to maintain law and order after incidents of clashes following VHP-Bajrang Dal protest demanding removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, in Chitnis Park area in Nagpur

## Minority leader arrested for Nagpur riots trigger

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

The Nagpur police on Wednesday arrested Minority Democratic Party Leader Fahim Shamim Khan for his alleged role in the communal riots that erupted in Nagpur on Monday night, even as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) condemned the violence in the orange city and said that Aurangzeb was no longer relevant in the current context.

On a day when he reiterated that the Nagpur violence was a "pre-planned" incident triggered to disturb social harmony, Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnis said that those who attacked the police during Monday's dis-

turbances in the orange city would be "dug out from their graves".

Replying to a debate in the Maharashtra Assembly on the budgetary demands of the Home portfolio which he holds, Fadnis categorically stated that the police had verified and found that any cloth on which Quranic verses were written was burnt during the protest against Aurangzeb in Nagpur on Monday.

Maintaining that the attacks on police were "unpardonable", Fadnis said: "Such people will be given the strictest punishment. Those who have attacked the police in Nagpur will be dug out from their graves," he asserted.

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## The Pioneer vindicated in Delhi CCTV scam

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Delhi government's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) has registered a case against former PWD minister and senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Satyendar Jain over alleged corruption in a ₹571-Crore CCTV project. The case revolves around claims that Jain waived damages worth ₹16 Crore imposed on Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for delays in installing CCTV cameras across Delhi. In exchange, he allegedly accepted a bribe of ₹7 Crore through contractors who benefited from additional orders. The Pioneer was the first newspaper to report the CCTV project scam.

Joint Commissioner of Police (ACB) Madhur Verma said the FIR was registered on Tuesday after obtaining prior sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act. An FIR was filed under Sections 7 and 13(1)(a) of the Prevention of Corruption Act and Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) after obtaining approval under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act from the competent authority.

In August 2019, the Delhi government under the AAP proposed a penalty of Rs 16 Crore on Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for its "slow pace" in installing 1.4 Lakh CCTVs in the capital. The Rs 571-Crore project, which included an annual maintenance clause for five years, specified the installation of 2,000 CCTVs in each of the 70 Assembly constituencies.

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## SIX SC JUDGES TO VISIT MANIPUR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Six Supreme Court judges, headed by Justice BR Gavai, will visit various relief camps in Manipur on March 22 to oversee and strengthen legal and humanitarian support to the violence-affected communities. This step was taken by National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) on Tuesday evening, whose Executive Chairman is Justice Gavai.

During the visit there will be distribution of essential relief materials to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Further, a team of 25 specialised doctors from Chennai will conduct Medical Camps across all relief camps.

On August 1, 2023, the Supreme Court had said that there was an "absolute breakdown of constitutional machinery" in the state. Over 200 people were killed, several hundred injured and thousands displaced since ethnic violence broke out in the state on May 3, 2023, when a "tribal solidarity march" was organised in the hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for scheduled tribe status.

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## NIA raids multiple locations in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Wednesday cracked down on the ecosystem sustaining terrorist activities across the Jammu region by raiding a dozen locations including residences of some of the active over-ground workers (OGWs).

These raids started early in the morning and continued during the day at several locations in Jammu city. Paramilitary forces stood guard outside the residences of suspected OGWs while NIA teams conducted raids and seized relevant records.

According to a spokesman of the National Investigation Agency, the raids were conducted in connection with a case RC-04/2024/NIA/JMU registered last year based on information about the infiltration of active terrorists.

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# Government revises NPDD, RGM to enhance facilities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The government on Wednesday revised two schemes — National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD) and Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM), raising the outlay by ₹2,000 Crore to ₹6,190 Crore to boost milk production, procurement level, processing capacity, lab testing facilities and other related infrastructure.

Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the Revised National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD) and the Revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM), Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told reporters.

“The Revised NPDD, a Central Sector Scheme, has been enhanced with an additional ₹1,000 Crore, bringing the total budget to ₹2,790 Crore for the period of the 15th Finance Commission cycle (2021-22 to 2025-26),” an official statement said.

This initiative focuses on modernising and expanding dairy infrastructure, ensuring the sector’s sustained growth and productivity, Vaishnav said.

The revised NPDD will give an impetus to the dairy sector by creating infrastructure for milk procurement, processing capacity, and ensuring better quality control. It is intended to help farmers gain better access to markets, ensure better pricing through value addition, and improve the efficiency of the supply chain.

In a post on social media platform ‘X’, Prime Minister Modi said the approval for the revised National Programme for Dairy Development will contribute to the sector’s transformation, ensuring better pricing for farmers, job creation and more.

The Cabinet also approved the Revised RGM to boost growth in the livestock sector. “Implementation of revised RGM, as central sector component of Development Programmes scheme is being done with an additional outlay of ₹1,000 Crore, that is



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with former CEO of Microsoft Bill Gates during a meeting

total outlay of ₹3,400 Crore during 15th Finance Commission cycle from 2021-22 to 2025-26,” the statement said.

Under the RGM, two new activities have been added, a) one-time assistance of 35 per cent of the capital cost for establishment of Heifer Rearing Centres to Implementing Agencies for creation of 30 housing facilities having a total of 15,000 heifers; (b) encourage farmers to purchase high genetic merit (HGM) IVF heifers to provide 3 per cent interest subvention on loan taken by the farmer from milk unions/financial institutions/banks.

This will help in systemic induction of high-yielding breeds. In another post, the Prime Minister said the decision relating to the Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM) will boost milk production, improve indigenous breeds and empower several dairy farmers. “It is a major effort towards self-reliance in the livestock sector,” he said.

There will be a continuation of ongoing activities of the Rashtriya Gokul Mission

- strengthening of semen stations, artificial insemination network, implementation of bull production programme, accelerated breed improvement programme using sex-sorted semen, skill development, farmer awareness, support for innovative activities including establishment of Centre of Excellence and strengthening of Central Cattle Breeding Farms. “With the implementation of the Rashtriya Gokul Mission and other efforts of the Government, milk production has increased by 63.55 per cent in the last ten years, along with the availability of milk per person, which was 307 grams per day in 2013-14, has increased to 471 grams per day in 2023-24. Productivity has also increased by 26.34 per cent in the last ten years,” the statement said.

The NPDD scheme consists of two key components the first one is dedicated to improving essential dairy infrastructure, such as milk chilling plants, advanced milk testing laboratories, and certification systems.

## SC asks CBI stand on plea to probe ‘fraud’ by Kolkata’s SREI group

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought the CBI’s stand on a plea seeking a probe into the alleged financial fraud committed by Kolkata-based SREI Group.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar took note of the submissions of advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for Lucknow-based petitioner Bhubendra Nath, seeking a comprehensive probe by the CBI and the ED into alleged financial irregularities committed by the group.

The petitioner alleged the SREI Group, which is now under the management of National Asset Reconstruction Company Limited after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) superseded the boards of some group firms due to governance concerns and repayment defaults in 2021, was accused of frauds involving round-trip-

ping of funds through a private trust and siphoning of public money borrowed from various banks.

The plea challenged the Allahabad High Court order of March 18, 2024, by which it accepted the report of the economic offences wing, Varanasi closing the investigation against the group.

The bench noted the submission of additional solicitor general SV Raju, appearing for the ED, that he would also represent the CBI and seek instructions from the central probe agency over the probe in the present case.

“It is for them (CBI) to take a decision as per law,” the CJJ said when Bhushan said a matter involving huge banking and financial fraud ought to be probed by the CBI. It was alleged that the amount involved runs into several thousand crores. Bhushan referred to RBI’s master directions on frauds and said the cases of fraud exceeding Rs 500 crore must be

referred to the CBI.

Despite the directive and a clear evidence of fraudulent activities, no serious action was taken by investigating agencies, he alleged.

The CJJ considered the submissions of some lawyers appearing for the opposite parties suspecting that the petitioner did not exist and the case was fictitious.

The bench said the petitioner would have to appear before the apex court registrar through the video-conferencing facility before the next date of hearing. Bhushan said the petitioner visited the top court to comply with the procedural formalities for filing the plea.

The bench has posted the plea for hearing in the May 5 week.

SREI Infrastructure Finance Limited and M/S Sahaj e-Village, the plea said, received approval from the UP government to run ‘Jan Suviddha Kendras’ in the various districts of the state.

## RSS to pass resolution on Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

The All India Pratinidhi Sabha, the highest decision-making body of the RSS, will hold a three-day meeting in Bengaluru from March 21 to 23, the outfit’s national publicity-in-charge Sunil Ambekar said on Wednesday. During these three-days, the executive committee will pass resolutions on Bangladesh and the RSS centenary celebrations will be passed, he told reporters. The presidents and general secretaries of 32 organisations affiliated to RSS will also take part in the event, including BJP national president Jagat Prakash Nadda and general secretary B.L. Santhosh, Ambekar said.

“From March 21 to 23, the executive committee members of the All India Pratinidhi Sabha of the RSS will meet here. This event is happening in Bengaluru after four years.” He further said the RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale will present a detailed synopsis of works done by the RSS and its future roadmap.

The regional heads will also present their works, programmes, role and future plans, which will be reviewed. “The prevailing situation in Bangladesh and the role of RSS will be discussed in the executive committee meeting and once approved, it will be presented before the core committee,” Ambekar said. Regarding the centenary year celebration of RSS, he said, on

Vijayadashami this year, the Sangh will complete its 100 years. “This is the centenary year of the RSS. It was started in Nagpur in 1925 and it has now spread across the country. The expansion of the RSS Shakra and its goals will be discussed in these three days,” the RSS leader said. “The RSS has decided to celebrate the Centenary year from Vijayadashami 2025 to Vijayadashami 2026. A resolution will be passed on the centenary year celebrations, which will be made public.”

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, general secretary of the outfit Dattatreya Hosabale, top RSS functionaries Krishna Gopal, Mukund, Arun Kumar, Ram Dutt, Alok Kumar, Atul Limaye will also be present.

## The Pioneer vindicated in Delhi CCTV scam

Continued from >> P1 “Jain is accused of arbitrarily waiving liquidated damages worth Rs 16 Crore imposed on Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for delays in installing CCTV cameras across Delhi. The waiver was allegedly granted after receiving a Rs 7-Crore bribe,” Verma said in a statement. Multiple complaints have suggested that the project was executed in a shoddy manner, with several cameras found to be non-functional at the time of hand over, he said.

According to the statement, the case is based on a news report which claimed that a bribe of Rs 7 Crore was arranged for Jain, who was the nodal officer for the CCTV project, in exchange for waiving penalties imposed on BEL and its contractors. The penalties were initially levied in

August 2019 by the previous AAP government due to significant delays in the installation of 1.4 Lakh CCTV cameras across Delhi’s 70 assembly constituencies.

The government publicly expressed its displeasure with the public sector undertaking (PSU), which was awarded the contract in November 2018, and threatened to invoke the penalty clause, outlined in the agreement entered into by the two sides. The government issued a show cause notice and had also threatened to blacklist the firm.

During verification, a BEL officer provided a detailed complaint supporting the allegations. The complaint further alleged that in addition to waiving the penalties, additional orders for 1.4 Lakh more CCTV cameras were awarded to BEL, the

Joint CP said. The bribe was allegedly routed through contractors who received the additional camera installation orders. Payments were reportedly made by inflating vendor order values, Verma said.

The ACB is in the process of scrutinising relevant documents from the Public Works Department (PWD) and BEL. A case has been registered under sections 7 (offence related to public servant being bribed) and 13(1)(a) (criminal misconduct by a public servant) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, read with Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code, he added. A comprehensive investigation has been launched to determine the full extent of the conspiracy and the involvement of PWD officials and BEL executives, the statement said.

## Minority leader arrested for Nagpur riots trigger

Continued from >> P1 “We will not leave them... Nagpur is calm now. The city is known for its peace. There had been no riot in the city since 1992. The violence in Nagpur was a pre-planned incident by certain people. Only a replica of Aurangzeb’s grave was burnt. We have verified that no ayat (quranic verses) were burnt. But, rumours were spread deliberately. Those who spread rumours to disturb social harmony will be dealt with sternly. Some people have been arrested,” Fadnavis said.

Earlier in the day, Fahim Khan - being seen as the mastermind behind the Nagpur violence -- was arrested after his name was included in an FIR registered at the Ganeshpeth Police Station. Earlier in the day, the police released his photograph and a video that purportedly showed him delivering an inflammatory speech sometime before violence broke out in some parts of Nagpur on Monday evening. After his arrest, Fahim Khan, a resident of Sanjay Bagh Colony in Yashodhara Nagar, was produced before a Nagpur court which remanded him in police custody till March 21.

Thirty-eight-year-old Fahim Khan has been named as one of the key accused in an 18-page FIR registered in connection with the Nagpur violence. The police said that preliminary investigations and the video that surfaced after Monday’s disturbances indicated that Khan’s inflammatory speech incited the violence.

Among other things, the FIR stated that Khan led a group of “50 to 60” people that gathered outside the Ganeshpeth police station on Monday and submitted a memorandum against the Vishwa Hindu Parishad’s protest to the police. After the protest, Khan and eight others went to the Bhaladarpura area where he reportedly addressed a gathering of 600 people and criticised the VHP and Bajrang Dal.

It may be recalled that violence broke out on Monday evening, hours after the 200-odd workers of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal staged a protest near the Shivaji Maharaj statue in Nagpur demanding the removal of Aurangzeb’s tomb at Khuldabad near Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar (erstwhile Aurangabad) and allegedly burnt an effigy of Aurangzeb.

When specifically asked if Fahim Khan was the mastermind behind Monday’s violence, Nagpur Police Commissioner Virender Singal said that the investigations were underway to identify the key accused and the role of those named in the FIR. “Some names have come up. Police will investigate whether these

people had any role from the beginning, whether they had criminal backgrounds, or whether they were planning (violence). All these aspects are being probed,” Singhal said, while talking to media persons in Nagpur on Wednesday.

Fahim Khan, as a Minority Democratic Party candidate, had contested unsuccessfully against senior BJP leader and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls from Nagpur constituency. He had polled mere 1073 votes as against 6,55,027 votes secured by Gadkari.

In all, six FIRs have so far been registered and 54 persons have been arrested in connection with the Nagpur violence.

In a related development, RSS Akhil Bharatiya Prachar Pramukh Sunil Ambekar condemned Nagpur violence, by saying that “any form of violence is detrimental to the society’s well-being.”

Interacting with media persons in Bengaluru where a three-day national convention of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) will take place from March 21 to 23, Ambekar said that the 17th-century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb “is no longer relevant in today’s context”. “Any type of violence is not good for the health of the society...,” Ambekar said. Queried if the Aurangzeb’s tomb at Khuldabad near Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar in (erstwhile Aurangabad) in Maharashtra, Ambekar said: “No, Aurangzeb is not relevant today,” Ambekar said.

## NIA raids multiple locations in Jammu

Continued from >> P1 According to the First Information Report, the Central Government received reliable information regarding the infiltration of active terrorists led by Lashker-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) proscribed terrorist organisations, into Indian territory through the International Border (IB) and line of Control (LOC) and these infiltrations were facilitated by Over Ground workers (OGWs) and other terror associates based in villages near the IB and LOC, who provide them with resources like logistical support, food shelter and money and guide them through wild terrains of Jammu province ensuring their safe passage to hinterland especially districts of Kathua, Udhampur, Doda, Kishtwar, Reasi, Rajouri, Poonch and also to the Kashmir valley.

According to the FIR, these active terrorists, OGWs and other associates have also intentionally hatched criminal conspiracy physically as well as through cyberspace using secured encrypted social media applications to wage a war against the Government of India.

According to the FIR, terrorists also launched a series of attacks in Kathua, Udhampur, Rajouri, and Poonch leading to the deaths of many civilians and security forces personnel.

Meanwhile, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Jammu Zone, Bhim Sen Tuti, Wednesday conducted a comprehensive visit to various Border Outposts (BOPs) in the Hiranagar sector of Kathua and Samba districts, to assess the operational preparedness of security forces deployed along the International

Border. The visit covered key locations, including BPP Sanyal in Hiranagar, Chakra, Mawa, Babber Nallah, Sherpur, and Harya Chak.

During his visit, IGP Jammu interacted with officers and personnel stationed at these critical outposts and reviewed security measures, and deployment strategies to counter any potential threats along the border. During the review, the effectiveness of surveillance systems, including CCTV cameras was also reviewed. A significant emphasis was placed on strengthening coordination and synergy between the Jammu and Kashmir Police and the BSF to ensure seamless border management. The condition of border infrastructure, including roads, fencing, and communication networks, was also evaluated.

# Sunita Williams touches down on Mother Earth

Continued from >> P1 The replacement crew’s brand new SpaceX capsule still wasn’t ready to fly, so SpaceX subbed it with a used one, hurrying things along by at least a few weeks.

Even in the middle of the political storm, Wilmore and Williams continued to maintain an even keel at public appearances from orbit, casting no blame and insisting they supported NASA’s decisions from the

start.

NASA hired SpaceX and Boeing after the shuttle program ended, in order to have two competing U.S. Companies for transporting astronauts to and from the space station until it’s abandoned in 2030 and steered to a fiery reentry. By then, it will have been up there more than three decades; the plan is to replace it with privately run stations

so NASA can focus on moon and Mars expeditions.

Both retired Navy captains, Wilmore and Williams stressed they didn’t mind spending more time in space - a prolonged deployment reminiscent of their military days. But they acknowledged it was tough on their families.

Wilmore, 62, missed most of his younger daughter’s senior year of high school; his

older daughter is in college. Williams, 59, had to settle for internet calls from space to her husband, mother and other relatives.

“We have not been worried about her because she has been in good spirits,” said Falguni Pandya, who is married to Williams’ cousin. “She was definitely ready to come home.”

Prayers for Williams and Wilmore were

offered up at 21 Hindu temples in the U.S. In the months leading up to their return, said organiser Tejal Shah, president of World Hindu Council of America. Williams has spoken frequently about her Indian and Slovenian heritage. Prayers for their safe return also came from Wilmore’s Baptist church in Houston, where he serves as a elder.

After returning in the gulf - Trump in

January signed an executive order renaming the body of water Gulf of America - Wilmore and Williams will have to wait until they’re off the SpaceX recovery ship and flown to Houston before reuniting with their loved ones. The three NASA astronauts will be checked out by flight surgeons as they adjust to gravity, officials said, and allowed to go home after several days.

## Gujarat village goes over the moon

Continued from >> P1 As Williams’ landing neared in the early hours of Wednesday, all eyes were on her, with Jhulasan residents gathering at one place to view the event live on a television screen.

Soon after the splashdown, residents celebrated the moment by bursting firecrackers, dancing and chanting “Har Har Mahadev.”

Even as Williams was on her way back, the villagers performed a ‘yagna’ at the temple and offered prayers. They said they had been performing a ‘yagna’ and had kept the ‘Akhand Jyot’ aflame on the premises for her safe return.

Jhulasan, known as the ancestral home of Williams’ father Deepak Pandya, was alive with excitement ever since the news of her proposed return, after a delayed stay at the ISS, trickled in. Navin Pandya, her cousin, said that the

villagers have been praying for her safety, taking care of the ‘Akhand Jyot’ that was lit up for her safe return soon after she went to space over nine months ago.

He said the villagers are looking forward to inviting Williams to visit Jhulasan. Williams has visited India at least three times, including in 2007 and 2013, soon after her space missions and has been honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 2008.

Through a post on X, CM Patel expressed his heartfelt congratulations to “our very own Sunita Williams and the Crew9 astronauts on their safe return to Earth after an extraordinary nine-month mission aboard the International Space Station.”

“Their unwavering dedication and resilience have been a beacon of inspiration for millions. We, in India, take immense pride in Sunita’s connection to

our land, celebrating her as a shining example of our shared heritage and aspirations,” he said in a tweet.

Education Minister Praful Pansheriya said people from all faiths prayed for Williams’ return and also remembered the late Kalpana Chawla, the first Indian-born woman and the second Indian person to fly in space.

“Williams has sent a positive message for women empowerment across the world and has given pace to astrophysics and a desire to know the cosmos,” he told reporters. Her father, originally from Jhulasan, migrated to the United States in 1957.

Williams’ space mission was initially scheduled to last seven days but got extended due to a technical glitch. Her SpaceX capsule splashed down in the Gulf of Mexico on Wednesday early morning.

## Earth missed you: Prime Minister Modi

Continued from >> P1 Expressing his delight at the safe return of the crew, Rajnath Singh said “India’s daughter Sunita Williams and other astronauts have rewritten the history of human endurance and perseverance in Space.”

“This incredible moment will be etched in our minds forever as a victory of human resilience...” Union Minister Piyush Goyal added in his post. “Welcome back to Earth, Sunita Williams!” Kharage said, adding that the safe conclusion of the extended mission has brought a sense of relief and elation to the 1.4 billion citizens of India.

The TMC said in its post, “After nine months in space, our daughter has finally returned, filling our hearts with happiness.”

Messages also came in from several chief ministers. Gujarat’s Bhubendra Patel said every Indian takes immense pride in Williams’ connection to the country.

“Heartfelt congratulations to our very own Sunita Williams and the #Crew9 astronauts on their safe return to Earth after an extraordinary nine-month mission aboard the International Space Station. Their unwavering dedication and resilience have been a beacon of inspiration for millions,” he added. According to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the astronauts’ “extended mission, shaped by technical challenges, has left an inspiring legacy in space exploration.”

Andhra Pradesh’s N Chandrababu Naidu said the two astronauts’ journey back shows exemplary human determination and teamwork.

Assam’s Himanta Biswa Sarma described the moment as a “one of the high points of humanity, a superlative convergence of endurance and scientific advancement.”

Former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said Williams’ incredible nine-

month journey in space has been truly inspiring.

“Your courage and dedication continue to ignite dreams across generations. The world celebrates your safe return and the knowledge you bring,” he added.

Mahindra Group chairperson Anand Mahindra said Williams’ return to Earth has provided him “enormous relief”. “She is courage personified and it’s good to have her back amongst us. Swagatam, Sunita,” he wrote, while sharing an old photo with Williams. From the world of cinema, actors Chiranjeevi and R Madhavan congratulated Williams on her return to Earth. In a post on social media, Chiranjeevi hailed the duo’s return to Earth as both “historic” and “heroic”.

Madhavan shared a video of Williams coming out of the SpaceX capsule and said the prayers of the whole world have been answered.

# Delhi ACB files case against Satyendar Jain

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A political tussle has erupted after the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) of Delhi government registered an FIR against former PWD minister and senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain over alleged corruption in a Rs 571 crore CCTV project.

While senior AAP leader Atishi called it a case of "political witch-hunt", Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva accused Jain of accepting a bribe of Rs 7 crore. In a post on X, former Delhi chief minister Atishi said, "When investigating agencies leave their work and start political witch-hunting on the orders of the boss..."

She also shared a document highlighting a reply by the BJP-led Centre in Parliament, which claimed that out of the 193 cases filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against political leaders in the past 10 years, only two resulted in convictions.

Delhi BJP president welcomed the ACB's move for registering an FIR against Jain in a CCTV scam case. In a video post on X, Sachdeva alleged that the previous government led by Arvind Kejriwal covered up the corruption case for years.



"In 2017-18, the Kejriwal government awarded a contract of Rs 571 crore to Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for installing CCTV cameras in Delhi. Due to delays, a penalty of Rs 16 crore was imposed in 2019 but Satyendar Jain waived it after taking Rs 7 crore bribe. The ACB completed its investigation in 2023 but the FIR was delayed due to AAP's cover-up act," Sachdeva claimed.

"Apart from reports from departmental sources, former Delhi BJP President Manoj Tiwari had also complained about the matter, which the ACB subsequently took up," he said.

Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav also slammed the AAP saying the Congress has been insisting that huge corruption had been committed by former AAP Minister Satyendar Jain in the installation of CCTV cameras in the Capital, which has been validated with the Delhi Government's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) registering an FIR against him over the Rs 571 crore corruption related to the project.

In a fierce rebuttal to Delhi government's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) alleged case against Jain, the AAP tore into the BJP over this "desperate attempt," questioning why the Centre had not approached the courts if it truly contested the Rs 16 crore penalty imposed on it. Senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh stated that another false case is being fabricated against Jain.

The Modi government at the Centre is constantly engaged in harassing the AAP. This is yet another attempt in that direc-

tion and nothing more. The FIR against Jain was filed on Tuesday after the ACB obtained sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act from the competent authority.

Joint Commissioner of Police (ACB), Madhur Verma, said Jain is accused of "arbitrarily" waiving the Rs 16 crore fine imposed on BEL despite complaints that several cameras were non-functional at the time of handover.

The case has added to Jain's legal troubles. On March 2, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) informed a special court that it had secured approval from the Delhi lieutenant governor to prosecute Jain in a disproportionate assets case.

The ED had arrested Jain in a money-laundering case linked to alleged hawala transactions in May 2022. He was granted bail in October 2024.

Jain, who was a key AAP leader and minister in the previous government, faced a political setback in the recent Assembly elections in Delhi, losing the Shukri Basti seat to BJP's Karnail Singh by nearly 21,000 votes. The BJP also claimed a landslide victory in Delhi, securing 48 out of 70 seats, leaving AAP with just 22.

# Delhi Assembly unveils best MLA of the year award

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a landmark announcement, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Wednesday unveiled the 'Best MLA of the Year' award during the valedictory session of the Orientation Programme for Newly Elected Members of the Delhi Legislative Assembly.

This prestigious annual award aims to recognise and encourage exemplary legislative performance, with criteria including excellence in parliamentary debate, attendance record, and decorum maintained in the House. On this occasion, Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bist, was also present.

The practice of "Best MLA of the Year" was discontinued by the AAP when they came to power. Speaking on the occasion, Gupta stated, "This award will serve as a motivation for legislators to uphold the highest standards of parliamentary conduct and actively contribute to meaningful legislative discourse. It is a step towards making the Delhi Legislative Assembly a 'Model Assembly' that sets

new benchmarks in democratic governance."

The Speaker also presented mementos to the legislators.

The two-day Orientation Programme, conducted by the Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE), equipped newly elected members with crucial parliamentary knowledge.

The meticulously designed sessions covered constitutional provisions, rules of procedure, question hour protocols, legislative motions, and policy-making frameworks. Expert-led lectures, discussions, and interactive sessions provided valuable insights into good governance and legislative drafting.

Expressing satisfaction over the programme's success, Gupta emphasised the Assembly's commitment to enhancing the effectiveness of its legislators. "These comprehensive training sessions play a crucial role in empowering our MLAs with the knowledge and skills required to serve the people effectively," he added.

# Israeli technology aids Delhi police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

An Israeli facial recognition system has helped Delhi Police solve a case of robbery at gunpoint, arrest two accused persons, and recover the entire stolen amount of ₹80 Lakh, officials said on Wednesday. According to police, the arrested accused have been identified as Md Ali (21) and Samir (19).

A trader's employee was allegedly robbed of ₹80 Lakh at gunpoint in the Chandni Chowk area on Monday. The accused fired a warning shot in the air before fleeing with the cash, the officer said. Police analysed footage from nearly 500 CCTV cameras installed in Chandni Chowk, Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Daryaganj and Lahori Gate areas.

An Israeli facial recognition technology was used to identify the prime suspect, Md Ali, which linked him to a previous case, Deputy Commissioner of Police (North), Raja Banthia, said.

The officer said Israeli technology helps identify accused persons using a complete database. In this case, police took a screen grab of the accused and matched his face with the database. "The similarity score was 32.09 per cent. We got to know that the accused lived in Daryaganj, where teams were already working to trace the Scooty used in the crime," the DCP said.

On March 17, Ajmal Bhai Ganesh (49), an employee of R K Enterprises and a resident of Patan in Gujarat, collected ₹80

Lakh from the Kucha Ghasiram area around 7 pm, Banthia said. "As he was heading towards his residence in Fatehpuri, Ganesh was intercepted by an armed man who attempted to snatch his bag. When Ganesh resisted, the accused fired a warning shot, seized the bag, and escaped," the DCP said.

During the probe, police identified a suspect wearing a blue shirt and a cap who followed the victim and was seen fleeing towards the Fatehpuri Masjid. Another accused was seen escaping towards Lal Qila on a Scooty, the DCP said. "Police later arrested Ali, a resident of Daryaganj, who disclosed the identity of his accomplice — Samir — during interrogation. Samir was arrested from Daryaganj," Banthia said.

A raid at Samir's residence led to the recovery of ₹79.5 Lakh in cash, a semi-automatic pistol with three bullets, and other incriminating materials, the DCP said.

Ali had prior knowledge of cash movement in the Kucha Ghasiram area and had conducted a reconnaissance before targeting the victim, the officer said. "While Ali identified the target, Samir executed the robbery. Both accused have been booked under the relevant sections of law," the DCP said.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor has congratulated the Delhi Police for solving the ₹80 lakh robbery case that took place in Haidarquli, Fatehpuri, yesterday evening.

# CM Rekha Gupta vows to end waterlogging issues

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta asserted on Wednesday that the new government in the national capital will leave no stone unturned to ensure de-silting of all the drains and prevent waterlogging issues during the rainy season. Accompanied by Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, PWD Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma and senior officers of various departments, the chief minister inspected the de-silting work at the Sunehri Pul drain.

Complaining that no de-silting was undertaken in the tenure of the previous AAP regime in Delhi, Gupta said the new BJP government has to start from "zero" and complete the work.

Gupta said "this is her second visit to review the Sunehri Pul Drain after two days. When this drain was initially constructed, perhaps no proper desilting mechanism was planned for the future. During the monsoon, these drains would get clogged, leading to severe waterlogging issues in nearby residential colonies. Today, we are here to find a solution to this challenge. Using advanced machinery, we are making cuts into the drain to remove layers of accumulated silt that have been settling for years." "The primary objective is to ensure that Delhi does not face waterlogging issues in the upcoming monsoon season. Officials have been strictly directed to complete desilting



Delhi Lt. Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, CM Rekha Gupta, Irrigation and Flood Control Minister Parvesh Verma and BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj inspect Sunehri Pul drain, in New Delhi

work on time," she added. The Chief Minister emphasised, "This initiative will not just be limited to the Sunehri Pul drain, but will extend to all major and minor drains across Delhi. We have made a complete plan, and all departments have been directed to ensure desilting is conducted in their respective areas. She also said the condition of the water pipelines and leakage is such that almost half of the city is getting water through tankers. "There is no water and taps and these need to be created," she said. The "double-engine" government of the BJP, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is com-

mitted to getting all these things done and has already started working on it, Gupta said, in a reference to the party being in power both at the Centre and in Delhi. Two days after the LG, chief minister and public works department (PWD) minister inspected the Sunehri Pul drain in south Delhi, they again went to the spot to supervise the de-silting work on Wednesday. "Nothing was thought about the de-silting of this drain by those who constructed it with at least 15-inch thick concrete slabs. The nearby colonies get waterlogged," Gupta told reporters. She said the slabs have to be cut

to expose the clogged drain for de-silting. "The accumulated silt has solidified like rock and is being removed with the help of machines," she said.

All kinds of machines, including super suckers of the PWD and high-pressure water jets of the fire department, are deployed to de-silt the drain, Gupta added. The bigger drains need to be de-silted first so that the water from the drains in the streets and the PWD's 60-foot-wide roads drain out. "We are on the ground to find solutions, we are not confined to air-conditioned rooms and are paying attention to what others are saying," Gupta said over senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia's jibe at her government's efforts to clean the Yamuna river.

During this visit, Saxena directed all the concerned departments to work in coordination and take concrete steps for desilting the drain and ensuring smooth water flow. Meanwhile, Sisodia reposted a video by a social media user on X, purportedly showing waterlogged streets in the Patparganj area.

"This is a part of the new government's Yamuna-cleaning plan. Stop all the sewerage of the localities in the streets, if the sewerage does not go into the Yamuna, the river will get cleaned automatically," the former deputy chief minister said in his post on the microblogging platform. Sisodia is also a former MLA from Patparganj.

# NSD to host ADIRANG MAHOTSAV 2025

ABHI SINGHAL ■ New Delhi

The National School of Drama (NSD) is set to present the 7th edition of ADIRANG MAHOTSAV 2025, a festival that celebrates the art, culture and heritage of India's tribal communities.

The event will take place from March 21st to 23rd, 2025, at the NSD Campus in New Delhi, offering an enriching experience of India's indigenous traditions.

Under the guidance of NSD Director Chittaranjan Tripathy, the festival will bring together around 300 tribal artists from across rural India, providing a platform to showcase and preserve their age-old traditions.

The event will feature 15 mesmerising dance and music performances from 13 states, along with exquisite tribal crafts from 11 states.

**Theatre lovers can look forward to Bir Birsa, a play from Jharkhand that pays tribute to the legendary tribal hero Birsa Munda, and Bana Guda from Odisha**

Theatre lovers can look forward to Bir Birsa, a play from Jharkhand that pays tribute to the legendary tribal hero Birsa Munda, and Bana Guda from Odisha, a captivating tale of bravery and folklore.

The festival will also highlight diverse dance forms, including Assam's Rabha, Gujarat's Siddi Dhamal, and Rajasthan's Chakri, alongside traditional crafts such as Telangana's Eklat sarees and Uttar Pradesh's horn and bone artwork.

Other attractions include Madhya Pradesh's Gudum Baja, Maharashtra's Songi Mukhawate, and Odisha's Durua and Singari dances.

Speaking about the festival, Chittaranjan Tripathy said, "ADIRANG MAHOTSAV is an opportunity to bring India's tribal heritage to the forefront, ensuring its appreciation and preservation for future generations."

In addition to performances and crafts, the festival will host national seminars and master classes, offering deep insights into tribal art and culture.

The event promises an immersive cultural experience, bridging ancient traditions with modern audiences.

# Delhi HC rebukes Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday censured the Delhi government for not ensuring funds to build official residences for district judiciary officials.

A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said any laxity or even slackness on the part of government officers or any authority in implementing the directions of the Supreme Court, passed in this regard, couldn't be appreciated.

"Why is this matter not a priority for the government? We don't appreciate lip service. Things should be seen on the ground and don't just push us against the wall. Don't do that. Make your officers understand this," it told the Delhi government counsel.

The conduct, the bench said, was not appreciable.

"Having regard to the nature of work and duties being performed by the judicial officers as underscored by the Supreme Court, it is needless to remind the officers of the state government and all other authorities and bodies that providing adequate official accommodation to judicial officers has to be necessarily a priority for all," the court added.

The court was hearing two petitions, one filed by the Judicial Service Association, which sought a direction to expedite the availability of government residential homes to Delhi judicial service officers and Delhi higher judicial services officers.

The members of the district judiciary filed the petition owing to a shortfall of residential flats.

The court noted that while the total sanctioned strength of judicial officers was 897, the number of available flats stood at 348.

The court was informed that the CBD ground land in Shahdara was allotted but non-release of funds had stalled the residential project.

The DDA counsel, however, said allotted land was not suitable.

The court said though it was informed a meeting of officers concerned was scheduled for December 10, 2024, it was not held.

The Delhi government's counsel said after December 10, 2024, the meeting could not be held due to assembly elections.

The bench said at least a month had passed since the elections were over but no efforts appeared in sight for exploring the finances for the pending projects.

"We have been informed that as far as the residential complex at Dwarka is concerned, the proposal is years old and even for this project, no decision has been taken to ensure the finances," it said.

The court granted three more weeks to the Delhi government to take positive steps in relation to the sanction and release of funds for building the pending housing projects for the judicial officers including projects at Dwarka and CBD ground, Shahdara.

# AAP slams BJP over law and order

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party leader Saurabh Bharadwaj on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on the newly-elected BJP government in Delhi, accusing it of failing to ensure law and order within a month of taking office.

"In just one month, the so-called double-engine government has turned into a 'double-murder sarkar'. Elderly couples are living in fear, unsure whether to keep house helps. Yesterday, an elderly couple was brutally murdered in Kohat Enclave, a posh area right next to the Delhi chief minister's residence," Bharadwaj said at a press conference.

The AAP leader's remarks came after the gruesome killing of a 70-year-old businessman, Mohinder Singh, and his

wife Diljeet Kaur in northwest Delhi's Kohat Enclave.

Police said the bodies of the couple, who lived alone, were found in a decomposed state with their newly-hired night attendant missing.

The incidents have reignited the political tussle between the AAP and the BJP over Delhi's law and order situation.

Bharadwaj also said that in another incident in Ashok Vihar, also in northwest Delhi, an elderly couple was looted, with no arrests made till now. At Fatehpuri, a trader was recently robbed of Rs 80 lakh in broad daylight, the AAP leader said.

The senior AAP leader charged that the BJP, which relies on police support for elections, lacks the will to act against them.

# Chaos erupts in MCD House as AAP, BJP clash

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Chaos erupted in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) House on Wednesday as councillors from the AAP and BJP engaged in heated exchanges, drawing the mayor's rebuke. BJP, AAP and the Congress have alleged each other of disrupting the House proceedings by creating chaos.

AAP and BJP councillors stood on tables and chairs and raised slogans against each other. AAP members chanted "Gundagardi Nahi Chalega," while BJP councillors responded with "Arvind Kejriwal Sharm Karo, Mayor Sharm Karo." Meanwhile, Congress councillors displayed a banner that read, "Samvidhan Humari Pehchan Hai, Samvidhan Ki Hatya Band Karo." Councillors were caught on video pushing each other, tearing papers, and throwing their bits at one another.

MCD Mayor Mahesh Khichi claimed that BJP councillors snatched mic from him. Khichi said that despite it being the last day of the budget session, the opposition refused to cooperate and disrupted proceedings. Meanwhile, motion of the entire proceeding was approved by the Mayor without reading the speech by the Leader of the House Mukesh Goel due to the disruptions.

As the last sitting of the House of current session started almost one hour late than its scheduled time, councillors from the opposition BJP gathered near the Mayor and Leader of the House shouting slogans against the AAP government



MCD Mayor Mahesh Khichi speaks as BJP councillors protest during the Budget session of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) in New Delhi

in MCD. When the Leader of the House began to read his concluding speech, the BJP councillors climbed on tables, tore the budget copy and other agenda items. Amid chaos, the Mayor approved finalisation of the budget alleging that the BJP wanted to create constitutional crisis.

During a press conference, Khichi alleged, "Opposition councillors stood on the table and tore up the list of key points that were to be discussed in the House." He claimed that for the past two years, the opposition had continuously been disrupting House proceedings, preventing discussions from taking place. "They did the same this time as well ... This kind of behaviour towards a Dalit Mayor is inappropriate and goes against the Constitution," Khichi said.

Meanwhile Goel, alleged that the BJP wanted to derail development of the civic agency. He said that the AAP has reduced

burden of MCD from Rs 16000 crore to Rs 14000 in a couple of year and has ensured salary payment of employees on time. Besides this it has made budgetary provision of nearly Rs 1000 crore for the next financial year for regularisation of 12000 employees. Meanwhile, the BJP is rattled with the AAP's model of governance and is creating hurdles.

Leader of Opposition (LoP) Raja Iqbal Singh, in a separate press conference, alleged that the Mayor has done constitutionally wrong by approving the budget of a government which has no majority. He said that sensing defeat in next mayoral polls scheduled in April this year, the party increased expenditure of LOP office by Rs 3 lakh. Secondly, they have also announced withdrawal of Rs 500 crore each from mayor's discretionary fund and comprehensive improvement and maintenance of roads fund.

# CRPF woman saves life of metro passenger

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A woman Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) sub-inspector has saved the life of a passenger, who fell unconscious in a packed Delhi Metro coach, by promptly performing the cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) procedure on him, officials said on Wednesday.

The incident took place between the Kirti Nagar and Moti Nagar stations on the Blue line of the metro rail network on Tuesday evening. CPR is an emergency life-saving procedure that is performed on a person when his heart stops beating. Security forces personnel are trained to render this procedure during their training. Sub-Inspector (SI) Anjali, 27, saw a man in his 40s standing behind her



falling unconscious on the floor of the coach. The man probably suffered a cardiac issue and fainted in the train that was heavily crowded, CRPF officials said.

Losing no time, the SI immediately

administered CPR on the man and he soon came back to his senses. The passenger was evacuated at the Moti Nagar metro station for proper medical assistance, the officials added.

# Need to deliberate on freebies, says Dhankhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday opined that there should be a structured discussion on freebies and subsidies in the House as there is an urgent need for a national policy to help put all government investments to the larger good. Responding to the demand made by Samajwadi Party's Ram Gopal Yadav for increasing the funds, which Members of Parliament have at their disposal for developmental projects and schemes in their respective constituencies to ₹20 Crore a year from the current ₹5 Crore during the zero hour, Dhankhar said he would be open to a structured discussion on the issue if the government and the opposition agree.

Electoral freebies, such as free electricity and water, subsidised cooking gas, and cash handouts to certain groups like farmers and women, have often been criticised as something that may lead to unsustainable financial burdens on the government, distort public resources, and undermine long-term development goals.

"On placatory mechanisms, on appeasement, which is often known as freebies, this House needs to deliberate. I will be open to a structured discussion after consulting the Leader of

the House and the Leader of the Opposition," he said.

The country can grow only if money is available for capital expenditure, he said. Capital expenditure or capex is expenditure for creating assets such as infrastructure that yield long-term returns for the economy.

In contrast, freebies are revenue expenditures that do not contribute to the creation or acquisition of fixed assets. "Electoral process is such that these have become electoral allurements and thereafter the governments that came in the saddle, found themselves very uncomfortable, so uncomfortable that they wanted to revisit their thoughts," he said. "There is an urgent need for a national policy so that all investments of the government in any form are used in a structured manner for the larger good."

If the leaders of both sides agree, there can be a discussion, he said adding this is a very serious issue.

The comments assume significance as many states faced challenges in funding electoral freebies, particularly due to the financial strain they place on state budgets. States like Punjab have faced financial constraints in meeting poll promises. Dhankhar then touched upon the issue of subsidies.

"Subsidies, if required in areas like the farm sector, should be direct. That is the practice in developed countries. I



Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar arrives to conduct proceedings in the House during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Wednesday

checked with the US mechanism.

The US has 1/5th of farm households as our country but the average income of a US farm household is more than the general income of a US household, and that is because the subsidy to the farmer is direct, transparent, without intermediary," he said.

This issue can also be discussed subject to the two sides agreeing, he said.

Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLAD), he said and went on to site how the cost of construction has risen in the last two decades, making the MPLAD funds inadequate to nurture constituencies.

He demanded that MPLAD fund amount be raised to ₹20 Crore, it be exempt from GST and a technical cell be created for estimates and quality inspection of work done. "If this is not possible, then MPLADs should be abolished," he said.

Dhankhar remarked that the constitution does not provide for a uniform mechanism for pay and perks of MPs and MLAs.

Some assemblies give members perks and salaries that are much more than what Members of Parliament (MPs) get.

"Even the pension variation for a former member of the assembly is on a scale of 1 to 10. If in one state, one is getting one rupee, in the other state the pension will be 10 times," he said.

He said in the Constituent Assembly debates, one of the distinguished members, Sidhwa, reflecting on the power of Parliament to remove the judges, said, "It is very good to arrogate power without examining other elements.

But trust me, he reflected, the number of judges will grow, we will not be able to fructify even one."

# Railway tracks kept vacant for maintenance, says Vaishnaw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Railway tracks throughout the country are kept vacant for a few hours every day for maintenance keeping in mind the safety of train travel, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

Vaishnaw said maintenance of railways is different from other infrastructure like highways. He said since the tracks and wheels are made of steel and the trains are travelling at a speed of 70 to 100 km per hour, the tracks often get damaged, resulting in creation of micro fractures

"If we don't repair the micro fractures regularly, there is a possibility of increased rail fractures which may lead to train accidents. That is why globally, out of 24 hours in a day, a few hours are kept for maintaining the tracks," he said.

The minister said taking into accounts all these aspects, a "tough decision" had been taken in 2018 that in every section, the railway tracks would be kept vacant for at least three hours for maintenance. "This was the reason why some train stoppages were done away and some trains are being regulated.

This has nothing to do with the Covid pandemic," he said replying to a question that some stoppages were done away due to the pandemic. Vaishnaw said the decision was taken after IIT Bombay carried out a detailed study and the time table was made in a way that three hours are kept for maintenance. "Its result has also come. It was a good result. Once there were 2,500 rail fractures which has come down to less than 250 now due to proper maintenance of the tracks," he said without specifying the time period.

The minister also informed the house the fares of various trains and their classes are based on the facilities provided in them and various types of train services are offered for different types of passenger segments. He said this in a written reply to questions in Lok Sabha regarding the high fares of Vande Bharat trains.

Rakibul Hussain, a Congress member from Dhubri in Assam, wanted to know whether the government has considered reducing the fares of the Vande Bharat Express to make this premium train service more affordable for a larger section of the population, particularly for the lower-income groups. Responding to the question, Vaishnaw said the Indian Railways fixes the fares with due consideration of the cost of service, the value of service, expenses the passengers can bear, competition from other competing modes, socio-economic considerations and the likes.

According to the railway minister, Amrit Bharat trains have modern state-of-the-art technology, equipped with advanced features like semi-permanent couplers for jerk-free travel, horizontal sliding windows and mobile holders.

# Delimitation will penalise states that managed population and reward that haven't: DMK MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

DMK's Rajya Sabha member P Wilson on Wednesday said implementing delimitation of parliamentary constituencies at this point would unfairly penalise states which have successfully managed populations and reward those that have not.

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, Wilson also made a demand for a holistic approach towards delimitation of constituencies for Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

He said delimitation was conducted after each census in 1952, 1962, and 1972 to ensure fair representation of all states.

Wilson said while some states embraced family planning policies, others ignored the issue allowing their populations to grow unchecked, and therefore to address this inequality, the 42nd constitutional amendment froze delimitation based on 1971 census data for 25 years, thereby safeguarding states that manage their population from losing political influence.

The freeze on population growth was extended through the 84th constitutional amendment following the recommendation of the national population policy in 2000, which expected stabilisation of population growth across all states by 2026, he said. "Data shows that the states like Tamil Nadu have a total fertility rate of 1.7 and Kerala TFR of 1.8 indicating that these states have successfully stabilise



DMK MPs stage a protest over the issue of delimitation of parliamentary constituencies during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Wednesday

their population. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh has a TFR of 2.4, Bihar has a TFR 3.0 which means that these states continue to experience exponential population growth," the DMK MP said. This suggests that the original reasoning for lifting the freeze in 2026 is no longer valid, he said.

"Implementing delimitation at this point would unfairly penalise states that have successfully managed by the populations while rewarding those that have not," he said, and added the consequence could be disasters for states like Tamil Nadu and others that have effectively controlled their population.

The DMK MP further said if Parliament strength is increased based on

2026 census, states like Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh are likely to gain more than 150 additional seats collectively. In contrast, southern states Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana will gain only 35 seats collectively, Wilson said.

According to him, states that have effectively implemented the National Family Planning Policy will face penalties, which will result in a loss of political representation and bargaining power.

He further said that if the Constitution is not amended before 2026 to extend the freezing, the delimitation will kick in and automatically be done from 2026 onwards. He urged the prime minister to address the issue.

# Put nation first, remain united: Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday here called upon the people to always put the nation first, remain united, discharge the duties with honesty, and move fearlessly towards achieving their goals.

These were the core principles of Major Bob Khathing, an extraordinary figure who made invaluable contributions to the North-East region and national security, he said.

The defence minister made these assertions while addressing the fifth edition of Major Bob Khathing Memorial Event jointly organised by the Indian Army, Assam Rifles and United Services Institution of India (USI) to honour the life and legacy of the legendary figure.

Paying glowing tributes to Major Bob Khathing, Rajnath Singh asserted that India has been fortunate that it is home to such prominent personalities for whom security, integrity and sovereignty of the nation is paramount.

He termed Major Khathing as a great son of India, who left an indelible mark in the history of the country through his bravery in the battlefield and skill in the field of diplomacy.

It is the responsibility of the people to adopt the ideals and principles of such great personalities, he said.

The defence minister commended Major Khathing's role in integrating, developing and rebuilding not only Tawang but the entire North-East region. "Major Bob Khathing made a significant contribution in strengthening national unity.

The work he carried out for the North-

East is similar to what Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel did at the national level," he said.

Rajnath Singh added that Major Bob Khathing efficiently carried out the integration of Tawang into India without firing a single bullet, and the Government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, follows the principles of such revolutionaries.

**The defence minister made assertions while addressing the fifth edition of Major Bob Khathing Memorial Event organised by the Indian Army, Assam Rifles and United Services Institution of India**

The defence minister highlighted the administrative proficiency of Major Khathing, especially his contribution in the formation of Sashashtra Seema Bal and Nagaland Armed Police and other such reforms. John Khathing, son of Major Bob Khathing, shared heartfelt reminiscences about his father's remarkable life and legacy, adding a personal dimension to the commemoration.

The event also featured vibrant cultural performances by troupes showcasing the rich and diverse heritage of North-East.

The defence minister had, in October 2024, virtually inaugurated Major Ralengnao 'Bob' Khathing 'Museum of Valour' in Tawang.

He was scheduled to visit Tawang, but could not due to bad weather. He carried out the inauguration from 4 Corps Headquarters in Tezpur, Assam.

# Budget allocation for health went up by 164 per cent in 2024, says Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Health Minister JP Nadda on Wednesday said the government's expenditure on healthcare has reached 1.84 per cent of GDP and is steadily moving towards the target of 2.5 per cent. In his reply to a discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the working of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Nadda said in 2013-14, the allocation of funds for healthcare was around ₹38,000 Crore and at present, it has reached

# Congress leaders should follow Tharoor: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Wednesday projected Congress leader Shashi Tharoor's praise of the government's handling of the Russia-Ukraine war as an endorsement of India's deft diplomacy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Former Union minister and Lok Sabha MP Ravi Shankar Prasad described Tharoor's acknowledgement that he has been proved incorrect in his early criticism of the government for not speaking out against the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a case of "better late than never."

Prasad told reporters that the Modi

government takes decisions that are good for India. "The way Shashi Tharoor has accepted it, if other Congress leaders would also acknowledge it, then it will be good," he said.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP and national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the government's diplomatic skills are clear to everyone who understands foreign affairs and noted that Modi had met the presidents of the two warring countries and drawn similar warmth from both of them. India has marked an epochal change in its diplomacy under Modi as it has gone from non-aligned to "all-aligned" in its approach, he said. "India is emerging as a friend of the world and this is what has been expressed by the

senior Congress leader," Trivedi said.

Tharoor said on Tuesday that the policy adopted by India following the outbreak of the conflict meant that the country has actually a prime minister who can hug both the presidents of Ukraine and Russia two weeks apart and be accepted in both places.

The former minister of state for external affairs said, "I am still wiping the egg off my face because I am one person in the parliamentary debate who actually criticised the Indian position at the time back in February 2022."

Tharoor justified his changed stand on Wednesday and said he voiced his opinion as an Indian and does not see politics in that.



Union Minister Nitin Gadkari speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Wednesday

# Cabinet approves six-lane highway project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the construction of a 6-lane access-controlled greenfield high-speed National Highway to connect JNPA Port (Pagote) with Chowk (29.219 km) in Maharashtra at an investment of ₹4,500 Crore. The Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi also approved enhancement of outlays to ₹6,190 Crore for two schemes aimed at increasing milk production. Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw informed that the Union Cabinet has approved the revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM) and National Program for Dairy Development (NPDD). Both the schemes, which seek to enhance milk production and raise farmers' income, will now have a total outlay of ₹6,190 Crore.

According to an official statement, the National Highway project will be developed on build, operate and transfer (BOT) mode at a total cost of ₹4,500.62 Crore. "The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, has approved the construction of 6-lane access controlled Greenfield High-Speed National Highway

starting from JNPA Port (Pagote) to Chowk (29.219 km) in Maharashtra," it said.

The development of road connecting infrastructure to major and minor ports in India is one of the main focus areas of integrated infrastructure planning under PM GatiShakti National Master Plan principles, it added. "With the increasing container volume at JNPA port and the development of the Navi Mumbai International Airport, a need was identified for augmenting National highway connectivity in the region," the statement said. Currently, it takes 2-3 hours for vehicles to move from JNPA Port to the arterial Golden Quadrilateral (GQ) section of NH-48 and Mumbai-Pune Expressway due to heavy congestion in urban areas like Palaspe Phata, D-Point, Kalamboli junction, and Panvel.

After the operationalisation of Navi Mumbai Airport in 2025, the need for direct connectivity is expected to increase further. Accordingly, the statement said, this project is designed to address these connectivity requirements and to improve the logistic efficiency of connecting JNPA port and Navi Mumbai International Airport. The project align-

ment starts at JNPA port (NH 348) (Pagote village) and ends at Mumbai-Pune Highway (NH-48) while also linking Mumbai-Pune Expressway and Mumbai-Goa National Highway (NH-66). Two tunnels passing through Sahayadri are provided for ease of movement for commercial vehicles instead of a ghat section in hilly terrain, ensuring high speed and ease of movement for large container trucks.

The new 6-lane green field project corridor will lead to better port connectivity helping in safe and efficient freight movement. The project will open new avenues of growth, development and prosperity in developing regions in and around Mumbai and Pune. The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved setting up of a urea plant in Assam with an estimated cost of ₹10,601.4 Crore as part of its effort to reduce import of this key crop nutrient and make India self-sufficient.

Cabinet also approved the proposal for setting up of a new brownfield Ammonia-Urea Complex of 12.7 Lakh tonnes annual capacity of urea production within the existing premises of Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corporation Ltd (BVFCL), Namrup Assam.

# Government to announce new toll policy, says Nitin Gadkari

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday said the government will soon announce a new policy for toll charges on national highways, offering a reasonable concession to the consumers.

Replying to queries in Rajya Sabha, the minister asserted that the government is spending a lot on building road infrastructure and therefore toll charges are necessary. "It is the policy of the department that when you want good road, you have to pay for it," Gadkari said.

In Assam, he said the government plans to make expenditure of ₹3 Lakh crore.

"We are making a lot of big roads, four lanes, six lanes. I am making a lot of bridges from the Brahmaputra. We are raising funds from the market. So without a toll, we cannot do it. But still, we are very considerable. We are only charg-

ing toll on four lanes, not on the two-lane paved shoulder." According to the rules of 2008, toll plaza on the same section of the national highway and in the same direction cannot be established within 60 kilometers.

"So actually, there are some exceptions. After completing this session, we are going to declare a new policy for the toll, where the problem will be resolved and we will give reasonable concession to the consumer, and there will be no debate on particularly about the toll," he said, adding that the problems would be resolved.

All user fee plazas on National Highways are established as per the provision of National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008 and the respective Concession Agreement.

Total toll collection in India touched ₹64,809.86 Crore in 2023-24, a 35 per cent rise over the previous year. The collection was ₹27,503 Crore in 2019-20.

# Six Supreme Court judges to visit Manipur relief camps

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In an unprecedented development, six Supreme Court Judges, headed by Justice BR Gavai will visit various relief camps in Manipur on March 22, to oversee and strengthen legal and humanitarian support to the violence-affected communities. Other Judges in the delegation headed by Justice Gavai are Justices Surya Kant, Vikram Nath, MM Sundresh, KV Viswanathan and N Kotishwar Singh. The Congress welcomed the decision of six judges of the Supreme Court to visit Manipur and slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not visiting the troubled State.

This step was taken by National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) on Tuesday evening, whose Executive Chairman, is Justice Gavai. "Nearly two years after the devastating sectarian violence of May 3, 2023, which led to the loss of hundreds of lives and displaced over 50,000 people, many continue to seek refuge in relief camps across Manipur. This visit by the Supreme Court Judges highlights the



(Left to right): Justices BR Gavai, Surya Kant, Vikram Nath, MM Sundresh, KV Viswanathan, N Kotishwar Singh

FILE PHOTO

ongoing need for legal and humanitarian assistance to these affected communities," said NALSA in a statement, adding that this will ensure that those people who need help and affected by sectarian violence in Manipur get Justice.

During the visit, Justice Gavai will virtually inaugurate Legal Services Camps and Medical Camps across all Districts of Manipur, as well as new Legal Aid Clinics in Imphal East, Imphal West and Ukhrul districts. There will be distribution of essential relief materials to Internally

Displaced Persons (IDPs). "The legal services camps will connect IDPs with government welfare programs, ensuring access to vital benefits such as healthcare, pensions, employment schemes, and identity document reconstruction. Each participating State Department will outline at least five key schemes tailored to address the needs of the displaced population. A team of 25 specialised doctors from Chennai will conduct Medical Camps across all relief camps," the release by NALSA said.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said his party welcomes the decision. Speaking to media, he recalled that in August 2023, the Supreme Court said that there was an absolute breakdown of constitutional machinery in the north-eastern state. Slamming the Government, Ramesh questioned Modi's "silence" on Manipur. "He goes around the world, goes to Assam, elsewhere, but doesn't go to Manipur even as people of the state continue to wait and wait and wait for his visit,"

the Congress leader said. On August 1, 2023, the Supreme Court said that there was an "absolute breakdown of constitutional machinery" in the state and despite such a harsh statement from the topmost court, the Modi Government took almost 18-19 months to impose President's rule, Ramesh said. Why it took 18 months to impose President's Rule, he asked. "Why was there no full-time Governor in Manipur for six months? Why did they remove a tribal lady, a distinguished

political personality and give additional charge to the governor of Assam?" the Congress leader posted in X.

He noted that the Modi government eventually brought a retired civil servant as a full-time governor. Why was the retired civil servant in question chosen and why did his appointment take so long? he asked.

"Most importantly, why is the Prime Minister still silent on Manipur? Our frequent flyer jets all over the world. He goes to Assam and he visits other parts of the northeast. But why does he refuse to go to Manipur?" Ramesh said.

"The pain of Manipur is the pain of India and I'm glad that the judges of the Supreme Court are going there. Perhaps this visit will provide answers to some of these questions," he said. Over 200 people were killed, several hundred injured and thousands displaced since ethnic violence broke out in the state on May 3, 2023, when a "tribal solidarity march" was organised in the hill districts to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for scheduled tribe status.

## Congress slams Goa CM over forest land conversion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Panaji

Congress has launched a scathing attack on the Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, accusing him of facilitating backdoor access for real estate interests at the cost of the environment.

A recent Supreme Court order halting the conversion of private forest land in Goa triggered the political storm as the controversy revolves around a 2021 move by the Goa government to form a Review Committee (RC-II) to re-evaluate forest lands earlier identified by the Thomas and Araujo Committee.

**Tribunal directed the Goa government to physically verify the lands removed from forest list by RC-II, and prohibited any development permissions until verification was complete**

The RC-II reversed the classification of 271 survey numbers, thereby opening up over 1.2 Crore square metres of land previously protected as private forest-for potential development.

The issue has drawn strong criticism from Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh, who posted on social media platforms about the Supreme Court that very recently halted the conversion of Goa's private forest land at least for the time being.

"Much earlier, the National Green Tribunal too had prohibited development of denotified forest land until physical verification of all plots was complete. This

was never done," said Jairam, who served as Environment Minister in the Manmohan Singh led Congress government.

"The Supreme Court's order is a temporary respite. Bigger battles lie ahead given the single-minded focus of the Goa CM to free up forest lands for real estate purposes," the Congress mentioned.

The matter was earlier flagged by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in a September 2023 order.

The tribunal directed the Goa government to physically verify the lands removed from the forest list by RC-II and specifically prohibited any development permissions until that verification was complete.

One plot in particular-survey number 257/1 in Sancoale, now earmarked for a major commercial project-has become a focal point of criticism.

With the Supreme Court's temporary halt now in place, the Congress has demanded a complete audit of the RC-II process, a freeze on all development on disputed plots, and accountability from the Chief Minister, who held the forest portfolio at the time the RC-II was formed.

This is not the first time Sawant has got into trouble related to land issues. Congress as opposition in the assembly had intensified its criticism of Sawant and his cabinet colleague Atanasio Monserrate, accusing them of a massive ₹500 Crore scam involving Zuari Agro Chemicals Ltd's (ZACL) land.

The discrepancy in the land's valuation from 25 paise per square metre in 1971 to ₹1,19,000 per square metre currently-fuelled suspicions of a massive scam.

## UP minister's 'beaten cops' remark sparks outrage

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

A minister in the Uttar Pradesh Cabinet has stirred controversy with a shocking statement, claiming he had assaulted seven police inspectors before reaching his current position.

"I did not reach here easily. I had to break the hands and legs of seven police inspectors and throw them into a ditch before I got here," the minister said while addressing a public gathering.

A video of his statement has since gone viral on social media, though its authenticity remains unverified. Efforts to seek clarification from the minister have been unsuccessful.

The remarks were made by Dr Sanjay Nishad, a Cabinet Minister in the Yogi Adityanath-led government, while addressing a gathering in Lambhua, Sultanpur, during the Constitutional

Rights Rath Yatra. During the event, a woman named Raghni Pradhan from Samokhpur village, accompanied by three to four others, approached the minister with a plea.

She informed him that her husband had been arrested in an assault case and was due to appear for an LLB examination on Thursday. She requested his intervention to secure his release. In response, Nishad made the controversial statement about his rise to power.

"I know everything who is falsely implicating me. I will deal with them. I was born to fight for women and the poor. I have struggled to reach here. Seven police inspectors had their hands and legs broken and were thrown into a pit. Only then did I reach this position," Nishad declared.

He further advised people to report injustices directly to him instead of wait-

ing. "Many times, I only get to know about incidents after someone has been jailed. That is your mistake. Everyone has my mobile number and if not, you can find it on the internet. Just write to me about the injustice and I will act. I do not call any officer's PA, I directly call the District Magistrate or Superintendent of Police. If I do not get a reply in five minutes, I complain to the Chief Minister."

Nishad also emphasised that his community now has a voice. "Earlier, no one spoke up for the Nishads, but now you have the strength to do so. Speaking up is your right. This country runs by the Constitution. Your ancestors fought for its freedom," he added.

The minister's remarks have drawn sharp reactions, with critics questioning the appropriateness of such statements from a public representative. The matter is expected to trigger further political

debates in the state.

During the same speech, the minister also commented on the Aurangzeb dispute, arguing that history should highlight the Mughal ruler's cruelty. "What kind of tradition is it to celebrate cruelty and organize fairs around it? People learn ideals from fairs. In today's times, no one names their son Aurangzeb," he said, adding that the current government honours those who contribute to Indian civilisation. He further linked the recent Nagpur violence to those who consider Aurangzeb as their role model, stating, "The people who idolise Aurangzeb are responsible for this violence, and the public will answer them."

The minister also took a swipe at political rivals, questioning whether they considered Aurangzeb or Lord Krishna as their ideal. Opposition parties are expected to react strongly to his remarks.

## Rakesh Rathore granted bail in rape case

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

MP Rakesh Rathore, and Congress leader who was lodged in the district jail on rape charges, was released on Wednesday morning after spending 48 days in custody. His bail plea was approved on Tuesday, following which the release order reached the jail. Rathore had been in judicial custody since January 30.

The Allahabad High Court had granted him bail on March 11, but the police subsequently invoked Section 69, delaying his release. A fresh bail plea was then filed in the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) Court on March 12, and after

arguments on Tuesday, the CJM approved the bail. Jail Superintendent Suresh Kumar Singh confirmed that the release order was received at 6 pm on Tuesday, but as per jail manual regulations, he was released the following morning.

A rape case against MP Rakesh Rathore was registered at the City Kotwali police station on January 17. After the case was filed, Rathore evaded arrest, prompting the deployment of local police and the crime branch to track him down. His family members and close aides were also placed under surveillance, and his representative Wasi Ullah along with another associate was detained for questioning.



Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses media after a meeting with farmers in Chandigarh

## Wife, lover murder husband, hide body in cement drum

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Meerut

In a shocking tale of love turned to betrayal, a woman named Muskan and her lover, Sahil, have been arrested for the brutal murder of Muskan's husband Saurabh.

The chilling crime unfolded in the Brahmपुरi area of Meerut, where authorities discovered Saurabh's remains concealed in a plastic drum filled with cement, revealing a sinister plot fueled by infidelity and desperation.

The couple's actions were driven by a toxic mix of addiction and betrayal. On the night of the murder, Muskan and Sahil, under the influence of drugs, conspired to eliminate Saurabh after he returned from London and confronted Muskan about her affair. As tensions escalated, Muskan restrained her husband while Sahil inflicted fatal wounds, ignoring Saurabh's desperate cries for mercy.

Following the murder, they dismembered Saurabh's body and encased the pieces in a drum filled with cement, sealing their gruesome act in silence. They even feigned normalcy, sleeping in the house while their five-year-old daughter, Pihu, remained blissfully unaware of the horror that had transpired.

In an attempt to mislead family members and neighbors, Muskan traveled to Shimla and Manali with Sahil for 12 days. During this period, she continued posting pictures and videos on Instagram, creating an illusion that she and Saurabh were vacationing together. She also used Saurabh's phone to respond to messages, ensuring no one suspected foul play.

The crime was uncovered when Saurabh's younger brother, Rahul, visited his house on March 18. To his surprise, he found Muskan accompanied by a young man (later identified as Sahil).

When he inquired about his brother's

whereabouts, Muskan failed to provide a convincing answer. Rahul also noticed a foul smell emanating from inside the house.

Suspecting something amiss, he raised an alarm, drawing the attention of neighbors, who promptly informed the police. Upon searching the premises, officers discovered the cement-filled drum and took both Muskan and Sahil into custody.

The shocking discovery of Saurabh's remains came after police pieced together the couple's confession. Despite the gruesome nature of the crime, Muskan and Sahil attempted to maintain a facade of innocence, even purchasing materials for their sinister plan under the guise of household chores.

### The love and betrayal

Investigations revealed that Muskan and Saurabh had married despite family opposition. Saurabh, who was mostly

stationed abroad, had been living with Muskan and their eight-year-old daughter, Pihu, in Indranagar for the past three years.

Trouble began in 2019 when Muskan met Sahil outside Pihu's play school. While Saurabh was away at sea, Muskan and Sahil developed a romantic relationship, which eventually turned into a full-fledged affair.

According to Muskan's statement to the police, Sahil pressured her to divorce Saurabh and start a new life with him. When she hesitated, he allegedly convinced her that getting rid of Saurabh was the only way forward.

Sahil and Muskan had meticulously planned the murder, selecting March 4 as the execution date. After the crime, they even attempted to hire laborers to dispose of the cemented drum but failed when the workers found the task suspicious and refused.

## Talks with farmer leaders to continue: Shivraj Chouhan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chandigarh

The seventh round of talks between farmer leaders and a central delegation concluded on Wednesday, with Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan announcing the next meeting on May 4.

The talks were held to discuss the various demands raised by the farmers, including a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for crops, among others.

"A positive discussion took place in a cordial atmosphere. The talks will continue. The next meeting will take place on May 4," Chouhan said after the meeting.

Besides Chouhan, Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal also attended the meeting held at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26 here.

**A positive discussion took place in a cordial atmosphere. The talks will continue. The next meeting will take place on May 4**

— SHIVRAJ CHOUHAN, AGRICULTURE MINISTER

that the deadlock over a law guaranteeing MSP will end and the talks will move forward."

Earlier, veteran farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal reached the meeting venue in an ambulance.

Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite fast since November 26 last year and is on medical aid, said they were expecting a response from the Centre on the data presented by the farmers to support their demands.

The last meeting between the farmers and the central delegation was held here on February 22, which was attended by Chouhan, Joshi, and Goyal.

In that meeting, the central team sought data from the farmers backing their demand for legal guarantee for minimum support price to discuss them with experts.

The farmers have been claiming that a legal guarantee for MSP (for crops) can be given with an estimated outlay of ₹25,000-30,000 Crore per annum.

A meeting between a central team led by Joshi and farmers' representatives was held here on February 14 as well.

Before that, four rounds of talks took place between central ministers and protesting farmers in February 2024, but they remained inconclusive.

The protesting farmers have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 last year, after security forces did not allow them to march to Delhi to press their demands.

Besides legal guarantee for minimum support price, the farmers are demanding debt waiver, pension for farmers and farm labourers, no hike in electricity tariffs, withdrawal of police cases against farmers, justice for the victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence in Uttar Pradesh, reinstatement of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013, and compensation to the families of farmers who died during a previous agitation in 2020-21. A meeting between a central team led by Joshi and farmers' representatives was held here on February 14 as well.

## Suvendu Adhikari demands President's rule in WB

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Even as the Hindu-Muslim rhetoric threatened to take a demonic proportion ahead of the coming festival season, Bengal Opposition leader Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday demanded imposition of President's rule in the State.

This, after his cavalcade was blockaded away and his car was allegedly hit with sticks by slogan-shouting Trinamool Congress workers at Baruipur in South 24 Parganas where he had gone to take part in a pre-announced rally against alleged deprivation of Hindus. In what the critics saw a "too apparent and too clear" an attempt to polarise the State's communal ecology with a specific political agenda ahead of the next year's Assembly elections the Opposition Leader said "let the Election Commission of India decide after today's rumpus created by the hostile, anti-Sanatani goons of the Trinamool Congress whether it is possible to a peaceful election in Bengal without the President's Rule being imposed, today's attack on the BJP workers in presence of the State Police only proves that there is



Leader of Opposition in West Bengal Assembly Suvendu Adhikari

PTI

no atmosphere to hold elections without President's Rule. So we demand it to be imposed in Bengal. We unequivocally demand President's Rule."

Earlier, the BJP was scheduled to organise a long march at Baruipur a district town skirting the southern suburbs

of Kolkata. "We had a police permission to hold the rally but the district SP played a TMC's stooge and allowed the TMC men to assemble on two sides of the road and raise filthy slogans and attack our men, they rained lathi blows on my vehicle and had I been walking I would get a broken

head, the police did it intentionally to harass the BJP, but we will not spare them and will return on March 27 and gherao the SP office," he said. Incidentally Union Home Minister is scheduled to visit Kolkata on March 27.

All the State BJP MLAs led by Adhikari had gone to Baruipur to take part in a rally reportedly to express solidarity with the local Sanatani population who they complained were living in a climate of threat.

"The religious places are being desecrated and when we try to raise this in the Assembly we are not allowed to speak. Our MLAs are suspended by Speaker Biman Banerjee who is also an MLA from this area. This cannot go on for too long and so we had come here to protest against what has been happening here but the TMC goons with the help of the police attacked us," party leader and MLA Agni Mitra Paul said. The communal atmosphere of the State had been hotting up for the past fortnight with Adhikari saying that when his party would come to power in Bengal after next year's Assembly elections it would throw out all the Muslim MLAs from the Assembly.

**Editor's TAKE**

## The quicksand of communalism

Clashes have erupted over Aurangzeb's tomb, exposing the deep historical roots that gnaw away at the socio-cultural fabric of our nation

In India, the spectre of communalism rears its ugly head every once in a while, often serving as a convenient political tool for those ascending the stairway to power. Grievances left behind as relics of history in a country as religiously diverse as India are manipulated for political gains to fuel unrest and keep the communal cauldron burning. Maharashtra has often been the epicentre of such clashes, the recent one adding yet another bleak chapter to a deeply riven society. The past few days have witnessed a surge of violence as Hindu nationalist groups demanded the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb, reigniting age-old conflicts. The ensuing agitation led to arson, stone-pelting, and clashes in Nagpur, forcing authorities to impose a curfew. However, to limit introspection on an issue so raw to the bone to Maharashtra alone would indeed be a fatal mistake, both for our political classes and the masses. The latest incident displays how historical narratives can be weaponised to serve regional political aspirations, and expose an already vulnerable society to centuries of wrongs committed in the name of religion.

Aurangzeb, the sixth Mughal emperor, remains a divisive figure in Indian history. His reign was marked not only by brutal territorial expansions but also by policies that amounted to a brazenly oppressive attitude toward his Hindu subjects. He imposed a crushing jizya tax on non-Muslims, dictated temple demolitions through royal firmans, and mercilessly butchered Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, silencing every voice raised against him and decapitating every hand that rebelled against his atrocities. Aurangzeb invoked the Mughal Empire's ulema to sentence Sambhaji to death for his apparent acts of atrocities on Muslims. In essence, the foreign invader, much like his British successors, wanted to leave behind a legacy that disinherited India's indigenous inhabitants. Admittedly, he employed Hindus in high administrative positions, patronised some temples, and engaged in diplomatic relations beyond religious boundaries. However, it is his relentless religious persecution of Hindus that fuels what is unfolding in Maharashtra today.

Here, it would be prudent to bear in mind that howsoever burdened by historical injustice one may be, violence by any community must be condemned and controlled. The recent violence in Maharashtra is to be seen as much in the present context as in the past. Hindu right-wing groups have long called for the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, arguing it stands as a symbol of historical oppression. A contemporary Indian film, Chhaava, portraying the brutal torture of Sambhaji by Aurangzeb, is now being cited by some analysts as the reason behind the reignited anger against the Mughal emperor. However, this is too facetious a premise to debate upon a historical wound still dangerously raw. The truth is that the current controversy intensified after statements by politicians, particularly Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Azmi's remarks, on Aurangzeb's rule, which were seen as attempts to whitewash a bloodied history, an argument his party members were quick to distance themselves from. The question of the hour is how to put this monster to rest. Indeed, educating people about the nuances of history can prevent the glorification or demonisation of historical figures. But that is easier said than done. The problem is that nobody wants to read history, let alone understand it, yet everyone remains opinionated. Aurangzeb was neither evil nor benevolent — his autocratic reign and religious chauvinism must be studied in the context of his times, the fact that he was last in the line of a foreign dynasty that had ruled India for centuries with an iron hand. For one, political leaders and groups would do well to desist from exploiting historical grievances for limited gains. Strict action should be taken against those inciting communal hatred.

## Leaderspeak

India actually has a Prime Minister who can hug both the president of Ukraine and the president in Moscow two weeks apart and be accepted in both places. Therefore, India is in a position where it can make a difference to a lasting peace if it was so required, in ways that very few countries would be able to. India also benefits due to a number of factors including its distance from Europe. If it were necessary... there would be some willingness on the Indian side to consider sending peacekeepers.

SHASHI THAROOR, CONGRESS LEADER

# Weathering the storm of US trade winds

The global economy is at a crossroads as the US introduces a disruptive reciprocal tariff model, challenging the foundation of global trade. This shift threatens developing nations, including India, by undermining WTO principles

The world is facing an uncertain and challenging time. The reciprocal tariff model introduced by the new Trump administration's economic policies has disrupted the seamless flow of global trade and commerce. This poses a significant economic challenge for developing nations, as it undermines the World Trade Organization (WTO) model, which upholds the principle of higher tariffs imposed by developing nations on imports from developed nations to protect their domestic industries.

The immediate consequences include the crippling of these industries, creating an unequal playing field. Rising unemployment and a slowdown in export-driven growth appear inevitable. India is not immune to this trade war, where global cooperation is being overshadowed by forced trade negotiations favoring the stronger party. A new world order is taking shape, and India must navigate this landscape not cautiously, but courageously.

Between April 2024 and November 2024, India, the second-largest trading partner of the US, exported goods worth USD 52.89 Billion while importing USD 29.63 Billion, resulting in a trade surplus of USD 23.26 Billion in India's favor. This trade imbalance is at the heart of the issue. India's key exports include diamonds, medical appliances and accessories, jewelry, agricultural products, refined petroleum, rice, textiles and apparel, automotive components, chemicals and petrochemicals, and machinery. Meanwhile, India's imports from the US primarily consist of mineral fuels and oils, pearls, precious and semi-precious stones, nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, electrical equipment, crude petroleum, petroleum products, electronic components, and gold.

A closer look at these product categories reveals that India has room to further expand its market share in these sectors by enhancing cost efficiencies and quality standards. In contrast, the US has limited options for increasing its exports to India, apart from pushing crude oil and defense products—both heavily supported by the US government. This is due to the cost and consumption limitations of US goods in the Indian market. Consequently, the US, in its bid to reduce the trade deficit, will likely attempt to penetrate new segments currently dominated by Indian domestic industries, such as automobiles.

This is not just a trade negotiation, it is a full-fledged trade war aimed at capturing market share with little regard for global cooperation or diplomatic considerations. The reciprocal tariff strategy is a veiled attempt to lower tariffs and open new markets for the US.



The true agenda is now apparent.

The concept of reciprocal tariffs, introduced under the Trump administration's "Fair and Reciprocal Plan," seeks to impose high import duties on trade partners in an effort to reduce trade deficits. The administration argues that exporting countries impose high tariffs on US products. However, this is not a product-to-product reciprocity but a nation-to-nation policy. The term "reciprocal" itself is misleading, as there is no defined framework governing its application. Instead, it grants the US government the flexibility to impose tariffs arbitrarily, leaving exporting countries guessing about their potential impact and forcing them to react after the tariffs are already in place. In a world marked by unequal wealth distribution, economic development, and technological progress, these tariffs are more punitive than reciprocal, disproportionately harming developing nations.

In international trade, the true meaning of reciprocal tariffs, as governed by the WTO, differs significantly from what the US administration is advocating. Under Article 22.4 of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Understanding, reciprocity serves as the basis for tariff retaliation when a country fails to comply with a WTO ruling. Additionally, Article XXVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) establishes legal guidelines for recalibrating trade agreements and calculating compensation. What the US is currently pro-

moting deviates from these principles.

As global trade policies continue to be shaped by dominant economies, the US's reciprocal tariff strategy is expected to cause significant disruptions until countermeasures emerge to stabilise the situation. However, the key question remains: Will this retaliatory tariff policy achieve its intended goal for the US? The likelihood is low. A closer analysis reveals that the US trade-to-GDP ratio stands at just 26.9 per cent, compared to 38.4 per cent for China, 46.8 per cent for Japan, and 50 per cent for India. Moreover, US import intensity is nearly three times

higher than its export intensity. The real issue behind the US trade deficit is not high foreign tariffs but the poor performance of US merchandise trade, which accounts for only 8.3 per cent of global exports. In contrast, the US enjoys a USD 200 Billion trade surplus in the services sector, making it the global leader in both imports and exports of services. The primary constraints on US merchandise exports stem from supply-side limitations and a failure to achieve economies of scale, not unfair tariff structures. Given the strong global demand for US service exports, why should

the US merchandise trade struggle to compete?

With a population of 1.4 Billion, India must support its citizens through various welfare programs funded by budgetary allocations. These expenditures rely heavily on trade and commerce, with export-driven industries playing a crucial role. India's ability to produce low-cost goods sustains its economy and provides employment to millions. Protecting these industries is imperative.

Allowing an influx of US products into new market segments could disrupt domestic industries in the short term and erode supply chains in the long run if US manufacturers fail to achieve economies of scale in affordable segments. While India can afford to reduce its diamond exports to the US, it cannot risk destabilising its domestic industries.

It is time for India to adhere strictly to WTO guidelines and advocate for a globally accepted trade policy to counter coercive trade deficit measures. A production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to boost domestic industries, along with stronger ties with alternative trading partners, can help mitigate the impact of reciprocal tariffs. India must remain vigilant; this phase is temporary, but its long-term economic stability depends on strategic resilience.

(The writer is an investment banker. Views expressed are personal)



MRIGANKA M BHOWMICK

## A new India: A journey through the decades

### SECOND Opinion



SANJAY CHANDRA

I was recently invited to participate in a panel discussion during which the young moderator posed a query — what did I think of a New India? This was an interesting subject that made me reflect.

Like most around me, I too had been engrossed in leading a routine life till about a decade back. I would also often crib about a stagnant life. It was as I turned 60 that I started indulging in self-reflections about the way my life had evolved each decade since birth.

The first decade saw our family living a more frugal life. We acquired a radio set six years after my birth and a refrigerator two years later. Even though the voltage fluctuated and light was often dim at night, we had electricity at home. Our homes had fans.

The second decade witnessed a carefree me, not much stressed about what I would do after school or college. The government had invested in the creation of innumerable public sector undertakings. There were enough jobs. We also graduated to having desert coolers at home.

The mid-third decade saw me buckling down to the onerous professional responsibilities and simultaneously getting used to married life and raising a family. Though, to be fair, it was my wife who was at home to bring up

our two daughters. I spent more time in the railway control rooms to ensure smooth running of trains. My young age and diligence made me dream about one of the topmost positions in the railways sometime towards the end of my career. My promotions ensured that I had an air-conditioned cabin in office and I was able to travel in the upper first class air-conditioned coach for office tours. But we were still happy with fans and desert coolers at home.

The beginning of the fourth decade saw me travelling for a 12-week official training to Japan. This was my first overseas trip. The money that I saved from the allowance ensured that I was able to take my family for a holiday to Goa by flights. We stayed in resorts, inexpensive, but better than the official guest houses that I had been exposed to so far. I went for my next overseas official trip to Europe. I also opted to move to Delhi in a railway public sector undertaking. It was towards the end of this decade that I came into my own professionally. I travelled extensively within India and outside for work.

I could save enough to buy one second-hand air conditioner. We slept in the single room, but it felt heavenly in the sweltering summers of north India. A home loan from the department on easier terms also ensured that we could afford to buy a decent sized house in an upcoming small-town locality.

The beginning of the 21st century was also the start of my fifth decade. The government had hiked salaries though successive pay commissions. We no longer lived hand to mouth. We could spend lavishly by our middle-class standards and still be left with a saving. We could afford decent education for our daughters. We could encourage them to fly and pursue their dreams. I could afford to buy air-conditioners for all the rooms in our house. I could take my family on annual vacation by flights and stay in hotels or resorts. Professionally too, government's continued investments in infrastructure saw me busier than ever as we won contracts after contracts.

The end of this decade saw me quitting the government to join the private sector. This too was a new experience. The salary I took home far exceeded the wildest imagination and gave me financial security. I happily shifted to my own apartment in a condominium complex. I could afford more gadgets at home. I had the financial safety net to quit working and indulge in creative passions through writing. Life has changed, and continues to get better, for many people, be it the middle-class or the daily service providers. We do not realise it from one day to the next. If we look back each decade, or in slices of five years, or even from year to year, it has been a new India. It is more than a slogan. It is a continuous process. And, this is how it will be — for us and the next generations.

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

## Letters to the Editor

### Silver prices goes over the top

Madam — Silver, once known as the "poor man's gold", is slipping out of the reach of the very people who cherished it the most. With prices soaring to ₹1,04,000 per kilogram, what was once an affordable metal for savings, traditions, and investment has now become a luxury. The middle-class Indian, who once celebrated festivals by buying silver coins, now finds it nearly impossible to do so. The tradition of gifting silver jewellery and utensils at weddings is weakening, and households that once prided themselves on their silverware are now struggling to keep up.

The metal that symbolised security and tradition is fast becoming a privilege of the wealthy. The rise in silver prices is not an accident, it is a direct result of global economic shifts and market manipulations.

The strengthening of the US dollar, increased industrial demand, and government policies are driving prices upward. Silver is no longer just a household commodity - it has become a critical component in industries such as electronics, solar energy, and medical devices. The increasing demand from these sectors has led to large-scale hoarding by big investors, leaving the common man out of the equation.

The Indian government, instead of providing relief, has raised import duties, further pushing silver beyond the reach of ordinary citizens.

SACHIN TRIPATHI | SATNA

### Education is a shambles

Madam — The article 'Transforming education' (March 19) presents good points to ponder over. Every change brought in education has added to the process of commodifying education instead of improving the quality of learning process. The very fact that the government is pushed to the corner of introducing an internship scheme incentivising the youth, who are already holding a certificate or diploma or degree, to be trained again and the industries offering the training depicts the status of education that prevails in the country.

Frantic efforts are on to give an ideological quote to education instead of inculcating the scientific temper as directed by the constitution.

Government is shirking its responsibility of providing meaningful education and left it to the private players for whom education is a mere commodity to mint profits than a process of learning. It does not equip them with at least skills to be employable. We have only institutions to produce students who carry marks for their memorising ability and nothing more. The government is happy with growing number of the unemployed as it helps the employers to pay less and extract more labour. The callousness of the government could be better understood from offering the title of University of excellence while inaugurating the university itself.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

### Nagpur riots: A symptom of deeper issues

Madam — This is in response to the news report titled "Riots sets Nagpur ablaze" (March 19). Perhaps Nagpur forms the latest specimen reflecting the "spirit" and "unity" of "Rising India". On the one hand environment will get shattered on the zealous shout of "vikas", on the other the society would be continuously dragged towards the past (history/epic/mythology) spanning several centuries with stories getting webbed one after another in the name of Ram Krishna Babur Aurangzeb and who not! And wherever their exist even an iota of fact, hatred gets raised without going into the social context of the concerned period (16th-17th century) and also ignoring the ultimate reality that history cannot be rewinded!

What about the Maratha Bargis who used to ransack villages after villages in Bengal in the 18th century killing innocent helpless unarmed persons and looting resources! Do the "nationalists", seething in "anger" in Maharashtra and baying for the interred bones of the "outsider" Mughal emperor (passing away more than 300 years ago), have any answer to such plunder of Bengal and Bengalis by the "insider" Maratha Bargis!

It will be better if the sleeping dogs are allowed to lie, else lot of skeletons are bound to tumble out from the cupboard of "nationalists" hailing from "proud" Hindutva vintage!

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

### BAIL, NOT JAIL: SUPREME COURT MOOTS FOR REASONABLE JUSTICE

Supreme Court (SC) had again exposed its anguish on denial of bail in 'not very serious cases' despite the completion of probe and further said a democratic country must not function like a police state where law enforcement agencies exercised arbitrary powers to detain individuals without genuine necessity and such type of actions of the police should be brought to the notice of public so that they may be discouraged to follow such undemocratic attitude which downgrade the democratic values of the country.

The SC further said "do not burden top court 'bail matters in cases triable by magistrates are being brought before us because people are not getting bail when they should and moreover 'It is shocking that the Supreme Court is adjudicating bail pleas in cases that should be disposed of at the trial court level and the system is being burdened unnecessarily 'the Supreme Court also noted that two decades ago, bail pleas in smaller cases

rarely reached high courts, let alone the SC.

And it is unfortunate that bail matters in cases triable by magistrates are being brought before the Supreme Court and we are sorry to say that litigants are approaching the highest court whereas such cases should have been easily disposed of at the lower level and also said that granting bail to a cheating case accused who remained in custody for more than two years and it shows that natural justice is being denied to an accused.

Here in this case both the trial court and the Gujarat High Court had rejected his bail plea, despite the fact that the chargesheet had already been filed after completion of the probe.

The top court has been repeatedly asking trial courts and high courts to be liberal in granting bail, particularly in not so serious cases.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

## Mid-level officers: The backbone of India's defence

India's evolving security landscape demands proactive empowerment of mid-level tactical communication and engineering officers. These officers are the operational backbone and technological brain of India's modern military, translating national defence strategies into battlefield readiness

FIRST  
Column

India's defence capability and strategic dominance in modern warfare are not solely dependent on high-ranking commanders or frontline soldiers. A critical yet often underappreciated element lies in the mid-level officers, tactical communication specialists, and engineering officers who serve as the vital link between strategic planning and operational execution. Their expertise ensures that India's military maintains technological superiority, robust battlefield communication, and seamless multi-domain operations. This analysis delves into their indispensable contributions across the Army, Navy, and Air Force, emphasising their roles in engineering innovation, cyber and electronic warfare (EW), and actionable policy measures needed to strengthen and empower them.

Mid-level officers—including majors, colonels, wing commanders, group captains, commanders, and technical or engineering specialists—are the core leadership managing battlefield dynamics. They oversee unit command, tactical communications, and the integration of cutting-edge technologies into operations. Despite being pivotal in India's AI-driven, network-centric warfare structure, their contributions are often overshadowed by senior leadership. Recognising and institutionalising their roles is vital to ensuring success in modern combat.

### Indian Army

The Corps of Signals, led by mid-level officers, enables real-time, encrypted communication, battlefield networking, and electronic warfare capabilities. Their responsibilities include securing tactical communication during high-intensity and joint operations, integrating EW and cybersecurity measures, and managing communication networks within Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs). The organisational structure comprises signal companies led by majors and signal regiments commanded by Colonels, with specialised trades such as Operator Radio and Line (ORL) and Technician Electronics and Systems (TES).

Engineering officers play a crucial role in combat engineering, rapid construction of strategic infrastructure, and executing counter-mobility tactics. They deploy AI-based Battlefield Surveillance Systems (BSS) and robotics to enhance warfare efficiency. A notable example is the India-China standoff (2020-21), where Signals Officers maintained encrypted communications in high-altitude conflict zones while engineering officers constructed operational infrastructure like bridges and logistics hubs under extreme conditions.

### Indian Air Force

The communication engineers of the Indian Air Force (IAF) are integral to maintaining a state-of-the-art, in-house communication network. These skilled



professionals ensure seamless, secure, and resilient connectivity by leveraging advanced technologies such as Software-Defined Networking (SDN) and 5G. Their expertise supports real-time situational awareness, mission-critical data exchange, and robust cybersecurity, enabling uninterrupted operations in high-intensity scenarios. By continuously adapting to evolving technologies and threats, IAF communication engineers strengthen air defence operations, enhance operational readiness, and uphold national security while setting new standards in military-grade communication technology.

Mid-level IAF communication officers ensure uninterrupted and secure communication for air defence and combat operations. They manage Air Defence Control Units (including S-400, Akash, and SPYDER systems), UAV and satellite networks, and cyber defences for air assets.

IAF engineers specialising in Aeronautical, Electronics, and Mechanical fields oversee aircraft readiness, system maintenance, and the integration of missile systems, radars, and EW platforms. Their expertise has been crucial in indigenous system development, such as the LCA Tejas and AMCA. During the Balakot Airstrike (2019), Communication Officers ensured real-time,

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THE COMMUNICATION ENGINEERS OF THE INDIAN AIR FORCE (IAF) ARE INTEGRAL TO MAINTAINING A STATE-OF-THE-ART, IN-HOUSE COMMUNICATION NETWORK. THESE SKILLED PROFESSIONALS ENSURE SEAMLESS, SECURE, AND RESILIENT CONNECTIVITY BY LEVERAGING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS SOFTWARE-DEFINED NETWORKING (SDN) AND 5G

encrypted communication for operational secrecy, while engineers guaranteed the operational

readiness of Mirage-2000 aircraft, including EW systems and radar evasion measures.

### IAF vs Chinese PLAAF mid-level officers

A comparison between India's IAF and China's PLAAF reveals key operational differences. Indian mid-level officers, including Squadron Leaders and Wing Commanders, are empowered for independent decision-making and multi-platform management. In contrast, Chinese officers operate under a centralised command model, limiting battlefield initiative. Reports from RAND Corporation and the Pentagon (2020-22) highlight that PLAAF officers face systemic challenges in joint operations and adaptive warfare. In contrast, Indian officers, seasoned through real combat experiences, lead the integration of advanced indigenous and Western technologies, whereas PLAAF officers primarily operate evolving domestic platforms with less proven combat capability.

### Indian Navy

Naval communication officers manage secure ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication, Blue Water Communication Systems (BWCS) for long-range coordination, and encrypted submarine and stealth platform communications.

Naval engineers oversee the maintenance and readiness of warships, submarines, and aircraft

carriers. They also integrate sophisticated weapons such as BrahMos missiles and torpedoes while managing stealth and radar-evading systems. A case in point is the anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, where communication officers coordinated multi-national, encrypted communication while engineers maintained operational readiness of naval platforms throughout extended deployments.

Mid-level officers play a pivotal role in coordinating tri-service communication and operational integration, ensuring seamless joint missions across land, air, and sea. Mid-level officers are at the frontline of cyber and EW defence.

Communication officers ensure robust cybersecurity frameworks, while engineers lead the design and operation of AI-based EW platforms and cyber-resilient technologies. These officers spearhead the induction and field application of indigenous defence systems like BrahMos, Akash, and AI-driven surveillance. They work closely with DRDO, BEL, and private defence innovators to enhance technological self-reliance.

### Empowering India's defence backbone

To strengthen mid-level officers, the government should implement AI, Cyber, EW, and space warfare training, conduct integrated tactical communication-engineering exercises, and facilitate global exposure through collaborations with allies like the US, France, and Israel.

National awards should be introduced to recognise excellence in tactical communications and engineering. Defence technology fellowships should be launched for innovation leaders in these domains. Mid-level officers should have representation in defence technology boards and policy-making bodies to ensure that operational insights shape defence strategies. Promotions should be fast-tracked for excellence in emerging tech domains like EW, AI, and Cyber.

Additionally, foreign exchange programs and specialised leadership incentives should be introduced. Collaboration with DRDO, clean startups, and established industries should be strengthened. Mid-level officers should play an active role in innovation ecosystems like iDEX to foster indigenous technological advancements.

### Conclusion

India's evolving security landscape demands proactive empowerment of mid-level Tactical Communication and Engineering Officers. These officers are the operational backbone and technological brain of India's modern military, translating national defence strategies into battlefield readiness.

(The writer is an eminent expert in counter-terrorism and national security and a defence advisor to several Middle Eastern and West Asian countries. Views expressed are personal)



NISHAKANT OJHA

## India's green growth: Balancing carbon sequestration with development

As the world grapples with the escalating impacts of climate change, tree plantation and carbon sequestration have emerged as indispensable tools in promoting environmental sustainability.

For India, an emerging global economy with a significant reliance on carbon-intensive industries, transitioning to greener practices is not just an option—it is an imperative.

India's current forest and tree cover stands at 25.17 per cent, falling significantly short of the 33 per cent target set by the National Forest Policy of 1988. Bridging this gap is essential to counter the effects of deforestation, urban expansion, and surging greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Tree plantations serve as natural carbon sinks, capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide, which is crucial in mitigating the impacts of global warming.

Recent initiatives, including the National Agroforestry Policy of 2014 and the Trees Outside Forests in India (TOFI) program, have sought to encourage private landowners, farmers, and industries to actively participate in plantation activities.

These efforts aim to reduce dependency on natural forests, address ecological degradation, and create employment opportunities in rural areas. By integrating agroforestry with tree-based enterprises, India can ensure that environmental restoration goes hand in hand with sustainable livelihoods.

### Global pressure on Indian industries

Indian industries are increasingly feeling the heat of stringent global carbon footprint regulations. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), set to take effect in 2026, will impose tariffs on carbon-intensive imports such as steel, cement, and chemicals. In 2023, trade between India and the EU reached ₹124 Billion, making the potential impact of these tariffs on Indian exports substantial.

To adapt, industries are looking toward carbon-offset projects, including large-scale tree plantations, as a viable solution. Investments in such initiatives not only help companies align with international sustainability benchmarks but also provide opportunities to secure carbon credits under globally recognised schemes like the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) or the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). These credits can offset industrial emissions, enabling businesses to comply with international regulations while maintaining their competitiveness.

### Economic and social advantages

Beyond their environmental benefits, tree plantations significantly contribute to

economic and social development. Agroforestry, in particular, creates opportunities for farmers and marginalised communities by offering income from multipurpose tree species that yield both ecological and economic returns. This dual approach addresses rural poverty while promoting environmental restoration.

Active community participation in plantation projects enhances their success and sustainability. Involving local stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership and ensures long-term viability. Training and capacity-building initiatives further empower communities with the knowledge and skills required to manage these projects effectively.

While tree plantations offer a promising path forward, several challenges remain. The rising cost of carbon credits poses a significant financial obstacle for industries. For instance, in 2023, carbon credit prices under the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) averaged ₹83 per tonne of carbon dioxide, with projections suggesting a rise to ₹238 per tonne by 2050. For Indian businesses, investing in tree plantations presents a more cost-effective alternative to purchasing expensive credits from international markets.

India also needs a robust and transparent carbon trading policy to engage in global carbon markets effectively. Under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, countries can trade carbon credits to meet their emission reduction goals. Establishing credible policies and governance mechanisms is critical for India to attract international investments and solidify its position in these markets.

### Toward sustainable development

Strategic partnerships and innovative project designs offer a way to tackle the dual challenges of environmental degradation and industrial sustainability.

Collaborations between industries, government agencies, and local communities can lead to scalable plantation models that integrate agroforestry, address climate change, and enhance rural livelihoods.

As India strives to achieve its net-zero emissions target by 2050, tree plantation and carbon sequestration will play pivotal roles in bridging the gap between policy objectives and on-ground realities. These initiatives align economic growth with environmental stewardship, offering a roadmap for a greener future.

Tree plantations are no longer an optional

solution but a necessity in combating climate change. They provide a scalable and impactful strategy to reduce carbon footprints while improving rural livelihoods. With tightening global regulations and the rising costs of inaction, Indian industries must embrace sustainable practices and invest in carbon offset projects.

By prioritising tree plantation and carbon sequestration, India can balance its industrial growth with ecological preservation, paving the way for a sustainable future that benefits both the economy and the environment. Integrating these initiatives into national policies and industry strategies will ensure that India remains a key player in the global fight against climate change.

### Conclusion

India stands at a crucial juncture where economic growth and environmental responsibility must go hand in hand.

Tree plantations and carbon sequestration offer a viable path to achieving sustainability while ensuring industrial competitiveness in a carbon-conscious global market. The nation's commitment to expanding forest cover, promoting agroforestry, and engaging in carbon trading mechanisms will determine its success in mitigating climate change and meeting international sustainability benchmarks.

Strategic investments in large-scale afforestation projects and partnerships between industries, policymakers, and local communities are essential for achieving meaningful progress. These initiatives not only enhance carbon capture but also create economic opportunities, particularly for rural populations.

By integrating tree-based enterprises into national development strategies, India can harness the economic potential of sustainability while addressing pressing ecological concerns. As global climate regulations become increasingly stringent, Indian industries must proactively invest in carbon offset initiatives, including afforestation and reforestation programs.

Establishing a transparent and efficient carbon trading policy will further strengthen India's position in international markets.

The road ahead requires a multi-faceted approach that aligns industrial growth with environmental stewardship. By prioritising tree plantation and carbon sequestration, India can strike a balance between economic development and ecological preservation, ensuring a sustainable and resilient future for generations to come.

(The writer is chairman Foundation for Organisational Research and Education (FORE) and FORE School of Management and former Chairman and Managing Director, MMTCL Ltd. Views expressed are personal)

## The confidence crisis holding back a talented team

The South African cricket team, is blessed with expansive talent and are successful champions in the various formats of the game. However, for impenetrable reasons they are unable to deliver something startling during the ICC tournaments.

Why does this happen? Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican entrepreneur and politician wrote, "If you have no confidence in self, you are twice defeated in the race of life."

Many years ago, in the Meiji era lived a wrestler known as the Great Waves, who possessed the uncanny ability to defeat even his teacher. However, in official tournaments, he was vanquished by opponents much inferior, which sullied his estimable reputation following every bout. There appeared to be a psychological problem.

To circumvent this unenviable state, he approached a Zen Master. The Master directed his new tutee to meditate in a Buddhist temple that night, which was located on the seashore and guided him to focus only on his breath and swallow even the greatest of waves that would arise from the depths of the sea. As night fell, there were high tides in the sea and the waves assumed gargantuan proportions and subsumed everything in its trajectory. Even the reclining Buddha was not spared and was inundated by the spectre that followed the path of the tidal waves. The waves had run amok, obliterating every object in the way.

But Great Waves, following the instructions of the Master, focused his attention on his breath and meditated passionately and with total concentration.

The next morning the Zen Master was a witness to both the destruction as well as the poise maintained by his stolid student. He merely said, "Upon conquering your wavering mind, be confident of sustained success in all the wrestling engagements and bouts."

To be confident, individuals, entrepreneurs, corporates, spiritual seekers, political leaders and parties, sportspersons and teams all need to metamorphose their thinking patterns from, "It is not possible," to a mental state of confidence that "It is very much within the realm of possibility."

The bedrock of success follows a pattern which is based on optimism, self-belief and self-motivation, leading to confidence. Talent and endurance alone are not adequate to ensure confidence and unalloyed success. It is quite possible that these could be mere flashes in the pan. It is exigent upon an individual or an organisation to harness the trait of self-belief and self-confidence.

Paradoxically, while hard work alone does not boost confidence levels, it is impinging upon an individual not to resort to shortcuts, as deep within it leads to an inferiority complex and the person would not be technically sound to adapt or to take up chal-

lenges.

The 3 Cs — Confidence, Credence and Conviction in a leader develops the personality to enhance latent potential, and to view muddled-up situations holistically.

Negative emotions like guilt, skepticism, being over critical of self and colleagues, self-pity, shame, lack of humility, idolising individuals without any concrete results, extreme laziness, a depressed state of mind, team members not trusting one another or excessive pride act as impediments in the progress of an individual or an organisation, consequently reducing the levels of confidence and achievement.

Buddha's prescription for such indolent individuals is to meditate on the purification of the mind, meditate on the impermanent nature of existence, meditate on the vast emptiness that surrounds us and simultaneously vow to develop self-esteem.

It is universally agreed by sages, philosophers and psychologists that life is full of vicissitudes and filled with challenges. Optimism and self-confidence can be developed by practising breathing techniques like Sudarshan Kriya, practising pranayama, meditating and observing the self.

### Conclusion

The South African cricket team's struggles in ICC tournaments may not stem from a lack of talent but from the absence of unwavering confidence. Just as Great Waves, the wrestler, needed to conquer his mind before achieving victory, teams and individuals must cultivate a deep-seated belief in their abilities. Confidence is not merely a byproduct of skill or endurance but a mental state shaped by optimism, self-motivation, and conviction. The 3 Cs — Confidence, Credence, and Conviction—enable leaders, athletes, and organisations to navigate challenges with clarity. Negative emotions like self-doubt, excessive pride, and lack of trust within a team can erode confidence, stalling success. Buddha's wisdom encourages individuals to purify the mind, embrace impermanence, and cultivate self-esteem.

For the South African team to break their ICC tournament jinx, they must transform their mindset from doubt to certainty, from hesitation to resilience. Meditation, breathing techniques, and self-awareness can help instill the mental fortitude needed to thrive under pressure. True champions are not just skilled but also possess unshakable confidence. With the right psychological approach, South Africa can harness its immense potential and turn promise into triumph on the world stage.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views expressed are personal)



RAVI VALLURI

## Lanka court rejects Rajapaksa plea for restoring personal protection

Colombo (PTI): The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed without a hearing the former president Mahinda Rajapaksa's plea for restoring his security contingent.

Rajapaksa, in January, had filed the fundamental rights petition seeking court intervention after the government slashed his security from over 350 personnel to just 60 in December last year. In his petition, Rajapaksa claimed his life was under threat as a result of his action to end the three-decade-long armed campaign by the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam) for a separate Tamil homeland.

He had cited Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya, the Cabinet and the defence establishment as respondents. The legal step by the 80-year-old came in the midst of action by the government to remove him from his official residence. Rajapaksa served as the President of Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2015.

## Israel's surprise attack plunges Palestinians back into 'hell'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Deir El Balah (Gaza Strip)

The Israeli bombs began falling before dawn, lighting the sky with orange flares and shattering the stillness. The surprise wave of airstrikes plunged Palestinians back into a nightmare they had hoped might be behind them. The bombs crashed across Gaza early on Tuesday, setting fire to a sprawling tent camp in the southern city of Khan Younis and flattening a Hamas-run prison. They hit the Al-Tabaen shelter in Gaza City, where Majid Nasser was sleeping with his family. "I went out to see where the bombing was. Suddenly the second strike happened in the room next to us," he said. "I heard screaming, my mother and sister screaming, calling for help. I came and entered the room and found the children under the rubble." Everyone was injured, but alive.

Palestinians tried to claw bodies from the wreckage with their bare hands. Parents arrived at hospitals, barefoot, carrying children who were limp and covered in ash. Streets and hospitals filled with bodies. By midday, over 400 people had been killed. It was one of the deadliest days of the 17-month war, following two months of ceasefire.

During the truce that began on January 19, hundreds of thousands of people in Gaza had returned to their homes, many of them destroyed. A surge of aid brought food and medicines — until Israel cut off aid two weeks ago to pressure the Hamas militant group into accepting a new proposal instead of continuing with the truce. The Muslim holy month of Ramadan had even provided moments of joy as families held communal sunset meals ending each day's fast without the fear of bombardment. Instead, the war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction was back with full force. "What is happening to us is hell. Hell in every sense of the word," said Zeyad Abed, as he stood among the blackened remains of tents in Khan Younis. Fedaa Heriz, a displaced woman in Gaza City, said victims were killed in their sleep just before the pre-dawn meal ahead of the daily Ramadan fast. "They set the alarm to wake up for suhoor, and they wake up to death? They don't wake up?" she screamed. Fedaa Hamdan lost her husband and their two children in the strikes in Khan Younis. "My children died while they were hungry," she said, as funeral prayers were held over their bodies.

**Hospitals felt like Armageddon:** Scenes at hospitals recalled the early days of the war, when Israel launched a massive bombardment of

Gaza in response to the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023. Survivors on Tuesday held rushed funeral rites over dozens of body bags lining the yard of Shifa Hospital in Gaza City. Mothers sobbed over the bloodied bodies of children, as warplanes hummed overhead. Doctors struggled to treat the flow of wounded.

"A level of horror and evil that is really hard to articulate. It felt like Armageddon," said Dr. Tanya-Haj Hassan, a volunteer with the Medical Aid for Palestinians aid group. She described the Nasser Hospital emergency room in Khan Younis as chaos, with patients, including children, spread across the floor. Some were still wrapped in the blankets they had slept in.

Dr Ismail Awad with the Doctors Without Borders aid group said the clinic received about 26 wounded people, including a woman seven months pregnant with shrapnel in her neck. She later died. "It was overwhelming, the number of patients," Awad said.

At the Al-Attar clinic in Muwasi in southern Gaza, medical staff said they were forced to operate without light bulbs and emergency ventilation devices.

Israel not only blocked all supplies from entering Gaza two weeks ago but also cut off electricity to the territory's main desalination plant last week. That has again created scarcities in medicine, food, fuel and fresh water for Gaza's over 2 million people.

**Palestinians flee once more:** New Israeli evacuation orders covering Gaza's eastern flank next to Israel and stretching into a key corridor dividing Gaza's north and south sent Palestinians fleeing again.

Israel's Arabic-language military spokesperson, Avichay Adraee, published a map on X telling Palestinians in those areas, including highly populated neighborhoods, to leave immediately and head for shelters. "Continuing to remain in the designated areas puts your life and the lives of your family members at risk," he said.

The evacuation zone appeared to include parts of Gaza's main north-south road, raising questions about how people might travel. Palestinians nevertheless gathered their belongings and set out, hardly knowing where to go.

UNICEF spokesperson Rosalia Bollen recalled that the days before the bombardment felt uneasy. She could sense fear. Children would ask if she believed the war would start again.

"This nightmare scenario has been on everyone's mind," she said. "It's just heartbreaking that it is materializing right now and that it is shattering the last piece of hope that people had."

## Putin's vow not to hit Ukraine's energy infra 'at odds with reality': Zelenskyy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Wednesday that a vow by Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin not to attack energy infrastructure was "very much at odds with reality" following an overnight barrage of drone strikes across the country.

Zelenskyy said that he would speak with US President Donald Trump later in the day and expected to hear more about the American leader's phone call with Putin about a ceasefire and to discuss the next steps to be taken. "Even last night, after Putin's conversation with ... Trump, when Putin said that he was allegedly giving orders to stop strikes on Ukrainian energy, there were 150 drones launched overnight, including on energy facilities," Zelenskyy said at a news conference in Helsinki with Finnish President Alexander Stubb.

Russia said it had halted its targeting of Ukraine's energy facilities and accused Kyiv of attacking equipment near one of its pipelines. "Unfortunately, we see that for now there is no reciprocity on the part of the Kyiv regime," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Russian strikes, which hit civilian areas and damaged a hospital, followed Putin's refusal to back a full 30-day ceasefire during discussions with Trump. The White House described the call between Trump and Putin as the first step in a "movement to peace" that Washington hopes will include a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea and eventually a full and lasting end to the fighting. But there was no indication that Putin backed away from his conditions for a prospective peace deal, which are fiercely opposed by Kyiv.

Stubb called the discussions between Putin and Trump a step in the right direction, but Finland's president said that Russia needs to end its aggression.

"There are only two ways to respond to the proposal of the president of the United States: it's a yes or a no — no buts, no conditions," Stubb said. "Ukraine accepted a ceasefire without any forms of conditions. If Russia refuses to agree, we need to increase our efforts to strengthen Ukraine and ratchet up pressure on Russia to convince them to come to the negotiating table."

Shortly after the lengthy phone call between Trump and Putin on Tuesday, air raid sirens sounded in Kyiv, followed by explosions as residents took shelter. Despite efforts to repel the attack, several strikes hit civilian infrastructure, including a direct drone strike on a hospital in Sumy and attacks on cities in Donetsk region. Russian drones were also reported over Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Sumy, Chernihiv, Poltava, Kharkiv, Kirovohrad, Dnipropetrovsk, and Cherkasy regions.

The Russian Defence Ministry said that the military complied with Putin's order to halt energy infrastructure strikes and downed seven drones its forces fired before the order at power facilities related to the military-industrial complex in Ukraine's southern Mykolaiv region.

Moscow accused Ukraine of targeting its energy facility in the Krasnodar region bordering the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014, several hours after the Putin and Trump talks. The ministry said that three drones targeted oil transfer equipment that feeds the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, causing a fire and leading one oil tank to lose pressure.

"It is absolutely clear that we are talking about yet another provocation deliberately concocted by the Kyiv regime, aimed at derailing the peace initiatives of the US president," the ministry said.

## Police arrest Istanbul mayor over alleged graft, terror links

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Istanbul

Turkish police on Wednesday arrested Istanbul's mayor — a popular opposition leader and key rival of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan — and several other prominent figures as part of investigations into alleged corruption and terror links.

It was a dramatic escalation in an ongoing crackdown on the opposition and dissenting voices in Turkey. The state-run Anadolu Agency said prosecutors issued detention warrants for the mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, and some 100 other people. Among those detained was Imamoglu's close aide, Murat Ongun. Authorities also closed several roads around Istanbul and banned demonstrations in the city for four days in an apparent effort to prevent protests following the arrest. Private NTV television said two Istanbul district mayors were among those detained.

Critics say the crackdown follows significant losses by Erdogan's ruling party in local elections last year amid growing calls for early national elections. Government officials insist that the courts operate independently and reject claims that legal actions against opposition figures are politically motivated.

"We are facing great tyranny, but I want you to know that I will not be discouraged," Imamoglu said earlier in the day in a video post on social media. Germany criticised the arrests, with Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sebastian Fischer describing them as "a serious setback for democracy."

**The backdrop:** Erdogan, a populist with increasingly authoritarian tendencies, has led Turkey as prime minister or president for more than 20 years and is now the longest-serving leader in the Turkish republic's history. His current term runs until 2028 but he has indicated he'd like to serve longer — something he could achieve with the help of a friendly parliament. Imamoglu was arrested as police searched his home, but it wasn't immediately clear if anything was confiscated. His wife, Dilek Imamoglu, told the private Now television that police arrived at their residence before dawn and that the mayor was taken around 7:30 am. The Istanbul Stock Exchange's main index dropped by 7 per cent over the news of his arrest, automatically triggering a temporary halt in trading to prevent panic selling and stabilise the market. Trading later resumed but was again halted in the afternoon. The Turkish Lira lost some 7 per cent of its value against the dollar. Anadolu, the news agency, said that Ekrem Imamoglu and several others are suspected of extortion, money laundering and irregularities concerning tenders and procurements, among other crimes.

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

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

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

Spl. Train No.	Station From	Dept. Time	Station To	Arr. Time	Stoppages
04026	Delhi Jn.	23:05	Raxaul Jn.	19:00	Ghaziabad, Hapur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Gonda Jn., Gorakhpur & Narkatiaganj Jn. Stns.
03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
02436	New Delhi	08:30	Patna Jn.	20:10	Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar & Ara Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
04028	Anand Vihar (T)	23:55	Jogbani	03:00	Ghaziabad, Moradabad Jn., Bareilly Jn., Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur, Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05114	Anand Vihar (T)	16:00	Chhapra	14:00	Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Burhwal, Gonda Jn., Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Padrauna, Tamkuhi Road, Thawe Jn., Dighwa Dubauli, Mashrakh & Chhapra Kacheri Stations
04018	Anand Vihar (T)	09:00	Muzaffarpur Jn.	06:00	Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Gorakhpur, Kaptanganj Jn., Narkatiaganj Jn., Sagauli Jn. & Bapudham Motihari Stations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 25.03.2025 (TUESDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
03012	Anand Vihar (T)	00:30	Howrah	03:00	Tundla Jn., Etawah Jn., Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone, Anugrah Narayan Road, Gaya, Koderma, Dhanbad, Asansol, Durgapur, Bardhaman & Bandel Jn. Stations
05204	Anand Vihar (T)	09:20	Muzaffarpur Jn.	05:00	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur, Patliputra, Sonpur Jn. & Hajipur Jn. Stations

### SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 26.03.2025 (WEDNESDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
03010	Anand Vihar (T)	00:30	Howrah Jn.	03:00	Tundla Jn., Etawah Jn., Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone, Anugrah Narayan Road, Gaya Jn., Koderma, Dhanbad Jn., Asansol Jn., Durgapur, Bardhaman & Bandel Jn. Stations

### SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 27.03.2025 (THURSDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpuri, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05114	Anand Vihar (T)	16:00	Chhapra	14:00	Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Burhwal, Gonda Jn., Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Padrauna, Tamkuhi Road, Thawe Jn., Dighwa Dubauli, Mashrakh & Chhapra Kacheri Stations

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



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Italian coast guard recovers 6 bodies after migrant shipwreck in Mediterranean

Milan (PTI): The Italian Coast Guard recovered six bodies and was searching for up to 40 migrants missing after a rubber dinghy that departed from Tunisia sank in the central Mediterranean, the UN refugee agency said on Wednesday. Another 10 people, including four women, were rescued Tuesday and brought to Italy's southernmost island of Lampedusa. The Red Cross said they were in good condition and were receiving psychological care. Aircraft from the European border agency Frontex, the Italian coast guard and others were assisting in the search due to difficult sea conditions, the coast guard said. Survivors said some 56 people were in the dinghy when it departed from the Tunisian port of Sfax on Monday, UNHCR said. The boat started to deflate a few hours later. The people on board were from Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Mali, the UNHCR said. The UN Missing Migrant Project puts the number of the dead and missing in the perilous central Mediterranean at over 24,506 from 2014 to 2024, many of them lost at sea. The project says the number may be greater as many deaths go unrecorded. So far this year, 8,963 migrants have arrived in Italy, according to Interior Ministry figures updated Wednesday, a 4 per cent increase over the same period last year. Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni's centre-right government has pushed for economic agreements with northern African countries aimed at preventing departures. Speaking to lawmakers this week, Meloni credited the deals with a nearly 60 per cent drop in migrant arrivals in Italy last year to 66,317 from 157,651 in 2023. She said 1,695 people were dead or missing at sea in 2024, compared with 2,526 a year earlier. "What do those numbers mean? They tell us that reducing the departures, and curbing the traffickers' business, is the only way to reduce the number of migrants who lose their lives trying to reach Italy and Europe," she said.

JFK assassination files released, sending history buffs hunting for new clues

Dallas (PTI): More than 63,000 pages of records related to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy were released following an order by President Donald Trump, many without the redactions that had confounded historians for years and helped fuel conspiracy theories. The US National Archives and Records Administration posted to its website on Tuesday roughly 2,200 files containing the documents. The vast majority of the National Archives' collection of over 6 million pages of records, photographs, motion pictures, sound recordings and artifacts related to the assassination have previously been released. Larry J. Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Centre for Politics and author of "The Kennedy Half-Century," said it will take time to fully review the records.

VERY SHORT TENDER NOTICE: IIM Ranchi invites tender from eligible bidders to 'Engage an Event Management Company for Convocation 2025'. The last date for submission of the sealed bid is up to 03.00 PM on 26.03.2025. For More details, please refer to our website: www.iimranchi.ac.in

PUBLIC NOTICE: Known to all that my client Sh. Ved Prakash Sharma owner of the PLOT No. 35, AREA 60 SQ. YDS. KHASRA No. 109/8, VILLAGE PALAM, BHARAT VIHAR, BLOCK-A, RAJAPUR, NEW DELHI and Sh. Ved Prakash Sharma purchase property from Manju Lata Sharma vide Notarized GPA, ATs and will dated 10.06.2011. Now Sh. Ved Prakash Sharma wants to sell aforesaid property to 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.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Notice is hereby given that the property described below is being transferred to Mr. Anil Dhandia, S/o Late Shri. Gyan Chand Dhandia, as per the last will and testament of Late Shri. Gyan Chand Dhandia, who passed away on 29/11/2018. Property Details: \* Property Address : R1-DF/021, Block-1, M3M Urbana, Pin code: 121072. \* Property Type : Commercial & Urbana Premium and \* Plot size : 958 Sq Ft. \* Property ID : 10NPR74

THE DELHI GOLF CLUB: Dr. Zakir Hussain Road, New Delhi-110003. Quotations are invited for 'Purchase & Installation of PDR Mats'. Detailed RFP can be downloaded from DGC website https://delhigolfclub.org/tendernotice/ Sealed forms mentioning words 'Purchase & Installation of PDR Mats' in capital letters on top of the envelope must reach us before 1200 Hrs on 27<sup>th</sup> Mar. 2025. Tender Box is placed in the Main Office of DGC. Secretary The Delhi Golf Club

HARYANA SHEHRI VIKAS PRADHIKARAN PUBLIC NOTICE

Online applications in prescribed application form are invited from the land owners whose lands were acquired in the past to develop the Sectors in Estates under Panchkula Zone namely i.e. Kaithal in Sector 18, 19 and 21. The outsteees are requested to apply along with application money Rs. 50,000/- for the concerned Sector. The claims of outsteees will be decided in terms of policy dated 11.08.2016 and 08.05.2018. For detailed terms and conditions, terms of payment, policy guidelines and Sector wise & category wise details of the plots are available on the HSVP website i.e. (www.hsvphry.org.in). The scheme will start w.e.f. 13.03.2025 and close on 30.04.2025 at 5:00PM. For any other details may contact Estate Officer, HSVP, Kaithal (01746-357201). Note:- It is hereby clarified that land owners who applied for allotment of plots under outsteees category in the advertisement issued by the HSVP previously shall have to apply afresh. Estate Officer, HSVP, Kaithal RO 33057-C-27-7

PUBLIC NOTICE: Known to all that my client Smt. Jaswanti owner of the PROPERTY NO. 40 & 41, AREA 25 SQ. YDS., KHASRA No. 64/6/2, VILLAGE HASTIAL, K-1 EXTN., MOHAN GARDEN, UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110059 and Smt. Jaswanti purchase property from J.K. Pandey vide Notarized GPA, ATs and will dated 06.03.2013. Now Smt. Jaswanti 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.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Known to all that my client Smt. Savita Joshi owner of the PLOT No. 61, AREA 90 SQ. YDS., KHASRA No. 266/267 Kamr; 280, VILLAGE NAWADA, BHAGWATI GARDEN EXTN. UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110059 and Smt. Savita Joshi purchase property from Smt. Chanchal Rani vide GPA, ATs and will dated 09.03.2006. Now Smt. Savita Joshi 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.

E-Tender Notice for Internet Bandwidth: GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR. Short Term E-Tenders are invited for the purchase of 1 GBPS (1:1) Internet Bandwidth. Naturally Ventilated Poly-House, Archery Equipments, Victor 2D Fluorometer (DELFA Xpress) and Fully Automated Hemoglobin System II are submitted online latest by 3/04/2025 upto 4:00 p.m. Detailed information can be obtained from website www.eproc.punjab.gov.in.

Re: Industrial Property bearing Plot No. 247, measuring 2000 sq. yds., alongwith Construction made thereon, measuring 9500 sq. ft. which comprises an Industrial Shed, situated at Sector-24, Industrial Estate Faridabad, Tehsil Ballabgarh, District Faridabad (Haryana); hereinafter referred to as "said property". NOTICE is hereby given to general public that our clients, M/s. Indolech Auto Interiors Company M/s. Suvy Polymers, Mr. Gulshan Sharma, M/s. Polymers Pvt. Ltd., Mr. Mohit Sharma, Veena Sharma are intending to purchase the said property from M/s. AMD Fishers Pvt. Ltd. (hereinafter referred to as the "Seller"). In this connection, the seller is the owners of the said property vide Sale Deed dated 21.12.2023 executed by Mr. Rajiv Mehta and Mrs. L.D. Mehta (Mr. L.D. Mehta in Book No. 1, Volume No. 91/83, pages 10073-75 SRB- Ballabgarh. Further, the seller has informed us that the said property was initially allotted to Mr. L.D. Mehta (Laxman Dass Mehta) and further conveyance deed dated 19.09.1972 has been executed by HUDA in favour of Mr. L.D. Mehta (Laxman Dass Mehta) and Mrs. L.D. Mehta (Laxman Dass Mehta) on 26.12.2007, his son Mr. Rajiv Mehta became the owner of the said property vide Re-Allotment Letter dated 09.10.2013 issued by HUDA. That the said Conveyance Deed dated 19.09.1972, forming part of chain documents, and hereinafter called the "said documents" have been lost/misplaced and are not traceable. An FIR in this effect has also been lodged by our clients with Crime Branch, Delhi Police, vide LR No. 2023242/2025 dated 09/10/2025.

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION, CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR E-Tender Notice 2024-2025 Tender Notice: E-Tender in B-I form for the following work invited by Municipal Administrator, Municipal Corporation, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Phone No. 0240-2333536-40) from Government Registered Contractors / Companies / Firms of Appropriate Category.

Table with 3 columns: Sr. No., Name of Work, Tender Amount Rs. 1. Construction of Concrete Road At Gut No. 38, Vinayak Nagar, Ikhdaha in Zone-10, 84,57,107/- 2. Construction of Concrete Road At Gut No. 112, Ravi Nagar, Nakshatravadi in Z-10, 1,29,72,705/- 3. Construction of Concrete Road At Jetwan Society main Route in Ward no 13, Bhimnagar Bhangsarpura, 1,51,22,424/- 4. Construction of Concrete Road At Gut No.5, Nakshatravadi in Zone No. 10, 64,38,926/- 5. Construction of Concrete Road At Petha Nagar Layout & Saket Nagar, Buddha Vihar in Ward-13 Zone No. 01, 6,43,29,263/- 6. Construction of B.T. road from goat farm to GutNo. 62 Padegaon to Gut No. 63 Padegaon (L,Shape), 4,05,21,642/- 7. Construction of BT road from Gut No. 47 Padegaon to Gut No. 61 Padegaon to 59 Padegaon (L. Shaped), 45,66,239/- 8. Construction of B.T. Road From Padegaon Substation to Safari Park 30M Wide DP Road, 14,18,80,359/-

Details regarding the tender for the said works will be available on 10/03/2025. From, 13/03/2025. Administrator, Municipal Corporation, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar reserves all the rights to reject/cancel any or all tenders without assigning any reason. Executive Engineer-Roads, CSMC, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that Campbell Advertising Pvt Ltd claims to be owner and in possession of Unit no. F-204, on 22nd Floor, Tower F in Ace Platinum Plot No. GH-121, Sec. Zela-1, Greater Noida, (UP) by virtue of Sub-Lease Deed dated 07.06.2021 reg vide Doc. No. 9189 and as per the said owner the Original Sub-Lease Deed dated 07.06.2021 is lost/misplaced & an information report have been filed with SHO crime branch on 20.03.2023 with regard to loss of said document & said Campbell Advertising Pvt Ltd has agreed to sell the said Property to Anand Prasad Mishra and said Anand Prasad Mishra has agreed to create a mortgage in favour of our clients Axis Bank Limited, Indraprasth Ghaziabad (U.P.), any person/s in possession of the above mentioned documents or having claim against the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, lien or otherwise howsoever, are hereby intimated to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 10days from the date hereof, failing which claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned and our client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan and subsequent creation of mortgage in respect thereof. Vishal Diwan, Advocate For Diwan and Company LLP Advocates and Solicitors House No.2 (LGF), NRI Complex, N.D-19 Email ID: vishalidwan@diwanandcompany.com

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences Sadiq Road, Faridkot -151023 Ph. 01639-256232, 256236

E-Tenders are invited for the procurement of following items for Guru Gobind Singh Medical College and Hospital upto 02-04-2025 1. Hysteroscope 2. Diagnostic Middle Ear Analyser 3. Computerized Speech Laboratory with Speech Machine 4. Digital Stroboscope and fess Machine 5. Laxometer 6. Gel Doc System 7. Sign the rate contract of Radiopharmaceuticals for Nuclear Medicine 8. Biosafety Cabinet 9. Source purchase/decayed in nuclear medicine department. 10. Radiant Heat Warmer. E-tenders are invited for the procurement of following items with pre bid meeting for Guru Gobind Singh Medical College and Hospital upto 09-04-2025 1. Slit Lamp 2. ENT Treatment 3. Co2 Laser machine Terms and conditions can be downloaded from http://leproc.punjab.gov.in. The tenders will be accepted in E-Tender mode only Bidder can also download tender notification and document from the University website i.e. www.bfuhis.ac.in 00/12/393/2023/42718 Dated CHD - 3/19/2025 Registrar

विशेष शाखा पुलिस मुख्यालय मध्यप्रदेश भोपाल क्रमांक - विशा.स्टो./2025-25 ( 101 ), दिनांक - 18.03.2025 निविदा सूचना का शुद्धि पत्र (Corrigendum) विशेष शाखा पुलिस मुख्यालय को निविदा सूचना क्रमांक SB/Store/2025-25 (03), Bhopal Dated 01.01.2025 द्वारा Up Gradation of Data Center के क्रय हेतु ई-निविदा सूचना जारी की गई है। उपरोक्त आमंत्रित निविदा के माध्यम से क्रय किये जाने वाले उपकरण की समय-समयी में आंशिक संशोधन के संबंध में शुद्धि पत्र (Corrigendum) जारी किया गया है जो website https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgpc/app पर तथा विभाग की वेबसाईट www.mppolice.gov.in पर उपलब्ध है। सहायक पुलिस महानिरीक्षक, विशेष शाखा (सा), म.प्र. भोपाल दूरभाष क्रं. - 0755-2443654 G-24512/24

PUBLIC NOTICE: NOTICE is hereby given that Mrs. Ekta Kumari (hereinafter referred to as the said Mortgagee/Borrower) is purchasing Flat No. F-1903 on 13th Floor, lower F, addressing 1950 Sq. Ft. in Ace Platinum in Plot No. GH-121/1 situated at Sector Zela-1, Greater Noida, Dist. Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. (hereinafter referred to as "said property") from M/s Campbell Advertising Pvt. Ltd. who is its owner vide Sub Lease Deed dated 07.06.2021, regt. as Doc. 9590 in Addl. Book No. 1, Vol. No. 38836 on pages 31-80, on 15.06.2021. The said Sub Lease Deed dated 07.06.2021, regt. as Doc. 9590 has been misplaced. The Borrower will create mortgage in respect of the said property in favour of our clients Axis Bank Ltd., Ghaziabad. Any person, body, individual institution having any claim and/or objection in respect of the said property by way of sale, exchange, lease, lien, mortgage, charge, encumbrance, gift, trust, easement, maintenance, inheritance, testamentary disposition or otherwise or having in their custody any title documents or Sub Lease Deed dated 07.06.2021, regt. as Doc. 9590 pertaining to the said property shall communicate the same to the undersigned at our address within 10 days from the publication of this notice with documentary evidence in support thereof, failing which all the claim of such person shall be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. Any objections raised after the completion of the 10 days shall not be binding upon the said property or my client.

M.P. BUILDING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (An Agency of Govt. of M.P. Public Works Department) 16-A, CEDMAP Building, Arera Hills, Bhopal (MP)-462011, Telephone : 0755- 4853297, 0755- 4853295 E-mail : eincompbdc@mp.gov.in, dgmhmpbdc@gmail.com NIT No. : 1646/GM/MPBDC/CW/25/NIT-65 Bhopal, Dated : 18.03.2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Madhya Pradesh Building Development Corporation invites online tender for the following construction works :- 1. Construction and Upgradation work at Awadesh Pratap Singh University, Rewa, M.P - 01 Work - PAC : Rs. 1139.75 Lacs 2. Construction of Composite Tehsil Office Building Maheshwar Dist. Khargone M.P.-01 Work- PAC : Rs. 627.47 Lacs 3. Construction of Composite Tehsil Office Building Pichhore Dist. Gwalior M.P.-01 Work - PAC: Rs. 808.37 Lacs 4. Construction, Renovation and Allied works at Jiwaji University, Gwalior M.P.-01 Work - PAC : Rs. 3481.23 Lacs 5. Composite Tehsil Office Building at City Center at Dist. Gwalior M.P.- 01 Work - PAC : Rs. 633.82 Lacs 6. Construction Renovation and Allied works at Barkatullah University Bhopal M.P.-01 Work - PAC: Rs. 4220.71 Lacs 7. Construction Renovation and Allied works at Vikram University Ujjain M.P. - 01 Work - PAC : Rs. 3895.86 Lacs 8. Construction works at Govt. Collge Badanagar Ujjain M.P.- 01 Work - PAC: Rs. 263.30 Lacs 9. Construction and other associated works at Govt. Arts College Niwas & Construction of 50 Seated Boys and Girls Hostel at Govt. Higher Secondary School Hathihara Dist. Mandla M.P.-02 Work- PAC : Rs. 647.65 Lacs 10. Construction and Renovation work at Govt. College Jaysingnagar, Construction and Renovation work at Pandit Ramkishore Shukla Smriti Govt. Arts and Commerce College Beohari & Construction of 50 Seated Boys and Girls Hostel at Govt. Higher Secondary School Chhatwasi Dist. Shahdol M.P.- 03 Work - PAC : Rs. 851.64 Lacs 11. Various works of Higher Education Department at Anjad & Barwani Dist. Barwani M.P.-02 Work-PAC: Rs. 440.28 Lacs 12. Various Construction and allied works in old college building Campus in Veer Balidani Khajiy Nayak Government PG College Sendhwa M.P.- 01 Work - PAC: Rs. 267.00 Lacs 13. Various works of Higher Education Department at Jaitwara & Satna Dist. Satna M.P.-02 Work -PAC: Rs. 870.16 Lacs 14. Construction, renovation and allied service works at Govt. College Bhaidehi, Betul M.P.-01 Work-PAC : Rs. 222.11 Lacs 15. Construction and Renovation works at Govt. Science College, Pandhurna Seoni M.P.-01 Work-PAC : Rs. 307.80 Lacs 16. Construction and extension works at Maharaja Bhoj Govt. PG College, Dhar M.P.-01 Work - PAC: Rs. 271.83 Lacs 17. Construction and Renovation work at Govt. Chandra Vijay College, Dindori, Mandla M.P.-01Work-PAC:Rs.233.82 Lacs 18. Construction, renovation & allied works at Govt. Degree College Timami, Harda M.P.-01 Work- PAC : Rs 247.55 Lacs 19. Renovation works at Govt. P.G. College Jhabua M.P.-01 Work - PAC : Rs 239.85 Lacs 20. Construction/ Renovation and upgradation works at Netaji Subhashchandra Bose Govt. College Biowara, Rajgarh M.P. - 01 Work - PAC : Rs 251.12 Lacs 21. Construction, renovation and upgradation and allied works at Sanjay Gandhi Smriti Govt. Autonomous Post Graduate College Sidhi M.P.-01 Work - PAC: Rs 263.83 Lacs 22. Construction of Composite Tehsil Office Building at Malharang Dist. Mandsur M.P. -01 Work -PAC: Rs. 633.68 Lacs 23. Construction of Composite Tehsil Office Building at Parasria Dist. Chhindwara M.P.-01 Work -PAC: Rs. 634.34 Lacs 24. Construction of 50 Bedded Ayush Hospital Shujalpur, & Construction of Auditorium & allied works at Govt. PG College Shujalpur, Dist. Shajapur, M.P. - 02 Work PAC- 3302.85 Lacs 25. Upgradation of New Classrooms in Existing Building and Renovation of Girls Hostel at Jawaharlal Nehru Smriti Govt. P.G. College Shujalpur, Dist. Shajapur, M.P.-01 Work PAC- 216.26 Lacs 26. Construction of 50 Bedded Ayush Hospital at Sheopur, M.P. - 01 Work PAC- 1081.00 Lacs 27. Construction of Ayurveda College and Hospital at Shahdol - 01 Work PAC- 6163.15 Lacs 28. Construction of Ayurveda College and Hospital at Sagar, M.P.- 01 Work PAC- 5057.60 Lacs 29. Construction of Ayurveda College and Hospital at Narmadapuram, M.P.- 01 Work PAC- 4885.30 Lacs 30. Construction of Ayurveda College and Hospital at Morena, M.P. - 01 Work PAC- 5065.00 Lacs 31. Construction of Ayurveda College and Hospital at Balaghat, M.P. - 01 Work PAC- 5049.00 Lacs 32. Interior and Partition Work of Additional Area at 11th Floor MPBDC Office in CEDMAP Building at 16-A, Arera Hills, Bhopal, M.P.- 01 Work - PAC : Rs 48.33 Lacs 33. Structural Strengthening of Dilapidated RCC Structure, Waterproofing & Repair works on Third Floor (South-West) of CEDMAP Building at 16-A, Arera Hills, Bhopal, M.P. (2nd Call)- 01 Work - PAC: Rs. 17.20 Lacs Detailed NIT and tender documents can be viewed, downloaded and purchased online upto from 02.04.2025 at 18:00 hrs. to 21.04.2025 at 15:30 hrs. (for Sl. No. 1 to 27), 08.04.2025 at 18:00 hrs. to 29.04.2025 at 15:30 hrs. (for Sl. No. 28 to 31) And 28.03.2025 at 18:00 hrs. to 12/04/2025 at 15:30 hrs. (for Sl. No. 32 to 33) from website www.mptenders.gov.in PAC can very at the time of uploading of tender document. Any amendment/corrigendum "if any" will be published on website only, will not be published on newspapers. ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF M.P. Madhyam/119294/2025

NORTHERN RAILWAY

Sub: Pre bid meeting for procurement of Elevators Tender No. 12255003 due on 14.04.2025 for procurement of "Elevators" have been floated by Northern Railway, Baroda House, New Delhi. The Pre Bid meeting is schedule for dated 27.03.2025 at 11:30 Hrs. at Conference Hall, 2nd Floor, Stores Department, Baroda House, New Delhi. India. Please make it convenient to attend the same. 866/2025

CHANGE OF NAME

I, JC-734091N Sub Santosh Kumar Jha, R/o- Shanti Nagar Ward No.- 20, Katihar, Bihar- 854105, have changed my son's name from Satyam to Satyam Jha, vide affidavit dated 19/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1702)C I, No.22051444N Sep Kushwah Sonu Maniram R/o- 332/1672 G.H.B Bapunagar Ahmedabad, Gujarat- 380024, have changed my daughter's name from Priya to Priya Sonu Kushwah, vide affidavit dated 18/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1707)C I, S Arulsundari, W/o No.14833680H Hav/Mt Sudhakar R, R/o- 1/88, Mettu Street, Vill- Thalanur, PO- Arcot, Taluk- Walaja, Dist- Vellore, TN- 632503, have changed my name from S Arulsundari to Arulsundari B, vide affidavit dated 19/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. PD(1707)C I, S Arulsundari, W/o No.14833680H Hav/Mt Sudhakar R, R/o- 1/88, Mettu Street, Vill- Thalanur, PO- Arcot, Taluk- Walaja, Dist- Vellore, TN- 632503, have changed my name from S Arulsundari to Arulsundari B, vide affidavit dated 19/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi. 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# India focuses on core trade issues for faster FTA outcomes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India is focusing on core trade issues such as import duty and non-tariff barriers in the proposed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) for faster outcomes from these negotiations, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said on Wednesday.

He said this approach is important as sometimes it takes "so much time" to conclude negotiations for these agreements and because of that businesses lose interest.

"The experience has been that when we look at these free trade agreements, sometimes they are so much time taking that people lose interest, the businesses lose interest."

"So we are also reviewing some of these issues in the department (of commerce) as well, as we are talking to our partners who are doing FTAs with us that why can't we first look at the core trade issues, and even if it is early tranche, or even if it is first phase of that comprehensive agreement, but let there be some kind of outcome which should come out of these negotiations. So we are taking that approach, that let us first focus on the core trade issues," Barthwal said at CII's India-LAC (Latin

America and Caribbean) Business Conclave here.

The secretary said that the core trade issues are tariffs, non-tariff barriers, SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary) barriers, and regulatory factors.

He added that there is a need for India and the LAC region to follow this approach.

"Look at the core trade issues with you, and start working in that direction. I think that is going to be a great way forward by which we will be able to achieve many things, and the businesses will be able to see that the outcomes are very, very fast," Barthwal said. He added that the multi-sectoral approach, which India is talking to the US with under the proposed bilateral trade agreement is also important.

In this approach, "we look at the sectors of mutual advantage, of mutual benefit", he said.

India is negotiating trade agreements with MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay), Chile and Peru.

"We are also thinking of how to look at this (LAC) region in terms of looking the impediments, whether it is non-tariff barriers, whether it is tariff barriers or the regulations, to see that trade grows between these two regions," he said,

adding there is a target to double two-way commerce from USD 50 Billion to USD 100 Billion in the coming years.

The secretary said that huge potential is there to boost trade between the two regions.

LAC region imports are at USD 1.8 Trillion and exports of goods and services are around USD 1.8 Billion.

He also said that countries will have to cut down protectionism to increase trade because that is the need of the nations.

"You cannot grow your GDPs, unless and until the trade also grows...we are embarking upon our trade promotion mission, which would be a kind of umbrella, a kind of scheme, where we look at how to take our trade further. "So trade is going to be an engine of growth, not only for that region, but also for India and that is the path which we will be taking forward," Barthwal said.

He added that sectors where cooperation can be increased included automobile, medical devices and pharmaceuticals. "So can we look at the automobile sector, in a manner in which there are gains to both the regions. Similarly, the pharmaceutical sector, again, India has developed that ability of focusing on generic drugs, which can provide affordable medicines," he said.

# Government recommends 12 per cent safeguard duty on certain steel imports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The commerce ministry's investigation arm DGTR has recommended imposition of a 12 per cent provisional safeguard duty for 200 days on certain steel products with an aim to protect domestic players from surge in imports.

Last year in December, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) started the investigation into the sudden surge in imports of 'Non-Alloy and Alloy Steel Flat Products', used in various industries, including fabrication, pipe making, construction, capital goods, auto, tractors, bicycles and electrical panels.

The investigations were conducted following a complaint from the Indian Steel Association on behalf of its members including ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India, AMNS Khopoli, JSW Steel, JSW Steel Coated Products, Bhushan Power and Steel, Jindal Steel and Power and Steel Authority of India Limited.

The directorate in its probe has preliminarily found that there is a recent, sudden, sharp and significant increase in the imports of these products into India, causing and threatening to cause serious injury to the domestic industry/producers.

The directorate has said in a notification dated March 18 that there exist critical circumstances, where any delay in application of provisional safeguard measures would cause damage which would be difficult to repair.

There is a necessity for immediate application of provisional safeguard measures.

"The authority recommends imposition of provisional Safeguard Duty at the rate of 12 per cent ad valorem for 200 days pending final determination on imports of the product under consideration," the DGTR has said in a notification.

The finance ministry will take the final decision to impose the duty.

According to the industry, the existence of significant excess capacity far exceeding domestic consumption in China, Japan and South Korea have arisen due to slowing demand in those countries.

Import of these products increased from 2.293 Million tonnes during 2021-22 to 6.612 Million tonnes during the period of investigation (October 2023 to September 2024, and the three preceding fiscal years - 2021-24).

The imports have increased from countries including China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

The notification added that the objective of the duty is to protect the Indian

domestic industry against the surge of imports.

While some big domestic steel makers are advocating for imposition of the duty, the user industry is strongly against it as the duty would push raw material prices, impacting their competitiveness.

Domestic steel players have raised concerns over increasing imports of steel from nations like China.

However, MSME exporters from the engineering sector have stated that any move to impose additional duties on steel imports would make domestic products uncompetitive and impact the country's outbound shipments from the sector.

Hand Tool Association Chairman S C Ralhan said that the imposition of the duty would hurt exports from India.

"It will be very damaging for MSME exporters and manufacturers as the duty will increase prices of steel which is a key raw material for our industry. It will make exporters uncompetitive in global markets," Ralhan said.

Safeguard measures in the form of duty or quantitative restrictions are trade remedies available to the World Trade Organisation member-countries.

They are imposed to provide a level-playing field to domestic players in case of sudden and significant increase in imports of a product.

# Sun-days Co launches first eyewear store in capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Luxury eyewear brand Sun-days Co has officially opened its doors at Omaxe Chowk, Chandni Chowk, offering a premium shopping experience for fashion-forward consumers. The new store features a curated collection of over 60 globally renowned brands, including Ray-Ban, Prada, Gucci, Kuboraum, and Philipp Plein, catering to both classic and contemporary tastes.

Located in the heart of Delhi, Omaxe Chowk provides the perfect setting for Sun-days Co, with its upscale ambience and world-class shopping experience. To mark the grand opening, Sun-days Co is hosting an exclusive event with television and film personality Garima Jain. The event promises a glamorous celebration of cutting-edge eyewear fashion in a sophisticated, vacation-like atmosphere.

Sun-days Co is the vision of Devansh Binani, the fourth-generation Director of Himalaya Optical, a brand with an 85-year legacy in the eyewear industry. The store offers not just high-fashion sunglasses but also prescription and sports eyewear from leading brands like Maui Jim and Oakley, ensuring both style and functionality. This is the ninth store of Sun-days and first in the capital. They plan to have 100 stores across the country.

# Telangana presents ₹3.05 Lakh Crore Budget for 2025-26

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hyderabad

The Congress government in Telangana on Wednesday presented a budget of nearly ₹3.05 Lakh Crore for 2025-26, with over ₹56,000 Crore for the implementation of the party's 'six poll guarantees', while expecting to raise ₹64,000 Crore through open market loans.

The budget estimates revenue expenditure of ₹2.27 Lakh Crore and capital expenditure of ₹36,504 Crore, said Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, who tabled the financial document in the state Assembly. "For the fiscal year 2025-26, I am proposing a total expenditure of ₹3,04,965 Crore, with revenue expenditure of ₹2,26,982 Crore and capital expenditure of ₹36,504 Crore," he said, describing it as a "perfect balance between welfare and development".

The 'six poll guarantees' of the Congress government include ₹2,500 per month, gas cylinder for ₹500 and free travel in state-run RTC buses under 'Mahalakshmi' scheme meant for women, ₹15,000 per acre for farmers and tenant farmers under 'Rythu Bharosa'.

As many as 200 units of free electricity for all households under 'Gruha Jyothi', house site and rupees five lakh for people not owning a house under the 'Indiramma Indlu', rupees five lakh for students under 'Yuva Vikasam' and social security pension of ₹4,000 monthly as per 'Cheyutha' scheme are the rest.

The state government has proposed an allocation of ₹24,439 Crore for the Agriculture Department, including towards the Rythu Bharosa Scheme, under which each farmer receives ₹12,000 per acre annually as investment support and



Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy with Deputy CM and Finance Minister Bhatti Vikramarka before the presentation of the State Budget for 2025-26 in the state Assembly in Hyderabad

an additional incentive of ₹500 per quintal for fine variety paddy procured from farmers. ₹31,605 Crore has been earmarked for the Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Department, while the Education Department has been allotted ₹23,108 Crore. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Welfare will get ₹40,232 Crore and ₹17,169 Crore respectively.

"Inspired by secular values, the Congress government has designed this budget for equitable distribution of resources to all classes of society and to establish a system free from inequalities," Vikramarka said. He further said the government's strategic roadmap for the next decade envisions a five-fold expansion of the current USD 200 Billion state economy into a Trillion-dol-

lar economy. ₹23,373 Crore was proposed for the Irrigation Department, while the Home Department has been allotted ₹10,188 Crore. The Health, Medical and Family Welfare Dept gets ₹12,393 Crore and the Energy Department would receive ₹21,221 Crore.

The state's outstanding liabilities stood at over ₹4,51 Lakh Crore (FRBM loans) during 2024-25 (revised estimates) and it is expected to go over ₹5 Lakh Crore next fiscal.

In 2024-25, total outstanding liabilities (FRBM Loans) of the state were budgeted at 27.38 per cent of GSDP. The revised estimates indicate that the outstanding liabilities will be contained at 27.98 per cent of GSDP.

To address the issue of off-budget borrowings, the state is actively negotiating with financial institutions to lower borrowing costs and extend the repayment periods associated with these borrowings, the Budget document said, adding that the guarantees will be extended to only those Public Sector Undertakings which have sufficient cash flows of their own to service the debt.

"Most of the borrowings of the government are being utilised for capital expenditure. This will result in income generating assets and more income to people," it said. Expecting that the growth momentum will pick up further, own tax revenue in 2025-26 is budgeted at ₹1,45,420 Crore as compared with the revised estimates of ₹1,38,181 Crore in 2024-25. Telangana's per capita income stood at ₹3,79,751 with growth rate of 9.6 per cent, while the GSDP at current prices registered 10.1 per cent growth to ₹16,12,579 Crore in 2024-25.

# Rupee rises 12 paise to settle at 86.44

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Rising for the fourth straight session, the rupee appreciated 12 paise to close at 86.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, supported by a positive trend in domestic equity markets and lower global crude oil prices.

However, a strengthening American currency against major currencies overseas ahead of the US Federal Reserve's interest rate decision capped the sharp gain in the local unit, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.60 and touched the intraday low of 86.68 against the greenback.

**The US dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.36 per cent higher at 103.26**

The unit also hit the day's peak of 86.43 before ending the session at 86.44 (provisional), up 12 paise against its previous close.

The domestic currency settled 25 paise higher at 86.56 against the US dollar on Tuesday.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee was supported by strong domestic equities, overnight decline in crude oil prices and FII inflows.

Choudhary further said the rupee is expected to trade with a positive bias on positive domestic markets and fresh FII inflows.

"Extended fall in crude oil prices and weakness in the greenback may also support the rupee. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the FOMC meeting. Fed is likely to leave the interest rates unchanged. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹86.20 to ₹86.80," he added.

Meanwhile, the US dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.36 per cent higher at 103.26.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.77 per cent lower at USD 70.02 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the BSE Sensex rose 147.79 points, or 0.20 per cent, to settle at 75,449.05, while the Nifty advanced 73.30 points, or 0.32 per cent, to close at 22,907.60 points.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) turned net buyers and purchased equities worth ₹694.57 Crore on a net basis on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

# NAR-INDIA to Host NARVIGATE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The National Association of Realtors India (NAR-INDIA), in collaboration with APP Delhi NCR, successfully insights into the future of Indian real estate ahead of NARVIGATE 2025 — the 17th NAR India Annual Convention, scheduled for March 21-22 at JW Marriott, Aerocity. The conference brought together industry leaders to discuss evolving real estate trends and investment opportunities. Moderated by NAR India Chairman Mr Sumanth Reddy Arani, the event featured prominent leaders including Mr Amit Chopra, Mr Tarun Bhatia, and Mr Gaganpal Singh, among others.

# Let us secure farmers' future through reform and unity



BINOD ANAND

It's time to end the agitation. Let's Focus on Real Solutions for Indian Farmers. Indian agriculture stands at a defining moment. The image of a farmer sowing seeds in the fertile fields of Punjab or harvesting crops in the sun-drenched plains of Maharashtra reflects the soul of the nation. Over the past decade, India's farmers have seen unprecedented support and transformation under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. From the sunburnt fields of Rajasthan to the fertile plains of Uttar Pradesh, farmers today stand more empowered, more secure, and more hopeful than ever before. Prime Minister Modi's unwavering commitment to transforming Indian agriculture has not only revitalised rural livelihoods but also restored the dignity and strength of India's farmers. The rollout of direct financial assistance, improved irrigation, access to credit, and strategic market reforms have given farmers a new lease on life. Yet, at a time when Indian agriculture is poised for a golden era, the misguided agitation led by the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) threatens to derail this hard-earned progress.

As a Founder Member of Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangha (RKM), I have witnessed firsthand how Indian farmers, fragmented by geography and economic disparity, came together under a single

banner. The formation of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) was a historic moment for India's agrarian community—a united front aimed at protecting farmers' interests and ensuring that their voices were heard at the highest levels of government. The SKM gave farmers a platform, a collective strength that made the government sit up and listen. However, the current agitation stands in stark contrast to that spirit of unity and purpose. It has been hijacked by political forces that seek to exploit farmers' grievances for electoral gain, diverting attention from the real issues facing Indian agriculture.

Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, Indian agriculture has witnessed a historic transformation. The PM-KISAN (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi) scheme has been a game changer. Over ₹2.8 Lakh Crore has been directly transferred to more than 11 crore farmers' bank accounts, providing them with financial security and flexibility to invest in inputs and equipment. For decades, farmers struggled with soil degradation and poor productivity. The Soil Health Card Scheme addressed this challenge by distributing more than 23 crore Soil Health Cards, enabling farmers to make informed decisions about fertilizers and improving soil fertility. The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) has been another milestone. As India's largest crop insurance scheme, it has provided over ₹1.4 Lakh Crore in claims, shielding farmers from crop loss due to weather extremes and natural calamities.

Recognizing the critical role of water in agriculture, the government launched the Per Drop More Crop initiative under the larger umbrella of the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana. Over 72 lakh hectares have been brought under micro-irrigation, ensuring better water efficiency and higher yields. The expansion of the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme has given farmers unprecedented access to affordable credit. Over 3 crore new Kisan Credit Cards have been issued since 2020,

allowing farmers to access institutional credit at low-interest rates, reducing dependence on informal moneylenders. To strengthen market access, the government has integrated over 1,260 mandis through the National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) platform. This has empowered farmers with better price discovery and reduced dependency on middlemen, ensuring fair prices for their produce.

India's global leadership in millet production is another testimony to Prime Minister Modi's agricultural vision. India has emerged as the world's largest producer of millets, and the United Nations' declaration of 2023 as the International Year of Millets was a direct result of India's

**While MSP provides a safety net for farmers, making it legally binding for all crops would force the government to procure excess produce it cannot store or distribute**

diplomatic and agricultural leadership. The government's push for crop diversification, sustainable farming, and export-driven growth has positioned Indian agriculture as a powerhouse in global markets.

Despite this remarkable progress, the SKM's agitation threatens to reverse these gains. The demand for a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP) is economically unsustainable and strategically flawed. While MSP provides a safety net for farmers, making it legally binding for all crops would force the government to procure excess produce it cannot store or distribute. This would create market distortions, drive up fiscal deficits, and ultimately harm the very farmers it seeks to protect. India's agricultural sector thrives when farmers are competitive in the global market—not when they are dependent on artificial price supports.

The same holds true for the demand to scrap the Electricity Amendment Bill. The

bill aims to improve the efficiency and distribution of electricity, especially in rural areas. Privatization, when regulated properly, will ensure more reliable power supply, reducing input costs and increasing production efficiency. Rejecting reforms without exploring their benefits only ensures that rural India remains stuck in outdated systems.

One of the most distressing demands is the call for compensation for the families of those who died during the previous farmers' protests. While the loss of life is tragic and deserves compassion, tying it to political leverage is morally wrong. Farmers' lives are not bargaining chips. Seeking compensation without addressing the underlying issues—better market access, improved irrigation, and insurance against crop loss—only shifts focus away from real solutions. Farmers need dignity, not charity.

The Government of India has shown unprecedented willingness to engage with farmers and address their concerns. The repeal of the three farm laws in 2021 was a testament to the government's commitment to listening to farmers' voices. A committee on MSP was formed, and multiple rounds of talks have been held. Yet the SKM's rigid stance, driven more by political ideology than by farmers' welfare, has stalled meaningful progress.

In a significant step toward resolving this crisis, the government has agreed to hold a detailed discussion with all stakeholders before the next date of talk on May 4th—the day with farmers' representatives. This creates a genuine opportunity for farmers' leaders to present their case in a structured and solution-oriented environment. The government will and possible stakeholders. The engagement will aim for viksit Bharat by 2047 and net zero emitter Indian economy and all representatives from agricultural cooperatives, financial institutions, Private sector, and farmer producer organizations (FPOs) to join the dialogue and create a comprehensive solution framework. This is a golden opportunity

for SKM to shift from confrontation to collaboration. If the government is showing willingness to listen, why continue the agitation? Why let political narratives hijack an opportunity for meaningful reform?

What India's farmers need is support—not hollow slogans, not political posturing, not temporary fixes. They need to know that when their crops fail, there's a safety net. They need to know that they can access affordable credit without falling into the clutches of moneylenders. They need to know that their produce will find a fair price in the market, not through artificial price supports but through competitive value chains and export opportunities.

This is not the time for confrontation, it is the time for cooperation. The SKM has a moral responsibility to step back from the brink and steer the movement toward meaningful reform. Farmers have already sacrificed enough. Let's not ask them to sacrifice more in the name of misguided political narratives.

To the leaders of SKM—your movement was born from a genuine cause. It gave a voice to the voiceless, brought farmers' issues to the national stage, and forced the government to listen. But now you stand at a crossroads. You can either continue down the path of confrontation, risking the very livelihoods you claim to protect—or you can choose the path of dialogue and reform.

India's farmers have achieved remarkable progress under PM Modi's leadership. It is time to stop the agitation—not as a sign of defeat, but as a gesture of strength and wisdom.

Let dialogue replace protest. Let solutions replace slogans. Let farmers finally breathe the air of hope and dignity. If the SKM genuinely cares about farmers' future, it should call off the agitation immediately and walk into the May 4th meeting with a constructive mindset. India's agricultural future depends on it.

(Founder Member, Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangha and Member, PM-MSP Committee, GoI)

## NCA rechristened to COE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The National Cricket Academy has been rechristened (NCA) to Centre of Excellence (COE) as it found a new home in Bengaluru but it appears to be a case of "old wine in a new bottle", with still no clarity on injury management timelines for specific players.

Whether it is India's Number 1 pacer Jasprit Bumrah or country's fastest bowler Mayank Yadav, the COE has maintained an iron curtain regarding the timeline and process of injury management.

There used to be a running joke about the COE for injured players few years back: "You can check-in anytime of the year but you can't leave".

From injury management (by the physios) in COE's Sports Science and Medical team to rehabilitation and injury prevention (by Strength and Conditioning coach) to return to play (handled by bowling coaches cum biomechanics experts), a player goes through a complicated three-way process.

For any and every injury and subsequent 'Return To Play', there are timelines, which obviously vary from player to player. But not being able to even provide a rough estimation of a player's return hasn't actually amused anyone related to Indian cricket.

"Over the past year, in most injury and rehabilitation cases, the medical team has simply stated 'clinically fit', which offers no real clarity on a player's Return to Play. Don't want to name but many players resume skill training under bowling coach only to still experience discomfort."

"The medical team is always non-committal on Return to Play," a BCCI source privy to developments in COE told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

"It is a strange situation where there remains a question mark with regards to proper co-ordination between the various verticals which needs work in tandem to get a elite athlete back on track."

In case of Mayank, he had a six-month lay-off between April and October when he first suffered a side strain. He made his



international debut against Bangladesh in October. He last played on October 12 and has been out with lower back stress fracture for last five months.

While he is expected to miss the first few games for LSG, Shardul Thakur training with the team suggests that Mayank's injury might be more serious than what people are envisaging.

For Bumrah, the last official statement that came was from chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar, who had informed that pace ace required five weeks of off-loading (complete rest from any rigorous exercise) before he can start training. That was back in early February and with IPL starting in next few days, Bumrah still isn't fit. "There is a reason why England and Wales Cricket Board has renowned sports and exercise medicine expert Dr Nick Pierce as their Chief Medical Officer (CMO). There is too much at stake for a physio to stick his neck out and give a proper overview of a player's medical condition. Hopefully, BCCI would have a sports medicine expert as head and not just a physio," a former national selector, who has seen how NCA functions said.

There is also a perennial problem when it comes to co-ordination between the national team's travelling support staff and the team working at BCCI's COE base in Bengaluru.

If multiple sources are to be believed, the

"co-ordination is nothing to write home about."

The IPL franchises spend millions on their key fast bowlers and they have every right to have a proper feedback from the COE not just the player updating them, a senior franchise official said.

Another interesting aspect that came out while talking to a number of people who have witnessed or worked in the COE is lack of "historical database" which also goes a long way in quick diagnosis and prognosis in terms of injuries.

"The BCCI now has an Athlete Management System (AMS) where the state team S&C trainers and physios update the injury management database. But what we need is a system of collecting body structure related data of all registered U-16 players.

"Someone from Tamil Nadu would have a very different body type to one in Punjab, Delhi or Haryana and boy from Bengal would be very different from ones in North East," a S&C coach, who has worked with COE said.

"One needs to collect data of their bone density, the kind of injuries each might have sustained early on and also kind of injuries each different body can be subjected to. It would take five to seven years of that historical data and then you can be sure about timelines when you are treating a player within the system," he added.

## Adani Group, PGTI to launch Invitational Golf Championship 2025

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Adani Group is set to enter Indian professional golf with the launch of the Adani Invitational Golf Championship 2025 in partnership with the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI), the official sanctioning body of men's professional golf in India.

"This Adani Group initiative intends to promote and broaden golf's accessibility and elevate its status as a mainstream sport, and also to cultivate the next generation of global champions from India," a company statement said.

The inaugural tournament, offering a ₹1.5 crore prize, will be held at Jaypee Greens Golf & Spa Resort, Greater Noida, from April 1-4, 2025, marking PGTI's return to the venue after 11 years.

"We are delighted to join hands with Kapil Dev and the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) to contribute to the growth of Indian professional golf," said Pranav Adani, Director, Adani Enterprises

Limited. "Our goal is to cultivate Indian global champions in golf. We are committed to enhancing accessibility to golf, promoting greater participation and offering world-class training and playing opportunities."

**Q We are delighted to join hands with Kapil Dev and the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) to contribute to the growth of Indian professional golf**

— PRANAV ADANI, DIRECTOR, ADANI ENTERPRISES LIMITED

Kapil Dev, President of the PGTI, said the backing of the Adani Group will help the PGTI produce more champion golfers from India who will make the country proud on the international stage.

"I expect to see golf fans in big numbers following their favourite players on the course during the tournament."

Terming the Adani Invitational Golf Championship 2025 as a watershed

moment for the PGTI, its CEO Amandeep Johl said, "This association will raise the stature of the Tour. We thank the Adani Group, our title sponsors, for sharing PGTI's vision of creating more playing opportunities for Indian professionals." "With an attractive prize purse, outstanding playing conditions at the Jaypee Greens Golf & Spa Resort and a top-notch field vying for the title, one can expect a spectacular week of golfing action at the eagerly awaited Adani Invitational Golf Championship 2025."

A pre-tournament event will be held on March 29 at The Belvedere Golf & Country Club, Ahmedabad. Along with this event, five leading PGTI professionals will conduct a golf clinic that will introduce the sport to 50 children from The Adani International School.

Cricketer legend Kapil Dev, now the PGTI President, will be present at this event to highlight the shared vision of the Adani Group and PGTI to develop golfing talent and advance Indian golf.

## Khelif says she is not intimidated by Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Algerian boxer Imane Khelif says that President Donald Trump's stance on gender in sports "does not intimidate" her and plans to defend her gold medal at the Los Angeles Olympics. Khelif, who found herself in the middle of a bitter divide about gender eligibility during the Paris Olympics, was asked about Trump's policies during an interview with British broadcaster ITV scheduled to be aired on Wednesday.

"I will give you a straightforward answer: the US President issued a decision related to transgender policies in America. I am not transgender. This does not concern me, and it does not intimidate me. That is my response," Khelif said in excerpts of the interview that were

released ahead of the broadcast.

Khelif then interrupted a question about her dream of repeating gold at the next Summer Games in 2028: "Second gold medal, of course," she said. "In America, Los Angeles."

Last month, Trump signed an executive order intended to ban transgender athletes from participating in girls' and women's sports.

On Tuesday, a federal judge blocked enforcement of another Trump executive order to ban transgender people from military service.

Trump has repeatedly labeled Khelif and fellow female boxing gold medalist Lin Yu-ting as men, even though the International Olympic Committee has consistently defended both boxers.

"These two women boxers have been

born as women, they have been raised as women, they have competed as women and nobody ever claimed even that they are transgender," IOC President Thomas Bach said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

Both had been disqualified from the 2023 world championships run by the Russian-backed International Boxing Association, which said they failed eligibility tests.

"What happened there was a Russian-led misinformation campaign which then distorted the truth, the facts, and now we have this unfortunate situation that these two athletes are considered to be transgender. But, They Are Not," Bach added. Khelif advanced through the Olympic Games amid international scrutiny and speculation about her sex.

## Keeping captaincy, batting apart is better: Shubman Gill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

Shubman Gill believes that a successful captain needs to keep his batting separate from leadership as mixing the two is never in the best interest of the team.

Gill took over the mantle of Gujarat Titans from Hardik Pandya last season and his start was an inauspicious one with the team finishing a lowly eighth after playing back-to-back finals in 2022 and 2023.

"The more you keep the captaincy and batting separate, the better it is. In my experience, if I am going to bat, the best thing for me is, that I concentrate on batting. The decision I take as a batter, that is the best decision for me," Gill said at the pre-season media conference here on Wednesday.

"When we are fielding, at that time, or off the field, I get more involved in captaincy. The more I bat, as a batsman, the better it is for me," said Gill, who had scored a massive 890 runs during the 2023 season.

However in his first season as skipper, the tally had come down by more than half to 426 runs and even the strike-rate dropped by 10 percent from 157.70 to 147.40.

The first season as skipper might not have gone as per plans but there were things that he learnt along the way.

"I think, the most interesting, and challenging thing, as a captain, is that, every day, you learn something new, about a player, or about yourself. If I want to be a good captain, these are the things I need to work on."

Gill thanked Director of Cricket Vikram Solanki and head coach Ashish Nehra for helping him in strategic matters as he him-

self is evolving as a young leader.

"The experience that I get here, from Ashu bhai (Nehra) and Vikram, is immensely treasurable for me."

Gill believes that whenever GT have played well at home, they have tended to perform well in away games too.

"If you look at our record, the better we performed, at home, the better we performed away as well. So, performing away, is just as important, and just as important, as performing at home."

The last season didn't go as per plan but Gill doesn't believe in doing something strikingly different.

"If you look at our record over the past three years, we are a team with the highest percentage of wins. So, if we continue to do that, it's going to be another great season for us. And, just because it's a new season, I don't think we have to do anything different."

The dynamics of T20 batting upfront is changing fast but Gill didn't want to be a soothsayer when asked if GT can breach the magic figure of 300 in this coming edition of IPL.

"That's not what our aim is. We want to play the kind of cricket where we will assess what the condition is and what the situation is. If the wicket or the situation allows us to make 240, 250 or 260 runs, then we are not saying no to that. But there might be a situation where 150 or 160 would be an ideal total on specific wickets.

"And hence, I feel as a team, if you are only looking to play one wicket, then you are not adapting the things how you should. The hallmark of a great team is that it adapts the best to the suitable conditions and the challenges that are coming up," he concluded.

## Rory McIlroy wins The Players Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ponte Vedra Beach (USA)

Rory McIlroy winning The Players Championship gave him so much of what he doesn't need.

The \$4.5 Million prize is the largest for any tournament in the world. It pushed McIlroy's career earnings on the PGA Tour alone to just over \$99.7 Million, second only to Tiger Woods.

The perks include a five-year exemption on the PGA Tour (his 28 wins make him a life member) and three-year exemptions to the majors (he's been eligible for all of them since 2009).

It also raised expectations for McIlroy going into the Masters. He probably doesn't need those, either. Even at the TPC Sawgrass for the premier championship of the PGA Tour, the week for McIlroy started and ended with talk about the Masters. It was last Tuesday when a University of Texas golfer watched McIlroy hook his tee shot into the water on the 18th during a practice round and told him it was just like the shot McIlroy hit on the 10th hole at Augusta National the one that started his shocking collapse in the 2011 Masters. That remains as close as McIlroy has come to winning a green jacket. McIlroy took his phone and handed it to security, the Longhorn lad was removed and McIlroy didn't want to talk about the incident a few days later.

Far more pleasant was the end of the week. Disappointed after losing a three-shot lead with five holes to play in regulation Sunday, more nervous than he would have expected at the start of a three-hole playoff Monday, McIlroy made quick work of JJ Spaun with three great swings. The last one was a three-quarter 9-iron in the wind that left everyone hopeful until it plopped down in the middle of an island at Number 17.

Winning The Players is a big deal, and McIlroy now has won it twice.

"I don't want to put any sort of label on it, but it is one of the biggest championships in the world," McIlroy said.

This also is the first time in his career he has two victories leading to the Masters, having won at Pebble Beach last month. Go back to last November, when McIlroy won the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai, and that makes three wins in his last six starts.

The first question from Sky Sports: "Have you ever been in a better headspace going into the majors after those two big wins?" The majors start with the Masters. For McIlroy, it's always the

**Q Look, I'm in good form. I'm playing well. I feel like all aspects of my game are under control. I just have to keep working hard, keep my head down**

— RORY MCILROY, GOLFER

Masters. This starts the 11th year since he last won a major, his 11th time going to Augusta National knowing it's the one major keeping him from the career Grand Slam. "I've had good starts to years before," McIlroy said, and this much is true. Go back to 2019 when he started the year with seven straight top 10s, including a victory in The Players Championship. He tied for 21st at the Masters. "Look, I'm in good form," he said. "I'm playing well. I feel like all aspects of my game are under control. I just have to keep working hard, keep my head down. It's another opportunity to just refine little bits that need refining."

But this is setting up nicely for him. Scottie Scheffler had to wait a month to get going because surgery to his right palm that was punctured by a wine glass

he was using to make ravioli. Scheffler still hasn't had all the pieces fall together since returning at Pebble Beach, though he does not appear to be far off.

Xander Schauffele, winner of two majors last year, just returned from two months away because of a rib injury. His only celebration has been making the cut on the number the last two weeks to extend his streak to 59 in a row.

McIlroy plans one more start the Houston Open before the Masters, the ultimate measure. He feels more equipped than ever to bag another major, and he certainly has been hardened by more failures than he would like to remember. St. Andrews in 2022 and the U.S. Open the last two years were his for the taking and someone else took home the trophy. Pinehurst No. 2 was particularly brutal last year when he missed a pair of short putts on crispy greens down the stretch.

McIlroy believes he began to turn the corner last fall in a playoff loss at Wentworth, and spending quality time on finding freedom in his swing. He also points to the second round of the Masters last year, when the wind came up and he went down with a 77 that effectively took him out of the tournament.

Now he has a shorter swing for the occasion, once for his wedge and now down to the 7-iron. He employed those beautifully in the Pacific wind when he won at Pebble Beach. His 9-iron to the par-3 17th in the playoff at Sawgrass on Monday was masterful.

"When the conditions come like that," he said, reflecting on that Friday round at Augusta last year, "I just feel like I'm a lot better prepared to handle them. It's always been off the tee, but it's flighting the wedges and short irons, which have been the issue, and I feel like I've been able to rectify that."

## Dominguez apologises for comparing Brazilian clubs to Tarzan's chimp

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sao Paulo

Alejandro Dominguez, the president of South American soccer body CONMEBOL, apologised for his remarks comparing Brazilian clubs to a chimpanzee from Tarzan films. Dominguez told journalists after the Copa Libertadores draw in Paraguay that the South American club tournament without Brazilian teams that have dominated it in recent years would be "like Tarzan without Cheetah."

"Regarding my recent statement, I want to express my apologies," Dominguez said in a statement. "The expression I used is a popular phrase and I never intended to belittle or discredit anyone. The CONMEBOL Libertadores is unthinkable without the participation of clubs from the 10 member countries. I reaffirm my commitment to continue working for a fairer, more united soccer, free from discrimination."

CONMEBOL has been under increased pressure to act decisively against racism. Moments before his comment to journalists, Dominguez spoke in Portuguese and claimed CONMEBOL has worked hard to stop racism. Several Brazilian players and fans have been targeted by monkey chants at away matches in recent years, which has also brought more pressure on the confederation's president to act.

## Varun Chakravarthy to be key part of Kolkata Knight Riders' spin in IPL: Sunil Narine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Fresh from his exploits in India's triumphant Champions Trophy campaign, Varun Chakravarthy will be a key component of Kolkata Knight Riders' spin attack with his element of "uncertainty" in the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL), veteran Sunil Narine said on Wednesday.

The West Indian spin-bowling all-rounder, heading into his 14th IPL season with KKR, believes Chakravarthy's ability to keep batsmen guessing would be key to their bowling unit's success.

"Over the years, we have proven it. We bowl well in tandem. It's always good to have him on my side. He keeps that pressure, that uncertainty something you're never sure about," Narine said in a select media interaction while launching 'PariMatch' here.

Chakravarthy, who picked up nine wickets in three matches in the Champions Trophy, has been a mainstay in KKR's lineup since 2020.

After an impressive first season with 17 wickets, he earned his maiden India call-up, though fitness issues delayed his international debut until 2021.

his best performance yet with 20 wickets and played a key role in their triumph last season.

**Have family-like bond with KKR**

Narine, one of the most decorated spinners in IPL history, is eager to embrace another season with a franchise that is like "family" to him.

"It's good to be back here. It's a place that I love being in, and I obviously enjoy the fans. The IPL is the hardest level of cricket, and as time goes on, it keeps getting tougher. All teams are competitive, and there are no easy games," Narine said.

Beyond his bowling, Narine's explosive batting at the top of the order has also played a crucial role in KKR's third IPL title last year.

"Cricket has evolved so much; you have to evolve with it. At times, you need to contribute with both bat and ball. It's all about confidence and belief in your ability. You have a God-given talent, and you try to make the best out of it," he said.

Reflecting on his journey so far, Narine said: "Starting off, franchise cricket felt like just another tournament. But as time went along, you developed a relationship, and it became like a family.



"This is going to be my 14th year in the IPL. I've played with them outside of IPL as well. It's like a family-based team for me. Every time I play with the Knight Riders logo, it feels like this is where I belong."

KKR will begin their title defence

against Royal Challengers Bengaluru at Eden Gardens on Saturday.

Narine emphasised the importance of a strong start as they have often slumped after winning a title.

"It's all about how you begin. The key

is to get a win and build from there. Yes, we have struggled after winning a title before that's just the way life goes. But we're going to give our best shot and hopefully win the title again," he said.

**The leadership shift**

KKR will see new leadership this season with Gautam Gambhir departing to take charge as India's head coach and Ajinkya Rahane replacing Shreyas Iyer as the captain. Dwayne Bravo, IPL's all-time highest wicket-taker, has joined as team mentor.

Narine remains optimistic. "GG (Gambhir) had his own way of playing cricket, and he was very successful in the IPL. He will be a big miss, but I'm sure he will be backing us from behind," he said.

On Rahane's captaincy, Narine added: "Rahane is a very experienced cricketer and leader. He has a big responsibility, but he also has senior players to back him. I know we will get together it's about finding the right combinations and winning games." Speaking about Bravo's addition, Narine said: "He has the most T20 wickets that speaks for itself. He has plenty of knowledge and a winning spirit. He knows how to win games, and coming to KKR will be no different for him."

Despite the leadership changes, KKR have retained key players, including Venkatesh Iyer, who has been re-signed at a huge price of ₹23.75-Crore and named the team's vice-captain.

"When you win a championship, you try to keep the core. We are in a good space, carrying a lot from last year, so the guys know their roles. Hopefully, we can get a good start," Narine said.

**Opening with de Kock?**

Asked whether he would continue opening the batting alongside South African Quinton de Kock, Narine said he remains flexible. "It depends on the team's needs. Obviously, I'd love to open after how things went last year, but it will be based on the team's requirements," he said.

**Overcoming adversity**

Having faced setbacks like a ban for a suspect bowling action, Narine also reflected on what drives him to keep going.

"It's all about legacy and the game you play. You always want to do well. It boils down to hard work nothing is guaranteed. Yes, there will be pressure, but by consistently playing, you find yourself in different scenarios and learn how to get out of them," he concluded.

# MI to approach IPL 2025 with togetherness: Hardik

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Mumbai Indians (MI) captain Hardik Pandya on Wednesday said now that the contentious Impact Player rule has been extended by three years, a cricketer has to be a pure all-rounder to find place in the starting eleven.

The rule allows a team to replace a player from their playing XI at a later stage of the match. The teams bring in a batting or bowling specialist as the situation demands.

The BCCI extended the rule to at least the 2027 edition despite reservations from leading Indian players, including Rohit Sharma who said the Impact Player strategy was holding back the development of Indian all-rounders with teams replacing them with an extra batter or bowler during the game.

"In the current scenario, it becomes difficult if you are not completely a 50-50 all-rounder to find your place. Going forward this can change or will change, we will have to see. But yes, definitely if you want to encourage more all-rounders they will need a fix spot for them to develop over the years," said Pandya during the season-opening media interaction.

Pandya will miss MI's opening game on Sunday due to one match suspension for over-rate related offences last year. Surya Kumar Yadav will lead the side.

Sitting next to him, head coach Mahela Jayawardene also had his say on



Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya during a press conference ahead of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025, in Mumbai

PTI

the matter.

"It has given a different set of challenges. So we have to adapt and get better. My only concern at that time was that sometimes you have a pure all-rounder and they have a specific role to play but the other all-rounders are taken out of the game because you can get a genuine bowler or batter, that is something we have to see in the long term," reckoned the Sri Lankan great.

Pandya upbeat about Mumbai Indians' revival after memorable 12 months

Pandya's return to Mumbai Indians last season was not the smoothest as the storied franchise finished last among 10 teams. He was also booed by the home fans. Considering their five IPL titles, Mumbai Indians have had a dry run since 2021. The premier all-rounder said he will carry the confidence of winning two ICC titles with India over the past year.

"Playing for India has always been prideful. It has also been my number one priority, winning two trophies is very close to our hearts and that joy will carry forward to the IPL.

"Last four seasons have been dry for Mumbai Indians. This season we will approach the season with joy and togetherness," said Pandya who linked up with his IPL team hours after winning the Champions Trophy in Dubai.

Pandya believes that he is constantly evolving as a cricketer notwithstanding his "unshakable" confidence.

Considering the rollercoaster last 12

months, his focus will be to help youngsters excel.

"My life has been about ups and downs. I have enjoyed the learning. It has taught me about sport as well as life over the years. It is a fresh year. Lot of things have changed. Every year there is .0 added. Hardik 3.0, if you want to call that, there will be passion, grit and challenges which I love.

"For me the crucial part is to make sure, if the challenges are thrown at boys how I can help them and add value."

On his own batting position, he added: "I like to play situations and entry points, specific batting number, it has gone from my cricketing journey."

Mumbai's core group remains intact despite the low returns over the past four seasons. Besides Pandya, the team has India captains in Rohit Sharma and Suryakumar Yadav. Jasprit Bumrah has also captained India.

Mahela stressed on the importance of maintaining the core group.

"We have relied on our core group for all the titles we have won. Winning IPL is not easy. With the core group, we have added more experience (with Boud and Deepak Chahar coming in).

"Trent has been a big part in our success. Also, we have not won our first game since 2012, so there is a big challenge ahead of us. "I had a good chat with Rohit on the season. With Bumrah and Hardik not starting, we will decide the combination when we get to Chennai."

## Suryakumar Yadav to captain Mumbai Indians in IPL opener

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Suryakumar Yadav will captain Mumbai Indians (MI) in their opening IPL match against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday as regular skipper Hardik Pandya will be forced to sit out due to a one-match suspension for over-rate offences committed by the team last season. Suryakumar is the national T20 captain and recently led the side to a 4-1 triumph over England at home.

However, his batting form wasn't particularly impressive and he managed just 38 runs in the five outings during the season. "Surya leads India as well. When I am not there he is the ideal choice," Pandya said during MI's pre-season press conference here.

MI head coach Mahela Jayawardene said the BCCI has communicated the one-match ban on Pandya to the team owing to three slow over-rate violations by his team last season.

MI had finished at the bottom of the heap, managing just four wins against 10 losses in 2024, which was Pandya's debut year as captain.

## Assam boxers, including Lovlina, being stopped from competing in Nationals, says BFI President

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh on Wednesday alleged that Assam boxers, including Olympic bronze-winner Lovlina Borgohain, are being stopped from participating in the National Championships by suspended BFI secretary general Hemanta Kalita, who refused the charge.

In an "emergency press conference" here, Singh said that the Tokyo Games medallist in the 69kg category is keen to participate in the marquee domestic event starting Thursday in Greater Noida but has been asked to withdraw by Kalita. Kalita, who has been found guilty of financial mismanagement in an inquiry conducted by former Delhi High Court judge Sudhir Kumar Jain, holds the secretary's position in the Assam body.

"Assam is discouraging players from participating in the women's Nationals," Singh said. "Lovlina has recorded a video of support. But officers have received a call that she has been asked by Hemanta Kalita not to participate. Because she owes a lot to Assam boxing, she is reconsidering her participation. "We have been hearing that a lot of tickets are being cancelled (both) train and air," Singh added.

However, Kalita said the charges were

baseless and the dispute was over the dates of the tournament.

"This is all being done to malign me. I have done no such thing. Since the beginning, state units were unhappy with the dates of the women's nationals. Several states had written to BFI as well," Kalita told PTI.

The BFI has received entries from 22 states but it remains to be seen how many boxers turn up for the National

**Lovlina has recorded a video of support. But officers have received a call that she has been asked by Hemanta Kalita not to participate**

— AJAY SINGH, BFI PRESIDENT

Championships, being held after close to two years. Talking about his suspension, Kalita maintained his innocence and said he will be contesting the decision.

"I will be challenging this. If any misappropriation of funds has occurred, the president should be held guilty, as he is the one who signs all the cheques.

"Additionally, it was agreed during the Executive Committee meeting that the Ethics Committee would investigate the matter. Why, then, was a judge appointed for the task?" he questioned.

Singh, however, insisted that he was well within his rights to call for an investigation. "When I was asked by the SAI (Sports Authority of India) to look into the complaint, I took the matter to the Executive Committee and said we need to have a proper investigation and they (secretary and treasurer) agreed. They were part of the meeting and agreed.

"The minutes of the EC meeting are available and there was no request for the inquiry to go to the Ethics Commission," Singh said. Kalita was among the four candidates for the president's post in the soon-to-be-held BFI polls but his nomination was rejected on the grounds that he needs to undergo a cooling off period after serving two terms, in different roles, in the body. In another development, the Delhi High Court stayed BFI's order allowing only elected members of its affiliated states to represent their respective units in the polls. Singh said BFI will appeal against the decision.

Former sports minister Anurag Thakur had been deemed ineligible to contest for the presidential election because of the March 7 notice. Thakur's name was brought into reckoning by the Himachal Pradesh body but it was rejected as he was not an elected member, according to the March 7 order.



## Openly gay soccer player still faces online death threats

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Adelaide

The first openly gay man to play in Australia's domestic soccer league says he's still subject to death threats four years after going public about his sexuality. Josh Cavallo, who plays for Adelaide United in the A-League, told the FIFPro Footballers Unfiltered podcast that "in a world of football, being a gay ... Player is a very toxic place."

"I still think we're a very, very long way from being accepted in this space, unfortunately," he said. Cavallo was 21 in 2021 when he decided to come out, acknowledging his video message "took the world of football for a shock." He still regards it as "the best move and decision" he's made, but warns that there's "mountains of downside." In the podcast, he asked rhetorically: "Why has no one ever come out to be themselves and be successful and play?"

"And I understand that now looking back all the negativity, all the things that come your way, there's multiple, multiple, multiple death threats that come my way daily, still, and it's quite sad to see."

Cavallo didn't detail the online threats. He continues to train and play as a professional footballer every week.

"I have a very strong support network, I have my good days, I have my bad days, but I'm free," he said. "I go to bed, I put my head on the pillow and I'm happy, I'm Josh Cavallo, I'm the footballer ... The gay footballer, and I'm super proud to say that." Cavallo told the Australian

Broadcasting Corp. On Wednesday that he still has positive experiences of meeting people who tell him they've been encouraged and inspired by his advocacy. In his "everyday life," he said, people had approached him and "know who I am and speak to me and say how I guided them and how I give them the courage to come out at school." "On the other side," he added, "opening my social media this morning, it was quite disturbing reading the comments that got sent my way."

He said when his club published a video of his announcement in 2021 it changed perspectives around the world, but there's still a long way to go for the sport to help remove the fear of public backlash for other players coming out.

"It's obviously ... Influenced a lot of people and made so much progression within the game," he said of his life story, "and I wouldn't trade it for anything."

In 2022, he reported homophobic abuse during a game and he said it continues on social media.

"I don't really like to show this side of things because I feel like it's going to put fear into people who are thinking about coming out," he told the ABC. "What I did in 2021 was fantastic and great for myself and for the wider LGBTQ+ community, but ... We're four years on now and we're still getting (homophobic abuse) on a daily" basis. Peter Malinauskas, premier of South Australia state where the Adelaide United club is based, said the vitriol Cavallo has faced is "beyond awful it's unacceptable."

## We will get to see glimpses of Dhoni's brilliance in IPL 2025: Uthappa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

The cricket fans may get to see glimpses of MS Dhoni's brilliance in the upcoming IPL season as the former skipper may bat at Number 7 or Number 8 in the batting order and it will allow him to extract maximum results out of minimum deliveries, reckons former India batter Robin Uthappa.

Dhoni, now 43, exhibited his readiness for IPL 2025 while smashing the bowlers around at the Chennai Super Kings net session on Tuesday. He even launched pacer Matheesha Pathirana's searing yorker on off-stump over the bowler's head for a six with a helicopter shot.

"As far as Mahi is concerned, I think we will get to see glimpses of his brilliance

because I have a feeling that he might bat at number 7 or number 8. Very much like last year, and we will see him bat between 12 and 20 balls through the season," said Uthappa. So, will Dhoni walk away after

**I don't think the passion ever dies. MS' love for the game has not dwindled at all. I think his passion for the game keeps him going**

— ROBIN UTHAPPA, FORMER CRICKETER

this season? Uthappa wasn't ready to predict the road ahead for the five-time IPL winning former CSK captain.

"I don't think the passion ever dies. MS' love for the game has not dwindled at all. I think his passion for the game keeps him

going. At 43, I think he's got the fastest hands in the world as a wicketkeeper.

"And if you've got those skills and if you've got the passion to keep going, I don't think anything should stop you. I won't be surprised if he retires at the end of the season. But I won't be surprised if he even goes on to play for another four seasons after this," said Uthappa, the JioStar expert, while addressing the media prior to the 18th edition of IPL.

**Good season for Kohli, Rohit**

Veteran batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma too will return to the T20 format for the first time after winning last year's T20 World Cup 2024. Uthappa felt that both Kohli and Rohit will have fantastic season. "I don't think they'll have even an

iota of issues to come out there and smash the living daylight out of bowlers. Virat has really come through in good form. He's familiar with conditions in Bangalore that he's always going to thrive there," he said.

"In the recent past, Rohit hasn't lived up to his potential as the incredibly dynamic batter that he is in the IPL. But it looks like everything is going his way at this point in time. So, I wouldn't put it past him to have one of his best seasons in the IPL," he added.

Franchises like Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bengaluru will go in with first-time captains in Axar Patel and Rajat Patidar in this edition of the IPL.

Uthappa said it will be challenging for them, and expressed confidence that they can adapt to the role.

## Players' association files antitrust suit against tennis organisers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

Calling the groups in charge of professional tennis "a cartel," the co-founded by Novak Djokovic filed an antitrust lawsuit against the women's and men's tours, the International Tennis Federation and the sport's integrity agency in federal court in New York.

The suit by the Professional Tennis Players' Association says the organizations that run the sport hold "complete control over the players' pay and working conditions" and their setup constitutes "text-book violations of state and federal law" that "immunise professional tennis from ordinary market forces and deny professional tennis players and other industry participants their right to fair competition." The lawsuit seeks a jury trial and wants players to gain access to more earnings, arguing that the governing bodies that oversee the four Grand Slam tournaments Wimbledon, the US Open, the French Open and the Australian Open and other professional events "cap the

prize money tournaments award and limit players' ability to earn money off the court." On top of the case in US District Court, the PTPA made filings with the European Commission in Brussels and the Competition Markets Authority in London. "There is a complete and utter lack of competition that exists in professional tennis, and we believe by filing these actions, we will ultimately inject the kind of competition that will be fair to the players, to the fans and actually to the people (who) operate the system," said Jim Quinn, a lawyer working with the PTPA. "It's going to require a restructuring," Quinn said.

The WTA Tour and ATP Tour issued separate statements Tuesday saying they would "vigorously" defend themselves.

The WTA said it has "committed to a \$400 million increase in player compensation" in recent years and labeled the PTPA action a "baseless legal case" that is "regrettable and misguided." The ATP touted a "major increase in player compensation" that created a jump of "\$70 mil-



lion in the past five years," and called the PTPA's case "entirely without merit."

"The PTPA has consistently chosen division and distraction through misinformation over progress," the ATP's statement said. "Five years on from its inception in 2020, the PTPA has struggled to

establish a meaningful role in tennis, making its decision to pursue legal action at this juncture unsurprising."

The International Tennis Integrity Agency which investigates and adjudicates doping and corruption said it noted the PTPA's action but did not offer any direct

reaction to the case itself.

A spokesman said the ITF "will take the appropriate time to consider our response." The PTPA was founded by 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic and Vasek Pospisil in August 2020, aiming to offer representation for players who are independent contractors in a largely individual sport. One of the goals made clear along the way was to become a sort of full-fledged union that negotiates collective bargaining agreements like those that exist in team sports.

"Beyond just the economics, we see ... Player welfare is completely disregarded in everything, from the tour schedule to anti-competitive practices, to abusing our rights around name, image, likeness," Pospisil said.

He is one of the players listed as a plaintiff; Djokovic is not. Players whose names are attached to the US lawsuit include 2022 Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios, Sorana Cirstea, Varvara Gracheva, Reilly Opelka, Tennyis Sandgren and Nicole Melichar-Martinez.

## Not having Bumrah is a challenge: MI coach Jayawardene

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawardene did not give a time frame for Jasprit Bumrah's return to competitive cricket and said the pace spearhead's absence will be a massive "challenge" for his side in the IPL 2025.

Bumrah will miss a few initial games of the tournament as he is currently recuperating from a back injury at the BCCI Centre of Excellence at Bengaluru. "Jasprit Bumrah is at the NCA. We have to wait and see their feedback on him. At the moment it is going well, the progress is on a day to day basis," said Jayawardene. "He is in good spirits, and not having him is a challenge. He is the best bowler in the world," he added.

Bumrah has been sidelined since the final Test against Australia at Sydney in early January, when he could not bowl in the second innings as the hosts chased down 162 to seal a 3-1 series victory.