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A Day of Reckoning for Indian Judiciary

SC initiates probe in Delhi High Court Judge case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

After a day-long turns and twists on the media report of huge pile of cash found in the Delhi High Court Judge Justice Yashwant Varma's home by the fire brigade, the Supreme Court on Friday said misinformation and rumours were being spread over the incident. The top court which initiated an in-house inquiry on the matter said it is waiting for the report from Delhi High Court Chief Justice. Meanwhile Fire Services Chief Atul Garg said there was no cash found from Justice Varma's residence.

As the controversies broke out, by afternoon, Justice Varma took leave from work. The Supreme Court in a statement in the evening said the proposal for Justice Varma's transfer to Allahabad High Court was independent and separate from in-house enquiry procedure. The top court said upon receiving information, the Delhi High Court Chief Justice commenced an in-house enquiry procedure collecting evidence and information.

The High Court Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya, who had commenced enquiry prior to March 20 collegium meeting, would submit a report to Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna today itself, said the top court. Following its examination, the court would proceed for "further and necessary" action, added the statement from Supreme Court.

Fire fighters found no cash during their operation to douse flames at the residence of Justice Varma, Delhi Fire Services Chief Atul Garg said. The control room received a call about a blaze at Varma's Lutyens Delhi residence at 11.35 pm on March 14 and two fire tenders were immediately

Justice Yashwant Varma PTI

rushed to the spot, Garg told media. Fire tenders reached the spot at 11.43 pm. The fire was in a store room stocked with stationery and domestic articles, Garg said, adding that it took 15 minutes to control the flames. There were no casualties.

"Soon after dousing the flames, we informed Police about the fire incident. Thereafter, a team of fire department personnel left the spot. Our fire fighters did not find any cash during their fire fighting operation," the DFS chief said.

The Allahabad High Court Bar Association opposed the transfer Justice Varma and said they may go for an indefinite strike against making the Allahabad HC as "trashbin." In a resolution passed soon after the news of the judge's transfer by a Supreme Court collegium was reported, the association said, "We were taken aback that the Supreme Court has transferred Justice Yashwant Varma back to Allahabad High Court..."

The resolution, naming association president and senior advocate Anil Tiwari as the signatory, claims that the discovery of the "unaccounted money" from the judge's house was of "₹15 Crore". "Supreme Court has taken cognisance on the matter immediately and unanimously decide repatriate Justice Yashwant Varma to Allahabad High Court," it said. The statement added, "The decision of the collegium raises a serious question as to whether the Allahabad high Court is a trash bin?"

The matter was raised in the Rajya Sabha and Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar saying he will find a mechanism for holding a structured discussion on the issue. Raising the issue in the morning session, Congress MP Jairam Ramesh also sought the Chair's response on judicial accountability and reminded him about a pending notice regarding impeachment of a judge of the Allahabad High Court. "This morning, we have read about a shocking case of huge amounts of cash unearthed at the residence of a judge of the Delhi High Court," Ramesh said.

He also pointed out that earlier, 50 members of Parliament had submitted a notice to the chairman regarding certain remarks that were made by a judge of the Allahabad High Court. Ramesh said the Chairman himself has repeatedly spoken about the urgency for judicial accountability. The senior Congress member also sought to remind Dhankhar that he had directed the Leader of the House on this issue.

Justice Varma accused in CBI FIR

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ New Delhi

The controversial judge Justice Yashwant Varma was named as accused by CBI in February 2018 in case related to bank loan fraud by Simbhaoli Sugars Limited. For CBI, the FIR No: RCBD1/2018/E/0002 dated February 22, 2018 is a hot potato due to the name of Yashwant Varma as accused who had already became a Judge in Allahabad High Court in October 2014. The agency was registering FIR based on a complaint by Oriental Bank of Commerce filed on 2017, without knowing that Varma had already became a High Court judge, having impunity. The bank loan fraud case is an interesting one. Varma who was a lawyer with expertise in tax laws was also non-executive director of the big sugar company Simbhaoli Sugars Limited and during this period the company took a loan to give money to sugar farmers to buy their products. According to the Oriental Bank, which filed complaint to CBI named all the 10 directors of the sugar company for the bank loan fraud raging above ₹109 Crore.

Justice Varma was named as ninth accused in the FIR along with sugar company's managing director Gurmit Singh Mann, deputy managing director Gurpal Singh, CEO GSC Rao and CFO Sanjay Tapriya, executive directors Gursimran Kaur. The bank's complaint also named other five non-executive directors along with Varma, who during the bank loan period was also a practicing lawyer in 2012. In October 2014, Advocate Yashwant Varma became Allahabad HC judge. When the loan amount was not repaid and the irregularities in the disbursement to sugar farmers were found in later years, the bank filed complained to CBI in November 2017 and within months in February 2018, the agency filed a 13 page FIR which also named Varma.

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Union Minister calls out Allahabad HC rape ruling

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Women and Child Development Minister Annapurna Devi on Friday said she "completely disagreed" with Allahabad High Court's ruling on what constituted rape or attempt to rape and urged the Supreme Court to intervene in the matter.

Her reaction came after the high court, in an order earlier this week, ruled that mere grabbing of breasts and snapping pyjama strings did not amount to rape or attempt to rape but fell under the ambit of assault or use of criminal force against any woman with the intent to disrobe or compel her to be naked.

"I am completely against this decision and the Supreme Court should take serious note of it. Such a ruling has no place in a civilised society," Devi, said outside Parliament. She also expressed concern over the broader implications of the judgment, warning that it could send the wrong message to society. "Somewhere, this will have a negative impact on society and we will discuss this matter further," she added. The case involved an 11-year-old girl in Uttar Pradesh's Kasganj, who was assaulted by two accused, identified as Pawan and Akash, in 2021. The accused grabbed her breasts, snapped her pyjama strings and attempted to drag her under a culvert. The assailants fled when passersby intervened.

Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal also slammed the ruling as "shameful" and "absolutely wrong". She questioned the message such a ruling sent to society, particularly regarding crimes against children. "This is deeply shameful and absolutely wrong. What message do they want to give to society? That a young girl can be subjected to such horrific acts and it still won't be considered rape?" she told reporters outside Parliament.

Maliwal also urged the Supreme Court to immediately intervene and take strict action against such judicial interpretations. "The Supreme Court should intervene in this matter without delay, and strict action must be taken," she said.

CPI general secretary D Raja has also slammed the judge's remarks on sexual violence as "appalling". "Grabbing breasts or snapping a pyjama string isn't 'attempt to rape'? This trivialises sexual violence and shows the tight grip of patriarchy on our institutions. The law must prioritise survivors' trauma, not minimise it," he said in a social media post on Thursday.

> This is deeply shameful and absolutely wrong. What message do they want to give to society? That a young girl can be subjected to such horrific acts and it still won't be considered rape?
> — ANNAPURNA DEVI, UNION MINISTER

"People see the judiciary as the last hope and such conduct puts a question mark before the credibility of the judiciary. Shameful!" he added. Legal experts too deplored the observation of the Allahabad High Court on what constitutes a rape charge, calling for a restraint by judges and underlining the drop in public confidence in the judiciary due to such statements.

Senior advocate and Supreme Court Bar Association president Kapil Sibal took to social media saying, "God save this country with such judges adorning the Bench! The SC has been too soft in dealing with errant judges (sic)."

Continued on >> P2

NDA dharma in Naidu's Andhra Pradesh

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Chennai

Vowing to safeguard Lord Venkateswara Swamy's assets in the country and across the world, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu declared that people working in TTD should be Hindus. Same time he mentioned that non-Hindus currently working in the premises will be given opportunities elsewhere.

"People from other religions will not be there in the worship places of Christians and Muslims. Religious places of a particular religion will only have people belonging to that particular religion," Naidu said talking to media after he visited the temple and offered prayers with his family.

Naidu who is part of the NDA alliance also said that Lord Venkateswara Swamy temples will be built overseas where Hindus are in large numbers. The move to transfer non-Hindu staff from Tirupati Temple is likely earn the wrath of the Congress. "We have resolved to build Venkateswara Temples in every State capital across India. To achieve this, we will send letters to all chief ministers. Additionally we will establish Venkateswara temples in regions worldwide where there is a significant Hindu population," said Naidu.

> People working in TTD should be Hindus. Same time he mentioned that non-Hindus currently working in the premises will be given opportunities elsewhere
> — N CHANDRABABU NAIDU, CHIEF MINISTER

Lord Venkateswara, another name of Vishnu, is rated as the richest Indian God as well as the second richest God in the world. It has assets to the tune of ₹2.5 Lakh Crore in various forms. There are days when the temple hundi records offerings worth more than ₹2.5 Crore. The temple boasts of a university, hospital, many schools, veda patasalas and even a satellite TV channel (Sre Venkateswara Bhakti Channel) airing the live sevas and poojas. Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, headed by an IAS officer appointed by the State Government administers the temple. Various Hindu organisations like VHP have been calling for the liberation of the temple from the shackles of the Government and handing over the administration to the devotees.

Vedic scholar Parappanangadi Unnikrishnan Panicker, who has held Deva Prasnam at Tirupati Venkateswara Temple twice in the past welcomed the move to establish such temples across the world. "The deity at Tirupati has special poojas as mandated by Agama sasthra. If this is replicated all over, the world will become a much better place to live," said Unnikrishnan Panicker.

Home Minister tears into Opposition over north-south language war

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday attacked opposition parties in the Rajya Sabha for raking up the language row, saying they were doing so to gain political mileage and hide their corruption.

Shah also said after December 2025, he will do correspond with chief ministers, MPs and common people in their respective languages.

Making these assertions while replying to the debate in the Upper House on the working of the ministry of home affairs, he said there have been enough divisions in the nation in the name of language and it should not happen anymore as Hindi is not in competition with other languages but a friend of those. "Some parties are raking up the language issue for their own politics. They are doing it just to hide their corruption," he said.

The DMK-led Tamil Nadu government and the Centre have been at loggerheads over the implementation of the new National Education Policy and the three-language formula proposed under it.

Shah also said that after December, he will do all correspondence with chief ministers, MPs and common people in their respective languages.

Those who take shelter behind the language issue to hide their corruption, this is a strong reply to them. "There have been enough divisions in the nation in the name of language, and it should not happen anymore," he said, amid the escalating row over the three-language formula implementation outlined in the National Education Policy.

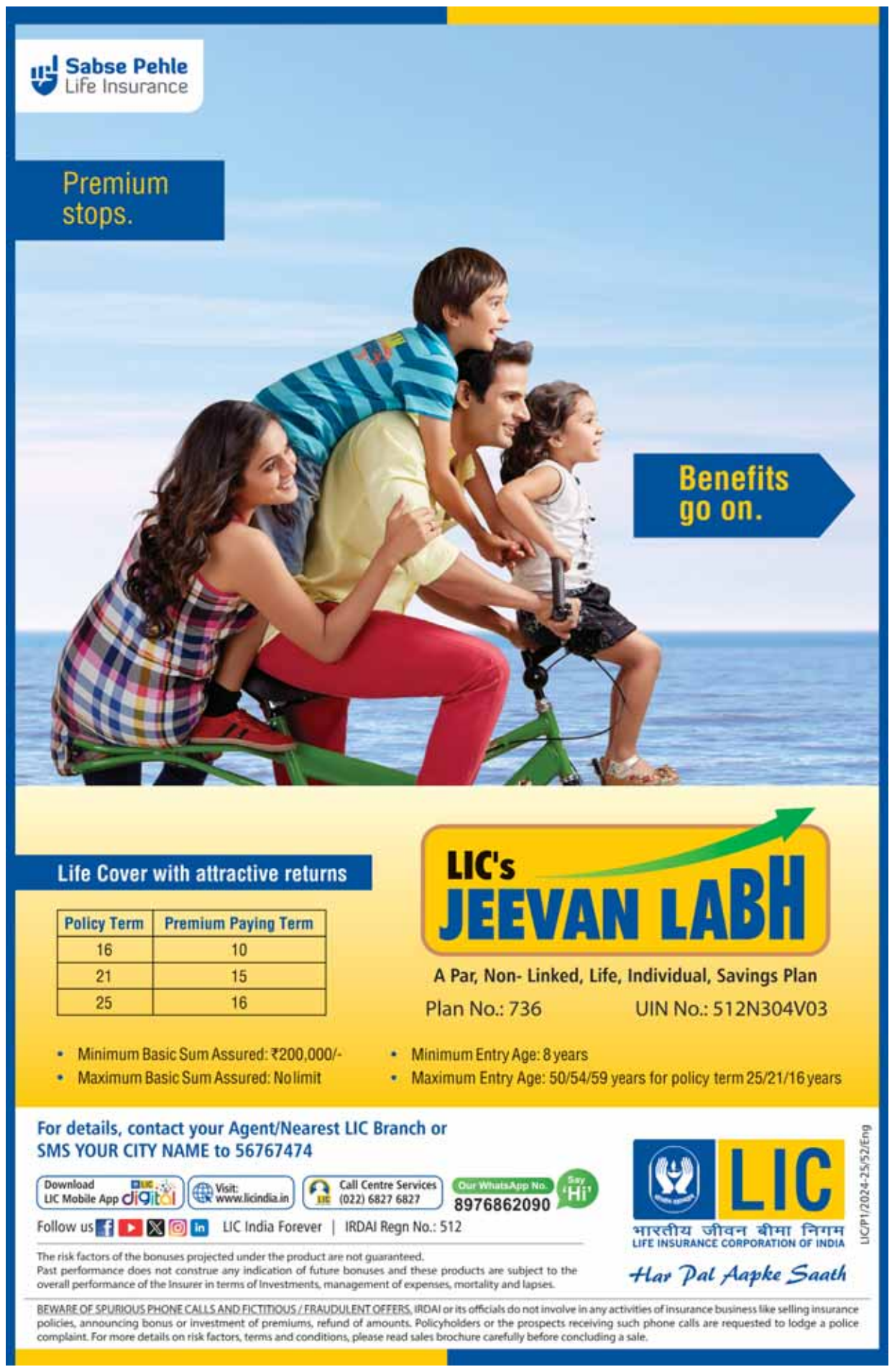
Home Minister Amit Shah speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament PTI

The Home Minister said every Indian language is a treasure for the country. "Hindi is not in competition with any Indian language, it is only a friend of other languages," the senior BJP leader said.

Dismissing the allegation of Hindi imposition, he said every Indian language is a treasure for the country. Shah informed the House that a new department of Indian languages has been established under the 'Raajbhasha Vibhaag' (Department of Official Language) of the Home Ministry.

"I want to say this so that those who want to divide the country in the name of language do not get an agenda... The Modi government has established a department of Indian Languages which will work on spreading all Indian languages. Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi, Assamese... Every language has been included, and there will be apps for translation too," he said. The Home Minister said some people have accused the Union government of being against Southern languages. "How is that possible? I come from Gujarat, Nirmala (Sitharaman) ji is from Tamil Nadu," he said.

Continued on >> P2



18 BJP MLAs suspended from Karnataka Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bengaluru

Eighteen BJP MLAs were suspended for six months from the Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Friday for "disrespecting" Speaker UT Khader. The suspension resolution, moved by state Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil, was adopted by the Assembly.

The incident occurred on the last day of the assembly's budget session, when the opposition BJP MLAs staged a massive protest. The legislators climbed onto the podium where Speaker Khader's chair is situated and threw papers at him. The protest was sparked by opposition anger over the allocation of a four percent reservation to Muslims in public contracts.

Earlier, the BJP members had protested from the well of the house, accusing the government of attempting to "honey trap" a minister and demanding a judicial probe into the matter, even as the Chief Minister addressed the budget discussion.

As the suspended legislators remained in the assembly, they were forcefully evicted by marshals. Leader of Opposition, R Ashoka condemned the resolution, saying that the government should be ashamed after Minister KN Rajanna raised the issue of "honey trap" and it failed to protect him. A similar display of unruly behaviour was witnessed in the Legislative Council, where BJP MLCs tore the bill and threw it into the well of the House, directly in front of Council Chairperson Basavaraj Horatti.

A BJP MLA being evicted by Marshals during the Budget session of Karnataka Assembly in Bengaluru on Friday PTI

While reading out the suspension order, Khader said, "The incident has hurt us a lot and it's painful. This seat is not just a chair. This is the symbol of democracy, truth and justice. To speak from this chair is a matter of pride. Every member should protect the dignity and sanctity of this chair. None of us are above the chair. Our personal sentiments should not be above the dignity of this chair. We should behave with commitment, calm and civilised way. Let this incident be a lesson for us. Let us in the coming days respect constitution and sanctity of this chair."

"This chair cannot tolerate interrupting the proceedings of the House, ignoring the dignity of the Chair and behaving in a way that damages the parliamentary traditions," he added.

Bengal opens bars for women workers

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Thanks to the Mamata Banerjee Government new watering hole laws, now the women in Bengal will go miles in proving that they are no less than men inside the pubs. This, but for a few eyebrows being raised.

The Bengal Government's new legislation allowing women to work in hostelry has evoked mixed response in the civil society and political circles. While those in the Trinamool Congress have said that this would go miles in ensuring "emancipation for women in the State" others including the Opposition parties said it would bring more miseries to them and had been done to attract more customers including the TMC goons.

The Government had on Wednesday proposed a new Bill lifting a century old ban on women working in bars. The British had through Bengal Excise Act in 1909 imposed a ban on women working in bars. However, Bengal Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya, while presenting the West Bengal Finance Bill 2025 before the legislative assembly on Wednesday, said, "women couldn't work at on-shops until now. They will get this opportunity. We all talk about gender equality. That's what we kept in mind while taking this decision."

The Bill is now pending with Governor CV Ananda Bose for his assent.

While the Bill was passed without any resistance from the Opposition which had walked out of the Assembly on issues including refusal by, Speaker to allow debates on attacks on the Hindu religious places the Left opposition which has no representation in the House attacked both the TMC and the BJP for letting the women to be exposed before "night vultures."

Senior CPI(M) leader Sujan Chakrabarty reminded how Bengal was topping the list of victimisation of women. "You cannot stop rapes and attacks on women … you have no adequate security for them particularly in the nights … your government victimises doctors who protested against the rape and murder of the lady doctor inside the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital… and now you are exposing them to further danger without even arranging for their security… the TMC government talked of taking steps to ensure safety of women at work place… Now it has walked in the opposite direction."

BJP's Shankar Ghosh on the other hand wondered whether the new law would be accompanied by additional police security for women during the nights. "It is an open fact that bars are mostly functional during the nights and the women who will work in the bar will not only be exposed to the hazards of the job inside the bar also their return home will be a problem … has the Government arranged for their protection … has the Government thought about enhancing their security."

Women social activist Saswati Ghosh falsified the claims made by the Finance Minister that the Bill had been brought as a gender equality measure. "Those talks of gender equality are only an eyewash this Bill has been brought to increase revenue of the Government … everyone knows that there is minimum industrial investment in Bengal as a result of which the Government's revenue has declined … the only big money that the Government earns is through the thousands of liquor shops that has come up in the past one decade or so … no other thing … only money was on the mind of the Government," she said happing "they do not expose women bar tenders to attract more and more customers."

Another social activist and a poet who is also a professor in a college said requesting anonymity, "these are very cunning and unscrupulous rulers … the Opposition is no better … the Government should have better tried to bring investment … if at all they had gender inequality in mind then could have prevented that in other sectors, especially unorganised industries… the BJP on the other hand instead of communalising the atmosphere would have taken up this Bill as a women's cause … but they chose to walk out and give a free passage to the Government … even the Left should have raised the issue on streets … they have bright faces like Meenakshi Mukherjee, Dipsita Dhar and Aishe Ghosh but they too would not."

However a TMC leader who reportedly owns a bar cum restaurant hailed the decision saying, "women in bar would help the women guests … in any case the Government should not allow women workers in the national highways."

Bangladeshi link emerge in Nagpur violence

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

A Bangladeshi link has emerged during the investigations into the recent Nagpur riots, with the police identifying as many as several fake social media posts, including the ones with Bangladesh IP addresses.

In the investigations conducted into social media posts that surfaced prior to and after the March 17 riots, the Nagpur cyber police sleuths have identified 97 such fake posts which were offensive in nature. Many of the social media posts reportedly came from computers with Bangladeshi IP addresses.

The Nagpur cyber police personnel are investigating four FIRs registered in connection with the rumour-mongering that went on ahead of the communal violence, in which nearly 40 persons, including 33 police personnel, were injured and scores of vehicles were damaged in Bhaldarpura area of Nagpur.

The violence broke out late on the evening of March 17 after the 200-odd workers of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal staged a protest near the Shivaji Maharaj statue in Nagpur demanding the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb and allegedly burnt the burnt an effigy of Aurangazeb. However, the protest sparked rumours that a holy book had been desecrated, leading to violence in Nagpur's Chitnis Park, Mahal, Kotwali and Ganeshpeth.

Meanwhile, it has come to l9ight that the alleged mastermind behind the Nagpur riots Fahim Shamim Khan, who is a Minority Democratic Party leader, hails from the communally-sensitive town of Malegaon in Nashik district in north Maharashtra.

Speaking at an event organised by a Marathi news channel, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said: "One of the masterminds of the Nagpur riots hails from Malegaon. A thorough investigation will be conducted and those who spoiled the atmosphere will not be spared. We have also filed cases against VHP and Bajrang Dal members. If we tolerate the attacks on the police, law and order in the state will collapse. Therefore, we shall teach the culprits a lesson," he said.

Fadnavis, who holds the state Home Portfolio, said that the Nagpur riots could not be described as a fallout of "intelligence failure". "We cannot term it as intelligence failure. However, the monitoring of social media after noon was inadequate. Inflammatory posts were spread through social media. We have the capacity for social media monitoring, but we need to develop the habit of using it. Now, violence is less on the streets and more through social media," the Chief Minister said.

The chief minister said that whether there were some larger plan or design was being probed. "In the past incidents of violence in the country, we have seen a pattern…whether the same pattern was there in Nagpur also is being investigated. More than 100 persons have been arrested so far"

"Some of the offensive social media posts were found to be in Bengali.. In fact, it is the kind of Bengali spoken in Bangladesh. We will probe whether there is a larger design," Fadnavis said.

Magisterial probe holds cops responsible for custodial death of Parbhani protester

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

Three months after he died in police custody in the wake of his arrest made in connection with the violence witnessed at Parbhani in Marathwada region, a magisterial inquiry has held the police responsible for the death of Somnath Suryawanshi, a Dalit youth, prompting the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC) to seek reports from the state government and police.

In its report submitted to the MSHRC, the magisterial inquiry has attributed Suryavanshi's death to police brutality. "Perusal of the report of the magisterial inquiry shows that the judicial magistrate has concluded that Suryawanshi was assaulted at Nava Mondha, Police Station in Parbhani. The police officials named in the Magistrial Inquiry are responsible for the custodial death of Suryavanshi".

Following the magisterial inquiry report, the MSHRC, which is hearing complaints concerning Suryawanshi's death, has issued notices to the Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary (Home), Additional Director General of Police (CID) and the Deputy Superintendent of Police (CID), Parbhani, seeking their reports in the matter.

Earlier, the post-mortem done on Suryavanshi's body had recorded the cause of his death as 'shock following multiple injuries.

The MSHRC has scheduled the next hearing of the complaint on Suryavanshi's custodial death for June 23.

It may be recalled that Suryavanshi (35), a law student who hailed from the Wadar community, died at a state-run hospital in Parbhani on December 15, 2024 while in judicial custody, days after he was arrested in connection with violence Parbhani in the wake of desecration of a replica of Constitution of India placed in a glass box alongside the statue of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Earlier, the post-mortem done on Suryavanshi's body had recorded the cause of his death as 'shock following multiple injuries. The MSHRC has scheduled the next hearing for June 23

The magisterial inquiry report has political significance considering that within days after Suryavashi's death, Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had — after a visited the family of Suryavanshi — had created a major stir in the Maharashtra political circles, by alleging that a Dalit man was "murdered by the police" and that chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had "lied" in the State Assembly over the issue.

After his visit to Suryavanshi's family on December 23, 2024, Rahul Gandhi had said, "The family showed me the post-mortem report and videos. From what I saw, I can say it was 100 per cent judicial death. The police have murdered him in custody. He was killed because he was a Dalit who was trying to protect the Constitution. He was beaten and finished off". Rahul had gone on to accuse the chief minister, claiming that the 'CM has lied in the Assembly', ostensibly to convey a 'message to the police'.

"It is the RSS ideology to finish off the Constitution. The (MahaYuti) government and their ideology are responsible (for Suryawanshi's death). The CM and those who thrashed him (the Dalit man) are responsible for all this," Rahul had said.

Questioned by the media as to whether he was trying to politicise the issue by visiting the family of the deceased and issuing a statement, Rahul had said, "There's no politics here. It's a matter of justice. There's been a murder. It's a question of ideology. We want immediate action in the matter. We want this to be resolved and those behind it must be punished".

Meanwhile, the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) has come down heavily on the BJP-led MahaYuti government over the findings of the magisterial inquiry. "Even though Somnath Suryavanshi died due to police beatings, attempts are being made to suppress this case…we will ensure that the family gets justice," VBA vice-president Siddharth Mokle said.

Senior NCP (SP) leader and former state Home Minister Anil Deshmukh has demanded action against the police personnel from the Nava Mondha police station responsible for Suryhavanshi's death. "Strictest action should be taken against the culprits in this case. The time to come will not forgive the rulers who support the guilty police officers," Deshmukh said.

Tharoor slams Government after private members' business 'scrubbed' from LS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor slammed the Centre over private members' business "scrubbed" from the Lok Sabha's revised list of business on Friday and wondered whether Parliament exists only for the government to pursue its own agenda.

Tharoor pointed out that there has been no private members' business in the Lok Sabha since July 2024.

"I was ready to introduce three Private Members' Bills today on important national issues. MPs are normally given opportunities every other Friday to introduce their Bills when Parliament is in session. But yet again, the item for private members' business was scrubbed from the Lok Sabha's revised list of business today, the Friday when it was due," the Congress MP from Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram said in a post on X. There has been no private members' business in the Lok Sabha since July 2024, he pointed out.

"Does Parliament exist only for the government to pursue its own agenda?" the former Union minister asked.

In July last year, Tharoor introduced a private member's bill seeking to reserve 10 seats in the Lok Sabha for those below 35 years of age, asserting that young members are a clear minority in Parliament and this is leading to a "democratic deficit".

Union Minister calls out Allahabad HC rape ruling

Continued from >> P1

Sibal subsequently said judges, especially those from the high courts, should refrain from making such statements, as it would "send wrong message to the society and people will lose faith in the judiciary".

Senior advocate Vikas Pahwa said the interpretation of the Allahabad High Court appeared to set a concerning precedent by narrowly defining what constitutes an attempt to rape.

He further said that at the summoning stage, courts typically assess whether there is a prima facie case based on the allegations, without delving deeply into the evaluation of evidence. Echoing his views, senior advocate PK Dubey said such an observation was not warranted.

Justice Varma accused in CBI FIR

Continued from >> P1

As per the Constitution, the High Court Judge and above enjoys impunity from cases and only Impeachment by Parliament is the only way to initiate actions against them. CBI was in fact, copy paste the complaint of the Bank in the FIR and no facing dilemma over this FIR for naming a person who had already became a High Court judge, having impunity from cases. According to many lawyers, as the CBI FIR wrongly included Varma's name, the trial procedures are still at frozen stage.

Collaborate with social media: Parliament to Doordarshan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A parliamentary panel on Friday suggested that Doordarshan collaborate with influencers and social media creators to enhance its reach among younger audiences.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, chaired by BJP member Nishikant Dubey, also recommended that Doordarshan enhance its digital footprint by boosting presence on social media and expanding content offerings on other digital platforms.

"The committee feel while providing vulgar-free content for entertainment, Doordarshan can still continue to fulfil its public service mandate by remaining relevant in an increasingly competitive media environment..." according to the 11th Report on Demands for Grants (2025-26) relating to the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

The committee's report was tabled in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

It also asked the public broadcaster to continue extensive coverage of cultural, social and political events but in modern presentation formats, appealing to younger demographics, and increase localised programming.

The ministry told the committee that Doordarshan was in the process of hiring personnel in various categories on a contract basis to strengthen manpower in its programme wing.

It informed the panel that against a sanctioned strength of 45,791, there were 30,221 vacancies in Prasar Bharati.

Of these, 13,970 vacancies are in Doordarshan and 16,251 in All India Radio (AIR).

Home Minister tears into Opposition over north-south language war

Continued from >> P1

Shah said the government has worked for the propagation of regional languages and made provisions for imparting medical and engineering education in Indian languages. "I want to tell the Tamil Nadu government, we have been saying this for two years... You do not have the courage to provide medical and engineering education in Tamil because your economic interests will be affected," he alleged.

"But when our NDA government comes to power (in the southern state), we will provide medical and engineering education in Tamil," he said. Assembly elections are due in Tamil Nadu next year.

Without naming any party or individual, Shah said, "Those who are spreading poison in the name of language prefer a foreign language and not an Indian language. Tamil youths can work in Gujarat, Kashmir, Delhi... You have been elected to Parliament, what kind of a system do you want?"

"There have been enough divisions of the nation in the name of language and it should not happen anymore. Don't use language to hide your corruption. We will go to every village and tell people," he said, attacking the DMK.

Congress to launch six-day statehood movement in J-K

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jammu

Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) will launch a six-day movement, "Hamari Riyasat - Hamara Haq" from March 24 to press for the early restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

"We will intensify the movement for the early restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir. In this regard, we will launch the six-day 'Hamari Riyasat - Hamara Haq' movement in Jammu city from March 24," JKPCC President Tariq Hameed Karra said.

Karra reviewed preparations for intensifying the movement, which will take place from March 24 to March 29, involving evening marches from different locations in the region in a phased manner.

Carrying forward the campaign alongside the AICC abhiyan, "Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan," the JKPCC chief said that Congress would continue its struggle for statehood, which is the right and demand of every citizen in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The movement will also highlight issues faced by common people in their daily lives and seek their redressal from the administration," he said.

The meeting decided to intensify the statehood movement while also raising concerns about the misgovernance of the BJP-led Centre and the Lieutenant Governor's administration over the past decade, which has led to multiple hardships for the common people.

They also supported the demands of daily wagers for regularisation.

Senior doctor of RG Kar Medical College transferred

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

In what is being viewed as a part of the Mamata Banerjee Government's "vendetta politics", Dr Subarna Goswami a senior specialist doctor who had taken a frontal role in the last year's RG Kar Medical College and Hospital movement has been transferred to an allegedly lesser position in far off Darjeeling prompting the association of Bengal health services doctors and joint platform of doctors associations to threaten a renewed agitation "if Dr Goswami's transfer order is not withdrawn and victimisation of doctors is not stopped."

Dr Goswami, who has been posted as the Deputy CMOH-II, East Bardhaman district has been transferred as the Superintendent, Darjeeling TB Hospital, some 600 km north of Kolkata. The order would be implemented with immediate effect, according to a notification published by the State Health Department of which Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is the minister in charge. "Dr Goswami who has been fighting for justice for the victim doctor of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital has now been transferred to Darjeeling … this is clearly a vendetta and proves amply the mindset of the State Government," said another senior Dr Utpal Chatterjee adding, "if the order is not withdrawn forthwith the doctors fraternity will soon launch a bigger movement."

Another senior doctor recounted how Dr Goswami had been transferred on eight occasions in a span of past a few years "just for raising his voice against corruption threat culture in various Government hospitals … he had been at the forefront of the RG Kar movement … the Government tried to purchase of threaten him into silence but he would not cow down … and so now he has been transferred out to Darjeeling … a letter has been sent to the Principal Secretary Health to withdraw his transfer … if it is not done immediately then the doctors' fraternity will start a more intense agitation," said another senior doctor.

Senior TMC leader Kunal Ghosh however justified the transfer saying it was a routine transfer. "When you are in a government job and a transferable service … you should be prepared for such routine transfers … the people should not see anything bad in such transfers," he said. The incident relates to the State wide doctors' agitation after a postgraduate lady doctor was on August 9 last year found brutally raped and murdered inside the Chest Medicine Department of RGKMCH where she had been working.

It was Dr Goswami who had for the first time revealed the contents of postmortem reports that suggested gangrape on the deceased medic.

The RG Kar case recently took a new turn with the Supreme Court allowing the case to be heard and the investigation done by the Central Bureau of Investigation to be monitored by the Calcutta High Court.

The Apex Court order came after the victim's parents approached it aggrieved by an order of the trial court that awarded life imprisonment to the main accused Sanjoy Roy a civic volunteer. The parents of the victim contended that there were other persons too involved in the case and the Government was shielding them.

Parvesh Verma pulls up Delhi officers

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

A day after Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta expressed displeasure over the functioning of the bureaucracy, Public Works Department minister Parvesh Verma came down heavily on the officials, terming them "'thick-skinned' and stating that they will be made to sweat in the field to burn their fat. Verma's remarks came during a field visit on Friday. Expressing displeasure over no work being done to clean a drain near the Akshardham Temple in Patparganj, Verma ordered the suspension of the PWD executive engineer Ramashish Singh.

Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) accused the BJP of targeting officers and pressuring them for a 10 per cent commission on government projects. Taking a dig at the BJP, newly-appointed Delhi AAP chief and former minister Saurabh Bharadwaj asked the saffron party not to feel bad, reminding it that the elected government in the national capital cannot suspend any officer.

"Don't feel bad; the elected Delhi government cannot suspend any officer. This power has been snatched away from the Delhi government by the BJP central government. The Centre had told the Supreme Court that these powers cannot be given to an elected government," Bharadwaj said in a post on X.

On the other hand, the bureaucrats feel that the current BJP government is acting like the previous AAP government which targeted the bureaucracy during the 10 years rule. The trouble began when Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijendra Gupta criticised the civil servants for allegedly ignoring the grievances of MLAs. This was swiftly followed by remarks from Verma, who described the bureaucrats as "thick-skinned," painting a contentious picture of their relationship with the political establishment. Such public denunciations from senior BJP leaders have stirred unease among the bureaucrats, who were just beginning to regain their footing after the governmental transition.

PWD Minister Parvesh Verma PIONEER PHOTO

Earlier, Verma said during a field visit that "all officers have become thick-skinned in the last 10 years. We are making them sweat in the field. We are also sweating in the field and they will also sweat now, burn their fat and do the job".

"The entire system in Delhi was on the verge of collapse. But the BJP government has now hit the streets, and the ministers are carrying out field visits for hours. Stern instructions have also been issued to the officials, and any slackness will not be tolerated," he added. Claiming that the government officials became "thick-skinned" in the past 10 years (of AAP rule), Verma said, "Just as we are taking up field visits, the officials too have to do the same to burn their fat and do the job. They are paid salaries from the public fund, and they have to do work for the people."

The minister also said that capacity is being enhanced to treat sewage water flowing into the Yamuna through drains.

"I have spoken to the chief ministers of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh for treating industrial waste water in the flowing into the Yamuna from drains there," Verma said.

Interestingly, the bureaucracy which were loggerheads with the previous AAP dispensation, now finds itself in a turbulent phase yet again, despite hopes that the winds of change following the recent assembly elections would usher in a period of stability and respect. With the assembly election results leading to a change in regime, many bureaucrats were optimistic about a fresh start and a more collaborative working environment. However, recent events suggest that these hopes might be premature.

A senior bureaucrat, speaking anonymously expressed dismay over the negative portrayal by the new regime. Reflecting on the past decade under various AAP administrations, he highlighted the challenges faced by officials, recalling instances where senior IAS officers, including former Chief Secretary Anshul Prakash, were subjected to disrespectful treatment.

The environment had become so untenable for some that they volunteered for remote postings in regions like the Andaman and Lakshadweep islands rather than continue under Delhi's fraught governmental climate.

The current situation poses a dilemma: if the new administration mirrors the antagonistic attitude of its predecessors, it will likely stifle the positive atmosphere essential for effective governance.

Addressing a press conference former chief minister Atishi questioned why the same officers, who worked efficiently under her party's government, were now being criticised.

"What has changed in just one month? These are the same officers who built the Signature Bridge and transformed Delhi's government schools.

The BJP is abusing them because the AAP never asked for any commission. Officers have told us that BJP ministers are demanding a 10-per cent cut on all projects and those who refuse are being threatened with suspension, despite the fact that no Delhi minister has the power to do so, only the LG has the power to do that," she said.

Government directs officers to respond promptly to MPs, MLAs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi government on Friday directed officers to promptly respond to communications from MPs and MLAs, warning them of disciplinary action against those who fail to do so. This comes a day after Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta flagged non-responsive behaviour of a section of officers.

"The matter has been viewed seriously by the chief secretary," said a circular issued by the General Administration Department (GAD) of the Delhi government.

The government has issued comprehensive instructions with regard to engagement and protocols to be observed while dealing with MLAs and MPs, it said.

The instructions need to be strictly adhered to in letter and spirit, said the circular issued by Additional Chief Secretary (GAD) Naveen Kumar Choudhary to all additional CSs, Principal Secretaries, Secretaries, Head of Departments asking non compliance of instructions will attract disciplinary action against the officials concerned. "There should be no occasion that MLAs or Members of Parliament are constrained to make such complaints. Non-compliance to these instructions will invite commensurate dlisciplinary action and will be an important input in evaluation of the officer concerned," it said.

The circular said, "The Delhi Vidhan Sabha Speaker has addressed the communication to the Chief Secretary bringing into notice non-acknowledgement of letters, phone-calls and messages of members of Delhi Legislative Assembly by the officers. The matter has been viewed seriously by the Chief Secretary. The government has issued comprehensive instructions with regard to engagement and protocols to be observed while dealing with the MLAs or the MPs."

The circular further said, "I am directed to convey that instructions be strictly adhered to in letter and spirit. There should be no occasion that the MLAs or MPs are constrained to make such complaints. Non-compliance of these instructions will invite commensurate disciplinary action and will be an important input in evaluation of the concerned officer."

The circular also shared a standard operating procedure (SOP) regarding official dealings of administration and MPs and MLAs, prepared by the GAD in 2020. It laid down that communications received from an MP or MLA need to be promptly attended.

A communication addressed to a minister or secretary, should be replied by themselves as far as possible.

The information sought by an MP or MLA should be supplied, unless it is of such nature that it would be denied to him, said the SOP.

Further, it said that each communication received from an MP or MLA should be acknowledged within 15 days, followed by a reply within the next 15 days.

The bureaucratic wing of Delhi government has, on many occasions, seen tussle with the political wins during the previous government and the recent controversy after the Speaker's letter provided an opportunity to the opposition party.

The AAP leaders have alleged that the BJP, while sitting in opposition, supported the officials for not coordinating with ministers and MLAs.

Rekha Gupta directs proper maintenance of national flag and statues

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

In a move to ensure the upkeep and maintenance of the national flag and statues of national heroes in the capital, the Delhi government has issued a circular directing all departments and organisations to ensure the dignified handling and maintenance of the national flag and its surroundings, which are installed at various locations.

This follows directives from Chief Minister Rekha Gupta to all officers, autonomous bodies, organisations, and departments of the Delhi government regarding the "respectful maintenance" of the national flag and statues of national heroes in the city.

In a circular issued to all departments and organisations of the Delhi government, Chief Secretary Dharmendra has directed the proper maintenance of all statues installed at various locations and requested compliance reports from the departments within 30 days.

There are hundreds of statues of national heroes across the city, many of which are not properly maintained.

"The officers, departments, and organisations of the Government of the NCT of Delhi are directed to ensure the dignified handling and upkeep of the national flag and its surroundings, which are installed at various locations in the NCT of Delhi."

"Furthermore, they are also instructed to properly maintain the statues installed in different parts of Delhi. Any statues that are damaged or have deteriorated should be appropriately repaired with due respect or replaced if necessary. A special drive may be undertaken in this regard, and a compliance report must be submitted within 30 days," the circular states.

The circular has been issued to all Additional Chief Secretaries, the MCD Commissioner, the Chairperson of the NDMC, Principal Secretaries, Secretaries, the Principal Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor, all heads of autonomous bodies, organisations, and departments, as well as secretaries to ministers and the Speaker of the Delhi Assembly.

Their respectful maintenance is not only our duty but also a source of inspiration and patriotism for future generations. It is our responsibility to honour them

The directive emphasises the importance of maintaining proper decorum and respect for the national flag and statues of national heroes in accordance with established protocols and regulations, according to an official statement from the Chief Minister's Office.

The Chief Minister has mandated the dignified handling and meticulous upkeep of the national flag and its surrounding areas at all installation points across Delhi, the statement added.

She stated, "Our national flag and statues of national heroes represent our glorious history, struggles, and cultural heritage. "Their respectful maintenance is not only our duty but also a source of inspiration and patriotism for future generations. It is our responsibility to honour the national flag and statues and contribute to their preservation," she added.

Gupta criticised previous governments for installing the national flag at many locations in the city but failing to ensure their proper maintenance.

"The condition is deplorable in many places. Similarly, they also neglected the maintenance of the statues of our national heroes," she said. The Chief Minister has instructed "the concerned authorities to undertake thorough inspections and ensure the proper maintenance of the national flag and statues of national heroes installed throughout Delhi".

"The directive specifically addresses statues that have suffered damage or deterioration, requiring that they be repaired with due respect or replaced if necessary. An order has been issued to launch a special campaign to address this issue, with a compliance report to be submitted within 30 days," she stated.

The Delhi government's objective is to foster a deep sense of respect for the national flag and statues of national heroes, undertaking all necessary measures to ensure their maintenance and upkeep, the statement added.

Delhi traffic enforcement gets AI boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi's traffic enforcement gets smarter with a 360-degree rotatable AI-powered 4D radar interceptor, capable of spotting violations like overspeeding, driving without a seatbelt, and using a mobile phone while driving. It would also issue automated e-challans without any human intervention, an official said Friday.

The AI-powered 4D radar interceptor will be mounted on top of police vehicles, a police source said, adding it will generate automated e-challan for violations, eliminating the need for human intervention.

The system can detect a wide range of violations, including overspeeding, driving a four-wheeler without a seatbelt, use of a mobile phone while driving, riding without a helmet, triple-riding on two-wheelers, pillion riding without protective headgear, and using fancy or designer number plates.

The interceptor features a 360-degree rotatable Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) camera mounted on the roof, providing a comprehensive view to monitor traffic and capture number plates.

Its 4D radar system simultaneously tracks multiple vehicles and accurately measures their speed using advanced radio wave technology, he said.

The system integrates with the National Informatics Centre (NIC) for automated e-challan generation, ensuring swift enforcement of traffic rules, he said.

"The project is still in its initial stages and the first trial to test its efficiency was done on Friday. A total of 120 e-challans were generated by the AI-powered 4D radar interceptor," the source said.

He added this will also reduce the need for intervention by the traffic personnel, ensuring the best use of resources and also minimising the chances of our police personnel getting hurt.

"Earlier, while the interceptor alerted police of violations, they had to physically intervene to stop the offenders. However, with this technology being equipped to generate e-challans, it reduces the chances of them getting hurt while trying to stop the violators," he added.

Gangster caught by police using fake social media profile

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A gangster was arrested after a Delhi Police officer lured him through a fake social media profile posing as a Mumbai-based model, an official said on Friday.

The accused, Manoj, a life convict and repeat parole-jumper, promised to meet the officer in South Delhi, from where he was arrested.

"Manoj, a member of the Gogi gang and a close associate of Deepak, was wanted in multiple cases across Delhi, Haryana and Rajasthan, including murder, kidnapping and armed robbery," Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP)(Crime) Aditya Gautam said in a statement.

Deepak is a key conspirator in the murder of rival gangster Tillu Tajpuria inside Tihar Jail.

The officer further said knowing that Manoj was active on social media, a specialised team of the crime branch devised a digital operation.

"Head constables Dinesh and Sukhbir created a fake social media profile, posing as a glamorous Mumbai-based actress. Over several weeks of chatting, they gained Manoj's trust. Eventually, they convinced him to meet in the Safdarjung Enclave area of South Delhi," said the DCP.

When Manoj arrived, a waiting police team apprehended him. A search of his belongings led to the recovery of two weapons and eight live cartridges. He was immediately taken into custody.

The police said Manoj, originally from Mahendergarh in Haryana, moved to Delhi's Nangloi area with his family in the 1990s. His criminal journey began in 2005 when he, along with his friend Chamanlal, kidnapped and murdered a businessman named Rahul over a ransom dispute. Convicted in 2013, he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

While in Tihar Jail, Manoj came into contact with key members of the Gogi gang, including Vicky Ramzanpur.

He became deeply involved in the gang's activities, coordinating crimes from behind bars. He also established close ties with Deepak, the key conspirator in the murder of rival gangster Tillu Tajpuria.

In 2014, Manoj was granted a one-month parole but he did not return, choosing instead to rejoin the Gogi gang.

Over the years, he engaged in many crimes, including murder in Shahbad Dairy, armed carjackings in Narela, Begumpur and Alipur, and extortion operations in Bawana and other areas.

Arrested again in 2015, he spent years behind bars but continued orchestrating crimes. In June 2023, he was granted a three-week parole, during which he

AAP's rejig after poll debacle: Sisodia, Saurabh Bhardwaj get major party posts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

After losing its home turf, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) underwent a major rejijg on Friday as it appointed former Delhi minister Saurabh Bhardwaj as its Delhi unit president, replacing Gopal Rai, while former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia has been appointed as the Punjab unit chief, marking another strategic position aimed at strengthening AAP's presence in the state.

According to AAP, former Delhi environment minister Gopal Rai will head Gujarat. Pankaj Gupta will lead its Goa unit. The decisions were made during a meeting of the AAP's Political Affairs Committee (PAC) at the residence of party supremo Arvind Kejriwal. Kejriwal, in a post on X, congratulated the party leaders on being given the new responsibilities.

AAP General Secretary (Organisation) Sandeep Pathak, after the PAC meeting, said Gopal Rai would now be in charge of Gujarat, where the party is aiming to expand its base.

Pathak, a Rajya Sabha MP, has been named in charge of the AAP's Chhattisgarh unit, while Pankaj Gupta will lead the party's Goa chapter.

Punjab, Gujarat and Goa will hold

AAP leader Saurabh Bhardwaj PIONEER PHOTO

Assembly elections in two years. Mehraj Malik has been named the new chief of the party's Jammu and Kashmir unit.

The party has also appointed co-in-charges for the state units, including Satyendar Jain for Punjab, Durgesh Pathak for Gujarat, and Ankush Narang, Abhash Chandela, and Deepak Singhla for Goa.

Bharadwaj said that in the Delhi Assembly polls, AAP received around 43.5 percent of the votes, which was just two percent less than that of the BJP. "Even in these circumstances, half of Delhi voted for AAP," he told reporters. "We have to take care of them as well as those who voted for the BJP and strengthen the party."

The new AAP chief for the Delhi unit said that organisation building is easier after a defeat because many people join the party at the time of victory, but those who stick together even in defeat are pure gold. "We will strengthen the party and expand the organisation," he said.Sisodia, in a post on X, thanked Kejriwal and the party leadership for giving him the responsibility to work as in-charge of Punjab." "My endeavor will be that all AAP leaders, workers, and the government, under the leadership of @BhagwantMann ji, together fulfill the expectations of the people of Punjab and live up to their trust," he said.

The former Deputy Chief Minister in the AAP government in Delhi mentioned that the affection of the people in Punjab is his inspiration. "The results of the AAP government's work in Punjab are visible now, and it's time to give rocket speed to this change," he added.

Sisodia said there have been a lot of developments in Punjab after the party formed the government in the state.

"The AAP government will continue to work for the welfare of the people of Punjab and will ensure that every dedicated worker of the AAP feels proud to be a part of the party. The people of Punjab respect Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann a lot."

Cops busts major immigration racket, arrests four for trafficking Bangladeshi nationals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police has busted a syndicate involved in facilitating the illegal entry and settlement of Bangladeshi nationals in the national capital..

Three Bangladeshi immigrants along with their Indian facilitator have been arrested, exposing an organised network that exploited forged documents to evade detection, the Delhi Police said in a statement. The arrested people include the kingpin, Md Iqbal Hossain, who operated as Farhan Khan in India. He was apprehended from the Nehru Place area, the statement said. "Investigations revealed that he possessed both a Bangladeshi passport and an illegally acquired Indian passport. Despite already being married in Bangladesh, he fraudulently married an Indian woman from Madhya Pradesh by posing as an Indian citizen through a matrimonial website," Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) (Crime) Aditya Gautam in the statement said.

Two other Bangladeshi nationals identified as Razeeb Miyan and Md Momin Badsha were also arrested. All three had obtained Indian identity documents, including Aadhaar, voter ID and PAN cards under false names, the statement said.

In addition, an Indian facilitator, Agrasen Kumar, who was responsible for generating Aadhaar cards for illegal immigrants using fraudulent information, was also taken into custody.

The syndicate was engaged in trafficking Bangladeshi nationals into India through the Assam border, where they were then transported to Delhi via train. Upon reaching the capital, they were assisted in procuring forged Indian identity documents, allowing them to settle here.

These documents not only provided them with legal cover but also enabled them to engage in various commercial activities, primarily in the garment trade, it read.

Syndicate was engaged in trafficking Bangladeshi nationals into India through the Assam border, where they were then transported to Delhi via train.

Police also said investigations uncovered that the syndicate had been operating for several years, helping Bangladeshi nationals integrate into Indian society undetected. The illegal immigrants were strategically placed in weekly markets in South and Southeast Delhi, where they worked as garment vendors.

During the raids, the teams recovered a host of incriminating materials, including an Indian passport and multiple Aadhaar cards in different names, Bangladeshi passports and other documents confirming their foreign nationality, Voter ID and PAN cards procured using fraudulent credentials, and several mobile phones containing critical evidence linking them to the illegal operation.

The officer also said the entire network was unearthed after police officers ASI Krishna Pandey and Head Constable Sanjay, posing as garment vendors in weekly markets, gathered intelligence leading to the arrests.

"Based on their findings, a series of raids were conducted. The main accused, Md Iqbal Hossain, was first arrested in Nehru Place, while Razeeb Miyan and Md Momin Badsha were apprehended near Badarpur Border. Their Indian facilitator, Agrasen Kumar, was later arrested after further investigation revealed his role in creating fraudulent Aadhaar cards for the illegal immigrants," said the DCP. Md Iqbal Hossain, originally from Sunamganj in Sylhet, Bangladesh, dropped out of school in 1995 and engaged in rice trading before moving to England in 2004. After spending nearly five years in the UK working in restaurants and delivery services, he returned to Bangladesh in 2009, where he operated a grocery store until 2016.

Seeking better opportunities, he illegally entered India in 2017 through the Assam border and settled in Delhi. He initially lived in Jamia Nagar, where he established a garment business and later married an Indian woman under pretenses. By 2022, he was residing in Malviya Nagar, with his Indian wife and children, the police said.

In addition to running a garment business, Hossain facilitated the trafficking of Bangladeshi nationals, helping them obtain forged Indian documents to avoid deportation. In 2020, he was arrested for selling illegal SIM cards but continued his illegal activities after securing bail. He even travelled to Bangladesh twice using an Indian passport under a business visa, further cementing his fraudulent identity in India.

Indian facilitator Agrasen Kumar played a crucial role in the syndicate by misusing his position as an Aadhaar enrolment agent in a bank. He reportedly registered multiple Bangladeshi nationals as Indian citizens by manipulating government records, allowing them to obtain official identity documents fraudulently. His involvement helped many undocumented immigrants settle in Delhi/NCR without raising suspicion, the police said.

"Further investigation of the entire syndicate is underway," said the DCP.

Dhankar calls discussion on judge cash controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The matter pertaining to alleged recovery of cash from the residence of a sitting judge of the Delhi High Court was raised in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, with Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar saying he will find a mechanism for holding a structured discussion on the issue.

Raising the issue in the morning session, Congress MP Jairam Ramesh also sought the Chair's response on judicial accountability and reminded him about a pending notice regarding impeachment of a judge of the Allahabad High Court. "This morning, we have read about a shocking case of huge amounts of cash unearthed at the residence of a judge of the Delhi High Court," Ramesh said. He also pointed out that earlier, 50 members of Parliament had submitted a notice to the chairman regarding certain remarks that were made by a judge of the Allahabad High Court. Ramesh said the chairman himself has repeatedly spoken about the urgency for judicial accountability. The senior Congress member also sought to remind Dhankhar that he had directed the Leader of the House on this issue.

"I request that you please make some observations on this and give necessary directions to the government to come up with a proposal for increasing judicial accountability," he added. On the issue related to alleged recovery of the cash, Dhankhar said what "bothers" him is that the incident happened but did not come to light immediately.

He said if such an incident was related to a politician, a bureaucrat or an industrialist, the person concerned would have become a 'target' immediately. "And, therefore, systemic response, which is transparent, accountable, effective, I am sure will be on the way" he said.

The chairman further said he will get in touch with the Leader of the House and Leader of the Opposition and find a mechanism for a structured discussion during course of the session. On the impeachment matter, the chairman said he had received a representation from 55 members of the Rajya Sabha.

Dhankhar further informed the members that he has taken all necessary steps to get verification from the signatories to the representation.

"Most members responded positively, helping me perform my duty," he said, and appealed to the remaining members to respond to the e-mails sent to them.

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar conducts proceedings of the House during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi PTI

Gabbard's visit reinforces US-India ties: US official

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard's meetings in India focused on bilateral cooperation in areas of intelligence-sharing, defence, counter-terrorism, and transnational threats, an American official said.

Gabbard's visit to New Delhi highlighted the decades strong US-India relationship that is bolstered by the leadership of and friendship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump, a spokesperson at the office of Director of National Intelligence (DNI) said.

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

Tulsi Gabbard held separate meetings with Prime Minister Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and NSA Ajit Doval.

"In India, the Director of National Intelligence held several bilateral engagements, including with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the spokesperson said.

"DNI Tulsi Gabbard's meetings in India focused on intelligence-sharing, defence, counterterrorism, and transnational threats," the official added.

Gabbard also delivered a speech at the Raisina Dialogue, focusing on Trump's efforts on bringing peace to various conflict-ridden regions.

"President Donald Trump remains unwavering in his commitment to achieving peace through a strategy rooted in realism and pragmatism," she said.

"Securing peace through strength requires strong leadership with a clear-eyed and realistic understanding of global challenges and opportunities, a commitment to fostering cultural and economic ties that reduce the likelihood of an escalation to conflict, and a dedication to reinforcing mutual interests," she added.

US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard's meetings in India focused on bilateral cooperation

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

Rajnath Singh also apprised Tulsi Gabbardabout SFJ's alleged links with Pakistani spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as well as its " collaboration" with Babbar Khalsa militant group, and pressed for action against it, they said.

Compassion, harmony cornerstones of civilisation, says Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday emphasised that compassion, inclusivity and harmony are cornerstones of the Indian civilisation, asserting that a nation's true progress is defined by its dedication to uplifting the marginalised. Speaking at Purple Fest 2025, a cultural event organised by the Social Justice Ministry at the Rashtrapati Bhawan here with the aim to empower PwDs, she reaffirmed India's constitutional values of social justice, dignity and equality.

A country or society is not known for what it does for the privileged but for its sensitivity towards the marginalised," the President said. She said compassion, inclusivity and harmony are intrinsic to the Indian civilisation. The President highlighted the govt's commitment to empowering PwDs through various initiatives, including the 'Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan', which focuses on both physical, digital accessibility expressed satisfaction that initiatives in skill development and entrepreneurship are equipping disabled to become equal stakeholders in India's economy. .

BJP slams Karnataka's four per cent Muslim quota

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Friday accused the Congress of pursuing "contract jihad" in Karnataka after the state assembly passed a bill that allows for 4 per cent reservation for Muslims in government contracts, slamming it as an infringement on the rights of OBCs, SCs and STs.

BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra claimed that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi pushed the state government's decision, alleging he was using the crutches of Muslim quota to advance his politics as he knows that he will be not be otherwise able to deliver.

Rahul Gandhi is politically unfit for sound political decision and that is why he is resorting to appeasement politics, Patra said, using rhyming Urdu lines to throw several barbs at him. "Alamgir Rahul-Zeb", he said in a play on Mughal king Aurangzeb, is nursing ambition to become "jahanpanah".

The Congress government's decision in Karnataka is only a beginning and will create divide in the country, the BJP spokesperson said, adding the opposition party can give even 100 per cent quota to the minority community in pursuit of its appeasement politics. He told reporters, "This is height of appeasement politics."

He said the Siddaramaiah-led government has been taking a host of measures aimed at Muslims. It followed "land jihad" through Waqf properties and "economic jihad" by offering huge package to development of the Waqf, he said, adding "anti-national jihad" was witnessed when pro-Pak slogans were raised in the state assembly, he added.

"It is contract jihad now," he said, adding the Congress had also allied the political wing of the banned radical Islamic organisation PFI and later given legal reprieve to many person accused of stoking social unrest.

Patra noted that the state government has proposed salary to imams, financial aid to Muslims for weddings, rebate in fee for Muslims students, and ₹1,000 Crore for the development of Muslim colonies among several decisions aimed at the minority community. The four per cent quota for Muslims contracts is from the reservation bracket meant for the Other Backward Classes, he said, calling for a united front among the OBCs, SCs and STs against this development.

BJP accused Congress of pursuing "contract jihad" in Karnataka after the state passed a bill that allows for four per cent reservation for Muslims in government contracts

The BJP leader claimed that it is such an appeasement politics which had led to the country's division in 1947. He reiterated that the state government's decision is unconstitutional, and the BJP will take appropriate measures to counter it. State BJP leaders have said that they will legally challenge it.

Asked about questions raised by some opposition parties on the fitness of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who looked distracted and tried to chat with someone while the national song was being played in the latest of his gaffes, Patra said it will not be appropriate for him to comment on any leader's health. One can talk about political fitness and everyone known who is the most politically unfit leader, he said, in a swipe at Rahul Gandhi.

One held in SDPI money laundering case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested a man from Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu following fresh round of searches in a money laundering case against the SDPI, the political front of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI), official sources said Friday.

Wahidur Rahman Jainullabudeen was taken into custody under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) from Mettupalayam in Coimbatore district on Thursday, the sources said.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) made the arrest after conducting searches at the house of Jainullabudeen, who was brought to Delhi on Thursday night, and is expected to be produced before a special PMLA court on Friday, they said. The federal probe agency carried out the first round of searches in the case on March 6 after it arrested M K Faizy, the national president of SDPI, from the Delhi airport on March 3.

The ED claimed before a court while seeking 55-year-old Faizy's custody that there existed an "organic" relation between the two outfits and that the Popular Front of India was carrying out its criminal activities through the political party (SDPI).

The Centre banned the Popular Front of India in September 2022, calling it an unlawful association which allegedly indulged in terrorist activities.

Multi-agency searches by the ED, National Investigation Agency (NIA) and various state police forces preceded the Popular Front of India ban. Founded in 2009, the SDPI is registered as a political party with the ECI.

No one can carry out blasts now: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

No one can now dare carry out blasts and escape, unlike in the past, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Friday and asserted that the country was safe under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Noting that blasts occurred frequently in the past, Shah also attacked previous governments for not taking action against terrorists, citing the 2008 Mumbai terror attack.

The government has sero tolerance policy towards terrorism, Shah said as he also asserted that Naxalism will end in India by March 2026. Amit Shah said this while replying to a discussion in the Upper House on the workings of the Union Home Ministry.

"There was a time when bomb blasts were routine. I want to tell the people of the country that, for the last 10 years, the series of bomb blasts have stopped. No one can now dare carry out bomb blasts. The country is safe under Narendra Modi. We are committed to uprooting terrorism," he said in the Rajya Sabha.

Referring to the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, he said terrorists earlier easily entered the country, attacked hotels and railway stations, and escaped. "But no action was taken," the home minister said.

There is peace in Kashmir, the majority of terrorists in the northeast have surrendered, and the country is moving forward under the leadership of Modi, he added. "With strong political willpower and strong management of Modi ji, the country is safe now. The opposition should not be worried. We will keep you (opposition) as well as the country safe," Shah said.

The home minister did not speak on the violence in Manipur, saying he would deliberate on the issue in detail when imposition of President's Rule in the northeastern state would come up for discussion. He said the government fulfilled the dream of the architects of the Constitution by abrogating Article 370.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi PTI

"Article 370 was the basis of separatism in Kashmir. But I also thank the architects of the Constitution, they made the provision temporary, and the way to abrogate it was also included in the Article," Shah said. "But due to vote bank politics and stubbornness, Article 370 continued. On August 5, 2019, Article 370 was totally abrogated.

The dream of the architects of our Constitution, was that there can't be two heads, two constitutions and two flags in the country," he said. Shah said the issue of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, left-wing extremism, and insurgency in Northeast were among the biggest challenges for India. "Around 92,000 citizens were killed in four decades.

No organised effort was done to deal with these, and the Modi government did it," he said. Shah also said the number of deaths of civilians and security personnel in terror incidents has drastically come down, while there has been zero incidents of stone pelting in the Kashmir valley.

"There has been a 70 per cent reduction in deaths due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir during Modi govt; terror incidents too fell sharply," he said.

Shah also said grassroots level democracy has been established in Jammu and Kashmir by successfully holding elections in urban and rural local bodies.

"Around 40,000 government jobs provided during 2019-24 in Jammu and Kashmir, 1.51 Lakh self employment created, skilling clubs operational," he said. The Home Minister also accused previous governments of not taking action against Naxalism."By March 21, 2026, Naxalism will end in this country," Amit Shah said.

Yoga gets Intelligence with Artificial perfect pose

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ New Delhi

As the world embraces yoga as a path to fitness and mental well-being, a new innovation is poised to address a growing concern, incorrect postures leading to pain and injuries.

As a recent survey highlighted that nearly 36 percent of yoga practitioners face discomfort due to improper alignment during their sessions, a timely solution has stepped in as PosePerfect, an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered yoga pose correction system that has been developed by a passionate team of young innovators. Born out of the XR (Extended Reality) Creator Hackathon, PosePerfect uses a blend of Extended Reality (XR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and 3D Visualisation to offer real-time feedback and guided corrections during yoga practice.

With the help of PoseNet and animated 3D avatars created using Blender, the system tracks the practitioner's movements and suggests corrections on-screen, making yoga practice not just safer, but smarter. The aim is to help users of all skill levels improve posture, avoid injuries, and achieve better results.

The team behind this innovation, Shama Kiran (Team Lead), along with Deepti Karani, Diya Thalanki, and Kriti Bhardwaj, believes that technology can play a vital role in enhancing traditional wellness practices. Their goal is to make yoga more accessible and effective, especially for those practicing without a trained instructor. The XR Creator Hackathon, a national platform that celebrates the power of immersive technology, is an initiative by Wavelaps in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting under the WAVES program. It has provided teams like PosePerfect with mentorship, technical guidance, and access to cutting-edge tools, thanks to strong support from India's leading XR communities, BharatXR and XDG.

Now, all eyes are on the Grand Finale, scheduled from May 1 to 4, 2025, at the Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai, where PosePerfect will showcase its prototype alongside other top XR innovations from across the country.

World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit, known by the acronym WAVES will be a key forum for promoting discussions, collaboration, and innovation in the media and entertainment industry. The event will bring together industry leaders, stakeholders, and innovators to discuss prospects, challenges, promote trade to India, and influence the sector's future. According to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, WAVES is a groundbreaking event designed to propel India's media, entertainment industry to even greater heights. "India is a major consumer and creator within the global entertainment landscape.

WAVES provides a platform to showcase this vibrant industry and its immense potential. It promotes knowledge exchange, dialogue, and collaboration between Indian and global stakeholders. This cross-pollination of ideas will fuel innovation and diversity within the media entertainment world.

It is to connect participants with new markets, diversifies revenue streams, and paves the way for a stable and sustainable growth trajectory for the Indian entertainment and media sector," said a senior official at Ministry of I and B. As India carves a space for itself in the global XR landscape, PosePerfect stands out as an inspiring example of how technology can elevate age-old practices.On a query as what impact shall the project bring to society, in India, and the world, Shama Kiran said the project aims to bridge the gap between traditional wellness practices and modern technology.

ADMM-Plus concludes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

With the 14th meeting of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus Experts Working Group on Counter-Terrorism (EWG on CT) concluding here, India and Malaysia announced work plan for the activities under their co-chairmanship of the forum for the cycle 2024-2027.

The forum announced the conduct of table-top exercise in Malaysia in 2026 and a field training exercise in India in 2027, the Defence Ministry said in a statement here on Friday.

The 14th meeting of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) Experts Working Group on Counter-Terrorism was held in New Delhi from March 19-20.

"Delegations from ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN countries (Lao PDR, Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam), ADMM-Plus member states (China, USA, Russia, Australia, Japan and Republic of Korea) participated in the meeting," it said.

During 14th ADMM-Plus EWG on CT, the co-chairs, India and Malaysia, conveyed work plan for the activities planned for the cycle 2024-2027.

The discussions focused on evolving a robust and comprehensive strategy to tackle the evolving threat of terrorism and extremism.

"The meeting was aimed to share the on-ground experience of the defence forces of ASEAN countries and its dialogue partners. The meeting laid a foundation for the activities, exercises, meetings, workshops planned for the current cycle," it said. Earlier, Myanmar and Russia, co-chairs for EWG on CT during the previous cycle for 2021-2024, handed over the co-chairmanship to India and Malaysia for the present cycle (2024-2027), the ministry said. India is hosting the maiden EWG meeting for the current cycle.

In the inaugural session, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh had delivered the keynote address and interacted with participating head of delegations.

He said terrorism remains a dynamic and evolving challenge with threats increasingly transcending borders. Singh had highlighted India's efforts towards countering terrorism in the region, including adoption of Delhi Declaration during India's chairmanship of Counter-Terrorism committee of the UNSC in 2022, the ministry said.

The discussions in the meeting focused on evolving a robust and comprehensive strategy to tackle the evolving threat of terrorism and extremism

Senior officials from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Defence Ministry and the Indian Army's Counter-Terrorism division participated in the event.

The heads of delegations of the participating countries and Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretariat also presented their views on adopting best practices for countering terrorism in the region, the statement said.

Naxal-free villages to get ₹1 crore, mobile connectivity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Raipur

In a fresh bid to eradicate naxalism, the Chhattisgarh government has announced a series of substantial incentives for village panchayats that declare themselves 'naxal-free' which includes mobile phone network connectivity, electricity, and ₹1 Crore for development works.

Additionally, the state government announced initiatives in the rehabilitation policy cleared by the cabinet aimed at encouraging naxalites to surrender and reintegrate into mainstream society.

The announcement by Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma comes a day after security forces killed 30 naxals in two separate encounters in the Bastar region, highlighting the government's intensified zero-tolerance approach.

The government announced that it will launch "Elvad Panchayat Abhiyan", under which panchayats facilitating surrenders and declaring themselves Maoist-free will receive the incentives.

"Village panchayats that facilitate the surrender of Naxalites and declare themselves free from the menace will be sanctioned construction works of ₹1 Crore, mobile phone network, and electricity," Sharma, who also holds Home portfolio, told reporters.

The recently approved Chhattisgarh naxal surrender and victim relief and Rehabilitation Policy-2025 offers comprehensive support to surrendered naxals, including free accommodation, food for three years, and monthly financial assistance of ₹10,000.

"Naxalites who have laid down arms will be provided skill development training, land, and houses under the PM housing scheme. Many other provisions, including financial aid, have been included in the new policy," Sharma said, adding the implementation of the new policy will encourage more naxals to lay down arms and join the mainstream.

Furthermore, the rehabilitation policy extends to victims of naxal violence, offering financial aid, land, and other forms of support to those displaced by Maoist threats.

Security personnel after an operation against Naxalites in Chhattisgarh's Kanker PTI

In a tribute to fallen security personnel, the government has allocated ₹10 Crore through the Panchayat Department for the "Veer Balidani scheme," which will fund the installation of statues of security personnel killed in their native villages.

An initial phase will see 500-600 statues erected, fulfilling a long-pending demand from the families of the deceased.

Sharma also lauded the security forces for their successful operations in Bijapur and Kanker districts. He explained that the Naxals had gathered for a meeting during their Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign (TCOC) when they were surrounded by security forces.

While 26 Naxalites were killed in Bijapur district, four Maoists were gunned down in Kanker by separate joint teams of security personnel. A police jawan was also killed in the encounter in Bijapur.

The Deputy Chief Minister also highlighted the government's efforts to improve connectivity and infrastructure in Naxal-affected areas.

For 25 years, Pamed was only accessible through Telangana covering a distance of 250 kilometers and there was no direct connectivity from Bijapur district headquarters to Pamed.

Now with the efforts of security forces, Pamed is accessible from Bijapur via Tarrem and Kondapalli, covering a distance of 90 km, and one bus has started operating for the commuters on the route, he said.

Weekly markets in several remote villages, including Garpa, Pujarikanker and Kondapalli, which were shut for the last several years due to Maoist activities have been reopened. At least 577 new mobile towers have been installed in the region, he said.

The Centre has announced that the menace of Naxalism will be finished by March 31, next year.

So far this year, 113 Naxalites have been killed in encounters in Chhattisgarh. Of them, 97 were gunned down in the Bastar division comprising seven districts including Bijapur and Kanker.

As many as 104 Naxals were arrested in different parts of the country and 164 have surrendered in 2025 so far.

Stalin slams delimitation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

If Tamil Nadu and other states lose representation in Parliament due to the proposed delimitation, it will strike at the very foundation of federalism, erode democracy and lead to compromise of rights, Chief Minister and DMK President MK Stalin said on Friday.

In a video message on the eve of the first meeting of the Joint Action Committee (JAC), Stalin said fair delimitation is the talk of the town right now. "Why has the DMK brought this into focus? It is because by 2026, delimitation will happen. And if delimitation exercise is carried out based on population, our representation in Parliament will be severely affected. That is exactly why we raised our voice first. This is not just about the number of MPs. This is about our state's rights," he said, adding that was why a meeting of all parties in Tamil Nadu was held.

> **If delimitation exercise is carried out based on population, our representation in Parliament will be severely affected.That is exactly why we raised our voice first. This is not just about the number of MPs. This is about our state's rights**
> — MK STALIN, TAMIL NADU CM

In that recent meeting, except the BJP, every other party came together and a resolution was passed demanding a fair delimitation process. "More importantly, we decided to unite the other affected states and fight together." In order to take the initiative forward, the Dravidian party chief said he wrote letters to the chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, Odisha, West Bengal and Punjab and also sent letters to the leadership of all major parties representing these states in Parliament. A party delegation comprising a Tamil Nadu state minister and one MP personally met the leaders and explained the DMK's stand.

Stalin said he personally spoke to all the chief ministers over the phone and some confirmed their participation, while others, due to prior commitments, will be sending their representatives.

He said, "This first round of discussions will be held in Chennai on March 22. Why are we organising this meeting now? If Tamil Nadu and other states we have reached out were to lose representation due to this delimitation, it will strike at the very foundation of federalism in India. It will erode the essence of democracy itself. Our voices in Parliament will be silenced. Our rights will be compromised."

Further, he said, "This is nothing short of a deliberate attempt to undermine certain states. States that have controlled their population growth, governed efficiently, and contributed significantly to national progress must not be punished by the union government."

Allahabad HC Bar opposes Justice Verma's transfer

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Prayagraj

The Allahabad High Court Bar Association has expressed strong opposition to the transfer of Justice Yashwant Verma from the Delhi High Court (HC) to the Allahabad High Court, calling the move unacceptable.

In a strongly worded letter, the association stated, "We are not a garbage dump," voicing its displeasure over the decision of the Supreme Court Collegium.

The controversy erupted following reports that a substantial amount of cash, allegedly around ₹15 Crore, was recovered from Justice Verma's official residence in Delhi while fire department personnel were extinguishing a blaze. The Supreme Court took cognisance of the matter, leading to his transfer to the Allahabad High Court. In a resolution passed on Friday, the Allahabad High Court Bar Association stated that it was "shocked and dismayed" by the transfer, emphasising that such decisions undermine the dignity and reputation of the judiciary in Allahabad. The association further criticised the Supreme Court Collegium, led by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna, for transferring Justice Verma to his parent High Court in the wake of the allegations. The transfer decision has sparked intense debate within legal circles, with senior advocates arguing that judges facing controversy should not be reassigned without a transparent inquiry. The Bar Association has called for a reconsideration of the transfer and demanded clarity on the circumstances surrounding the alleged cash recovery.

As the matter unfolds, legal experts and judicial observers are closely monitoring the developments, with concerns being raised over the impact of such decisions on judicial accountability and public trust in the legal system.

Who is Justice Verma? Born on January 6, 1969, in Allahabad, Justice Verma completed his Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) at Hansraj College, Delhi University, and obtained his LLB from Rewa University, Madhya Pradesh. He enrolled as an advocate in 1992 and practiced extensively in the Allahabad High Court, specialising in constitutional law, taxation, corporate law, and industrial disputes. He served as Special Counsel for the Allahabad High Court (2006-2014) and as Chief Standing Counsel for the State of Uttar Pradesh (2012-2013).

Terrorist handlers trying to target security convoys in Valley

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

After suffering huge setbacks at the hands of the security forces in recent anti-terrorist operations, the terrorist handlers have been desperately trying to register their presence by targeting the security forces convoy using Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) along their routes in the Kashmir valley.

Since March 16, as many as four Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) have been recovered and defused in Kashmir, prompting a heightened security vigil across the region.

According to official sources, these IEDs were found in Bandipora, Pulwama, Kupwara, Kulgam, and Shopian districts of Kashmir Valley.

The Director General of Police J and K, Nalin Prabhat also rushed to Srinagar on Thursday to assess the current security situation.

During the security review meeting, DGP reiterated the 'zero-tolerance policy' against terrorism. He also directed the officers to remain on high alert. According to a spokesman of the Srinagar-based Chinar Corps, on March 19 a major terror incident, which would have threatened the innocent lives of Kashmiri citizens, was averted after a joint team of the Indian army and Jammu and Kashmir police recovered and destroyed an IED on the critical line of communication along Bandipora-Srinagar Road, Aragam.

The busy road link is often used by security convoys for their routine movement towards the Gurez valley.

Likewise, on March 17, another IED was found in a pressure cooker in Kulgam district's Qaimoh village while another one was defused in Kupwara and Pulwama district this week.

Following the recovery of IEDs a general advisory was also issued to the politicians and protected persons to exercise extra caution and avoid changing their travel plans without the knowledge of the security personnel deployed on security duties. A senior police officer posted in the North Kashmir district of Kupwara said, "These IED attempts by terrorists are aimed at creating panic and showing their presence even though the local cadre has significantly depleted".

According to a recent assessment, at least 59 foreign terrorists from three different terror outfits and 17 local terrorists are active in Jammu and Kashmir. Of the 59 foreign terrorists, 21 are from Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), 35 from Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and three are associated with Hizbul Mujahideen (HM).

Ready to sacrifice power for Lord Ram: Adityanath

BISWAJEET BANERJEE/KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ Ayodhya

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, during his visit to Ayodhya, made a resolute declaration that his tenure in power is secondary to the construction of the Ram Mandir. Addressing a gathering at the 'Timeless Ayodhya: Literature and Arts Festival', he stated, "Even if I have to lose power for Ram Mandir, there should be no problem. I will be happy if I have to relinquish my seat for Lord Ram. I am here to serve people. Ram will find a new way for me."

During his speech, Adityanath underscored Ayodhya's significance as the spiritual heart of Sanatan Dharma. He described the city as more than just a historical location, calling it a "source of inspiration for religion and literature." He elaborated on Ayodhya's sacred status, stating that it was here that Lord Manu laid the foundation of human civilisation, and the land became the *'karmabhoomi'* (sacred ground of action) for Lord Ram, an incarnation of Vishnu.

He also emphasised the Ramayana's unparalleled contribution to literature, calling it "the world's first epic that provided a new direction to human civilisation." He noted that generations have drawn inspiration from the values embodied in the Ramayana, making Ayodhya a timeless symbol of moral and cultural wisdom.

The Chief Minister reflected on the transformation of Ayodhya since 2017, when his government introduced Deepotsav (grand Diwali celebrations). He recalled how the idea faced skepticism at first, with many questioning whether such a large-scale celebration could be sustained. However, over the years, *deepotsav* has grown into a grand festival, attracting millions of devotees and becoming a globally recognised cultural event.

Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya PTI

"Today, Ayodhya is witnessing celebrations instead of riots. The city, once neglected, has now become the pride of the nation. Those who once opposed the Ram Mandir are now trying to associate themselves with Lord Ram," he remarked.

In his concluding remarks, Adityanath expressed his vision for Ayodhya as a city that will attract pilgrims and tourists from around the world.

He reiterated that his government is working tirelessly to develop infrastructure, improve connectivity, and promote cultural tourism.

"Ayodhya is not just a city, it is the spiritual heartbeat of the nation. It has been, and always will be, a guiding light for Dharma. With the blessings of Lord Ram, this sacred land will continue to shine on the world stage," he declared.

Upon his arrival in Ayodhya, Yogi Adityanath was welcomed by senior BJP leaders and rebel Samajwadi Party MLA Abhay Singh from Gosaiganj.

The Chief Minister proceeded directly to the Hanumangarhi temple, where he offered prayers before heading to the Ram Mandir.

Following his temple visit, Adityanath participated in the Art and Literature Festival, where he addressed a gathering of young entrepreneurs. He distributed cheques amounting to ₹47 Crore to 1,148 youth, encouraging them to take charge of their futures. "If there is strong willpower, then there is no dearth of opportunity. The Prime Minister has also said that the youth of India is now not just job seekers but also job providers. If Uttar Pradesh becomes self-reliant, then India will also become self-reliant," he asserted.

Adityanath's strong statements come at a time when the political climate in Uttar Pradesh is intensifying ahead of the 2027 Assembly elections. His speech not only reinforced his image as a devout leader but also sent a clear message that he prioritises faith and governance over political gains.

His remarks are being seen as a strategic move to consolidate the BJP's core voter base, particularly in the wake of Opposition parties attempting to recalibrate their positions on Hindutva.

As the temple nears completion, the role of Ayodhya in BJP's electoral strategy is expected to grow even more prominent.

Elderly couple gets married

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Prayagraj

In a heartwarming testament to the fact that love knows no age, 66-year-old Munnalal and 57-year-old Preetilata tied the knot at the Ramlal Old Age Home in Agra, vowing to spend the rest of their lives together. The wedding not only marked the beginning of a new journey for the couple but also fulfilled a lifelong dream of Munnalal's 90-year-old mother, who had long wished to see her son settle down.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she watched the wedding rituals, overwhelmed with joy. "I had given up hope of ever welcoming a daughter-in-law into my life. This is a dream come true for me," she said, her voice quivering with emotion.

For Munnalal and Preetilata, both of whom had been grappling with loneliness in their later years, the marriage was a chance to rediscover companionship. "I never imagined I would find a partner at this age," Munnalal shared. "Loneliness is a painful reality of old age, but now, I have someone to share my joys and sorrows with."

Preetilata echoed his sentiments, saying, "I spent years believing that my life was meant to be lived alone. But love has its own plans. I feel like I have been given a second chance at happiness."

The celebrations at the old age home began on Wednesday with haldi and mehendi ceremonies, where fellow residents joined in with enthusiasm, singing and dancing. On Thursday, the wedding procession (baraat) took place, with the elderly residents stepping into the roles of baratis. Laughter and music filled the air as they danced, clapped, and cheered for the couple.

To make the moment even more special, the president of Ramlal Old Age Home, Shivkumar Sharma, stepped in as the bride's father, conducting the rituals with utmost care. "A wedding is not just about two people; it's about bringing families together. And here, we are all a family," he said with a smile.

The wedding received widespread appreciation from social workers and dignitaries present at the ceremony. Rajkumar Jain, President of Agra Vikas Manch, and Sunil Kumar Jain, the organisation's coordinator, spoke about the importance of companionship for the elderly.

"Old age should not mean isolation. Everyone deserves love and care, regardless of their age. Munnalal and Preetilata's marriage is a reminder that companionship is a basic human need that doesn't fade with time," Rajkumar Jain said.

He also announced plans to launch a campaign encouraging the remarriage of widows and elderly individuals who struggle with loneliness. "Society often shuns the idea of remarriage in old age, but we need to change this mindset. Every person deserves happiness, no matter how old they are," he added.

Fake DSP arrested for extorting ₹80 Lakh

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

Gurugram Police arrested an accused for allegedly extorting ₹80 Lakh from a 15-year-old girl by threatening to arrest her by posing as fake DSP, police said. The alleged fake DSP was identified as Fardeen a resident of Nuh district in Haryana. He was arrested from Patudi area on Thursday.

During police interrogation, it was found that the accused had created a DSP ID on TRUE CALLER. After this, he got the money transferred from the victim by threatening her of arrest by posing as a fake DSP. At least six other suspects have already been arrested in the matter, police said on Friday. All the suspects were arrested for extorting ₹80 Lakh from a 15-year-old girl by threatening to leak her objectionable photos on social media, which turned out to be morphed, police had said.

Inspector Rambir Singh, station house officer (SHO) of the Sector 10A police station, said, "The accused accomplice had provided multiple account numbers to the girl via social media platform for transferring money from her grandmother's bank account.They had spent most of the amount on parties," he said. Police had said the elderly woman had recently sold a property and received ₹80 Lakh in her account. The girl shared details about the money with her school friends, one of whom may have leaked her information to the accused, they added. The victim, a Class IX student living in Sector 10, managed her grandmother's internet banking.

The matter came to the fore on December 21, when the grandmother discovered her account had been drained of funds and approached the police.

"It was only after being confronted by her parents and grandmother that the girl disclosed the blackmailing," said SHO Singh.

Court remands Amritpal Singh's accomplices to custody

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Amritsar

Radical preacher Amritpal Singh's seven associates were on Friday produced before a court here in connection with the attack on the Ajnala police station in 2023 and remanded to police custody till March 25.

The seven were released from the Dibrugarh Central Jail in Assam and re-arrested in another case by the Punjab Police.

All seven detainees were produced before the court in Ajnala here under tight security and sent to four-day police remand, officials said.

Police here sought the remand on various grounds, including to recover some mobile phones and weapons, and to conduct further investigations.

The Punjab government had decided not to reinvoke the NSA at the end of the detention period of Amritpal's seven associates. Punjab Police had secured their transit remand and after completing the legal transfer process from Dibrugarh Central they were brought to Ajnala.

Amritpal Singh's aide Gurindar pal Singh being released after his NSA detention period expired in Dibrugarh PTI

A 25-member Punjab Police team had been camping in Dibrugarh for the past few days to facilitate the transfer of Singh's accomplices, who have been imprisoned along with the Waris Punjab De (WPD) leader in Dibrugarh for nearly two years. The seven brought back are Basant Singh of Daulatpura Ucha in Moga, Bhagwant Singh alias Pradhan Mantri Bajeke of village Bajeke in Moga, Gurmeet Singh Gill alias Gurmeet Bukkanwala of village Bukkanwala in Moga, Sarabjeet Singh Kalsi alias Daljeet Singh Kalsi of West Punjabi Bagh in New Delhi, Gurinderpal Singh Aujla alias Guri Aujla of Phagwara, Harjeet Singh alias Chacha of village Jallupur Khera in Amritsar and Kulwant Singh Dhaliwal alias Kulwant Singh of Rauke Kalan in Moga. All of them were released from Dibrugarh Central Jail in batches during the last few days as their detention period in the National Security Act (NSA) expired. Amritpal Singh and his associates have been in Assam's Dibrugarh jail under the NSA for the past two years.

He had fought the 2024 Lok Sabha polls as an independent and won from the Khadoor Sahib seat.The radical preacher, who styled himself after slain Khalistani militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, was arrested in Moga's Rode village on April 23, 2023 following an over a month-long manhunt. The Khalistani sympathiser had escaped the police net in Jalandhar district on March 18, 2023 switching vehicles and changing appearances.

Editor's TAKE

Countdown to reciprocal tariffs

India braces for the impact of Trump's tariffs, set to take effect on April 2

As April 2 approaches, India braces for the implementation of US President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs, a move poised to reshape the economic landscape between the two nations. These tariffs aim to equalise the duties imposed by countries on US exports, targeting nations with higher tariffs on American goods.

President Trump has criticised countries like India for imposing substantial tariffs on US products. He made it clear recently when he said that he believed they (India and others) are probably going to be lowering those tariffs substantially, but on April 2, and that he would be charging them the same tariffs they charge US. The reciprocal tariffs are designed to pressure countries into reducing their tariffs to match those of the United States.

The introduction of these tariffs could have several implications for India. Firstly it is going to affect India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in a big way. Analysts predict a potential reduction in India's GDP growth by 5 to 10 basis points from the current estimate of 6.6 per cent. The key industries such as gems and jewelry, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles, which have significant export volumes to the US, may face increased duties, affecting their competitiveness and profitability. Moreover, the Indian steel sector is particularly vulnerable. With the US imposing a 25 per cent tariff on steel imports and if India lowers its steel import duties there are genuine concerns about cheaper Chinese steel flooding the Indian market and damaging the Indian steel industries.

Indian government is yet to figure out how to reciprocate as the Trump's deadline is just ten days away. The best bet is diplomatic negotiations but at the moment the US President is adamant on going ahead with his plans to wage the trade war on nations who do not comply with his dictums. Indian officials have been in talks with their US counterparts to negotiate and potentially mitigate the impact of the tariffs. India has proactively reduced tariffs on certain US goods, such as motorcycles and bourbon whiskey, to address US concerns and foster goodwill. However, lowering the import duties across the sectors would be disastrous for Indian industry.

The best bet in this scenario, as other countries are also exploring and experimenting is to find alternative markets and increase South South Cooperation (SSC). Efforts are underway to explore alternative markets for Indian exports to reduce dependence on the US and mitigate potential revenue losses. But the problem is far grave as the ripple effects of the tariffs extend beyond direct trade. Increased US tariffs could lead to uncertainty, affecting foreign direct investment inflows as investors may adopt a cautious approach.

Trade tensions can lead to volatility in currency markets, impacting the Indian rupee's value against major currencies. Higher tariffs on imported goods could lead to increased prices for consumers, affecting purchasing power and overall consumption. As the deadline approaches, India's preparedness and strategic responses will be crucial in navigating the challenges posed by the US reciprocal tariffs.

India has a strong economic foundation, and while the impact of these tariffs may be challenging, the country is well-positioned to weather this unprecedented situation.

Moreover, as other affected nations like China and Canada devise strategies to mitigate the impact, India can draw valuable lessons from their responses to navigate the evolving trade scenario.

Leaderspeak

"The delimitation exercise, if carried out, will strike at the very foundation of federalism in India. It will erode the essence of democracy. Our voices in parliament will be silenced. Our rights will be compromised. This is nothing but a deliberate attempt to undermine certain states. States that have controlled their population growth, governed efficiently and contributed significantly to national progress must not be punished by the union government."

MK STALIN, CHIEF MINISTER OF TAMIL NADU

AI is transforming healthcare

From AI-driven diagnostic software aiding rural healthcare centers to machine-learning models enhancing radiology and pathology, technology is automating tasks once solely performed by doctors

Medical practice is based on protocols that help doctors diagnose conditions. A protocol is an algorithm and it appears that machines might be gaining an advantage in diagnosing conditions efficiently and quickly. It is increasingly being recognised that a digitally connected healthcare ecosystem can improve treatment outcomes, especially in large parts of rural India where the lack of specialists often comes in the way of timely diagnosis and medication. Software, developed by doctors and technicians at AIIMS Delhi, is a significant initiative in this respect.

The software can extend specialised diabetes consultation to primary healthcare centres (PHCs) in rural areas. Studies have suggested that India's diabetes burden, already the second highest in the world, is underreported because half the patients, even in urban areas, are not even aware of their condition. The AIIMS software is one step towards addressing these deficits. It requires the local level healthcare professional to feed in patient data on risk factors like blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. It then uses AI to process the information to suggest the treatment or further consultation, as the case may be. All this, however, does not attenuate the significance of the attending physician. The doctor will be required to adapt the software's advice. The digital intervention's potency, therefore, is dependent on the quality of analogue care.

The country's healthcare system requires accessible PHCs run by quality professionals, empowered by digital resources. With this statement, I will talk about the shape of jobs in the field of medicine in this era of AI and GenAI. The advent of AI is posing serious concerns about jobs in future. Some people will become more productive and some roles will be replaced. I have a different take on this.

I hypothesise that AI is automating tasks, not jobs. Let us take the example of a Radiologist—he reads X-rays, sees patients, maintains machines, and mentors younger doctors. Computers analyse X-rays and other medical diagnostics more efficiently and accurately than human experts. The task of reading x-rays can be done by AI, but not the other parts of a radiologist's job. So I suggest that while identifying areas that will be impacted by AI, we need to break down a job into tasks.

We have to accept that most jobs will likely have at least some of their tasks affected by LLMs.Pathologists are receiving scanned slides of biopsies accompanied by critical data. Then the pathologist only has to focus on the more complex issues to generate a diagnosis. The positive side of this is that speed and accuracy will increase. The downside is that if pathologists are no longer required to evaluate the basic histology elements themselves, the skill to do so will gradually be lost and ultimately they will become dependent on machines, the output of which they will not be able to even corroborate. In this context, there is a need to redefine the job profiles, and we will have to give opportunity to health workers to develop new skill sets relevant to shifting economies and labour markets. Emerging market realities call for major changes to the medical college curriculum. The advent of AI threatens to alter not only how subjects are taught but also what is taught. A recent survey reveals that 60 per cent of medical students are already using AI. However, they need to appreciate that all information given by AI is not accurate; AI and GenAI also suffer from the GIGO rule (Garbage In Garbage Out). Doctors also need to be taught where and how they should use AI and GenAI tools and apps.

There is an urgent need to revamp the medical educational architecture of our country, integrating it with modern technologies and national priorities.Software like the one developed by AIIMS can become more potent if synced with the electronic repository of the National Health Programme for Diseases. Data portability is in line with the Digital Health Mission's objective of facilitating seamless interaction between medical experts.

A second caveat: Given the asymmetrical relationship between patients and health service providers, the system should be insulated against data confidentiality breaches. Data is crucial for AI to evolve. Machine learning is the field that trains computers through analysis of large quantities of data. There is plenty of data available in our country. This data is being acquired by seducing the public to part with it voluntarily, people are tantalised with online carrots and free to use apps and their responses are monitored, tracked and recorded. Most people happily and voluntarily give up their private data, often without realising it. The digital capitalists use several pretexts and constantly reassure the public that data collection is for their good.

MONIKA S GARG

For instance, in the name of developing custom diets, lots of personal medical information is being captured. Genetic data from a country's immense biodiversity is being collected as part of studies and medical collaborations with foreign organisations.

Another interesting development, COVID-19 forced physicians and their patients to use telemedicine, and the response has been universally appreciated. It might trigger your thoughts when I say that telemedicine can capture new kinds of patient data such as facial expressions, emotional states, etc. The pandemic also accelerated the commercial availability of health and fitness wearables which facilitated doctors—supervised health monitoring, remote diagnostics, and even certain treatments. With these new kinds of devices, there will be new kinds of data captured as well. A word of caution here—we need a techno-legal approach to unlocking data. We need to work out modalities of Confidential Data Clean Room—Sangam of data and model where secrecy is maintained.The cause of concern is that in this game one player is largely ignorant. The suppliers of digital services understand the game and play it skillfully, while most doctors are not even aware that the interests of patient may be at odds with those of the digital and pharma companies. AI has entered the medical field so rapidly and unknowingly that it seems that doctors have accepted interactions with it without due diligence or in depth consideration. They are giving away their knowledge, research and data to AI apps voluntarily. AI may be capable of outstanding performance in terms of speed and accuracy, but all of its operations are built on data, ie, knowledge derived from experts in the field ie the doctors. We should realise that while AI is essential for meaningful progress in diagnosis and understanding of disease mechanisms, keeping AI within boundaries is essential for the survival of ethics in medical profession.

(The writer is UP's Agriculture Production Commissioner. Views expressed are personal)

Starliner Mission redefines space exploration

SECOND Opinion

BIJU DHARMAPALAN

The recent record-breaking mission by NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams has captured global attention, not only for its remarkable duration but also for its implications on the future of space exploration. The mission of NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft in July 2023 was intended to be an eight-day demonstration flight. Rather, their duration aboard the International Space Station (ISS) was extended by an extraordinary 286 days due to technical malfunctions. Even though this unanticipated mission demonstrates human resilience, it also emphasises the precarious equilibrium between ambition and preparedness in the field of space exploration.

The Starliner's propulsion system failures, including helium leaks and thruster malfunctions, exposed the dangers of deploying inadequately tested technology in the harsh space environment. While challenges are inherent in space exploration, this incident highlights a troubling trend: the rush to privatise and commercialise space travel may prioritise speed over reliability. Boeing's struggles with Starliner reflect broader concerns within the industry, where cutting corners to meet deadlines can jeopardise astronaut safety. Future space colonisation efforts demand rigorous redundancy systems and fail-safes to ensure that no single malfunction can endanger lives millions of miles from Earth.

NASA has accumulated decades of data on long-duration missions, however, risks are exacerbated by unanticipated extensions. Over time, muscle atrophy, bone density loss, and radiation exposure accumulate, while mental health strains-such as isolation, confinement, and the stress of uncertainty-are exacerbated. Solving these issues at a large scale is necessary for the colonisation of Mars or the establishment of lunar bases. Is it possible to create artificial gravity? Protecting oneself from cosmic radiation? Psychological support systems that are reliable? The astronauts' ordeal is a living experiment, but it is one that we cannot afford to replicate indiscriminately.

The extended stay of Wilmore and Sunitha Williams has yielded valuable insights into the long-term physical and psychological consequences of space travel. Although previous expeditions, such as Scott Kelly's year-long ISS stay, have provided critical data, this extended mission has significantly enhanced our comprehension. The effects of microgravity on muscles, bones, and cardiovascular systems, as well as the strains of protracted isolation, emphasise the necessity for improved medical protocols, exercise regimens, and mental health support systems for future astronauts. Colonising Mars or establishing lunar bases will require innovative solutions-from developing artificial gravity systems to improved radiation shielding. The current ordeal has created an opportunity to refine these strategies, ensuring astronauts are better prepared for extended deep-space missions. The ISS served as a critical lifeline during the astronauts' extended mission, reinforcing the importance of private collaboration.

SpaceX's partnership with NASA has been pivotal in advancing spacecraft reliability. The Crew Dragon spacecraft's advanced life-support systems and automation capabilities played a key role in sustaining the crew. This highlights how public-private partnerships are essential for building resilient space infrastructure. As we expand our cosmic ambitions, maintaining cooperation in space exploration will be vital. Future colonies on Mars or the Moon will require shared resources, international rescue protocols, and diversified expertise. Yet rising geopolitical tensions threaten this cooperative spirit. For sustainable colonisation, global collaboration must become the foundation of our extraterrestrial endeavours. The prolonged mission of Wilmore and Sunitha Williams exemplifies human creativity, adaptation, and perseverance. Their experience provides essential insights into spaceship design, astronaut welfare, and mission strategising. As mankind approaches interplanetary flight, these insights will ensure that future explorers are prepared to confront the challenges that await.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Views expressed are personal)

Letters to the Editor

Saliva ban lifted, spinners get a boost

Madam—Apropos to "BCCI lifts saliva ban in IPL" published on March 21, here is my response. The saliva ban was enforced during Covid pandemic because of obvious reasons and it has been five years since this ban has been in existence in international cricket.

Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) latest decision to lift the saliva ban ahead of IPL 2025 is a welcome move because it will aid fast bowlers in reverse swinging the ball.

And it will also bring some sort of equality into the context which is otherwise heavily tilted towards the batsman. Hope it will also trigger discussion at ICC level to bring this change in international cricket as well.

BCCI has also made another change of introducing two balls in second innings in night matches which is also praiseworthy because it will counter dew.

As the dew sets in it becomes really difficult for spinners to turn the ball as seams gets wet and becomes a bit grassy hence comes nicely on the bat so this change in the rule will help spinners make better grip over the ball.

Both these measures will significantly help bowlers and it is good for the game of cricket to bring some balance and hopefully fans will get to see some evenly contested matches in this IPL.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Respect, care for parents now legal necessity

Madam—A historic decision by the Tamil Nadu High Court has empowered the dignity and rights of the elderly. The court has made it clear that if children or heirs fail to properly care for and serve their elderly parents, the elderly have the full legal right to reclaim the property they had gifted. This decision gives a new direction to the sense of duty and sensitivity towards the elderly in society.

This case involved an elderly woman who, out of love and trust for her son, transferred her property to him through a gift deed. However, after her son's death, her daughter-in-law began mistreating her and showed a neglectful attitude. Unable to bear the situation, the elderly woman approached the court. The court ruled in her favour, stating that if the children or heirs fail to fulfil their duties, the elderly have the legal right to reclaim the gifted property.

This verdict has not only provided legal protection to the elderly but also sent a strong message to society that serving and respecting parents is not only a moral obligation but also a legal duty. If love and care from children are lacking, the existence of the gift deed can be nullified. This decision will serve as a milestone in protecting the dignity and self-respect of the elderly. It reminds every individual in society that respecting and caring for parents is not just a duty but a fundamental value of life.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

Devotees' trust at stake

Madam—Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's recent allegations against the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) are purely politically motivated. These accusations, based on false information, seem to be a deliberate attempt to mislead devotees and tarnish Hindu sentiments.
The comments were made with the intention of disregarding the services provided by TTD and spreading misinformation.

TTD has always been committed to serving devotees without any regional discrimination. The institution ensures that devotees from all states receive equal treatment, and there is no scope for favoritism.

The ₹300 special entry darshan and VIP darshan tickets are made available transparently through an online booking system, ensuring that every devotee gets a fair opportunity to have darshan of Lord Venkateswara. Every day, thousands of devotees from Telangana successfully book their tickets online and visit the temple without any hindrance.

Recommendation letters from public representatives are considered only for the VIP break darshan.

However, due to limited slots, not all recommendations can be approved. The claim that TTD has rejected Telangana leaders' recommendation letters is entirely false.

APPANNA GONAPA | VISAKHAPATNAM

ECONOMIC GROWTH ALONE IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF HAPPINESS

The 'World Happiness Report 2025' has shown a slight improvement in India's ranking, yet it remains unsatisfactory. India stands at 118th position among 147 countries, while Pakistan, despite its economic instability, is ranked 109th. Finland has secured the top spot for the eighth consecutive year, followed by Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and the Netherlands. This report highlights that economic prosperity alone does not ensure national happiness, rather, a combination of social, cultural, administrative, and psychological factors shapes a truly content society.

India is one of the fastest-growing economies, but the extent to which this growth benefits its citizens remains debatable. The wealth gap continues to widen, leading to dissatisfaction and despair. In contrast, smaller European nations with limited resources offer better social security and fair economic distribution, ensuring greater happiness. India must focus on redistributing its economic resources to make prosperity accessible to all. Social cohesion and community support play a vital role in happiness. While India has traditionally had strong family and social ties, modernisation and digitalisation have weakened these bonds, increasing isolation, stress, and depression.

Western countries emphasise mental health services, providing free counselling, community interactions, and a supportive environment. India must prioritise mental well-being through robust policies that encourage social cooperation and emotional resilience.

Healthcare accessibility and life expectancy are also crucial determinants of happiness. Despite improvements, India's healthcare system remains inaccessible to the general public. Government hospitals require urgent reform, while private healthcare remains unaffordable.

SACHIN TRIPATHI | SATNA

Please send your letter to the letterstopioneer@gmail.com. In not more than 400 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Humanism and the world

FIRST Column

The human race stands at a critical juncture, where its unchecked expansion and relentless exploitation of the natural world threaten its own survival. The pressing need to amend Protagoras' aphorism "Man is the measure of all things" has never been more urgent

HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Is humanism as a philosophy leading to human extinction? The search for an answer must begin with the Greek sophist Protagoras' frequently-qouted aphorism, "Man is the measure of all things." It is generally considered to be the best encapsulation of the central message of humanism which asserts the centrality of humankind's place in the cosmic order of things, including both the quotidian and historic flows of time. The value of everything, according to the Humanist weltanschauung has to be judged by its impact on the well-being of humans. It, however, does not refer to half of humankind-women. This was obviously because gender had not become an issue in public discourse in Protagoras' time. He lived from 490 to 420 BCE. As things have changed vastly since then and the first amendment to his aphorism should make it read as. "Humankind is the measure of all things."

The need for the second amendment arises from the nature of humankind's relationship with other living beings-animals, birds, fish and plants-the essence of which is relentless exploitation of these by people, which is driving them to extinction. Significantly, the theme of Earth Day, 2019, observed, as in every year, on April 22, was "Protect our Species." Elizabeth Kolbert writes in *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (first published in 2014), "Very, very occasionally in the distant past, the planet has undergone change so wrenching that the diversity of life has plummeted. Five of these ancient events were catastrophic enough that they're put in their own category: the so-called Big Five. In what seems like a fantastic coincidence, but is probably no coincidence at all, the history of these events is recovered just as people come to realise that they are causing another one."

It has become increasingly clear since the book first came out in 2014 that the sixth extinction is around the corner. The causes are well-known. Seabed mining is destroying unique ecosystems besides taking pollution to the deep sea. Rivers bring toxic industrial waste from hinterlands and, as in the case of stretches of Yamuna close to Delhi, make it impossible for fish to survive in their waters. Oil spills pollute hundreds of square miles. Increasing carbon emission is making sea water acidic and hence inhospitable to marine life. The consumption of plastic bags, hunting, poaching, the arrival of invasive species, have disastrous effects.

Container ships are killing a growing number of whales through accidents. Japan's murderous whaling expeditions are killing hundreds of whales. Global warming has worsened matters.

All this is the result of human activity, which has increased sharply as a result of growing human population, which, currently around 8.2 Billion, is, pace UN projections, set to peak at 10.3 Billion by the mid-1980s. According to another estimate, it is expected to exceed 10 Billion by 2060. It is not just their sustenance demands that are increasing with their numbers. Market capitalism, with advertising as its cutting edge, is manufacturing demands for ever new consumer goods and leisure activity.

The result is pressure on nature, resources and space. Animal habitats and forests, for example, are destroyed to make room for townships, factories and roads, and rail lines linking them. Trees are cut en masse to provide for lumber for construction, firewood and the furniture industry.

Not surprisingly, Ian Johnston's report in The Independent of the United Kingdom of 31 May, 2017, cited scientists writing in a special edition of the magazine, Nature, that humans were causing the sixth mass extinction of life on earth. Chris Jasurek's piece in The Epoch Times of October 31, 2018, cites a World Wildlife Fund report as stating that humans have killed about 60 per cent of animals on the planet since 1970.

> THE RESULT IS PRESSURE ON NATURE, RESOURCES AND SPACE. ANIMAL HABITATS AND FORESTS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE DESTROYED TO MAKE ROOM FOR TOWNSHIPS, FACTORIES AND ROADS, AND RAIL LINES LINKING THEM. TREES ARE CUT EN MASSE TO PROVIDE FOR LUMBER FOR CONSTRUCTION, FIREWOOD AND THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

The future of humans themselves is at stake. Population increase is an important cause of accelerating human activity. Referring to the soaring increase in global population under way, Desmond Morris predicts in *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal*, that time will come when "the densities we are now experiencing in our major cities would exist in every corner of the globe. The consequences of all this for all forms of wild animals is obvious. The effect it would have on our own species is equally depressing."

Morris adds shortly thereafter, "Long before our populations reach the levels envisaged above we shall have broken so many of the rules that govern our biological nature, that we shall have collapsed as a dominant species. Many exciting species have become extinct in the past and we are no exception." Those dismissing Morris' prediction as alarmist can argue that the human mind, which accounts not only for the survival of the species but its dominance over nature through technology, will find a way of preventing this. Nothing of the sort. Technology would remain a formulation on paper if the environment in which it has to be applied disappears.

More important, the devising and application of technologies would require continued and serious application of the mind. Paul Shepard writes in Thinking Animals: Animals and the Development of Human Intelligence, "the mind and its organ, the brain, are in reality that part of us most dependent on the survival of animals. We are connected to animals by sinews that link speech to rationality, insight, intuition, and consciousness." He states that people everywhere had "a profound, inescapable need for animals" which "are used in the growth and development of the human person, in those most priceless qualities which we lump together as 'mind.' Animal images and forms play a critical role in the shaping of personality, identity, and social consciousness. Animals are among the first inhabitants of the mind's eye. They are "basic to the development of speech and thought."

The progressive extinction of species will have a devastating effect on the human mind, and a progressive decline of the mind will have its own disastrous consequences. The mind is the home of reason and consciousness. As the basis of analytical thought, reason is the cutting edge of the mind.

Its possession has enabled humankind to create a civilisation tailored to cater to its needs, fancies and craving for luxuries, and based on the exploitation of all other species, who are considered inferior as they do not have the ability to reason. The argument will, of course, be that reason would enable people to recognise the deadly consequence of their way of life and retreat from the brink of the precipice.

Such optimism is unwarranted. Reason is an instrument, and not humankind's defining attribute, and is often overpowered by passion and the urge for self-indulgence. The consequences of global warming and what is to be done to combat it are well known. Yet people are unable to overcome the growing desire for creature comforts, which is so overwhelming that they are incapable of jettisoning it. Many now join the Taliban or other groups whose obscurantist doctrines do not stand rational interrogation—as many in Nazi Germany joined the Sturm Abteilung (SA) and the Schultz Staffein (SS) steeped in Hitler's racist doctrine. If the first instance reflects the failure of rationality, the second indicates the triumph of hatred over reason, Not many today realise that their human supremacist worldview and ruthless exploitation of non-human living beings is facilitating their own extinction. Instead of killing, they need to nurture and cherish all animals, birds, fish and plants. The second amendment to Protagoras' aphorism should transform it to read, "Humankind is the preserver and protector of all beings."

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. Views expressed are personal)

Himachal factors in growth aspirations amid fiscal challenges

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, who also oversees the finance portfolio, recently presented the 2025-26 state budget, aiming to balance fiscal prudence with developmental aspirations. The budget emphasises tourism expansion, green energy, and rural upliftment as key growth drivers. However, persistent financial challenges-including declining central grants, rising debt, and increasing revenue expenditure-continue to pose significant hurdles to fiscal management.

Plummeting central grants

Himachal Pradesh's fiscal distress stems from policy shifts and structural financial limitations. A major setback has been the sharp reduction in central grants, particularly the Revenue Deficit Grant (RDG), which dropped from ₹10,949 Crore in 2021-22 to ₹3,257 Crore in 2025-26. Additionally, the withdrawal of GST compensation has led to a cumulative revenue shortfall of ₹9,478 Crore, further exacerbating the fiscal deficit.

The state's debt burden has surged to ₹1,04,729 Crore, including ₹29,046 Crore in liabilities inherited from the previous BJP-led administration. Capital expenditure has also taken a significant hit, declining by 46.58 per cent from ₹8,485.83 Crore in 2024-25 to ₹3,941.85 Crore in 2025-26. This substantial reduction restricts long-term infrastructure investments, raising concerns about future economic expansion.

The revenue deficit stands at ₹361 Crore (0.83 per cent of GSDP), while the overall fiscal deficit remains high at ₹10,338 Crore (4.04 per cent of GSDP), reflecting ongoing financial strain despite expenditure control efforts. The slight reduction in the overall revenue deficit-from ₹6,486 Crore to ₹6,390 Crore-offers little relief, as fiscal imbalances continue to hinder development prospects.

In contrast, the Union Budget 2025-26 has allocated ₹11.21 Lakh Crore for capital expenditure, constituting 3.1 per cent of the national GDP, a 10.1 per cent increase over the previous year's revised estimate. This disparity in resource allocation leaves states like Himachal Pradesh struggling to secure adequate fiscal support.

Pathways to financial stability

Himachal Pradesh's fiscal crisis calls for a multi-pronged approach to revenue generation, ensuring financial stability while maintaining developmental momentum. Given the state's heavy reliance on central grants and borrowings, the government must diversify its revenue streams through effective taxation policies, asset monetisation, tourism expansion, and private sector participation. Below are key areas requiring focused action:

Enhancing tax compliance

Improving tax compliance and minimising revenue leakages are crucial for fiscal recovery. The state must focus on:

Expanding the tax base*:* Increasing the number of taxpayers through effective registration drives and stricter enforcement of tax laws.

Digital tax governance: Implementing advanced digital tracking systems to monitor tax collections, curb evasion, and streamline compliance.

Rationalising tax incentives: Reviewing and eliminating unnecessary tax exemptions that lead to revenue losses.

Strengthening enforcement: Enhancing audit mechanisms to detect tax evasion while promoting voluntary compliance.

Rationalising subsidies

Himachal Pradesh bears a high subsidy burden, which, while essential for social welfare, often leads to fiscal strain when not managed effectively. A targeted subsidy framework is necessary to balance welfare with financial sustainability. Key measures include:

KS TOMAR

Identifying non-essential subsidies: Phasing out benefits that primarily aid economically well-off sections while protecting critical subsidies for healthcare, education, and agriculture.

1. Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT): Ensuring subsidies reach intended beneficiaries directly, reducing middlemen and leakages.

2. Performance-based subsidies: Linking benefits to efficiency and sustainability, particularly in the power sector, where leakages are common.

3. Encouraging alternative funding models: Exploring Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) partnerships to support social welfare initiatives.

By curbing wasteful subsidies, the government can reallocate resources to productive investments, fostering long-term economic stability.

Monetising state assets

Himachal Pradesh possesses vast underutilised assets in land, tourism, hydroelectricity, and public infrastructure. Monetising these resources can generate substantial revenue.

a) Land monetisation*:* Leasing state-owned land for commercial and industrial use while ensuring sustainable development.

b) Maximising hydroelectric revenue*:* Enhancing revenue-sharing agreements with power producers and improving efficiency in the hydropower sector.

c) Revamping state properties*:* Converting unused government buildings into revenue-generating assets like hotels, business centers, or cultural hubs.

d) Auctioning mineral resources: Regulating and monetising mineral deposits through transparent and competitive bidding processes.

Effectively utilising state assets can reduce fiscal dependence on external sources and create sustainable revenue streams.

Seeking ecological compensation

As a major ecological contributor, Himachal Pradesh provides critical environmental services, including carbon sequestration and water conservation. However, these contributions often go uncompensated in national financial allocations. The state must aggressively advocate for ecological compensation, estimated at ₹90,000 Crore annually, through:

Financial incentives for forest conservation*:* Seeking compensatory grants from the central government.

i) Monetising carbon credits*:* Participating in national and international carbon trading markets.

ii) Eco-taxation*:* Imposing green taxes on businesses impacting the environment, with revenues directed toward conservation efforts.

iii) Securing environmental compensation will provide much-needed fiscal support while reinforcing Himachal's commitment to sustainability.

Boosting tourism revenue

Tourism is a cornerstone of Himachal Pradesh's economy, yet its revenue potential remains underutilised. The government must focus on:

i) Eco-tourism and adventure tourism: Developing sustainable resorts, trekking trails, and adventure sports facilities.

ii) Religious tourism infrastructure*:* Enhancing connectivity and amenities around pilgrimage sites.

iii) Cultural and heritage tourism: Restoring historical sites and promoting Himachal's unique culture and handicrafts.

iv) Better taxation and regulation: Ensuring proper taxation of tourism-related businesses to minimise revenue leakages.

v) With strategic investments and promotional efforts, tourism-driven revenue can significantly reduce dependence on external grants.

vi) Himachal Pradesh stands at a critical economic juncture where strategic action is essential to overcome fiscal distress.

By diversifying revenue streams, strengthening tax governance, optimising state resources, and fostering private sector collaboration, the state can navigate financial challenges while sustaining economic growth.

A well-implemented, multi-sectoral strategy will not only bridge fiscal deficits but also position Himachal Pradesh as a model of financial resilience.

(The writer is a strategic affairs columnist and senior political analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Phishing scams: Protect yourself from cyber threats!

Imagine waking up to an urgent email with the subject line "immediate action required: your bank account has been suspended!" or "your streaming subscription has been terminated—update your payment details now!" The message no doubt looks official, with the bank's or the streaming service's logo and a professional tone, warning that your account has been compromised or your payment details need to be updated immediately.

Panic sets in. You don't want to lose access to your hard-earned money or favourite shows. Without thinking twice, you click the link in the email, which takes you to what appears to be the official website. It prompts you to enter your login credentials, bank details, or social security number. The urgency of the message makes you act fast until you realise, too late, that you have just handed over your sensitive information to cybercriminals.

SHAINY SHARMA

This is a classic phishing scam, a deceptive tactic that is used by hackers to trick people into revealing personal and financial information by pretending to be a trusted entity. With a single click, all your accounts, confidentiality and finances could be at risk. Phishing is a cyber-attack technique where malicious actors or hackers attempt to trick people into sharing sensitive information, such as usernames, passwords, and financial details by using fake websites, emails, or messages to steal data such as credit or debit card details and login credentials. This form of social engineering exploits human psychology rather than technical vulnerabilities, making it a persistent and evolving threat in the digital age. There are numerous types of Phishing Attacks, such as:

1. Whaling*:* A specialised type of spear phishing aimed at high-profile individuals like CEOs or government officials, often involving sophisticated social engineering tactics.

2. E-mail phishing: The most common form, where attackers send fraudulent emails pretending to be reputable entities, such as banks or online services, urging recipients to click on malicious links or download harmful attachments.

3. Spear phishing*:* A targeted attack where hackers gather personal information about their victims to create personalised, convincing messages that appear legitimate.

4. Smishing and vishing*:* Smishing (SMS phishing) uses fraudulent text messages to lure victims, while vishing (voice phishing) involves phone calls from attackers impersonating trustworthy organisations.

5. Clone Phishing*:* Attackers replicate legitimate emails, replacing attachments or links with malicious versions to deceive recipients.

6. Website Spoofing*:* Fraudsters create fake websites that closely resemble legitimate ones to trick users into entering sensitive credentials.

The first and foremost way to prevent yourself from being a victim is to enable multi-factor authentication (MFA), even if credentials are compromised for it adds an extra layer of security. Organisations should conduct regular cybersecurity training to raise awareness about phishing tactics for their employees. Even, the Indian government has taken several initiatives such as the Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative, Digital India Campaign and many more to raise awareness about phishing and enhance cybersecurity among citizens, businesses and government institutions. The Indian Government regularly posts cybersecurity tips and scam alerts through platforms like Twitter (@Cyberdost) and Facebook and the Cyber Crime Helpline 1930 allows victims to report phishing attacks quickly are a few initiatives that aim to guide how to detect and avoid phishing attacks and educates users about common phishing tactics used especially in digital payments, banking frauds and fake emails.

As a safety concern, it would be beneficial to install and update antivirus and anti-phishing tools to detect malicious content. Before entering any personal information, one must ensure the website's URL begins with "https://" and is authentic, as attackers often use slight variations of legitimate domains. It is crucial to look for red flags such as poor grammar, urgent requests and generic greetings that indicate phishing attempts.

If you fall victim to a phishing scam, act quickly to minimise damage and protect your personal and financial information. You may:

i) Immediately turn off your Wi-Fi or unplug your internet connection to prevent malware from spreading or further data theft. Report the attack to the relevant authorities or IT departments.

ii) If you entered your login credentials on a phishing site, then change the password of the compromised account immediately, followed by updating other accounts that use the same or similar passwords.

iii) If you entered banking details or made a payment, then call your bank or credit card provider immediately explain the situation, and Request to block or freeze your account if necessary.

There is no denying that phishing remains a prevalent cybersecurity threat, but with vigilance and proactive measures, individuals and organisations can mitigate risks. As cybercriminals refine their techniques, staying informed and implementing robust security practices is essential to safeguard personal and professional data from phishing attacks. Taking the mentioned steps immediately after falling victim to a phishing scam can help minimise financial and data loss while preventing further damage.

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

Travel disrupted as fire shuts down Heathrow Airport

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

A large fire near London's Heathrow Airport knocked out power on Friday to Europe's busiest flight hub, forcing it to shut and disrupting global travel for hundreds of thousands of passengers. Heathrow said it didn't know when power would be restored — raising the possibility that the shutdown would last longer than just the day, as previously expected.

At least 1,350 flights to and from Heathrow were affected, flight tracking service FlightRadar 24 said, and the impact was likely to last several days as passengers try to reschedule their travel and airlines work to get planes and crew to the right places. Authorities do not know what caused the fire but so far found have no evidence it was suspicious.

Residents in west London described hearing a large explosion, followed by a fireball and clouds of smoke, when the blaze ripped through the electrical substation near the airport. Some 120 flights were in the air when the closure was announced, with some turned around and others diverted to Gatwick Airport outside London, Charles de Gaulle Airport near Paris or Ireland's Shannon Airport, tracking services showed. Lawrence Hayes was three-quarters of the way to London from New York when Virgin Atlantic announced they were being diverted to Glasgow.

"It was a red-eye flight and I'd already had a full day, so I don't even know how long I've been up for," Hayes told the BBC as he was getting off the plane in Scotland.

"Luckily I managed to get hold of my wife and she's kindly booked me a train ticket to get back to Euston, but it's going to be an incredibly long day."

Heathrow is one of the world's busiest airports for international travel. It had its busiest January on record earlier this year, with more than 6.3 million passengers, up more than 5 per cent from the same period last year. Still, the disruption on Friday fell short of the one caused by the 2010 eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajokull volcano, which spewed clouds of ash into the atmosphere and created trans-Atlantic air travel chaos for months.

Unclear what caused the fire but foul play not suspected: It was too early to determine what sparked the huge blaze about 2 miles (3 kilometers) from the airport, but there's "no suggestion" of foul play, Energy Secretary Ed Miliband said.

This photo provided by London Fire Brigade, shows a fire at the North Hyde electrical substation, which caught fire Thursday night and lead to a closure of Heathrow Airport in London, on Friday AP/PTI

The Metropolitan Police force said counterterrorism detectives were leading the investigation because of their ability to find the cause quickly and because of the location of the electrical substation fire and its impact on critical national infrastructure. Miliband said the fire, which took seven hours to control, also knocked out a backup power supply to the airport. Heathrow said in a statement that it had no choice but to close the airport for the day. "We expect significant disruption over the coming days, and passengers should not travel to the airport under any circumstances until the airport reopens," the airport said.

The fire's widespread impact on travel led to criticism that Britain was ill prepared for disaster or some type of attack if a single blaze could shut down Europe's busiest airport. "The UK's critical national infrastructure is not sufficiently hardened for anywhere near the level it would need to be at to give us confidence this won't happen again," said Alan Mendoza, the executive director of the Henry Jackson Society, a security think tank.

"If one fire can shut down Heathrow's primary systems and then apparently the backup systems, as well, it tells you something's badly wrong with our system of management of such disasters."

Tom Wells, a spokesperson for Prime Minister Keir Starmer, acknowledged that authorities had questions to answer and said a rigorous investigation was needed to make sure "this scale of disruption does not happen again".

Heathrow — where the UK government plans to build a third runway — was at the heart of a shorter disruption in 2023 when Britain's air traffic control system was hit by a breakdown that slowed takeoffs and landings across the UK on one of the busiest travel days of the year.

Disruption could last days: Though the fire has been brought under control, the airport said in a statement it does not have "clarity on when power may be reliably restored". It said it expects "significant disruption over the coming days and passengers should not travel to the airport under any circumstances until the airport reopens".

Heathrow earlier said the airport was not expected to reopen until Saturday.

Sudan military says it has retaken Khartoum's Republican Palace

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Cairo

Sudan's military said on Friday it retook the Republican Palace in Khartoum, the last heavily guarded bastion of rival paramilitary forces in the capital, after nearly two years of fighting.

The seizure of the Republican Palace, surrounded by government ministries, represents a major symbolic victory for Sudan's military against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. However, it likely doesn't mean the end of the war as the RSF holds territory in Sudan's western Darfur region and elsewhere.

Social media videos showed its soldiers inside giving the date as the 21st day of Ramadan, the holy Muslim fasting month, which corresponds to Friday. A Sudanese military officer wearing a captain's epaulettes made the announcement in the video, and confirmed the troops were inside the compound.

The palace appeared to be partly in ruins, with soldiers' steps crunching broken tiles underneath their boots. Soldiers carrying assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenade launchers chanted: "God is the greatest!"

Khaled al-Aiser, Sudan's information minister, said the military had retaken the palace in a post on the social platform X. "Today the flag is raised, the palace is back and the journey continues until victory is complete," he wrote.

Palace's fall a symbolic and strategic moment: The fall of the Republican Palace, a compound along the Nile River that was the seat of government before the war erupted and is immortalised on Sudanese banknotes and postage stamps, marks another battlefield gain for Sudan's military. It has made steady advances in recent months under army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan.

It means the rival Rapid Support Forces, under Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, have been mostly expelled from the capital, Khartoum, after Sudan's war began in April 2023. Sporadic gunfire could be heard throughout the capital Friday, though it wasn't clear if it involved fighting or was celebratory.

Brig Gen Nabil Abdullah, a spokesperson for the Sudanese military, described its troops as holding the palace, surrounding ministry buildings and the Arab Market to the south of the palace.

Khartoum International Airport, only some 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) southeast of the palace, has been held by the RSF since the start of the war.

The RSF did not immediately acknowledge the loss, which likely won't stop the fighting as the paramilitary force and its allies still hold territory elsewhere in Sudan. Late Thursday, the RSF claimed it seized control of the Sudanese city of al-Maliha, a strategic desert city in North Darfur near the borders of Chad and Libya. Sudan's military has acknowledged fighting around al-Maliha, but has not said it lost the city.

Al-Maliha is around 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the city of El Fasher, which remains held by the Sudanese military despite near-daily strikes by the surrounding RSF. The head of the UN children's agency has said the conflict created the world's largest and humanitarian crisis. The war has killed more than 28,000 people, forced millions to flee their homes and left some families eating grass in a desperate attempt to survive as famine sweeps parts of the country. Other estimates suggest a far higher death toll.

The Republican Palace had been the seat of power during the British colonization of Sudan. It also saw some of the first independent Sudanese flags raised over the country in 1956. It also had been the main office of Sudan's president and other top officials. The Sudanese military have long targeted the palace and its grounds, shelling and firing on the compound.

Sudan has faced years of chaos and war: Sudan, a nation in northeastern Africa, has been unstable since a popular uprising forced the removal of longtime autocratic President Omar al-Bashir in 2019. A short-lived transition to democracy was derailed when Burhan and Dagalo led a military coup in 2021. The RSF and Sudan's military then began fighting each other in 2023.

Burhan's forces, including Sudan's military and allied militias, have advanced against the RSF since the start of this year. They retook a key refinery north of Khartoum. They then pushed in on RSF positions around the capital itself. The fighting has led to an increase in civilian casualties.

Al-Bashir faces charges at the International Criminal Court over carrying out a genocidal campaign in the early 2000s in the western Darfur region with the Janjaweed, the precursor to the RSF. Rights groups and the UN accuse the RSF and allied Arab militias of again attacking ethnic African groups in this war.

Since the war began, both the Sudanese military and the RSF have faced allegations of human rights abuses. Before US President Joe Biden left office, the State Department declared the RSF are committing genocide. The military and the RSF have denied committing abuses.

Indonesia's Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki volcano erupts, prompting alert level to be raised

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jakarta

The Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki volcano in south-central Indonesia erupted three times into Friday, sending an ash column 8,000 metres (26,200 feet) high and prompting authorities to expand the danger zone around the volcano.

The volcano on the remote island of Flores in East Nusa Tenggara province has had hundreds of earthquakes and visible volcanic activity has significantly increased in the last seven days. After the three eruptions late Thursday and early Friday, the volcano was quiet during the day. Seismic activity monitored from the observation post in Wulangitang showed a decline.

Authorities raised the eruption alert to the highest level and expanded the danger zone from 7 kilometres (4.5 miles) to 8 kilometres (5 miles) from the crater. No new evacuations were immediately reported. Several airlines cancelled flights between Australia and Indonesia's tourist island of Bali due to the eruption, while other international and domestic flights to the island have been delayed.

Residents were warned to be vigilant about heavy rainfall triggering lava flows in rivers originating from the volcano, Indonesia's geology agency said in a statement. An eruption of Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki in November killed nine people and injured dozens. The 1,584-metre mountain is a twin volcano with Mount Lewotobi Perempuan in the Flores Timur district. Indonesia is an archipelago of 270 million people with frequent seismic activity. It has 120 active volcanos and sits along the "Ring of Fire," a horseshoe-shaped series of seismic fault lines encircling the Pacific Basin.

N Korea tests new missiles as it threatens strong steps against US-S Korea drills

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

North Korea said on Friday it test-launched new anti-aircraft missiles, as its military threatened unspecified grave steps against the US and South Korea over their joint military drills that it views as an invasion rehearsal. The official Korean Central News Agency said that leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the tests Thursday and called the missiles involved "another major defense weapons system" for North Korea.

The missile launches, North Korea's sixth weapons testing activity this year, occurred on the same day that the US and South Korean militaries concluded their annual Freedom Shield command post exercise. The 11-day training was the allies' first major joint military exercises since the inauguration of President Donald Trump in January, and the two countries held diverse field training exercises alongside the Freedom Shield drills.

US and South Korean officials describe their combined military drills as defensive in nature, but North Korea slams them as a major security threat. Hours after this year's Freedom Shield training began on March 10, North Korea fired several ballistic missiles into the sea.

On Friday, the North Korea's Defence Ministry alleged the recent US-South Korean drills involved simulations to destroy underground tunnels in the North to remove its nuclear weapons. An unidentified ministry spokesperson said the US and South Korea would face consequences if they perform similar provocative actions again. "The accumulated reckless military moves of the US and the ROK, seized with the daydream that they can jeopardize the sovereignty and security of a nuclear weapons state, can undoubtedly bring the gravest consequences they do not want," the spokesperson said in a statement carried in KCNA. ROK is the Republic of Korea, South Korea's official name.

North Korea often churns out warlike rhetoric and threats of attacks when the US and South Korea militaries conduct big drills. South Korea's Unification Ministry on Friday warned North Korea not to use its defensive drills with the US as a pretext to launch provocations.

Trump has said he's willing to reach out to Kim to revive their nuclear diplomacy, but North Korea hasn't made any public responses to Trump's overture. Many experts say Kim, now preoccupied with his support of Russia's war efforts against Ukraine with supply of troops and conventional weapons, won't likely embrace Trump's outreach anytime soon, but could seriously consider it when the war ends.

Kim and Trump met three times in 2018-19 to discuss North Korea's possible nuclear disarmament, but their diplomacy eventually fell apart due to disputes over US-led economic sanctions on North Korea. Russian state news agency Tass reported Friday that Russian Security Council Secretary Sergey Shoigu has arrived in Pyongyang and plans to meet with Kim. It gave no further details.

In 2023, when Shoigu, then a defense minister, traveled to North Korea, Kim gave him a personal tour of a North Korean arms exhibition in what outside critics likened to a sales pitch. In September 2024, Shoigu, then with the new security council post, went to North Korea again for a meeting with Kim, and the two discussed expanding cooperation, according to North Korea's state media.

Turkiye opposition urges peaceful protests over Istanbul mayor's arrest despite bans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Istanbul

The leader of Turkiye's main opposition on Friday renewed a call on supporters to take to the streets for peaceful demonstrations against the arrest of Istanbul's mayor and top rival to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, even as authorities widened a ban on protests and criticized the call as irresponsible.

Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu was arrested in a dawn raid on his residence on Wednesday over alleged corruption and terror links, escalating a crackdown on opposition figures and dissenting voices. Several other prominent figures, including two district mayors, were also detained.

Many view the arrest as a politically driven attempt to remove a popular opposition figure and key challenger to Erdogan from the next presidential race, currently scheduled for 2028. Government officials reject claims that legal actions against opposition figures are politically motivated and insist that the courts operate independently.

Since Imamoglu's arrest, thousands of people have gathered at Istanbul's city hall for night-time rallies, and clashes have erupted between demonstrators and police in Istanbul, the capital, Ankara, and Turkey's third largest city, Izmir.

The most violent clash took place at Ankara's Middle East Technical University, where police deployed tear gas and water cannons to disperse the demonstration and students claimed rubber bullets were used. The government has denied the use of the bullets. On Friday, authorities in Ankara and Izmir announced a five-day prohibition on demonstrations, following a similar ban imposed earlier by the Istanbul governor's office. The bans came after the country's justice minister acknowledged people's right to demonstrate but said street protests amid ongoing judicial investigations were unacceptable.

Russian drones strike Ukrainian city of Odesa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv

Russian drones pummelled the Ukrainian Black Sea port city of Odesa, injuring three people and sparking massive fires, officials said on Friday, an attack that underlined Moscow's intention to pursue aerial attacks even as it agreed to temporarily halt strikes on energy facilities.

The strike came shortly before Czech Republic President Peter Pavel visited Odesa early Friday morning and held meetings with the city's leaders and officials from other southern regions.

"This is another reminder to the whole world: the war continues and Ukraine continues to fight," the head of the Odesa region, Oleh Kiper, said in a statement. He reported blazes at at least three locations after the attack late Thursday. "Civilian infrastructure, commercial facilities are on fire, cars damaged," Kiper said.

Over 70 people and 20 fire engines were involved in extinguishing what the emergency services called "massive fires".

In another attack, Russian glide bombs injured at least six people, including a child, in the Zaporizhzhia region overnight Thursday to Friday. Regional head Ivan Fedorov published photos showing fire fighters extinguishing flames at multiple damaged residential buildings. The Ukrainian air force reported that Russia fired 214 exploding drones and decoys in the latest wave of attacks. It said 114 of them were intercepted and another 81 were jammed. Russia's Defence Ministry said air defences shot down 43 Ukrainian drones, 34 of them over the Volgograd region and others over Rostov, Kursk and Belgorod regions. The authorities didn't report any casualties or significant damage.

Meanwhile, a massive blaze at an oil depot in the Krasnodar region has continued to rage since it was hit by a Ukrainian drone attack late Wednesday.

Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after US President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders this week, though it remained to be seen what possible targets would be off limits to attack.

After a roughly hourlong call with Trump on Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told reporters that "technical" talks in Saudi Arabia this weekend would seek to resolve what types of infrastructure would be protected from attack under the agreement.

The three sides appeared to hold starkly different views about what the deal covered. While the White House said "energy and infrastructure" would be covered, the Kremlin declared that the agreement referred more narrowly to "energy infrastructure". Zelenskyy said he would also like railways and ports to be protected.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov emphasised on Friday that the agreement reached between Trump and Putin referred only to energy facilities, adding that the Russian military is fulfilling Putin's order to halt such attacks for 30 days. "The Russian military are currently refraining from strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure in accordance with the agreement reached between Russia and the United States," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

Army captain, 10 terrorists killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Peshwar

A Pakistani Army captain and at least 10 terrorists associated with a banned outfit were killed during a gunfight in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) has said.

The intelligence-based operation (IBO) was conducted on Thursday following reports of the presence of terrorists in the area, a statement from the military's media wing said.

It said that during the intense fire exchange, Captain Hasnain Akhtar fought gallantly and made the ultimate sacrifice, leading his troops from the front.

"Hasnain was a brave officer and renowned for his courage and bold and daring actions during previous operations," it said. The ISPR said weapons and ammunition were seized from the killed terrorists who were involved in numerous attacks against law enforcement agencies as well as target killing of innocent civilians. It further said, "A sanitisation operation is being conducted in the area and the security forces are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country. Such sacrifices of brave young officers further strengthen our resolve."

The country has been reeling under increased terrorist attacks especially targeting law enforcers and security forces since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021, particularly in the bordering provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

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

The data revealed that at least 74 militant attacks were recorded nationwide, resulting in 91 fatalities, including 35 security personnel, 20 civilians, and 36 militants. Another 117 individuals sustained injuries, including 53 security forces personnel, 54 civilians, and 10 militants. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained the worst-affected province, followed by Balochistan. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's settled districts, militants carried out 27 attacks, resulting in 19 fatalities, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and two militants.

The tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (erstwhile Fata) witnessed 19 attacks, resulting in 46 deaths, including 13 security personnel, eight civilians, and 25 militants.

Top Russian official visits North Korea to meet Kim

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

A top Russian security official travelled to North Korea on Friday to meet leader Kim Jong Un, after North Korea recently reportedly sent additional troops to Russia to support its war against Ukraine. A brief dispatch by Russia's state-run news agency Tass reported that Sergey Shoigu, Russia's Security Council secretary, had arrived in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, and plans to meet top North Korean officials including Kim. It gave no further details including what Shoigu would discuss with Kim.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency confirmed the arrival of a Russian delegation led by Shoigu but didn't provide details on the purpose of their visit. Shoigu's visit comes after Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders, though it remained to be seen when it might take effect and what possible targets would be off limits to attack.

North Korea has been supplying a vast amount of conventional weapons to Russia, and last fall it sent about 10,000 to 12,000 troops to Russia as well, according to US, South Korean and Ukraine intelligence officials. In late February, South Korea's spy agency said North Korea appeared to have sent additional troops to Russia. South Korean media put the number of newly sent North Korean soldiers at about 1,000 to 3,000. South Korea, the US and others suspect North Korea is receiving economic and military assistance from Russia in return for providing weapons and troops. Many experts say North Korea will likely ramp up its support of Russia to win as much benefits as possible from Russia before the war ends. Shoigu's trip could be related to Kim's possible trip to Russia, some observers say.

This photo provided by the North Korean government shows Russia's Security Council secretary, Sergey Shoigu, right, who arrived at Pyongyang Airport being greeted by Party Secretary Park Chung-cheon on Friday, March 21, 2025 AP

In June 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Pyongyang and signed a major mutual defense treaty with Kim. At the time, Putin invited Kim to visit Moscow.

In 2023, when Shoigu, then a defense minister, traveled to North Korea, Kim gave him a personal tour of a North Korean arms exhibition in what outside critics likened to a sales pitch. In September 2024, Shoigu, then with the new security council post, went to North Korea again for a meeting with Kim, and the two discussed expanding cooperation, according to North Korea's state media.

Earlier Friday, KCNA said Kim oversaw the test-launches of new anti-aircraft missiles the previous day. It cited Kim as calling the missiles "another major defense weapons system" for North Korea.

The missile launches, North Korea's sixth weapons testing activity this year, occurred on the same day that the US and South Korean militaries concluded their annual training that North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal.

Judge blocks deportation of Indian student at Georgetown University

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

A US federal judge has blocked the deportation of an Indian student at Georgetown University who was arrested after federal authorities accused him of "actively spreading Hamas propaganda".

Badar Khan Suri is a postdoctoral fellow at the Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at the Edmund A Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington DC.

In a court order dated March 20, United States District Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles said, "It is ordered that petitioner shall not be removed from the United States unless and until the court issues a contrary order."

A senior Department of Homeland Security spokesperson earlier said in a statement to PTI that "Suri was a foreign exchange student at Georgetown University actively spreading Hamas propaganda and promoting anti-semitism on social media. Suri has close connections to a known or suspected terrorist, who is a senior advisor to Hamas.

"The Secretary of State issued a determination on March 15, 2025 that Suri's activities and presence in the United States rendered him deportable."

Suri's lawyer Hassan Ahmad had filed a petition for a writ of habeas corpus on March 18. According to the petition, the Department of Homeland Security had arrested and charged Suri with "removability" on March 17.

At the time of filing, Suri alleged he was being detained at the Farmville Detention Center in Farmville, Virginia, Giles' order had noted. Suri's lawyer said he and his team are working "diligently" to secure his client's removal from the detention facility. "We welcome Judge Giles' ruling," Ahmad said in a statement to CNN. "It is the first due process Dr Suri has received since he was snatched away from his family on Monday night."

A report in Politico had said that Suri, who was studying and teaching on a student visa, was "detained by federal immigration authorities amid the Trump administration's crackdown on student activists whom the government accuses of opposing American foreign policy." The report said that "masked agents" arrested Suri from outside his home in Virginia Monday night.

Suri's lawyer said in the petition that he is being punished "because of the Palestinian heritage of his wife — who is a US citizen — and because the government suspects that he and his wife oppose US foreign policy toward Israel."

The petition says the couple has "long been doxxed and smeared" on anonymously run, far-right websites due to their support for Palestinian rights. The petition adds that Suri's wife Mapheze Saleh has been alleged to have "ties with Hamas" and once worked for Al Jazeera. The Politico report cited a 2018 Indian newspaper article that had said that Saleh's father, Ahamed Yousef, was a former deputy foreign minister in the Hamas government in Gaza.

In the newspaper article, Suri is quoted as saying that "My father-in-law left the Hamas government after its five-year term ended and there were no fresh elections."

Suri's father-in-law told The New York Times that his son-in-law was not involved in any "political activism," including on behalf of Hamas. The Politico report said that Suri's lawyer has filed a lawsuit for his immediate release.

"The agents identified themselves as being with the Department of Homeland Security and told him the government had revoked his visa," the lawsuit says, according to the Politico report.

The report added that according to Suri's petition, he was put in "deportation proceedings under the same rarely used provision of immigration law" that the government has invoked to try to deport Mahmoud Khalil, the Columbia University graduate and legal permanent resident arrested for his role in leading campus protests at Columbia against Israel.

The petition further notes that Suri has no criminal record and has not been charged with a crime. According to his profile on the website of Georgetown University, Suri completed his PhD in Peace & Conflict Studies from Nelson Mandela Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi in 2020. He wrote his thesis on "Transitional Democracy, Divided Societies and Prospects for Peace: A Study of State Building in Afghanistan and Iraq" in which he underlined the complexities involved in introducing democracy in ethnically diverse societies; as well as challenges to project state building.

He has travelled extensively in the conflict zones of India, Pakistan, Balochistan in Iran, Iran, Turkey, Kurdish Areas in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and its southern region, Egypt and Palestine. The Politico report quoted a statement from a Georgetown spokesperson as saying that Suri is an "Indian national who was duly granted a visa to enter the United States to continue his doctoral research on peace-building in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Israeli hostage freed after 491 days questions UN, Red Cross

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

Freed Israeli hostage Eli Sharabi, who was beaten, chained and starved while held for 491 days by Hamas, expressed his anger during an appearance at the UN Security Council on Thursday for having to suffer for so long and worry every day about being killed.

"Where was the United Nations? Where was the Red Cross? Where was the world?" Sharabi asked. He challenged the UN's most powerful body: "If you stand for humanity prove it" by bringing home the 59 hostages still in Gaza, many of whom are believed to be dead.

The fate of the remaining hostages became more uncertain after Israel on Tuesday ended a six-week break in the fighting that had allowed for the return of some hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Sharabi said the council talked about the need to get humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza, but he saw Hamas militants eating stolen food from dozens of boxes marked with UN emblems while the hostages starved. They were given maybe a piece of pita and a sip of tea a day, and an occasional dry date, he said.

When he was released on Feb 8, Sharabi said he weighed 44 kilos (about 97 pounds) — less than the weight of his youngest daughter, who was killed along with his wife and older daughter in Hamas' surprise attack in southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, along with about 1,200 others. He was among 251 people taken hostage. The United States in November vetoed a UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire in Gaza because it was not linked to an immediate release of the hostages.

The Palestinians and their supporters then went to the 193-member General Assembly, which adopted a resolution in December demanding a ceasefire and reiterating its demand for the release of the hostages. Unlike Security Council resolutions, though, those passed by the General Assembly are nonbinding.

The ceasefire that went into effect in January was shattered on Tuesday with surprise airstrikes on Gaza that killed more than 400 Palestinians, one of the highest death tolls in the nearly 18-month war. Gaza's Health Ministry said most victims were women and children.

Sharabi's appearance before the council, the second by a freed hostage, followed an Israeli request last week for a meeting on the plight of the hostages.

Britain's deputy ambassador James Kariuki called Sharabi's suffering "beyond the imagination" and said "Hamas must be held accountable for their despicable actions."

But Kariuki also said the UK condemns Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz's "warning of the total destruction of Gaza." Britain calls for the rapid resurgence of aid to Gaza, an investigation into allegations of sexual and gender-based violence against Palestinian detainees by Israeli forces, and an urgent return to the ceasefire deal, he said.

France's new UN ambassador, Jérôme Bonnafont, expressed his country's deepest condolences to Sharabi but also condemned the resumption of Israel's bombing, saying it will not ensure the release of hostages, and demanded an end to Israel's humanitarian blockade of Gaza.

Russia's deputy UN ambassador Dmitry Polyansky told the council, "Our hearts were filled with sorrow as we listened to the tragic story of Mr Eli Sharabi," adding "such brutality can have no justification."

Polyansky criticized Israel's leaders for not moving to phase 2 of the ceasefire deal, which calls for the release of all hostages and a permanent end to the fighting. He said it's difficult to discuss the future when Israel's military and political leaders appear to have made the choice in favor of war.

Israel's top court halts Netanyahu's dismissal of internal security chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jerusalem

Israel's top court on Friday ordered a temporary halt to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's dismissal of the country's domestic security chief until his appeal can be heard.

The Supreme Court's decision came hours after Netanyahu's Cabinet unanimously approved his request to fire the head of the Shin Bet internal security service, Ronen Bar. The court said it was delaying the firing until an appeal could be heard no later than April 8. Netanyahu's office had said Bar's dismissal was effective April 10, but that it could come earlier if a replacement was found.

Israel's attorney general has ruled that the Cabinet has no legal basis to dismiss Bar. A Shin Bet report into Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack that prompted the war acknowledged failures by the security agency. But it also said policies by Netanyahu's government created the conditions for the attack.

White House rescinds executive order targeting prominent law firm

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

President Donald Trump has rescinded an executive order targeting a prominent international law firm after it pledged to review its hiring practices and to provide tens of millions of dollars in free legal services to support certain White House initiatives. The move follows a meeting between Trump and Brad Karp, the chairman of the law firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Garrison & Wharton, over the White House order issued last week.

The order, the latest in a series of similar actions targeting law firms whose lawyers have provided legal work that Trump disagrees with, threatened to suspend active security clearances of attorneys at Paul, Weiss and to terminate any federal contracts the firm has. It singled out the work of Mark Pomerantz, who previously worked at the firm and who oversaw an investigation by the Manhattan District Attorney's office into Trump's finances before Trump became president.

To avoid those consequences, the White House said Paul, Weiss had agreed to "take on a wide range of pro bono matters that represent the full spectrum of political viewpoints of our society," to disavow the use of diversity, equity and inclusion considerations in its hiring and promotion decisions and to dedicate the equivalent of USD 40 million in free legal services to support Trump administration policies on issues including assistance for veterans and countering anti-Semitism.

In a statement issued by the White House, Karp said: "We are gratified that the President has agreed to withdraw the Executive Order concerning Paul, Weiss. We look forward to an engaged and constructive relationship with the President and his Administration." The firm becomes the latest corporate target to make concessions to the president to avoid his ire. Meta and ABC made settlement payments to Trump's future presidential library to end lawsuits filed by Trump. Other tech and financial firms have publicly rolled back DEI programs in line with Trump's policy interests.

Jury convicts two men of plotting to assassinate Iranian American journalist

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

A jury has convicted two men of plotting to assassinate Iranian American journalist Masih Alinejad at her home in New York City in a murder-for-hire scheme that prosecutors said was financed by Iran's government. The verdict was returned at a federal court in New York on Thursday, ending a two-week trial that featured dramatic testimony from a hired gunman and Alinejad, an author, activist and contributor to Voice of America.

Prosecutors said the convicted men, Rafat Amirov and Polad Omarov, were crime bosses in the Russian mob. Their lawyers argued that they were innocent and trial evidence was flawed. Alinejad, 48, was targeted by Iran for her online campaigns encouraging women there to record videos of themselves exposing their hair in violation of edicts requiring they cover it in public. Iran offered USD 500,000 for a July 2022 killing of Alinejad after efforts to harass, smear and intimidate Alinejad failed, prosecutors said.

American officials have accused Iran of backing several assassination plots in the United States, including against President Donald Trump when he was campaigning last year. Tehran has denied being behind any plots to kill people in the US. Alinejad, who was not in court, told The Associated Press she cried when she learned about the verdict. "I am relieved that after nearly three years, the men who plotted to kill me have been found guilty. But make no mistake, the real masterminds of this crime are still in power in Iran," she said.

Alinejad testified last week that she came to the United States in 2009 after she was banned from covering Iran's disputed presidential election and the newspaper where she worked was shut down. Establishing herself in New York City, she built an online audience of millions and launched her "My Stealthy Freedom" campaign, telling Iranian women to send photos and videos exposing of them exposing their hair when the morality police were not around.

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that I, SHAKEEL AHMAD S/o SHRI NIHAL AHMAD R/o B-34, THE CITY CGHS LTD. (KNOWN AS CITY APARTMENTS), PLOT No 21, VASUNDHARA ENCLAVE DELHI-110096, original allottee/owner of flat No.B-34, THE CITY CGHS LTD. (KNOWN AS CITY APARTMENTS), PLOT No.21, VASUNDHARA ENCLAVE, DELHI-110096, have applied for conversion of the said flat from leasehold to freehold in DDA. All Original documents i.e. Share Certificate, Allotment Letter and possession Letter etc. issued by the City CGHS Ltd. in my name, has been misplaced/lost. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in the Police Station Crime Branch. New Delhi, vide FIR/NCR No LR 2132028/2024 dated 05/08/2024. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No 9811936757. within seven days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to the Dy. Director. (GH) or Director (RL), Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

(SHAKEEL AHMAD)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Smt. Savita W/o Sh. Ravindra is the owner of Built-Up Property land area measuring 25 Sq. Yds., Out of Khasra No. 171/4, Bearing Property No. B-166, Situated at Village Ghonda Gujran Banger in the Abadi of Mandir Marg North Ghonda Illaqa Shahdara Delhi 110053, executed by Sh. Ravindra Alias Ravindra Kumar, same to be finance by SMFG India Home Finance Company Ltd., General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest/title in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present. **Rahul Raj Pathak, Advocate**
SG Associates (Law Firm)
FF 18, Lotus Pond Plaza,Vaibhav Khand,Indirapuram,Ghaziabad UP.
E-mail: sgassociatespl@gmail.com, Ph: 7011172764, 01204440300

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mr. Subhash Garg S/o Mr. Gopi Ram Garg is the owner of Portion of Built-up Property No. C-2, area measuring 50 Sq. yards i.e. 41.80 Sq. Yards, out of Khasra No. 80, 84, 77, situated in the area of Village Sarai Peepal Thala, Mahindra Park, Delhi., by virtue of Notarized GPA dated 28.01.2010, executed by Mr. Mukesh Chand Jain, same to be finance by SMFG India Home Finance Company Ltd., General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest/title in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present. **Rahul Raj Pathak, Advocate**
SG Associates (Law Firm)
FF 18, Lotus Pond Plaza,Vaibhav Khand,Indirapuram,Ghaziabad U.P.
E-mail: sgassociatespl@gmail.com, Ph: 7011172764, 01204440300

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of **MR. RAJEEV KUMAR** with respect to **PROPERTY BEARING NO. L2A/60, AREA MEASURING 66.66 SQ. YDS., OUT OF KHASRA NO. 58/11, SITUATED AT MOHAN GARDEN BLOCK-L-II, NEAR GEETA MANDIR, UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110059**; which is presently owned by **Mrs. Ranju Singh** had purchased the subject property from **Mr. Harminder Pal vide Regd. General Power of Attorney (with consideration Amount), Agreement to sell and Will dated 13.08.2010.** Now, **MR. RAJEEV KUMAR** intend to purchase the same and mortgage against the financial assistance from **ADITYA BIRLA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED.** To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim /right/title/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within **7 days** from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. **Lucem Legal LLP**
Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049,Contact # 011-40046316

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of **DEEPAK CHADHA** with respect to **Built-up Third floor, with roof rights part of Property bearing No. 376, in Block B, area measuring 300 Sq., Yds, in the layout plan of Janta Co-operative House Building Society Limited, known as Meera Bagh, New Delhi**; which is presently owned by **Mrs. Madhu Mittal** had purchased the subject property from **Mr. Bharat Bhushan Mittal vide Sale Deed Regd. as Document No. 7522, Book no. I, Volume No. 10961, on page 141-146, dated 20.06.2003, SRO-II New Delhi.** Now, **DEEPAK CHADHA** intend to purchase the same and mortgage against the financial assistance from **IDBI BANK LIMITED.** To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim /right/title/interest/creatingmortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within **7 days** from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. **Lucem Legal LLP**
Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049,Contact # 011-40046316

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
Mechanized Coal Handling Plant
No.: EM/MCHP/Tender-01/2025/103
Date: 19.03.2025

Corrigendum-II to e-Tender Call Notice No. EM/MCHP-04/2025 for the work "Design, Fabrication, Supply, Erection and Commissioning of one no. Stacker of 4000 TPH Capacity"

The date of submission of bids and opening for the above e-tender call notice are hereby extended as follows:
1. Bid Submission end date : 02.04.2025, 17:15 hrs.
2. Bid Opening date : 04.04.2025, 10:00 hrs.

All Other terms and Conditions of the Original tender remain unchanged.

The prescribed Tender Document is available in the website: **https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app** for online bidding.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer (Mech.)
Mechanized Coal Handling Plant, Paradip Port Authority.
PPA/PR/70/2024-2025
21/03/2025

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is informed to all concern that Sh. Prabhu Dayal S/o Late Sh. Daulat Ram and Sh. Bhuley Ram S/o Late Khiman Singh R/o H. No.- 199 2nd floor Jeevan Nagar, Ashram, Delhi-110014 are the co-owner of Plot No. D-127 Sector-105 Noida. Sh. Prabhu Dayal has executed a Registered WILL of his part in the said above Plot in favour of Sh. Bhoop Singh S/o Sh. Bhuley Ram R/o Village Garhi Chaukhandi Noida Gautam Budh Nagar U.P. Dated 28/11/2018 in Book No. 3 Volume No. 1110 on Page No. 367 to 380, Document no. 2532 at Sub. Registrar (III), Noida. Sh. Prabhu Dayal has expired on 27/10/2019.
Now the share of Sh. Prabhu Dayal in said above Plot is going to transfer through registered WILL in favour of Sh. Bhoop Singh S/o Sh. Bhuley Ram R/o Village Garhi Chaukhandi Noida Gautam Budh Nagar U.P. If anyone has/have any objection, he/she may file his/her objection along with the sufficient proof in the Residential Plot Department of NOIDA Authority, Sector 6 Noida within the 30 days from the date of publication of this notice.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of **Mrs. Sheela** with respect to **Entire Ground Floor without Terrace Roof Rights, measuring about 55 sq. yards i.e. 45.98 sq. meters, Part of Property Bearing No. 393, Ward No. XVI, Gali No. 13, Situated at Faiz Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi;** which is presently owned by **Mrs. Bimla Juneja** had purchased the subject property from **Mrs. Lata Jaggi & Mr. Sahil Kumar Jaggi through Sale Deed dated 06.06.2013, Document No. 4259, Book No. I, Volume No. 15167, dated 06.06.2013, (SRO-III, Delhi). Now, Mrs. Sheela** intend to purchase the same and mortgage against the financial assistance from **Ummeed Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd. That, All the original 1) Sale Deed dated 20.12.2005 (Doc. No. 1916), 2) Sale Deed dated 11.06.2007 (Doc. No. 3535), 3) Sale Deed dated 11.06.2010 (Doc. No. 5274) & 4) Sale Deed dated 05.07.2012 (Doc. No. 5825) are lost/misplaced/not available.** To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim /right/title/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within **7 days** from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. **Lucem Legal LLP**
Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049,Contact # 011-40046316

THE JAGRITI NAGAR CHBS LTD. (REGN NO.- 2183)
Jagriti Enclave, Vikas Marg, Delhi-110092
PUBLIC NOTICE

In terms of the provisions of Schedule - VII of DCS Rules 2007, the general public is hereby informed that Smt. Indu Chawla W/o Late Shri S.K. Chawla (Membership No. 601) of The Jagriti Nagar Co-operative House Building Society Ltd. is being forwarded by Managing committee of the society for draw of lots in her name through RCS/DDA as per the provisions of DCS Act 2003 & Rules 2007 framed thereunder & guidelines thereof. Any person/member having any objection, may file before the President/Secretary of The Jagriti Nagar Co-operative House Building Society Ltd. (Regn. No. 2183) at Redg. Office Jagriti Enclave, Vikas Marg, Delhi-110092 or before the office of the Registrar, Co-operative Societies, Govt. of NCT of Delhi, Old Court's Building, Parliament Street, New Delhi-110001 within 3 days of publication of this notice and no objections shall be entertained, thereafter in any manner whatsoever and the society will proceed further accordingly.

For & on behalf of
The Jagriti Nagar Co-operative House Building Society Ltd.
President / Secretary

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Th Gunindra Singha, Father of No. 23001882W GNR Th Thoiba Singha, R/o- Bantarapur, Sundari Pt IV, Cachar, Assam- 788099, have changed my name from Th Gunindra Singha to Gunendra Singha, vide affidavit dated 21/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(1716)C

I, No.16021469M Nk Bhat Swapnil, R/o- A/P- Khebvade, T/L- Karvir, Dist- Kolhapur, Maharashtra, have changed my son's name from Vihaan Swapnil Bhat to Vihan Swapnil Bhat, vide affidavit dated 21/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi
PD(1717)C

I, No.15713810A Hav Sujith Kumar K, R/o- Kakkunnam, Trikaripur (PO), Kasaragod (Dist), Kerala- 671310, have changed my son's name from Dheerav K V to Dheerav R Jith, vide affidavit dated 21/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi
PD(1718)C

I, Siripuram Urmila, W/o 14880087P Sep Lukalapu Tarakeswararao, R/o- Barrage Center(Hiramandalam), Dist- Srikakulam, A.P., have changed my name from Siripuram Urmila to Lukalapu Urmila, vide affidavit dated 21/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(1719)C

I, No.10136552L Hav Vikash Kumar, R/o- Arya Nagar Gobindpura, PO- Arya Nagar, Dist- Charkhi Dadri, Haryana- 127308, have changed my son's name from Vansh to Vansh Sheoran, vide affidavit dated 21/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(1720)C

I, No.10136552L Hav Vikash Kumar, R/o- Arya Nagar Gobindpura, PO- Arya Nagar, Dist- Charkhi Dadri, Haryana- 127308, have changed my son's name from Akshit to Akshit Sheoran, vide affidavit dated 21/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(1721)C

I, No.15719467Y L/Hav Kalyan Singh, R/o- Vill- Lalpur, PO- Jayee, Teh- Mawana, PS- Bhawanpur, Dist- Meerut, U.P- 250406, have changed my son's name from Shaurya to Shaurya Pratap, vide affidavit dated 21/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(1722)C

I, Deen Dayal S/o Bharat Mahto R/o Pengwara, Siwan, Bihar-841241 declare that Sangeeta Devi & Kisnawti Devi is same & one peerson. In future my wife name should be known as Kisnawti Devi for all future purposes.
PD(1723)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that **Campbell Advertising Pvt Ltd** claims to be owner and in possession of **Unit bearing No. F-2205, on 22nd Floor, Tower F in Ace Platinum Plot No. GH-12/1, Sec Zeta-1, Greater Noida, (UP)** by virtue of Sub-Lease Deed dated 07.06.2021 reg vide Doc. No. 9187 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 Kapil Sadh and said Kapil Sadh has agreed to create a mortgage in favour of our clients **Axis Bank Limited, Indirapuram 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/registered 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:vishaldiwan@diwanandcompany.com

कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, चतुर्थ वृत्त,
लोक निर्माण विभाग, रूद्रपुर (ऊधमसिंह नगर)
फोन: 05944–240921 ईमेल: sepwdusn@gmail.com
पत्रांक : 629/23 एम–04/2025 दिनांक : 21/03/2025

राष्ट्रीय प्रतिस्पर्धात्मक ई–निविदा (e-tendering)

महामहिम राज्यपाल उत्तराखण्ड की ओर से अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, चतुर्थ वृत्त, लो०नि०वि० रूद्रपुर (ऊधम सिंह नगर) द्वारा निम्नलिखित कार्यों हेतु ई–टेण्डरिंग द्वारा टू–बिड सिस्टम के अन्तर्गत निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती हैं। निविदा से सम्बन्धित सभी सूचनायें वेबसाईट **http://www.uktenders.gov.in** पर दिनांक 24.03.2025 से उपलब्ध रहेगी।

क्र. सं.	कार्य का नाम	धरोहर धनराशि (लाख में)	निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य (रू में)	निविदा की वैधता (दिवस)	कार्य पूर्ण करने का समय	ठेकेदार की श्रेणी
1	2	3	4	4	5	6
1	जनपद ऊधमसिंह नगर में प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना (शहरी) हेतु उकरौली–सितारगंज–1 आवासीय परियोजना हेतु मुख्य मार्ग से परियोजना स्थल तक पहुँच मार्ग निर्माण कार्य। (1.575 कि0मी0)	10.00	Rs. 5000.00 +18% G.S.T	120 दिन	15 माह	भारत सरकार / किसी भी राज्य सरकार के विभाग एवं उपक्रम में मार्ग कार्य हेतु श्रेणी A एवं उच्चतर में पंजीकृत

अधीक्षण अभियन्ता

CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED
Registered Office: Aggarwal Corporate Tower, Plot No. 23, 5th Floor, Govind Lal Sikka Marg, Rajendra Place, New Delhi- 110008
"APPENDIX-IV-A" [See proviso to rule 8(6)] Sale notice for sale of Immovable Properties

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable property mortgaged/ charged to the **Clix Housing Finance Limited** (CLIX) (Secured Creditors), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of **Clix Housing Finance Limited** (CLIX), Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis on **22.04.2025**, for recovery of amount as mentioned below, due to the Secured Creditors from following Borrower(s), Guarantor(s) and Corporate Guarantor(s). The reserve price and earnest money to be deposited is mentioned below respectively

Name of Borrower, Co-Borrower/ Guarantor(s) with address/es	Description & Owner(s) of Properties
1. Amit Kumar Chaurasia S/O Sant Lal Chaurasia, 2. Anita Chaurasia W/O Amit Kumar Chaurasia, Both At - A-356, Budh Nagar, Jj Colony, Inderpuri I.A.R.I central Delhi-110012, **Sr No. 1 Also At -** Ugf-3 A-133 Rail Vihar Loni, Ghaziabad-201014, **3. Friendz Ice Cream & Kulfi,** 2-42 1st Floor, Loha Nand Naraina, New Delhi-110028. **Loan No. - AC2019022653221** (Along With Future Interest And Charges Accruing After 13.11.2024 Till The Total Realization Of The Loan Amount)	A Residential Plot No. A-133 And Khasra No. 348 In Flat No. Ugf-3 Back Side Lig Without Roof Rail Vihar Sadullabad, Tehsil Loni District Ghaziabad. Area 83.61 Sq. Mt. On Which The Said Flat Is Constructed: East: Plot No. A-134, West: Road 30 Ft, North: Plot No A-132, South: Road Is 30 Feet Wide

Reserve Price (RP) & EMD Amount 10% of the Reserve Price & Incremental Amount	Recovery Amount as per Demand Notice	Date & Time of On-Site Inspection of Property	Date & Time of E-Auction with unlimited extensions of 5 Minutes each
Rs. 9,00,600/- & Rs. 90,060/- & Rs. 10,000/-	Rs. 8,34,002.93/- as on 13.11.2024	21.04.2025 From 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM	22.04.2025 - 10 Am to 12 Pm

EMD amount shall be remitted through NEFT/RTGS/Funds Transfer in favour of "Clix Housing Finance Limited", Account No. 341905000653_ICICIBANK_IFSC-ICIC0003419
Last date for deposit of EMD and uploading Bid documents: 21-04-2025 Till 12.00 PM at www.bankeauctions.com

The balance 25% of final purchase price minus EMD Amount shall be deposited by the successful bidder, latest by the next working day by way of RTGS / NEFT in the E-Auction account of Clix. The balance 75% of the final purchase shall be deposited by way of RTGS / NEFT within 30 days from the date of auction in the same E-Auction account as above. The refund of EMD to the unsuccessful bidders shall be made only in the account number mentioned by such bidder in the Bid form within 5 working days. **Terms and Conditions :- E-auction is being held on "AS IS WHERE IS" and "AS IS WHAT IS" and "WHATEVER THERE IS" basis** and will be conducted "Online". The auction will be conducted through Clix's approved service provider C1 India Pvt. Ltd. at the web portal www.bankeauctions.com. Bid Documents, Declaration, General Terms and Conditions of online auction sale are available in www.bankeauctions.com. To the best of knowledge and information of the Authorized Officer, there is no encumbrance on the properties. However, the intending bidders should make their own independent inquiries regarding the encumbrances, title of properties put on auction and claims/rights / dues/ affecting the property/ies, prior to submitting their bid, in this regard, the a-Auction advertisement does not constitute and will not be deemed to constitute any commitment or any representation of Clix. For any details with respect to any help, procedure and onl1ne training in respect of the auction process please contact **Mr. Ayush Gupta, (M) 9999916811, Mr. Amit Aggarwal (9717792407) E mail ID. delhi@.c1india.com.** for any details regarding the property please contact +91-7291981124 / 25 / 26. It may please be noted that in case of any discrepancy/ inconsistency between auctions notices published in English and in Hindi then the contents of the notice published in English shall prevail. The Authorised Officer/ Secured Creditor shall not be responsible in any way for any third party claims/ rights/ dues. The sale shall be subject to rules/ conditions prescribed under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security interest Act, 2002 STATUTORY 30 DAYS SALE NOTICE UNDER THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002.

Place : Ghaziabad, Date: 22.03.2025
Authorized Officer, Clix Capital Services Pvt. Ltd.

मध्यप्रदेश पुलिस आवास एवं अधोसंरचना विकास निगम
कार्यालय परियोजना यंत्री, संभाग क्रं.-1, भदभदा रोड, भोपाल
क्र./425, 426/तशा/प.यं./2025 **दिनांक : 21.03.2025**

प्रेस विज्ञप्ति

इस कार्यालय द्वारा पिपरई विकासखण्ड मुंगावली जिला अशोकनगर में 50 सीटर बालक छात्रावास एवं 50 सीटर बालिका छात्रावास भवन का निर्माण कार्य एवं संजय स्टेडियम गुना में पूर्व से निर्मित बास्केटवॉल कोर्ट का मरम्मत कार्य हेतु ऑनलाइन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा क्रमांक 2025_MPPHC_411136_1, 2025_MPPHC_411175_1 दिनांक 07.04.2025 समय अपरान्ह 17:00 बजे तक खरीदी जा सकती है। विस्तृत निविदा सूचना एवं अन्य विवरण **Portal : www.mptenders.gov.in** पर देखे जा सकते हैं।

म.प्र. माध्यम/119351/2025 **परियोजना यंत्री**

Unregistered advisors a menace: Narayan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Markets regulator SEBI, in consultation with social media platforms, has removed 70,000 misleading handles and posts since the implementation of the fin-influencer framework last year, said its whole-time member Ananth Narayan G on Friday.

Amid concerns over foreign portfolio investors selling equities, the SEBI's whole-time member said the overall flows are not as bad as one would imagine and stressed that they "remain invested" in India.

The unregistered investment advisors and research analysts are a "menace" who are cashing in on the rising interest in investments, he said.

"Since October 2024, SEBI has worked with social media companies to bring down over 70,000 misleading handles/posts," he said while addressing an event organised by registered investment advisors here.

He sought the advisors' help in ensuring compliance and mentioned the UPI 'Payright' handle to help identify Sebi-registered entities and the optional Centralised Fee Collection Mechanism as SEBI's efforts in the direction.

Narayan, a commercial banker-turned-regulator, also offered a nuanced take on the FPI outflows, stressing that the situation is not as bad, but added that we should not be complacent as India needs foreign savings.

"Notwithstanding recent trends, overall, FPI flows have not been as bad as one might perhaps imagine today," Narayan said.

As of February 2025, FPIs held ₹62 Lakh Crore or over USD 700 Billion of Indian equities, and about ₹5.9 Lakh Crores or USD 68 Billion in debt, he said.

The last five years have seen USD 54 Billion of foreign flows into equity and debt, which is much higher than the USD 19 Billion in the prior five years, he said.

The onus is on us, and we will need to deliver sustained growth, stable macros, and governance to keep their interest, he said. "We are working with all stakeholders, including FPIs, to enhance their investment experience in our country," he added.

Lauding the surge in domestic flows, especially from the mutual funds, he said the supply of quality investment options is essential, and pointed out that in FY24, there was only ₹2 Lakh Crore of equity issuances against flows of ₹5 Lakh Crore by MFs and FPIs.

"Adequate supply of fresh paper, in line with the demand for such paper, spurring fresh businesses and economic activity, is crucial for sustained capital formation and stable markets," he said.

Minister Sirsa meets CTI officials, discusses reforms

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi food and supply minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa PIONEER PHOTO

Delhi's Food and Supplies Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa met officials from the Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) to discuss key reforms, including a new food policy, cloud kitchen regulations, and streamlining multiple food licences.

The meeting focused on implementing a single-window system to improve the Ease of Doing Business in the food sector.

During the discussion on Thursday, Sirsa highlighted the need for a dedicated cloud kitchen policy in Delhi and simplification of food licence procedures, as per a statement. He said these measures would not only create more jobs but also provide greater convenience to the public. Additionally, he proposed setting up food trucks at 20 public locations where food and water would be available 24/7.

According to the statement, CTI officials suggested organising food fairs similar to those held in other countries to boost the industry.

CTI Chairman Brijesh Goyal highlighted the urgent need for a revamped food policy and the promotion of nightlife in the capital. "Delhi operates 24 hours a day with travellers arriving by train, bus and flights, yet there is a lack of quality food options after midnight, as most hotels and restaurants close early," Goyal said. Traders raised concerns about the licensing process and said vendors selling sweets and snacks must obtain an FSSAI licence, yet a separate health licence from the Delhi Municipal Corporation is also mandatory, it stated.

They argued that this duplication is unnecessary and fosters corruption, the statement added. "These outdated requirements should be abolished, as they only lead to 'harassment' by inspectors. Additionally, some dry fruit and mixtures items attract 12 per cent GST while others are taxed at 18 per cent, which needs to be rationalised," the traders stated.

In response, Sirsa assured traders that he would take up their concerns with the GST department and the Chief Minister. He said the cloud kitchen policy would be properly implemented and promised that there would be no 'inspector raj' in Delhi, it stated.

The meeting was attended by Virendra Jain, President of the Federation of Sweets and Namkeen Manufacturers, along with traders, including 40 leading food industry brands, it added.

Ola Electric shares surge over eight per cent, market valuation jumps ₹1,914 Crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Shares of Ola Electric on Friday jumped more than 8 per cent after the company said sales were strong and it remains focused on clearing all backlog by the end of March.

The stock surged 8.40 per cent to settle at ₹56 apiece on the BSE. Intra-day, it zoomed 10 per cent to ₹56.85.

On the NSE, it rallied 8.25 per cent to ₹55.98 per share.

The company's market valuation climbed ₹1,914.31 Crore to ₹24,700.65 Crore.

Ola Electric on Friday sought to address sale discrepancies saying the backlog in February, caused due to vendor negotiations, has been 40 per cent cleared and the remaining will be fully addressed by the month-end.

The company had previously said it sold 25,000 electric scooters in February but the data on the government's Vahan portal showed only 8,651 scooter registrations.

As of March 20, the company's registrations stood at 11,781 on the Vahan portal.

"Our sales remain strong, and the temporary backlog in February was due to ongoing negotiations with our vendors responsible for vehicle registrations".

"This backlog is being rapidly cleared, with daily registrations exceeding 50 per cent of our three-month daily sales average. About 40 per cent of the February backlog has already been cleared, and the remaining will be fully resolved by the end of March 2025," the company said.

On the discrepancies in its sales claim and data on Vahan portal, Ola said, "This is a straightforward case of a temporary registration backlog" and yet it was "deliberately misrepresented as a regulatory issue through misinformation and smear campaigns" by "vested interests."

DP World, Reliance partner on rail solution

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

DP World and Reliance Industries have partnered to launch an innovative logistics solution for the petrochemicals industry, shifting product transport from road to rail, significantly cutting carbon emissions.

The Dubai-based logistics operator in a statement said the new solution connects Reliance Industries' Jamnagar plant in Gujarat to DP World's inland container depot (ICD) in Ahmedabad and onward to the port of Mundra.

Previously, the Mundra-Jamnagar-Mundra round trip involved approximately 700km of road transport for each container, it added.

"With the new solution, the Ahmedabad-Jamnagar-Mundra route, also approximately 700km, has been converted to rail," the statement said, adding that this transition eliminates the environmental and operational challenges associated with long-distance road transport while maintaining the same coverage.

The statement said the integrated rail service enables the transport of up to 1,260 tonnes of cargo and consolidates up to 45 containers in a single movement, streamlining logistics and reducing the need for multiple trailers and drivers.

By reducing over 700 km of road transport per container, the rail solution significantly reduces carbon emissions and contributes to Reliance's environmental goals, it added.

DP World Marine Services Global Chief Operating Officer Ganesh Raj said this innovative approach not only aligns with Reliance's sustainability commitments but also ensures greater efficiency, seamless coordination, and timely exports to support their growing operational demands.

Reliance Industries Ltd - Petchem head SCM operations Ravikumar Nair said the shift from road to rail has streamlined our operations, reduced carbon emissions, reduced road exposure by eliminating 45 road trailer movement, and reinforced our commitment to responsible and efficient supply chain practices.

Adani Energy wins ₹2,800 Crore transmission project in Gujarat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ahmedabad

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd (AESL), India's largest private transmission and distribution company and part of the globally diversified Adani portfolio, today said it has won a power transmission project in Gujarat, which will supply green electrons for manufacturing Green Hydrogen and Green Ammonia in Mundra, Gujarat.

The project which will cost ₹2,800 Crore, will be delivered to the nation in 36 months. This project "Transmission System for Green Hydrogen and Ammonia Manufacturing Potential in Mundra, Gujarat" involves upgrading the Navinal (Mundra) electrical substation by adding two large 765 per 400kV transformers. Additionally, a 75 km long 765kV double-circuit line will be constructed to connect this substation to the Bhuj substation.

The project will see the addition of 150 cKM of transmission lines and 3,000 MVA of transformation capacity to AESL's overall transmission infrastructure, taking them to 25,928 cKM and 87,186 MVA, respectively. AESL won the project under the Tariff Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) mechanism and PFC Consulting Limited was the bid process coordinator. The project SPV was formally transferred to AESL on March 20, 2025.

This is AESL's 6th order win this fiscal year, taking its orderbook to ₹57,561 Crore. AESL, part of the Adani portfolio, is a multidimensional organisation with presence in various facets of the energy domain, namely power transmission, distribution, smart metering, and cooling solutions. AESL is the country's largest private transmission company with a cumulative transmission network of 25,928 ckm and 87,186 MVA transformation capacity.

In its retail electricity distribution business, as on AESL serves approximately 13 million consumers in metropolitan Mumbai and the industrial hub of Mundra SEZ.

AESL is ramping up its smart metering business and is on course to become India's leading smart metering integrator.

SEBI relaxes 'skin in game rule' for AMCs' employees

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

With an aim to address concerns about the "skin in the game" rule for designated employees of mutual funds, including CEO, CIO, and fund managers, markets regulator SEBI on Friday reduced the mandatory investment percentage, with the requirement now based on specific salary brackets.

Earlier, AMC-designated employees were required to invest 20 per cent of their annual salary and perks in the mutual funds they manage. This amount is locked in for three years. The new framework will come into effect from April 1, 2025, SEBI said in a circular.

Apart from easing regulatory framework pertaining to reduction of minimum investment amount, SEBI has reduced frequency of disclosure, lowered lock-in period for employees who have resigned, empowered Nomination and Remuneration Committee to verify compliances by designated employees and relaxed requirements for employees managing liquid funds.

On investment requirements of designated employees, SEBI said such employees are required to invest a percentage of their salary or compensation (after tax and statutory deductions) in mutual fund schemes where they have oversight.

The required investment percentage is determined by their gross annual compensation. Employees with a compensation below ₹25 Lakh are not required to make any investment. For those earning above ₹25 Lakh, a minimum of 10 per cent of their salary (or 12.5 per cent if employees stock options or ESOPs are included) must be invested.

SEBI has reduced frequency of disclosure, lowered lock-in period for employees who have resigned, empowered Nomination and Remuneration Committee to verify compliances by designated employees

Further, employees with compensation between ₹50 Lakh and ₹1 Crore must invest at least 14 per cent of their salary (or 17.5 per cent with ESOPs), while those earning above ₹1 Crore are required to invest a minimum of 18 per cent (or 22.5 per cent with ESOPs).

For employees managing liquid funds, up to 75 per cent of their required investment can be in riskier schemes, while the rest must be in liquid funds, SEBI said. With regards to lock-in period for investments, SEBI said if an employee retires, they can redeem their mutual fund units after a lock-in period, except for close-ended schemes, which remain locked until the scheme's tenure ends. If an employee resigns or leaves before retirement, the lock-in period for their investment will be reduced to one year from their last employment date.

If a designated employee violates the code of conduct or engages in fraud or gross negligence, the AMC's Nomination and Remuneration Committee is required to investigate and recommend actions to SEBI. SEBI has asked AMCs to disclose the total compensation invested in mutual fund units by employees on the stock exchange website within 15 days after each quarter.

The move is aimed at aligning the interests of AMC employees with those of the mutual fund unitholders.

Rupee jumps 36 paise to close at 86 against US Dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Rising for the sixth straight session, the rupee appreciated 36 paise to close at 86 (provisional) against the US Dollar on Friday on a sharp rise in the domestic equity markets and fresh foreign capital inflows. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.26, then touched an intraday high of 85.93 and a low of 86.30 against the greenback.

The unit ended the session at 86 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 36 paise from its previous closing level. On Thursday, the rupee stayed almost flat and appreciated just 1 paisa to close at 86.36 against the US Dollar.

This is the sixth straight session of gain for the rupee, during which it has added 123 paise. "We expect the rupee to trade higher on strength in the domestic equities and fresh FII inflows. However, positive crude oil prices may cap sharp gains. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.80 to 86.25," said Anuj Choudhary — Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. Meanwhile, the Dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.19 per cent higher at 104.04. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.29 per cent to $71.79 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex surged 557.45 points, or 0.73 per cent, to settle at 76,905.51, while the Nifty advanced 159.75 points, or 0.69 per cent, to close at 23,350.40 points.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) purchased equities worth ₹3,239.14 crore on a net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

BLS launches Aadhaar enrolment service in Punjab

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

BLS International Services on Friday said it has received a mandate from the Department of Food and Civil Supplies, Punjab for Aadhaar enrolment and update services in the state.

This initiative is designed to assist children, individuals with disabilities, bedridden patients, senior citizens, and other vulnerable groups who face challenges in visiting Aadhaar enrolment centres, a release said. BLS International Services Limited is the parent company of BLS E-Services.

BLS E-Services officials will visit homes of people who are unable to visit the centre, set up mobile enrolment stations, and guide them through the necessary procedures. Residents are required to submit a duly filled Aadhaar Enrolment or Update Form along with original supporting documents, which are verified and returned immediately, the release said.

1.91 Lakh circuit km transmission lines to be added by 2032

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Union Power Minister Manohar Lal on Friday said that India has planned to add about 1.91 Lakh ckm (circuit kilometre) of transmission lines and 1274 GVA of transformation capacity by 2032. Addressing a meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee of Members of Parliament for Ministry of Power on Thursday evening he stated that power is a critical component in achieving the goal of a developed India by 2047.

He said that the National Electricity Plan provides the details of transmission system required to be added in the country during the period 2023 to 2032, commensurate with the generation capacity addition and growth of electricity demand in the country.

He also said that the optimal utilisation of generating capacity can be ensured with availability of adequate transmission system, which is the requirement of a reliable power system.

As per the NEP- Transmission, about 1.91 Lakh ckm of transmission lines and 1274 GVA of transformation capacity is planned to be added during the ten-year period (2023 to 2032), he stated. National Electricity Plan-Transmission covering transmission plan till the year 2031-32 has been prepared by CEA (Central Electricity Authority).

The Plan has been released in October, 2024. As per Section 3 of the Electricity Act, 2003, Central Electricity Authority (CEA) has to prepare the National Electricity Plan in accordance with the National Electricity Policy.

In the meeting issues related to RoW (Right of way), new technologies in transmission, Cyber Security were also discussed. Members of Parliament provided several suggestions concerning various initiatives and schemes.

They also commended the initiatives and efforts of the power ministry in expansion of the transmission network in the country. Lal concluded the meeting by expressing gratitude to the participants for their valuable contributions.

He further directed officials to take appropriate actions to incorporate the suggestions made by Members of Parliament and prioritise the welfare of the people.

Gold declines ₹400 to ₹91,250 per 10 grams

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Gold prices decreased ₹400 to ₹91,250 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday due to profit-booking and a subdued trend in the global markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at `91,650 per 10 grams on Thursday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity went lower by `400 to `90,800 per 10 grams. It had concluded at `91,200 per 10 grams.

"Gold prices fell...due to profit-taking by the traders and a recovery in the US dollar." "The precious metal is taking a break in response to the US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's comments about slowing US growth and higher inflation," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Extending the losses for the second straight day, silver prices also declined by ₹1,700 to ₹1,00,300 per kg from Thursday's closing level of ₹1.02 Lakh per kg. Meanwhile, gold futures contracts for April delivery on the Multi Commodity Exchange depreciated by ₹493 to ₹88,213 per 10 grams. Chainwala said markets remain on edge as Trump recently said both broad reciprocal tariffs and certain additional sector-specific tariffs would come into force on April 2. In the international markets, spot gold slipped by $12.15 to $3,032.75 per ounce.

Reclaiming India's agricultural, water sovereignty: A call to action

Binod Anand

Brothers and sisters, let us pause for a moment and reflect-who truly controls the destiny of our farmers? Who decides how we grow our food, manage our water, and secure our future? While our ancestors tilled this sacred land for generations, a quiet but sinister force is at work, attempting to hijack our agricultural policies, control our resources, and turn our farmers into mere pawns in a global game played by corporate giants and foreign think tanks.

Today, as we mark World Water Day 2025, we must recognise that the theme-"Glacier Melting and the Emerging Threats to the Global South"-is not just an environmental issue, but a political one.

It is yet another attempt to manipulate climate change narratives to push policies that weaken our sovereignty. Make no mistake-this is a direct assault on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat@2047'.

And at the heart of this attack lies the shadowy influence of global entities like George Soros' Open Society Foundations (OSF), which, under the guise of research and philanthropy, are working to disrupt India's cooperative model of agriculture and water management.

For years, Indian farmers have relied on the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) for guidance, innovation, and indigenous solutions. But today, underhanded funding mechanisms and collaborations with international institutions like the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) are being used to infiltrate our policies. OSF-backed research promotes genetically modified crops, patent-heavy seed regulations, and reliance on multinational agrochemical companies-effectively making our farmers dependent on foreign corporations. NGOs funded by Soros-backed networks are positioning themselves as "experts" on water scarcity and climate change-slowly shifting control of water policy from local farmers to international bodies.

By undermining age-old farming techniques and forcing farmers into contract-based, corporate-dominated models, they are ensuring that control over India's food supply slips from our hands.

Our forefathers built civilisations on rivers like the Ganga, Yamuna, Brahmaputra, and Narmada. Today, our enemies are using fearmongering tactics around glacier melting and water scarcity to push policies that will privatise water management, take power away from local communities, and open the floodgates for Western corporations to take over our irrigation systems. This is a direct attack on Modi's Jal Shakti Abhiyan, Atal Bhujal Yojana, and the larger vision of Viksit Bharat@2047. By controlling access to water, these organisations hope to dictate what Indian farmers grow, how they grow it, and who they sell it to.

We do not need foreign-backed policies to solve our problems. India already has the solution-Cooperative Economic Frameworks! Local farmer-led organisations must have the power to govern their own water resources without interference from foreign-funded NGOs. Our traditional rainwater harvesting, community irrigation models, and organic farming methods must be protected and promoted.

Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) must be empowered to control supply chains, dictate pricing, and ensure fair markets for Indian-grown produce. The government must legally restrict foreign influence in agricultural policymaking, ensuring that research remains independent and farmer-centric.

India's fight for agricultural and water sovereignty is not just about food-it is about our freedom, our future, and the very soul of Bharat.

If we do not wake up now, tomorrow may be too late. We must reject the foreign-funded think tanks that claim to know what's best for our farmers. We must embrace cooperative-led development, indigenous agricultural wisdom, and local governance over our water and land. Our ancestors fought for India's independence from colonial rule. Today, the battle is different, but the stakes are just as high. Will we let foreign corporations dictate our future, or will we rise to defend Viksit Bharat @2047? The choice is ours.

Jai Kisan, Jai Bharat!

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

SHADOWS OF A DISTANT HOME

An artistic journey through home, migration, and identity, where cinema and visual arts converge, writes ***SAKSHI PRIYA***

Kabir Khan, Imtiaz Ali, Mithu Bhowmick (Producer of My Melbourne) and artist Ajaysingh Bhadoriya exploring the art exhibition

Art and cinema are powerful forms of expression that capture human emotion, identity, and the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of the world. Walking into the 'I View World Film Festival' at Travancore Palace, curated by Myna Mukherjee, felt like entering a living canvas, where each frame, each brushstroke of storytelling, attempted to grasp the elusive, shifting meaning of home, migration, and belonging. This was part of something much larger: **Desh Pardesh**, a multidisciplinary art exposition exploring history, displacement, and identity.

Art exposition that explores notions of home, migration, gender, race, and memory across mediums and aesthetics. Bringing together several projects from micro solos by artists, designers, and architects to group shows, film festivals, and performances, in a range of mediums and scales, that respond to the complex notion of 'home' that occupies the central place in the imagination of both the local, global, and Diasporic deliberations in the global south today.

This series of parallel exhibitions allows a creative articulation of Diasporic self and space, desire, dilemmas, discontent, and delight. It uses the genre of creative representation and productions of Diaspora to ascertain the extent to which these representations and productions collapse the distinction of home and abroad and create a new global-local South Asia, highlighting that the history of modern art is a history of global turmoil, migration, and transnational exchange.

AT HOME IN THE WORLD

While the festival showcased cinematic brilliance, with auteurs like Imtiaz Ali, Kabir Khan, Onir, and Rima Das telling stories of the marginalised and misunderstood, it was the accompanying art exhibitions that gave the event its depth. Future-Past Continuous, a group show, featured paintings, installations, and visual provocations that whispered stories of migration and memory.

The connection between cinema and art was undeniable. Take The Shameless, the festival's centrepiece, which unfolded like a haunting painting - dark, visceral, and poetic. Anasuya Sengupta's award-winning performance pulled audiences into the story of Renuka, a woman navigating the violence of survival and the longing for freedom. It was a moving portrait of resilience, much like the evocative works displayed at Desh Pardesh, where the idea of 'home' was not just a place, but an aching question. The city premiere of Puratwan - The Ancient added another layer to this exploration of time and memory. With the legendary Sharmila Tagore marking her return to Bengali cinema, the film became an introspective mirror, reflecting how history, family, and unspoken truths shape us.

Desh Pardesh extended beyond paintings and film. Dance and performance became another medium of storytelling, none more powerful than, performed by Nrityagram. The piece captured the feeling of Hiraeth, a Welsh word for a deep, unfulfilled longing for something lost. It was a wordless narrative, told through movement, of memories fading and reappearing like ghosts.

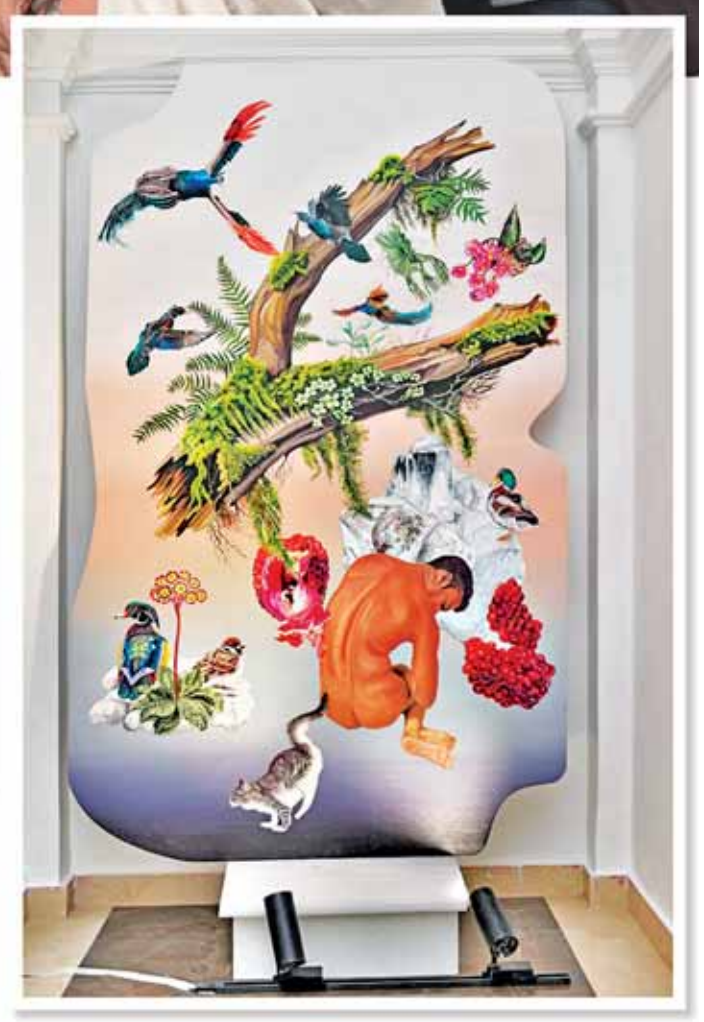
At Bikaner House and Stir Gallery, micro solos and queer art shows expanded this dialogue. The exhibition questioned not just where we belong, but how identity is constructed in an ever-changing world. Do we carry home with us, or does it remain a distant echo?

The visual arts segment featured over 55 artists from across the country, each responding to the themes of migration and belonging through diverse artistic mediums. From painting and sculpture to new media art and interactive installations, the exhibition showcased how contemporary artists engage with the evolving landscapes of home and identity. The selection of artworks highlighted both personal narratives and broader socio-political concerns, reflecting the fluidity and fragmentation of cultural memory in a rapidly changing world.

FINDING ART THROUGH HOME

As the festival drew to a close with Five Films for Freedom, an online celebration of LGBTQIA+ narratives, it was clear that this was an invitation to engage, challenge, and rethink the spaces we inhabit, both physically and emotionally.

Standing amid these artistic expressions, whether in the dark of the screening hall or the luminous glow of an art installation, there was a shift. This Festival served as reminders that in the chaos of borders, histories, and identities, storytelling remains our most powerful way of finding home.



Lost in Ragas, found in Ruhaniyan's Soul

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

Experiencing the magic of Sufi music and poetry, says ***SAKSHI PRIYA***

Some evenings stay with you long after they are over. **Jahan-e-Khusrau's** 25th edition was one such evening and curated by Muzaffar Ali, has completed 25 years, yet it remains as timeless as the poetry it celebrates. The festival, brought together voices, rhythms, and poetry that felt like something ancient yet deeply relevant. On the opening evening, *Naara-e-Mastana* by Kanwar Grewal set the tone. His voice, raw and unfiltered, carried the weight of longing that defines Sufi music. There was no hurry, just a quiet surrender to the music.

The second evening belonged to the mesmerising Saiyaan *Sajilay, Torey Naina Rasilay*, where Manjari Chaturvedi's Kathak met the qawwali of Danish Husain Badayuni and Gufran Aslami Khairabadi. There was something hypnotic about the way dance and music intertwined, each responding to the other, neither overpowering nor retreating. *Yaad-e-Kanhaiya* by Malini Awasthi followed, her voice bringing a thumri-inspired touch to the intensity of the night. On the final day, *Raqs-e-Junoon* saw Shivani Varma's dance meet the melodies of Sina Fakhroddin and the Tehran-Delhi Music Ensemble. Their performance felt less like an act and more like a prayer. Later, *Ruh*, a poetry and storytelling session by Murad Ali, wove together words and whirling dervishes in a way that made time slow down, just for that moment.

The night ended with a qawwali, voices rising, claps growing louder, the energy filling every corner of the venue. No one was in a hurry to leave. Music had done what it always does, brought people closer, made everything else fade away for a while.

"Ishq likhne baithe toh har lafz mehka mile..."
"Jahan-e-Khusrau sirf mehfil nahi, ek manzar mile."

The festival may have drawn to a close, but its presence remains, much like the verses of a Sufi poet, growing louder in memory, until they become a part of you.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

PALETTE OF POSSIBILITIES

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Delicate Sanjhi papercuts cast intricate shadows, Kalamkari paintings unfold mythological tales in rich detail, and the textured patterns of Lippan art shimmer under the lights, each piece at **Art for Hope** — Season 4 carried a story waiting to be discovered. Organised by Hyundai Motor India Foundation. This exhibition was a platform where creativity intersected with tradition, innovation, and social change.

The event brought together 50 talented artists and collectives from across India, each presenting work that reflected personal and cultural narratives. The visual experience was enriched by performances that embodied movement and expression — Lavani, Ottan Thullal, Theyyam, and Yakshagana dancers brought age-old traditions to life, their vibrant costumes and rhythmic gestures captivating the audience. A special musical performance by differently-abled artists demonstrated the transformative power of art, proving that creativity knows no boundaries. Accessibility and inclusivity were at the heart of the exhibition. Tactile artworks, braille descriptions, and sign language tours ensured that visitors of all abilities could fully engage with the displays. This thoughtful curation extended to discussions and workshops that explored themes of sustainability and representation in art. Sessions on 'Art from Waste' and 'Inclusivity in Design and the Arts' provided insight into how artistic practices can address contemporary issues while preserving heritage.

Every artwork, every performance and every discussion at exhibition reinforced the idea that art is a living, breathing entity, it carries memories, challenges norms and shape the cultural landscape.

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | MARCH 22, 2025

New rules, saliva ban reversal as IPL kicks off

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

New rules and new captains will be in focus but the razzmatazz will be pretty much the same when the 18th Indian Premier League kicks off here on Saturday with defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders taking on perennial underachievers Royal Challengers Bengaluru amid a looming threat of rain.

There is plenty to look forward in the league. Among the most prominent rule changes is the lifting of saliva ban. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, bowlers will be allowed to use it to shine the ball.

The BCCI lifted the ban after receiving a majority consensus from IPL captains in a landmark decision taken at the captains' meeting in Mumbai.

The International Cricket Council had made the saliva ban permanent in 2022, but the IPL operates under its own regulations and the latest move could set a precedent for the global game.

The 18th season will also witness tactical innovations, including a major change to counter dew's impact.

The second innings of evening matches will see a fresh ball introduced from the 11th over, provided the on-field umpires deem the dew factor significant as the trend of high-scoring games is likely to continue.

However, this rule will not apply to afternoon games.

Additionally, the Decision Review System has been expanded to include height wides and off-side wides, ensuring a fairer adjudication of deliveries. Despite debates about its influence on the game, the Impact Player rule remains in place.

Captain's corner

As many as seven teams will start IPL 2025 under new leadership, although some of them will be a stop-gap arrangement due to varied reasons.

The most surprising of them all is Rajat Patidar, who is yet to play a T20I for India, leading the RCB team that features megastar Virat Kohli.

Axar Patel takes charge of Delhi Capitals to lead, among others, his Team India senior KL Rahul, who would be aiming to shake off the disappointment of a turbulent stint with Lucknow Super Giants in 2024.

Shreyas Iyer, fresh off leading KKR to glory in 2024, will don the captain's armband for Punjab Kings with Ajinkya Rahane replacing him in the Kolkata team.

Rajasthan Royals will start the season with Riyan Parag as interim captain for the first three matches due to Sanju Samson's recovery from a finger injury taking longer than expected.

Mumbai Indians will be led by Suryakumar Yadav in their away opener against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday, as Hardik Pandya serves a suspension for an over-rate violation from last season.

Pant's redemption arc

Rishabh Pant is set to begin a crucial new chapter in his career after his resolute comeback from a life-threatening accident

became part of cricketing lore.

The IPL's most expensive player in history — acquired by Lucknow Super Giants for a record INR 27 crore — will be eager to silence his critics.

Despite making the squads for the Champions Trophy and the T20I series against England, he was not given a single match.

Now, he has a point to prove, particularly in the T20 format, where he has struggled to cement his place in the Indian team.

Pant's explosive batting style and leadership skills have long been debated, and this season presents an opportunity for him to not only justify his hefty price tag but also send a strong message to the selectors ahead of future international assignments.

There are changes in the support staff line-ups too. Ricky Ponting has moved from Delhi Capitals to Punjab Kings as head coach. Hemang Badani has replaced Ponting as Delhi Capitals' head coach.

Kevin Pietersen has joined Delhi Capitals as mentor, while Rahul Dravid returns to Rajasthan Royals as head coach, his first IPL coaching stint after leading India to the T20 World Cup title last year.

CSK veteran Dwayne Bravo will be KKR mentor, replacing Gautam Gambhir, who is now India's head coach.

Bumrah's fitness

A major question mark hangs over Jasprit Bumrah's fitness.

The pacer, back at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru, is undergoing assessments to determine his readiness for the IPL. Mumbai Indians coach Mahela Jayawardene remains optimistic but cautious, given that Bumrah's availability crucial not only for MI but also for India's upcoming tour of England.

The Dhoni question

As the IPL returns, so does the never-ending speculation: Is this Mahendra Singh Dhoni's last season?

The 43-year-old, who retired from international cricket in 2020, remains an enigma, gracing the field only during the IPL.

While he may not be the consistent match-winner of old, his presence alone bolsters Chennai Super Kings.

His sharp cricketing brain, field placements, and ability to finish games with quick cameos make him an invaluable asset.

Exactly 30 years his junior is Vaibhav Suryavanshi, a prodigal batting talent acquired by Rajasthan Royals but it remains to be seen how many games he manages to get.

Ro-Ko in T20 again

Both Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma retired from T20Is after India's triumphant World Cup campaign last year, making IPL 2025 their first major outing in the shortest format post-retirement.

Kohli, the highest run-getter in IPL 2024 with 741 runs, remains the linchpin for RCB, while Rohit, after a lean patch, will look to rediscover his magic for Mumbai Indians.

Novak Djokovic wanted players to add names to antitrust lawsuit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens (US)

Novak Djokovic doesn't want the antitrust lawsuit filed by the players' association he co-founded to create a rift in tennis, but he also said that the athletes' share of revenues and their influence both need to increase.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion, speaking at a pre-tournament news conference at the Miami Open on Thursday, explained that he was not listed among the plaintiffs on the case filed Tuesday in federal court in New York — along with actions in Brussels and London — "because I want other players to step up."

The suit by the Professional Tennis Players' Association (PTPA) against the women's and men's tours, the International Tennis Federation and the sport's integrity agency said the organizations hold "complete control over the players' pay and working conditions," calling them a "cartel." "I've never been a fan and supporter of division in our sport, but I've always fought for better representation and influence of and positioning of the players globally in our sport, which I think is still not where I think it should be," Djokovic said, "and where most of the players think it should be, not just in terms of prize money, but in terms of many other points that have been also stated in that document."

The PTPA said it had spoken with more than 250 players — women and men — and gotten backing for the class-action suit. Players whose names are attached to the US lawsuit include 2022 Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios, Sorana Cirstea, Varvara Gracheva, Reilly Opelka, Tennys Sandgren and Nicole Melichar-Martinez.

But four-time major champion Carlos Alcaraz said Wednesday at the Miami Open that he wasn't a fan — in part because he wasn't aware he'd be quoted in the filing, hadn't been told it was happening and didn't agree with everything stated by the attorneys.

Djokovic echoed that last sentiment.

"I really hope that all the governing bodies, including PTPA, will come together and solve these issues," he said.

"This is a classic lawsuit, so lawyers to lawyers, type of situation. So to be quite frank with you, there are things that I agree with in the lawsuit, and then there are also things that I don't agree with. And I found that maybe some wording was quite strong in there, but I guess the legal team knows what they are doing and what kind of terminology they're supposed to use in order to get the right effect.

Parry, Hillier to participate in Hero Indian Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Gurugram

England's John Parry and New Zealand's Daniel Hillier, both in outstanding form, have confirmed their participation in the 2025 Hero Indian Open, scheduled to be held at the DLF Golf and Country Club here from March 27 to 30.

The tournament, sanctioned by the DP World Tour and the Indian Golf Union, will feature 138 players from nearly 30 countries competing for a prize purse of $2.25 Million.

Both Parry and Hillier are currently in Top-5 of the Race to Dubai rankings on the DP World Tour.

Parry, ranked third in the Race to Dubai, is no stranger to success in India, having won the Delhi Challenge on the Hotelplanner Tour last year. He followed up this victory with two more wins on the Hotelplanner Tour and secured his first DPWT win in 14 years at the AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open.

Parry has continued his strong form in 2025, finishing T-8 at the Australian PGA, T-2 at the Alfred Dunhill Championship in South Africa, and clinched a win at Mauritius, followed by a runner-up finish in Kenya.

Hillier, 25, is also in impressive form, having finished runner-up at the 2025 Hero Dubai Desert Classic. He has posted consistent Top-20 finishes across Australia, South Africa, Bahrain, and Qatar and is currently ranked fifth in the Race to Dubai standings.

Among other top players in the Race to Dubai standings, three winners from the ongoing season will also be competing. They are Johannes Veerman (No. 8), winner of the Nedbank Golf Challenge; Callum Hill (No. 11), winner of the Joburg Open; and Ryggs Johnston (No. 14), winner of the ISPS Handa Australian Open. Additionally, Jayden Schaper, ranked 15th, will also take part.

The tournament is part of the Asian Swing, which began in Singapore and will conclude with two events in China. The winner of the 'Asian Swing' will earn an exemption into the next Rolex event, the Genesis Scottish Open, co-sanctioned with the PGA Tour.

Another major incentive for all DPWT players is the opportunity to earn points towards the Race to Dubai. At the end of the season, the Top-10 players who are not already exempt from the PGA Tour will earn dual PGA Tour membership for the following year.

As many as 16 winners from both the current and previous DP World Tour seasons are set to compete. This includes 12 champions from the 2024 season and four winners from the 2025 schedule, all of whom will be serious contenders to lift the trophy on March 30.

Pakistan beat New Zealand by 9 wickets in third T20

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Auckland

Hasan Nawaz made an unbeaten 105 from 45 balls as Pakistan beat New Zealand by nine wickets in the third Twenty20 international on Friday to keep alive the five-match series. Pakistan won the toss and was able to bowl first, reversing the trend of the first two matches which New Zealand won by nine and five wickets. Nawaz was supported in his first century by captain Salman Ali Agha, who made 51 from 31 balls in an unbroken partnership of 133 for the second wicket. Pakistan finished at 207-1, running down the home team's total of 204 with four full overs to spare to inflict New Zealand's heaviest T20 loss in terms of wickets.

"I failed in the first two games and I thank the team for backing me," he said through an interpreter. "When I went out to bat I wanted to score my first international run. "After I scored the first run the pressure was released and I wanted to win the game." Mark Chapman made 94 from 44 balls before New Zealand was bowled out with one ball remaining in their 20 overs. Chapman hit 11 fours and four sixes but lacked support. Captain Michael Bracewell's 31 was the next-best effort by the Kiwis, who lost wickets regularly. Tim Seifert made 19, including 16 runs from the second over.

Sankar stuns world no 2 Antonsen in Swiss Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Basel

India's Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian caused a major upset by knocking out world no 2 Anders Antonsen of Denmark in a thrilling three-game contest to reach the men's singles quarterfinals of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here.

The 21-year-old from Tamil Nadu, a silver medallist at the 2022 World Junior Championships and currently ranked 64th in the world, put up an impressive display of defense to defeat the three-time World Championships medallist 18-21 21-12 21-5 in a 66-minute contest.

This win marks one of the biggest victories of Subramanian's career, which will boost his confidence as he continues his transition into the senior ranks.

Next, the Indian will face world no 31 Christo Popov of France, a 2019 World Junior Championships silver medallist. Popov had a strong 2024 campaign, claiming titles at the German and Hylo Opens. He was the runner-up at this year's German Open.

Subramanian is the sole Indian singles player remaining in the tournament, while the women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also advanced to the quarterfinals. The world no. 9 pair defeated Germany's Amelie Lehmann and Selin Hubsch 21-12 21-8 on Thursday.

Among other Indians, Isharani Baruah put up a valiant fight but lost 19-21 21-18 18-21 to China's Han Qian Xi in 63 minutes.

Anupama Upadhyaya was ousted by Indonesia's world no. 11 Putri Kusuma Wardani as she lost 17-21 19-21 in another women's singles match.

The mixed doubles pair of Sathish Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath had a tough outing, going down 14-21 16-21 to Liu Kuang Heng and Jheng Yu Chieh.

Subramanian vs Antonsen

Subramanian was more precise, while Antonsen struggled with his control at St Jakobshalle, often sending his shots wide and long.

In the opening game, the two engaged in a tough battle, with leads changing frequently. Antonsen managed just a one-point lead at the break. The left-handed Subramanian made it 16-14 but couldn't sustain the pressure as the Dane took the first game.

However, the momentum shifted completely in the second game, with Subramanian giving no chance to his illustrious opponent.

After Antonsen sent another shot wide and kicked his racquet in frustration, Subramanian moved from 8-4 to 11-6. He then surged to 18-9 as Antonsen continued his errors.

Subramanian soon sealed the game, taking it 21-12, with Antonsen sending another shot long.

The third game started with the score tied at 3-3 before Antonsen completely lost control, committing a series of unforced errors as the Indian raced to an 11-3 lead at the break.

The Dane continued to send his net shots, cross-court shots, and tosses out, and Subramanian emerged victorious without much ado.

AIU bans two more Indian athletes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian long distance runners Pradhan Kirulkar and Vivek More have been banned for three and five years by the Athletics Integrity Unit after they tested positive for prohibited substances

Indian long distance runners Pradhan Kirulkar and Vivek More have been banned for three and five years respectively by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) after they tested positive for prohibited substances.

Both athletes' positive results were from in-competition tests conducted during the Pune Half Marathon on December 15, 2024, adding to a recent surge in doping cases involving Indian athletes.

On Tuesday, Archana Jadhav also tested positive for a banned substance from a urine sample collected during the same event. She has been banned for four years.

Kirulkar's urine sample collected during Pune Half Marathon in December last year, which he had won with a time of 1:04:22, was found to contain Meldonium when tested at the National Dope Testing Laboratory in New Delhi.

His ban period was to be four years but it was reduced by one year following his early admission of the doping offence and acceptance of sanction.

His ban period has already started from February 19 and his results from December 15, 2024 — the date of sample collection — onwards will be disqualified.

The 24-year-old More's sample was also collected at the same event in December last year and it returned positive for Mephentermine, Meldonium and dEPO.

More was to be suspended for six years for testing positive for multiple prohibited substances but he was given one year reduction in the ban period due to his early admission of the doping offence and acceptance of sanction.

His ban period began Friday and his results from December 15, 2024 onwards disqualified.

Jadhav's sample, meanwhile, was found to contain prohibited substance Oxandrolone.

This synthetic anabolic steroid promotes protein production and muscle building in the body.

The ban came into effect from January 7. Jadhav has been under provisional suspension for the duration.

New Zealand, New Caledonia to meet in Oceania qualifying final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Wellington

Nottingham Forest striker Chris Wood scored a hat trick of headed goals as New Zealand beat Fiji 7-0 on Friday to join New Caledonia in the Oceania qualifying final for the 2026 World Cup.

New Caledonia earlier beat Tahiti 3-0 in the first semifinal in FIFA's smallest confederation. The winner of the Oceania qualifying series will gain direct entry to the World Cup for the first time. That means the victor in Monday's final in Auckland, New Zealand will join hosts Canada, the United States and Mexico and Japan, which on Thursday became the first nation to qualify for the 48-team tournament.

New Zealand captain Wood headed Sarpreet Singh's cross home to open New Zealand's scoring in the sixth minute as it led 4-0 halftime. He then scored off Tim Payne crosses in the 56th and 59th minutes for his 43rd and 44th goals in 81 internationals before being substituted in the 61st minute. Wood received a yellow card when climbed into the grandstand to finish the game among the crowd, surrounded by fans and signing autographs for eager children.

Singh and Payne also scored in the first half along with an own goal by Fiji. Payne's goal was his first for New Zealand since 2013. Kosta Barbarouses scored the final goal in the 73rd minute while Ben Waine missed an 87th-minute penalty.

"It's all about team," Wood said. "We had a pretty dominant first half and we wanted to keep it going into the second half. I think the team did really well in that sense."

Earlier, New Caledonia's 36-year-old striker Georges Gope-Fenepej scored twice in his team's win over Tahiti. The 14-year international veteran collected the rebound from captain Cesar Zeoula's saved shot in the 50th minute and delicately chipped the ball into the Tahiti goal from close range. In the 75th minute, he launched a spectacular left-foot shot from 30 meters, catching the goalkeeper off his line. Substitute Lues Waya added to the scoring in stoppage time. "We're all obviously football fans so to see someone like Georges play and the display he put on today is absolutely magnifique and wonderful," New Caledonia coach Johann Sidaner said.

The loser of the Oceania final will still have a chance to qualify through an intercontinental playoff.

The decision to award direct entry to Oceania offers an historic opportunity to some of soccer's smallest nations.

New Zealand with a population of 5 million, ranked 89, is the largest and highest-ranked of the Oceania nations and has qualified twice before, in Spain in 1982 and South Africa in 2010.

New Caledonia had to overcome political unrest in its homeland to qualify for Friday's match. Violent protests against voting reforms broke out last year, leaving 13 dead before the French army was deployed to restore order.

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