Celebrating Women in March

The Pioneer

Paper with passion since 1865

www.dailypioneer.com
@TheDailyPioneer
facebook.com/dailypioneer
instagram.com/dailypioneer

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY MARCH 27, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

RNI No. 53466/91, REGD. No. DL (C)-05/1219/2021-23 Posted at DRMS Delhi 6 I Late City **Vol.35 Issue** 84 I *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

YEH KASHMIR HAI...

Visitors at Tulip Garden after it was opened for the public in Srinagar on Wednesday PIONEER PHOTO

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Srinagar

With over 1.7 Million tulips of 74 exquisite varieties in its lap, Asia's largest Tulip garden overlooking the world-famous Dal Lake was thrown open on Wednesday by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, marking the beginning of the new tourism season in the Valley.

"Delighted to throw open Asia's largest Tulip Garden in Srinagar today," the Chief Minister's office posted on X.

The Chief Minister, sporting a skull cap and a traditional 'pheran' greeted and interacted with the tourists assembled at the garden to witness the blooming carpet of flowers.

He also extended an invitation to tourists from all over the world to make a plan to witness the sublime beauty of nature and enjoy the warm hospitality of Kashmir. Visitors, who were seen posing for a group photograph, acknowledged the hard work of gardeners and all others who worked laboriously behind the scenes to decorate the Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden.

The Tourism department is already expecting a heavy tourist influx this year as compared to last year. Last year, as many as 4.45 lakh tourists thronged the garden, which was the highest ever.

A record number of tourists visited the Kashmir valley this year raising hopes of hoteliers and all other stakeholders of a buoyant tourism season ahead.

The floriculture department has expanded the channel to the top of the garden. In addition, some fountains have been set up in the garden to make it more attractive.

Briefing media persons, Floriculture director Shakeel-ul-Rehman Rather said, "Tourists intending to visit the famous Tulip Garden can now book tickets online as authorities have started an online and QR code-based booking system at several places, including the Srinagar Airport".

"We have planted 17.50 Lakh tulip bulbs and other flowers," Rather said.

The director said this year, the department has started the facility of an online ticket booking system. "Tie-up has also been done with the tourism departments of many countries and their websites have the link for online tickets. Apart from this, tickets are also available through the physical mode.

The Union Territory administration has already made elaborate arrangements to accommodate the large rush of tourists visiting Jammu and Kashmir.

Supreme Court outraged by Allahabad High Court's insensitive rape order

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE n New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the Allahabad High Court's recent observations on grabbing of a woman's breasts and pulling the drawstrings of her "pyjama" not amounting to an attempt to rape and admonished that the order reflected total "insensitivity" and "inhuman approach". Taking a strong exception to the High Court's observations made in its March 17 verdict, the apex court termed it a "very serious matter".

"In normal circumstances, we are slow in granting stay at this stage. But since the observations appearing in paragraphs 21, 24 and 26 are totally unknown to the cannons of law and depict total insensitive and inhuman approach, we are inclined to stay the said observations," a Bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih said. The top court took suo motu cognisance of the matter after "We the Women of India" collective wrote to Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna. "Until further orders, there shall be stay to the observations made by the judge in paragraphs 21, 24 and 26 of the order dated March 17, 2025," the Bench held.

The staying of the High Court's observations would mean the same cannot be used in any judicial proceeding to seek relief by the present set of accused or others. The High Court's verdict held that the attempt to rape offence was not made out against the accused and they were liable to be summoned for the lesser offence of assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe her. "There is no allegation that the accused tried to commit penetrative sexual assault against the victim," the HC further said.

Justice Ram Manohar Narayan Mishra also said, "On facts of the case a prima facie charge attempt to rape is not made out against the accused Pawan and Akash and instead they are liable to be summoned for a minor charge of Section 354(b) IPC, ie, assault or abuse a woman with intent to disrobing or compelling her to be naked...."Referring to the High Court's observations, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said, "This is one judgement I take a very serious exception." Attorney General R Venkataramani also appeared in the matter.

"It is a very serious matter," Justice Gavai said, "exhibiting total insensitiveness on the part of the judge." The Bench added, "We are sorry to use such harsh words against the judge." The SG Mehta said the Chief Justice of the High Court was the master of the roster there and it was advisable that some steps were taken. "We are at pains to say that some of the observations made in the impugned order and particularly in paragraphs 21, 24 and 26 depict a total lack of insensitivity on the part of the author of the judgment," the Bench said.

> Until further orders, there shall be stay to the observations made by the judge in paragraphs 21, 24 and 26 of the order dated March 17, 2025
>
> — BENCH

The top court said it was not as if the order was dictated in the spur of the moment in the court. It noted the High Court had reserved its verdict on November 13, 2024, and after almost four months, the judgment was pronounced. "It is thus clear that the judge has authored the judgment after due application of mind," it said.

The top court issued notices to the Centre, Uttar Pradesh government and the parties before the high court in the matter seeking their responses in the suo motu proceeding. "The Registrar concerned of the this court is directed to forthwith communicate this order to the Registrar General of the High Court of judicature at Allahabad, who shall place the same immediately before the Chief Justice of the High Court of judicature at Allahabad, who is requested to look into the matter and take such steps as deemed fit and proper," the bench said, posting the matter for hearing on April 15.

During the hearing, one of the advocates appearing in the matter said they moved a plea against the High Court Order. The Bench said the plea would be heard along with the suo motu proceedings. Another lawyer said they would file an application on behalf of the survivor's mother. The accused had challenged the summoning order of a special judge in Kasganj under Section 376 (rape) of the IPC, among other sections.

It came on record that an application was moved before the court of special judge, POCSO Act, alleging that on November 10, 2021, she (informant) was returning from her sister-in-law's home along with her 14-year-old daughter and Pawan, Akash and Ashok, who hailed from the same village, met her on the way and offered a lift to her daughter. They allegedly stopped their motorbike on the way to her village and grabbed her breasts.

Akash was accused of dragging her and trying to take her beneath the culvert while pulling the drawstrings of her lowers. The High Court said the alleged actions of the accused Pawan and Akash was "not sufficient to draw an inference that the accused persons had determined to commit rape" on the survivor as "apart from these facts no other act was attributed to them to further their alleged desire to commit rape on the victim."

Opposition parties also slammed the order as Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi wrote to CJI Sanjiv Khanna calling it "flawed" and seeking the judge's disqualification "for delivering such a misguided verdict". Calling the observations "outrageous" and "unacceptable", Chairperson of the Congress Social Media and Digital Platforms Supriya Shrinate said, "If courts give such observations, where do children and women go and report about incidents when they are harassed?"

CBI raids ex-Chhattisgarh CM Baghel's houses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/ Raipur

The CBI on Wednesday conducted searches at 60 locations, including the residence of former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, in connection with the alleged ₹6,000 Crore Mahadev betting app scam, officials said.

The agency teams cracked on at Baghel's residences in Raipur and Bhilai, as well as the houses of a senior police officer and a close associate of the former CM, they said. The searches also covered the premises of Congress MLA Devendra Yadav in Bhilai town of Durg district and of IPS officers Anand Chhabra, Abhishek Pallava and Arif Sheikh, among others, sources said. Congress said the CBI's searches at Baghel's residences were politically motivated, and asserted it will not be intimidated by such actions.

In a social media post from Baghel's office, the former chief minister's office said, "Now CBI has arrived. Former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel is scheduled to go to Delhi today for the meeting of the 'Drafting Committee' constituted for the AICC meeting to be held in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) on 8 and 9 April. Before that, the CBI has reached Raipur and Bhilai Niwas."

The CBI has taken over the investigation from the Economic Offences Wing of the Chhattisgarh Police, which had earlier named Congress leader Baghel, promoters of the app, Ravi Uppal, Saurabh Chandrakar, Shubham Soni, and Anil Kumar Agrawal, and 14 others in its FIR. Baghel had termed the EOW FIR "politically motivated." The Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is also probing the case, has alleged that its probe revealed the involvement of several top politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh. The app was an umbrella syndicate arranging online platforms for illegal betting websites to enrol new users, create user IDs and launder money through a layered web of 'benami' bank accounts, it claimed. The projected proceeds of crime are about Rs 6,000 crore, the ED earlier said.

Continued on >> P2

MHA finally responds to Rahul's citizenship issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Home Ministry on Wednesday informed the Delhi High Court that probe on the British Citizenship of Rahul Gandhi is "under consideration". Previous hearing, the High Court had send notice to MHA to declare its stand, while the Ministry many times sought time to reply to the petition filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy.

"In this regard it is humbly submitted that the subject matter is presently under consideration in the Ministry. Therefore it is requested to appraise the Honorable Court regarding the same on the next date of hearing ie 26.3.2025, thereby defending the interest of the Union of India," said MHA's Foreigners Division (Citizenship Wing). The next hearing is posted for March 28, by dismissing an intervening petition by a BJP worker Vignesh Shishir.

The BJP worker from Karnataka had approached Allahabad High Court, and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has been asked to take a decision by April 21. A Division Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela noted the same and also said the Ministry should have apprised the Court of the action taken, since the pendency of similar matter before Allahabad High Court could lead to divergent orders.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi during the Budget session of Parliament PTI

Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Chetan Sharma, appearing for the MHA, said that the Allahabad High Court had on March 24 ordered MHA to decide the representation filed by the petitioner before the High Court, one Vignesh Shishir. "It has been posted for hearing before High Court on April 21," the ASG pointed out.

The petitioner Subramanian Swamy alleged that Government was resorting to delay tactics. "This is delaying tactic. My petition has been there since 2019. The minister had given a show cause notice to which Gandhi has not replied. At least, a direction can be passed to file his affidavit. When I had filed this matter, there was no other matter (in any other High Court). It is unfair that after doing all this work, they have recycled the same matter," Swamy said.

The Court nevertheless said that the issue is under the consideration of the MHA and the hearing can wait till a decision is taken by the Government. "ASG has been informed by Ministry about the Allahabad High Court order. It is for the Ministry to make this decision. We cannot pass any direction. We are only taking notice of the Allahabad High Court decision which has been passed by a division bench," the Delhi High Court remarked while adjourning the case.

Continued on >> P2

Mirror, mirror on the wall...who's the fairest of us all?

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

Sarada Muraleedharan, chief secretary of Kerala, who had made empowerment of women, social justice and equal opportunities as her mission in life found late on Tuesday night that the renaissance of the State as claimed by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has remained a non-starter and there is large scale discrimination based on colour of one's skin.

People in the State was in for a shock on Wednesday morning as Muraleedharan took to the social media to give vent to her shock and sorrow over comments made by a section of the society that the last seven months of her tenure as the top bureaucrat of Kerala was a period of black while her predecessor's stewardship stood out as white. Muraleedharan had taken over as chief secretary from V Venu on August 31, 2024. Interestingly, Venu is her husband and it was a rare event in the State to see the wife succeeding her husband as chief secretary.

Venu happened to be of fair complexion while Muraleedharan was a bit on the dark side. The comments about the colour of Muraleedharan's skin are yet another proof that the self-styled progressive State is yet to come out of the regressive mindset. The heart-wrenching account by Muraleedharan speaks about dilemma and taunts suffered by her because of the tone of her skin.

"As a four-year-old, I apparently asked my mother whether she could put me back in her womb and bring me out again, all white and pretty. I have lived for over 50 years buried under that narrative of not being a colour that was good enough. And buying into that narrative. Of not seeing beauty or value in black. Of being fascinated by fair skin. And fair minds, and all that was fair and good and wholesome. And of feeling that I was a lesser person for not being that — which had to be compensated somehow," writes Muraleedharan.

She further stated that it was her children who glorified the beauty of black and she felt happy afterwards about her tone. "Black is the all pervasive truth of the universe. Black is that which can absorb anything, the most powerful pulse of energy known to humankind.

Continued on >> P2

Juvenile crime turns fatal, 16-year-old killed for ransom

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A 16-year-old boy was abducted and killed for an ₹10 Lakh ransom in the Wazirabad area of north Delhi and three juveniles were apprehended in connection with the crime. They reportedly also tried to cut the boy's body into parts. All the three lived near the victim's home.

The class nine students were taken to a deserted area near Bhalaswa Lake, where he was stabbed multiple times, police officials said on Wednesday.

"The family members of the boy had received a call regarding a ransom of ₹10 Lakh. Later, they discovered his body," said the officer.

On Monday, a complaint was filed at the local police station about a boy missing since Sunday. The boy studied in Mukherjee Nagar.

"During investigation, it was found that the missing/kidnapped boy was last seen with three boys, two of them aged 16 and 17, on a motorcycle on Jharoda Pushta road," the officer said.

The sighting was confirmed through CCTV footage from the area.

Police apprehended all three boys, who, during interrogation, revealed they had kidnapped the boy for a ransom of ₹10 Lakh.

They said that on Sunday, they took him with them on a motorcycle to hang out. They took him to a forested area near Bhalaswa Lake, where they stabbed him and fled, leaving him dead.

The next day, they called the boy's father, a driver by profession, using the boy's SIM and demanded a ransom of ₹10 Lakh.

"The body of the victim was discovered by a police team at the instance of the apprehended juveniles," the officer said. Police sources said that the accused also tried to cut the boy's body into parts. Victim's mother told reporters that the boys, who allegedly killed her, son lived nearby.

"My son left on Sunday around 7.30 pm after receiving a call, saying he will come back in 10 minutes. Later, we got a call with a demand for ₹10 Lakh," she said.

The father of the boy added, "Two boys came to our house to pick my son. After that, his mother kept calling him but it went unanswered. Around 9 pm on Sunday, his phone went off. I started a search for him and then went to the police station to register a complaint."

He said around midnight he got a call with the demand for a ransom, to be paid within three days, or else his son would be killed.

"He was killed so brutally. His throat was slit and he was stabbed multiple times. I want them to go through the same pain that my son did," he said.

Muslim prayer inadmissible in Sabarimala: Islamic zealot

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

Malayalam filmdom's megastar Mammootty has been dragged into a controversy by a religious zealot O Abdullah, a Jama-at-e-Islami fundamentalist, who questioned the former for allowing another megastar Mohan Lal to offer prayers at the holy shrine of Sabarimala for the former's health.

Abdullah and another Islamic extremist Nazar Faizi who heads a powerful wing by name Samasta called for an atonement by Mammootty and they also demanded the megastar to apologise to the Muslim community in the State.

Mohan Lal's special pooja for the health of his friend Mammootty, whom he addresses as Mammookka (a mark of respect for his senior) was the fall out of an unsubstantiated news that the latter was suffering from colon cancer.

Though there has been no communication from Mammootty or his close family members about the report, persons who claim to be close to the megastar said he was diagnosed with the ailment and was undergoing medication for the same.

What added to the controversial news was that Mammootty and family shifted to Chennai from Kochi and he has cancelled his shooting schedule for the next two months.

But this could be due to the fasting he routinely undertakes during the Ramadan month. Mohan Lal who undertook a pilgrimage to Sabarimala on the first of Malayalam month Meenam had held special poojas as the shrine for his mother, wife and Mammootty.

The receipt from the temple authorities carrying the birth-star and name of Mammootty went viral in the social media and this made Abdullah, who masquerades as a journalist, furious. The Jamat-e-Islami leader lambasted Mammootty and called him to perform atonement lest he may have to face religious punishment.

Abdullah's comment has created a furor in Kerala as Mammootty remains a widely respected and adored artist in the State irrespective of caste and religion.

The Jamat-e-Islami leader and another leader who owns educational institutions across Kerala have called for the establishment of a Caliphate in South India.

"This is ridiculous. Offering pooja at a temple is to request the God Almighty to cure the person for whom the ritual is held. The community and political leaders should see this as a plea to the deity for the well being of the person," said Sreejit Panicker, political observer.

Lal's pooja for Mammootty is happening in a filmdom, which is a dog eating dog world.

Kunal Kamra takes swipe at Nirmala Sitharaman

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

After his "gaddar" jibe at Maharashtra deputy chief minister Eknath Shinde and the equally sharp barb at the ruling BJP at the Centre over its theme of 'Viksit Bharat', stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra on Wednesday took potshots at Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and the Union government over fritting away of public money.

Undeterred by the FIR lodged against him by the Mumbai over his "Gaddar" barb against Shinde, Kamra put out one more poetic video – this time used iconic iconic track "Hawa Hawai" from film 'Mr India', featuring Sridevi, to target the Union Finance Minister and the Centre. He lamented how tax-payers' money was going 'hawa-hawai' (frittered away) in schemes, and that the central government was ruining the roads. "The Metro is in their thoughts and they relax after digging up, leading to traffic congestion on the roads, crashing down bridges, and these are examples of 'dictatorship' (tanashahi)," he croons in his new song.

"It makes no difference to them (the Government) if the peoples' aspirations are binned, or if corporate employees pay more tax than the corporates, as is in the national interest," he says.

"The huge inflation in the country has come with the Central government, and the 'sariwali didi' has come to loot peoples' earnings and rob their salaries….The woman, Nirmala-tai is also crushing the middle-classes, feeding popcorn to the masses," he takes a jibe at Sitharaman.

Pulling no punches, Kamra said: "She is the JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University) student that the country deserves. It's Nehru's mistake that she was educated there. If she had studied at the Benares Hindu University, she would have made a better Finance Minister".

Kamra, who has been deriving a lot of mileage for the past four days after his "Gaddar" jibe against Shinde, has — for his new video — managed to notch up almost six lakhs views, 30 thousand likes and 6 thousand-plus likes and comments.

Thirty-six-year-old Kamra — who is currently in Puducherry — had earlier refused to tender an apology for his jibe against Shinde as demanded by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis. He did not appear before the Mumbai police in response to the summons issued to him to present himself before them at 11 am on Tuesday for questioning in connection with the FIR registered against in the "gaddar" controversy. He has reportedly sought a week's time to appear before the Mumbai police.

Namo Bharat introduces loyalty points for free travel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In an effort to increase ridership, Namo Bharat train commuters can enjoy free trips by redeeming their loyalty points. Under the Loyalty Points Program, recently introduced by NCRTC, commuters earn loyalty points every time they generate a digital QR ticket through the Namo Bharat app or travel using the National Common Mobility Card (NCMC).

A statement by NCRTC also said on Wednesday every rupee spent on a journey using a NCMC card or the Namo Bharat app earns one Loyalty Point, with each point valued at ₹0.10 (10 paise). Once a commuter accumulates a minimum of 300 loyalty points, they can redeem them for a free trip.

Under the loyalty program, the points accumulated by commuters using NCMC cards are credited to the commuter's NCMC account at the end of each operational day. These points are reflected in their NCMC account the next day. For example, if a commuter spends ₹100 on his travel, he gets 100 points equivalent to ₹10, which is added to his NCMC account. Once sufficient points are accumulated, passengers can redeem them. To eliminate the hassle of redeeming points repeatedly by commuters, a provision has also been made to redeem five trips at a time.

Points equivalent to the fare of these five trips will be deducted from the passengers' NCMC account. The redeemed trips are valid for seven days, which means if a five-trip pass is redeemed, all five trips must be used within the stipulated time limit of seven days. Commuters using NCMC can check their accumulated points at Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs), ticket readers or ticket counters.

Commuters can use any NCMC card issued by any Metro or Transport Authority or Financial institution in the country to travel in the Namo Bharat Trains. This system has been in the place from the first day of operations of the service. For those using the Namo Bharat app to generate digital QR tickets, checking and redeeming loyalty points is simple. The points are displayed under the "account" section of the application, and redemption is just a click away.

By selecting the 'loyalty points' option and choosing "redeem", commuters can book their tickets, with points deducted according to the fare between their selected stations. If they have any queries, they can refer to the FAQ section under the 'Namo Bharat' segment in the app's 'my account' section.

This initiative is not just about offering discounts on journeys but also about promoting paperless ticketing, making travel more seamless while contributing to a cleaner, more sustainable future.

The loyalty program is designed to benefit frequent commuters of Namo Bharat trains, helping them save more with every journey. Frequent commuters can unlock accumulative loyalty points with each trip, making every ride more accessible. Commuters are encouraged to download the Namo Bharat mobile app for a more efficient and comfortable travel experience. New users of the Namo Bharat app receive 500 loyalty points (equivalent to ₹50) upon downloading.

Additionally, users can earn an extra 500 loyalty points by referring others to the app, with both the referrer and the referee receiving ₹50 worth of points in their respective accounts. All loyalty points remain valid for one year from the date of credit, ensuring continuous engagement and frequent travel. The Namo Bharat application is available for download on both the Google Play Store and Apple App Store.

Delhi's new avatar: BJP plans image revamp

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Just a month after coming to power in Delhi, the BJP -led government has now decided to undertake a branding exercise for the city in order to have a lasting imprint of the ruling party as well as the national capital's image, by promoting it as a heritage and tourism hub.

Further eyeing the Bihar polls which is scheduled later this year, the Delhi government doubled the budget allocation for Maithili-Bhojpuri academy from ₹3.50 Crore to ₹6.30 Crore. "I have seen Delhi very closely since my student life. I have seen all its colours and have found that perhaps it is the most beautiful city in the world," chief minister Rekha Gupta said.

The branding measure for which ₹25 Crore has been allocated will entail creation of a catchy tagline on the lines of the ones in other States like Rajasthan with the catchline of Padharo Mhare Desh, Gujarat's Kuch Din to Gujaro Gujarat Me and Kerala's God's Own Country, among others, said tourism minister Kapil Mishra.

As part of the makeover bid, the city will also boast of a state guest house as speculations are rife that the "Sheesh Mahal" (previous official residence of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal) will be converted into the facility to host government's official guests.

Aiming to transform the national capital into a major tourist hub, the Delhi government has allocated a total of ₹117 Crore for various schemes as compared to ₹66 Crore last year by the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government. The national capital will host an international film festival to culturally enrich and promote Delhi as a film destination for which ₹30 Crore has been allocated.

Fake Haridwar Akhara priests caught cheating in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Police has arrested four men posing as priests of Haridwar Akhara for allegedly cheating a man of his gold ring on the pretext of bringing him good fortune. According to police, the accused have been identified as Rinku Nath (30) and Sahil Nath (22), both residents of Haridwar, and Rocky Nath (35) and Vickey Nath (31), both from Sonipat, Haryana. The complainant, Gagan Jain, a chartered accountant from Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh), was attending a conference in Aerocity when he was allegedly approached by the four accused near JW Marriott Hotel on March 23, police said.

"Dressed as sadhus with ash smeared on their bodies and bells tied to their feet, they claimed to be well-versed in the Vedas and offered to apply a tilak on his forehead. When Jain refused, they insisted, invoking his faith in 'Ganga Maiya' and Mahadev," Additional Commissioner of Police (IGI Airport) Usha Ragnani said.

The accused allegedly convinced him that his gold ring was "defective" and needed to be given away to rid him of misfortune, she said. Fearing their words, the victim handed over his ring, after which the accused asked him to leave the spot without looking back, warning that he would suffer a loss otherwise, the officer said.

Realising he had been duped, Jain reported the incident to police, and an FIR was registered, she said, adding that the four accused were arrested from Mahipalpur.

Waqf Bill protests rocked Bihar

All India Muslim Person Law Board and General Secretary Maulana Fazlur Raheman Mujaddidi with RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav and Tejaswi Yadav during a protest against Waqf Amendmend Bill 2024 in Patna on Wednesday PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Patna

Protests against the Waqf Bill rocked the Bihar capital on Wednesday, as Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav vowed to fight it out till rollback of the "undemocratic" legislation by the NDA government at the Centre.

Yadav drove down to Gardanibagh, the designated spot for 'dharnas' in the city, along with ailing father Lalu Prasad, the RJD president, to express solidarity with a demonstration staged by the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB). Barely a kilometre away, RJD MLAs and their Left allies, who had reached the assembly carrying the tricolour and placards with slogans denouncing the contentious Bill, stalled the proceedings of the assembly, forcing adjournment till 2 pm.

Yadav told the AIMPLB gathering that "we believe in your cause and our party had expressed the same before the Joint Parliamentary Committee when it came to Bihar. We will fight it out till this 'Nagpuriya' undemocratic and unconstitutional legislation is rolled back". The allusion was to the headquarters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the parent body of the ruling BJP at the Centre.

The AIMPLB had recently announced plans to hold protests in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, primarily to goad chief ministers of the two states, Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu, respectively, both of whom swear by their "secular" credentials. Indirectly targeting Kumar, Yadav said "there are some who are supporting the Bill because of their greed for power… I am proud that I have in my veins the blood of Lalu ji, who has come here despite his body having been worn down by a kidney transplant and heart surgeries". Notably, Lalu Prasad remains a favourite with the minority community on account of his gutsy arrest of BJP patriarch L K Advani in the thick of the Ayodhya movement in the 1990s, as well as his ability to keep Bihar relatively free of communal clashes.

Yadav told the gathering that "we had moved an adjournment motion before the assembly on the Waqf issue. The proceedings could not continue long enough for a discussion to take place". "We will blow to smithereens the agenda of this government, which is dictatorial and wants to throw the Constitution out of the window. Today, in the name of regulating the Waqf, they are targeting Muslims. Tomorrow, it may be the turn of Christians and Sikhs," he asserted.

After the RJD leaders left the site of the day-long dharna, the protesters were joined by Jan Suraaj Party founder Prashant Kishor, who has promised to field a significant number of Muslims in the Bihar assembly polls due later this year.

Punjab FM announces ₹10 lakh health cover for all in budget for FY26

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chandigarh

Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema announced a ₹10 lakh health insurance cover for all families, steps to tackle drug menace and a 'Rangla Punjab Vikas scheme' for holistic development in the ₹2.36-lakh-crore state budget for 2025-26 presented in the Assembly on Wednesday.

With a theme of 'Badalda Punjab' (transforming Punjab), Cheema kept the focus of his budget on the health, education and other sectors in the fourth budget of the AAP government in Punjab.

According to budget documents, the state's outstanding debt has been pegged at ₹4.17 lakh crore (₹4,17,136 crore) for FY 2025-26 as against revised estimates of ₹3.82 lakh crore (₹3,82,934.98 crore) for 2024-25.

In his nearly two-hour-long address, Cheema also announced a loan waiver for the Scheduled Caste beneficiaries who defaulted on loans availed from Punjab Scheduled Castes Land Development and Finance Corporation (PSCFC) and reducing service fee for availing government services at their doorsteps from ₹120 to ₹50. Facing flak from the opposition over not keeping its poll promise, the budget did not find any mention of giving monthly income of ₹1,000 to women, which was one of the key promises of the AAP before coming to power.

Replying to a question, Cheema said the state government will soon launch it. "Different departments including finance and social are conducting surveys for it," he further said. Calling the state budget the 'Badalda Punjab roadmap', Cheema, while presenting the budget document in the House, said, " I propose a total budget expenditure of ₹2,36,080 crore for FY 2025-26." The budget estimated revenue deficit and fiscal deficit at ₹23,957 crore and ₹34,201 crore, respectively, for the next financial year.

The budget proposed ₹9,992 crore as power subsidy for the agriculture sector.

Acknowledging that the problem of drugs was the biggest threat to the progress and prosperity of Punjab, Cheema also noted that the bulk of the drugs are coming from across the border.

Announcing steps to check the smuggling of narcotics, Cheema announced the state government will establish a second line of defense at the border by deploying 5,000 home guards alongside the BSF.

He further said the government will deploy the most advanced and effective anti-drone systems to track and neutralize the sophisticated cross-border drones being used to drop drugs and arms inside Punjab. "I am allocating a budget of ₹110 crore towards these initiatives next year," he said.

In another initiative, he said the government has decided to carry out a first ever 'drug census' in Punjab next year.

"This Census will cover every household of Punjab and will collect data to understand the prevalence of drugs, usage of de-addiction centers, etc., besides collecting data on socio-economic status of the people of Punjab. We will use this data to craft an effective and scientific strategy to eradicate the problem of drugs within the next 1-2 years. Our government proposes to spend ₹150 crore on this initiative," he said.

On the health front, Cheema noted free and quality healthcare should be available as a matter of right to every citizen of India — irrespective of whether they are rich or poor. Cheema announced to extend the state health insurance scheme to make it universal and cover all the 65 lakh families of Punjab.

"There will be no bar or discrimination — rural or urban, rich or poor, everyone can participate in this scheme," he said.

"The second big decision is that we are extending the insurance cover for all the families of Punjab to ₹10 lakh per annum. This includes those enrolled in the central government scheme too, they will get an additional top-up cover of ₹5 lakh from the state government.

A sum of ₹778 crore has been allocated for this purpose, he said.

Cheema said so far, 45 lakh families of Punjab are enrolled in government health insurance schemes of which 16 lakh families are covered under the Central government's Ayushman Bharat Yojana and the remaining 29 lakh families are covered under the Punjab government's Mukh Mantri Sarbat Sehat Bima Yojana. The insurance coverage for the entire family is only ₹5 lakh per annum in these schemes. Announcing the 'Rangla Punjab Vikas Scheme' — a new initiative dedicated towards restoring the lost glory of Punjab and ensure holistic development of the state. "The fund will be administered by the district commissioners (DCs) and will be spent based on the recommendations of MLAs, community organisations, citizen groups and public-spirited citizens. This fund will be a huge enabler in ensuring all-round development of all our districts across all sectors such as construction and repair of roads and bridges, street-lights, clinics, hospitals, schools, water, sanitation etc," he said.

I am allocating ₹585 crore (₹5 crore per constituency) for this scheme," he said. Cheema further announced a new initiative, Khed-da Punjab, Badalda Punjab' initiative, under which the government will promote sports at the grassroots level by providing playgrounds and indoor gyms in every village of Punjab.

Mirror, mirror on the wall... who's the fairest of us all?

Continued from >> P1

It is the colour that works on everyone, the dress code for office, the luster of evening wear, the essence of kajol, the promise of rain," she concluded her monologue.

It is nothing new that colour of the skin is given priority over qualifications and efficiency in the State. Kanaka Durga, famous artist who became the darling of film viewers through her sterling performances had told this writer that she got a raw deal from movie makers because of the colour of her skin.

Recently, RLV Ramakrishnan, a Mohiniyattam dancer was removed from the roster of performers of a State-sponsored show due to same reason. The incident created a lot of controversy across the State. In yet another shocking incident, KK Shylaja, the CPI(M) leader and former health minister (2016-2021) was denied a ministership in the second term of Vijayan despite her excellent track record in handling the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead of Shylaja, a lady with fair complexion made it to the council of ministers and she has ended up as butt of jokes. This is progressive Kerala in its true 'splendour'.

Delhi Assembly to go paperless with e-Vidhan application

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Assembly is likely to be ready to go paperless from the Monsoon session and MLAs will use the e-Vidhan application through touchscreen desktops, mobile phones and tablets for legislative work.

Addressing the Budget session of the Assembly, Speaker Vijender Gupta said on Wednesday the initiative to go paperless has been fast-tracked to complete the project within 100 days so that legislative work in the Monsoon Session scheduled for June-July is carried out using the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA), he said.

"Adoption of the e-Vidhan application will make the functioning of the assembly, its committees and the secretariat digital and paperless," Gupta said.

The Speaker said the MLAs will be given training to use the application, adding that it was quite user-friendly and a permanent facilitation centre will be set up for the purpose. A detailed project report (DPR) on the project has been prepared and three training sessions on the app have already been held, he said.

Speaker Gupta said the MLAs will use the application through touchscreen desktops that will be installed at their tables in the assembly hall. The application will be installed on the desktops by the Monsoon session and legislators will also be able to download it and use it on their smartphones and tablets, he said.

A tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Delhi Assembly, the Delhi government and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs on March 22 for the implementation of NeVA, the Speaker said, adding that the Centre gave funds to the Vidhan Sabha for the project. He said all members will be able to submit notices online and receive records of the Assembly on their smartphones and tablets.

CBI raids ex-Chhattisgarh CM Baghel's houses

Continued from >> P1

"In the investigation of Mahadev Book online betting scam, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) today is conducting searches at 60 locations across Chhattisgarh, Bhopal, Kolkata, and Delhi including premises linked to politicians, senior bureaucrats, police officers, key functionaries of Mahadev Book, and other private individuals suspected of involvement in the case," a CBI Spokesperson said in a statement.

The agency said that the case pertains to the illegal operations of Mahadev Book, an online betting platform promoted by Ravi Uppal and Saurabh Chandrakar, both of whom are currently based in Dubai. "Investigations have revealed that the promoters allegedly paid substantial amounts as 'protection money' to public servants to ensure the smooth and uninterrupted functioning of their illegal betting network," the statement said.

The app was an umbrella syndicate arranging online platforms for illegal betting websites to enrol new users, create user IDs and launder money through a layered web of 'benami' bank accounts, it claimed. The projected proceeds of crime are about Rs 6,000 crore, the ED earlier said.

MHA finally responds to Rahul's citizenship issue

Continued from >> P1

In 2015, Subramanian Swamy produced documents of a british company Backops, where Rahul Gandhi is a Director and Company Secretary. The documents showed that from 2002 to 2009, Rahul declared himself as Brtish Citizen and London resident. The company was closed in 2009 and Rahul was Member of Parliament from 2004. In 2017, Swamy filed complaint to MHA and in April 2019, MHA issued show cause notice to Rahul. In 2023 Swamy approached Delhi High Court, seeking MHA to take a decision on his complaint.

Meerut administration issues directives for Eid

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Meerut

The district administration and police in Meerut have issued strict directives ahead of Eid, warning that offering prayers on roads will lead to severe consequences, including the confiscation of passports and driving licenses. The authorities have emphasised that Eid prayers will only be allowed at designated Eidgahs and mosques, and any violations will result in legal action.

In a bid to maintain law and order, the Meerut police have reiterated that offering Namaz (prayers) in public spaces, especially on roads, will not be tolerated. Officials have appealed to the public to adhere to the rules and ensure prayers are performed only at permitted locations.

Last year, around 200 individuals were booked for violating similar restrictions. This time, the administration has warned of even stricter measures. The police have announced that violators could face legal action under relevant sections of the law, and their passports and driving licences might be seized as a punitive measure.

To ensure compliance, the administration has ramped up surveillance. Authorities will use CCTV cameras to monitor key locations, drone surveillance to keep an aerial watch over large gatherings, and local intelligence teams to track potential violations and prevent any law-and-order issues. Senior officials have instructed police personnel to be vigilant, especially in sensitive areas where tensions have previously been reported.

To prevent any untoward incidents, additional police forces have been deployed in sensitive areas. Quick Response Teams (QRTs) and paramilitary forces have also been kept on standby to handle any emergencies. A senior police officer urged all citizens to respect the guidelines and cooperate with law enforcement, emphasising that prayers should be conducted peacefully at designated places to avoid legal complications.

The final date for Eid prayers will depend on the sighting of the moon, which is expected on either March 31 or April 1. The police have assured that all arrangements are in place to ensure a peaceful celebration while maintaining law and order. Authorities have urged religious leaders and community representatives to spread awareness about the restrictions and encourage compliance to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

MLAs' pay hike on the cards in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Days after the Centre notifying a 24 per cent hike in the salaries of members of Parliament with effect from April 1, 2023, based on the Cost Inflation Index, Delhi Assembly formed a five-member committee on Wednesday to look into the demands for revising MLAs' salaries, after BJP and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) legislators raised the issue during a discussion in the House.

The committee will also look into requests of MLAs to increase in the number of staff provided to them for constituency- related works and revising the remuneration for the data entry operators provided to them.

The formation of the panel comes close on the heels of Centre notifying a 24 per cent hike in the salaries of members of Parliament with effect from April 1, 2023, based on the Cost Inflation Index. The salaries of the Delhi MLAs were last revised in February 2023, from then ₹54,000 to ₹90,000 per month.

The salaries of chief minister, cabinet ministers, Speaker, Deputy Speaker, chief whip and Leader of Opposition were raised from ₹72,000 to 1.7 Lakh. The hike had come after a gap of 12 years.

"Two issues were discussed by the House, including that related to data entry operators and increasing the honorarium (of MLAs) in line with Parliament," Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta told the House.

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta PIONEER PHOTO

BJP chief whip Abhay Verma heads the committee and comprises MLAs Surya Prakash Khatri, Poonam Sharma, Sajeev Jha and Vishesh Ravi.

It will submit its report in two weeks, and the time can be extended also as per requirement, he added.

During the discussion, MLAs from both ruling and opposition parties cited their low salaries and pressed for a hike. The AAP MLAs said that they have been given a dignified status with a protocol but their salaries and perks were much less than even district magistrates and SDMs in their areas. They also demanded a respectable pension for the former MLAs.

AAP MLA Anil Jha said that MLAs were given a dignified status with a protocol, but their salaries and perks were much less than even district magistrates and SDMs in their areas. Jha, MLA from Kirari, also demanded a respectable pension for the former MLAs.

His party colleague, Vishesh Ravi, said that the Delhi government should prepare a proposal for revision of MLAs' salaries and send it for approval of the Centre.

BJP MLA Kulwant Rana also said that Delhi MLAs should be paid respectable salaries like other states, including Goa and Jammu and Kashmir.

His party colleague, Surya Prakash Khatri, raised the issue of increasing the number of data entry operators provided to the MLAs from two to four. He also said that their remuneration be enhanced as per the skilled category under the Minimum Wages Act".

Khatri received support from his party MLAs and Jha, who, too, demanded more staff to undertake constituency-related works.

Recently, the Karnataka Assembly has passed Bills giving a 100 per cent salary hike to the chief minister and all lawmakers. An analysis by the pioneer of the last salary revision done by state Assemblies shows that MLA salary hikes have ranged from 120 per cent in Telangana (2016) and 100 per cent in Karnataka (March 2025), Manipur (2020) and Tamil Nadu (2018) to 30 per cent in Madhya Pradesh (2016), 50 per cent in Jharkhand (2024), 60 per cent in Himachal Pradesh (2019), 64 per cent in Gujarat (2018), 66 per cent in Delhi (2023) and 46 per cent in Rajasthan (2019). According to the latest data on state Assembly websites, the highest monthly salary of ₹2.75 Lakh is currently earned by MLAs of the Telangana Assembly. It was under the K Chandrashekar Rao-led BRS government that the salary of MLAs in the state was hiked from ₹1.25 Lakh to ₹2.75 Lakh, inclusive of all allowances.

Kashmere Gate registers 139 FIRs for public nuisance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A city court was on Wednesday informed by the police that 139 FIRs have been registered in the Kashmere Gate police station for causing danger or obstruction in the public way so far in 2025.

The station house officer (SHO) responded in a civil suit filed for removing the illegal obstruction or encroachment of public roads and footpaths in central Delhi, especially within a one-kilometre radius of the Tis Hazari district court and surrounding roads, such as Mori Gate Chowk to St Stephen road, GT Karnal Road, Lala Hardev Sahi Marg, Hamilton Road and Raj Pura Road.

The plea filed by a lawyer said trucks and transport services illegally loading and unloading goods aside from encroachments by street vendors resulted in severe traffic congestion, hampering pedestrian movement and disrupted work of advocates in the Tis Hazari courts. On March 18, the court sought a detailed status reports from the authorities concerned, including the SHOs of Kashmere Gate and Subzi Mandi.

The reply by the SHO of Kashmere Gate said the area had a "very large footfall" because it was one of the biggest automobile parts markets and that regular action was taken against encroachment by the local and traffic police.

It said, "139 FIRs have been registered under Section 285 (danger or obstruction in public way) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at police station Kashmere Gate till date in the year of 2025. Moreover, regular action is being taken to ensure smooth movement and to maintain law and order."

In 2024, the reply said, a total of 20 heavy vehicles were impounded aside from 1,963 challans being issued for improper parking, and 1,700 challans for permit and registration certificate violations.

It said a total of 76 cases were registered against encroachments or obstructions in public places in 2024.

According to the report of the traffic inspector of Civil Lines, multiple factors caused vehicular congestion around Tis Hazari courts, including inadequate parking facility in and around the court premises, a large number of DTC buses plying in the area and lack of a foot-over bridge near gate numbers 3 and 4 of Kashmiri Gate metro station.

"The area of central Delhi is densely populated. Also, there are three popular thok (wholesale) markets, ie, Chandni Chowk, Sadar Bazar, Khoya Mandi where large number of people from different places visit these markets, and due to non-availability of proper parking space and congested roads, the visitors use small and slow moving commercial vehicles to reach these markets. Breakdown of vehicles, especially DTC buses on these roads, increases the problem," the report said.

Delhi Budget sparks heated debate in Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Assembly on Wednesday witnessed a heated debate, with the treasury benches highlighting the city government's plans for economic development in its Budget for 2025-26, while the Opposition called its revenue estimates "unrealistic".

As soon as the Question Hour started on Wednesday, Leader of Opposition Atishi raised questions related to development in slum areas. Atishi's criticism on the floor of the House irked Education Minister Ashish Sood and both the leaders exchanged sharp words. When Atishi's name was called to read her question, she was not present in the House. She came later in the House following which she was given opportunity to raise her issue listed for the Question Hour.

The LoP raised the issue of cleanliness of toilets in many areas of the city especially in slum and JJ clusters. She said that in its maiden budget, the government has made a provision of ₹700 Crore for developments works in slum areas but the reality is that the slum dwellers in the city are living in a worse condition and even there is no cleanliness of toilets run by the government agencies.

The House witnessed uproar after Atishi's statement as MLAs from both sides made allegations against each other.

Education Minister Ashish Sood reacted over Atishi's statement saying that when AAP was in power, DUSIB's budget was passed around 11:40 in the night on March 31 and it shows how much serious you were for slum people across the national capital. "You wanted to corner the government for budget announcement but you were not present on time. Your tension is that how the newly formed government has presented a budget with more outlay than your government's budget in just 33 days. The slum dwellers of Delhi shown you people the exit door and you people are feeling uneasy," the Minister said.

During a discussion on the budget, PWD Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh slammed AAP over its financial performance. "Those who made claims (about providing) world-class health (services) spent ₹2,100 Crore lower than planned. Those who boasted about an education model revised their estimates to ₹16,711 Crore but spent only ₹13,987 Crore. This is the reality of AAP's big claims," he said.

AAP, now in Opposition after governing Delhi for a decade, slammed the budget and said its revenue estimates were "unrealistic". "The budget is full of baseless numbers. By the end of the financial year, we will see this ₹1 Lakh Crore budget falling short," said AAP MLA Sanjeev Jha.

AAP MLA Kuldeep Kumar questioned the BJP over its poll promises and asked, "Where is the ₹2,500 for women? Where are the free gas cylinders for Holi? The festival has passed but the promises remain unfulfilled."

Rekha Gupta's convoy halted due to stray cattle

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A major accident averted as Chief Minister Rekha Gupta's convoy halted for nearly 15 minutes on the Haiderpur flyover on Wednesday morning as half a dozen stray cattle blocked the road. This prompted the driver to make an emergency stop. The incident occurred when she was touring different parts of Delhi a day after presenting the city's largest-ever budget of ₹One Lakh Crore. She went around constituencies and listened to people's grievances.

Upon seeing the stray cows, the Chief Minister came out of her vehicle and asked the officials to find a shelter for the animals. According to an eyewitness, the driver applied the brakes just in time as the stray cattle appeared on the flyover. The Chief Minister stepped out of her car to check on the animals and later security personnel intervened to ensure they were safely moved aside.

A major accident was averted as the driver applied brakes on time, seeing the stray cattle on the flyover. A video from the Chief Minister's Office captured her inquiring about the animals and waiting approximately 15 minutes for them to clear the road. According to a Chief Minister Office (CMO) official, the Chief Minister has issued instructions to provide proper shelter for the stray cattle in the area.

She also directed officials to remove unauthorised posters and banners from public property and emphasised, "No one has the right to damage public property. If we want a clean and beautiful Delhi, everyone's cooperation is necessary.

It is our collective responsibility to protect public property."

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta PIONEER PHOTO

While inspecting metro pillars, she objected to posters and hoardings hanging from them and asked the officials to remove those. She said such acts must be discouraged since such banners destroy the city's beautiful landscape.

The Chief Minister inspected Pitampura and inaugurated development projects. She directed the removal of unauthorised posters and banners from public property including Delhi Metro pillars, said a CMO statement.

"If we want a clean and beautiful Delhi, everyone's cooperation is necessary. It is our collective responsibility to protect public property," she said.

During the inspection in ward 57 in Pitampura, the Chief Minister suspended a sanitation inspector finding a lack of desilting of a four feet wide drain in the area, a Delhi government officer said. During the visit, she went to various blocks in Pitampura, interacted with the residents and directed officials to solve the problems raised by them.

The Chief Minister inaugurated development works completed in SD (C) Block, HP Block, LP Block, RU Block, MU Block and G and JU Block in Pitampura. These works include the construction of new lanes, drains, sewage lines and security gates.

She emphasised that the Delhi government is committed to providing comprehensive, world-class amenities and facilities in all colonies across the city.

Construction of drains in front of Gopal Mandir Marg and City Park Hotel in LP Block at a cost of ₹36 Lakh, improvement of drainage system and strengthening of Outer Ring Road worth ₹12.86 Crores in RU Block, new sewage line in MU block and construction of two stainless steel security gates in G and JU blocks, the statement said.

DELHI CM SUSPENDS SANITATION INSPECTOR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Wednesday suspended a sanitation inspector after finding a lack of desilting of a drain in the Pitampura area of northwest Delhi.

During an inspection, the Chief Minister found serious lapses in sanitation in Pitampura Block. It was found that proper desilting and cleaning of drains less than four feet deep had not been carried out.

"Taking serious note of this negligence, the Sanitary Inspector responsible for the Municipal ward no-57, Pitampura Block was found to have failed in his duty to ensure proper sanitation. His inability to supervise the assigned area and uphold cleanliness standards was deemed gross misconduct and a dereliction of duty," the CMO said in a statement.

"In light of this, the Sanitary Inspector, DEMS, Keshav Puram Zone(MCD) , has been placed under suspension. In addition, SI and ASI from Ward 55 from DEMS, Keshav Puram and RSK from ward number 57 of Pitampura responsible for sanitation lapses have been relieved of their duties and transferred on administrative grounds and directed to report for further posting," it said.

Speaker rejects Atishi's budget time allegations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Terming Leader of Opposition Atishi's accusation baseless and incorrect, regarding limited time allotted for budget discussions, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Wednesday said her claim that only one hour was set aside for the budget discussion was "incorrect."

Speaker Gupta said that the business advisory committee of the Assembly, which includes Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs, had decided that the budget discussion would take place over two days, on March 26 and 27.

In a letter to Speaker Vijender Gupta, Atishi expressed outrage over the Assembly's 'List of Business' for the day, which allocates barely an hour for Budget discussions, a move she termed "deeply worrying" and an attempt to avoid scrutiny, accused the ruling BJP of deliberately curtailing discussions on the Annual Budget 2025-26 and may be trying to hide crucial economic details. Speaker Gupta, in his reply, said, "I have received a letter from Atishi in which she has stated that only one hour has been allocated for discussion on the budget. This is completely untrue.

In a letter to Speaker Vijender Gupta, Atishi expressed outrage over the Assembly's 'List of Business' for the day, which allocates barely an hour for Budget discussions, a move she termed "deeply worrying"

In the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee, in which opposition members were also present, it was decided that discussions on the budget will take place on March 26 and 27.

Additionally, all members will be given equal speaking time in proportion to their party's representation, ensuring that every member gets a fair opportunity to speak."

He said that the rules followed in previous sessions will be adhered to this time as well. If the need arises, the session duration will also be extended.

It should be appreciated that discussions are taking place on every subject during the session. Therefore, the claim that only one hour has been allocated for the budget discussion is completely baseless and politically motivated. Responding to Atishi's letter, Gupta said her claim that only one hour was set aside for the budget discussion was "incorrect."

In her letter, Atishi also pointed out that the government had failed to present the Economic Survey, a standard parliamentary practice - before tabling the budget, and wondered whether this was an attempt to withhold vital economic data from the public.

"It almost seems that the Government wants to avoid a detailed discussion on the Budget. Is this Budget based on fictitious revenue projections and economic trends? Is that why the economic survey was not presented?" she wrote in her letter.

AAP slams UP government over 'one plus, one free' liquor scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday accused the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government of encouraging alcoholism by allegedly allowing a "one plus, one free" liquor scheme in the state.

Liquor shops across Noida and Ghaziabad are offering discounts and deals to clear out their stock before the new excise policy in Uttar Pradesh comes into effect on April 1.

Addressing a press conference, Delhi Aam Aadmi Party chief Saurabh Bharadwaj also wondered why no action had been taken against liquor shops reportedly offering free bottles of alcohol.

"We are seeing many videos on social media from across Uttar Pradesh where long queues are forming outside liquor shops. It is a conspiracy to make people alcoholics. I want to ask UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath why there has been no bulldozer action against these shops," Bharadwaj said.

The former Delhi minister asked if the scheme had the approval of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) central leadership.

"Has CM Yogi started this 'one plus, one free' alcohol scheme after consulting the BJP leadership? If not, why is the central BJP leadership silent on this?" he asked. The party attacked the UP government also in a post on X.

"A river of liquor is flowing in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh. At liquor shops in Noida, a free bottle of alcohol is being given with each purchase. Do the Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress not see any scam or irregularity in this? Will the BJP central government order a Central Bureau of Investigation-Enforcement Directorate (CBI-ED) investigation into this?" it posted.

This year, the Uttar Pradesh government introduced an e-lottery system for liquor shop licenses instead of renewing licenses as done in the past six years.

This change allows new players to enter the market.

Additionally, the government has introduced "composite shops" that will sell both beer and Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) together.

Because of this, many separate beer and IMFL shops will be merged.

According to excise officials, Noida liquor stores usually sell about 10,000 beer bottles, 30,000 foreign liquor bottles, and 40,000 country liquor bottles daily, generating ₹three-four Crore in revenue every day.

With the current discounts, they expect a 30-40 per cent spike in sales this week.

Delhi government cracks down on private schools' monopolistic practices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Private schools compelling parents to purchase books and uniforms from particular shops will face action, the Delhi Directorate of Education (DoE) said in an order asking the schools to display a list of at least five vendors on their websites and notice boards. The government said that the move will protect parents from unnecessary financial burdens and ensure transparency in the system.

The DoE has directed schools to implement its directives failing which strict action will be taken against them. The move comes after the DoE received several complaints against some private schools for compelling parents to purchase books, uniforms and study materials from particular vendors. "Schools must display information about books, uniforms, and their availability at multiple vendors on both their official websites and notice boards," the department said.

It has often been observed that various private unaided recognised schools were compelling students to purchase education materials, such as books, guides, ties, belts, notebooks, uniforms and bags from specific private vendors.

Parents demand that their children students should have the freedom to choose their educational supplies.

The DoE also instructed the schools not to change the colour, design or any other specification in uniforms for at least three years once prescribed. The department has urged parents to report any violations to the nodal officer, assuring strict action against defaulting schools.

"If any violations are reported, appropriate action under BNS and BNSS will be taken against such malpractices," it stated.

The DoE clarified that students should be free to purchase study materials from vendors of their choice at fair market prices. The directive aims to prevent commercial exploitation and promote fair competition, it said, adding that schools must also allow students to use books and study materials aligned with the official curriculum and examination guidelines. Private schools have also been instructed to display the names, addresses, and contact details of vendors located near the school where all necessary study materials are available.

Education Minister Ashish Sood said that private schools must transparently display the list of prescribed books, educational materials and other required items in the school premises. This information must be displayed prominently on school notice boards and the official websites. Any private school found concealing this information or misleading students and parents will face legal consequences.

He also said that all schools must ensure that they display this list in a public place within the school campus. Any school failing to comply will be held accountable. Under the powers vested in the Directorate of Education, nine key instructions have been mandated for all private unaided recognized schools in Delhi. These includes parents must not be forced to buy from specific vendors or school-appointed suppliers, uploading the list of books and uniform specifications on their official website before the academic session begins and schools and principals must also ensure that students and parents are not pressured to purchase extra study materials beyond the prescribed curriculum.

The Directorate of Education will closely monitor adherence to these guidelines and take strict action against violations.

Parents and stakeholders concerned have been requested to report any violations to the Nodal Officer, Deputy Director of Education (PSB), via email at ddeact1@gmail.com or through the helpline number 9818154069. The government directives said that failing to adhere to the guidelines will be considered a violation of the Delhi School Education Act and appropriate action under BNS and BNSS against such malpractices will also be taken up. The Delhi Government remains committed to making education affordable and accessible for all.

Lok Sabha being run in non democratic manner: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday claimed that he was not being given a chance to speak in the House which was being run in a "non-democratic style", and said Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had made "unsubstantiated" remarks about him. Gandhi's remarks came after Birla asked him to follow the rules of procedure that members are expected to observe to uphold the dignity of the House. It was not immediately clear what was the reason for the Speaker to make the observation.

Rahul said the Speaker made remarks about him and then adjourned the House without giving him an opportunity to speak. "The Speaker just got up and left. He did not allow me to speak a word.

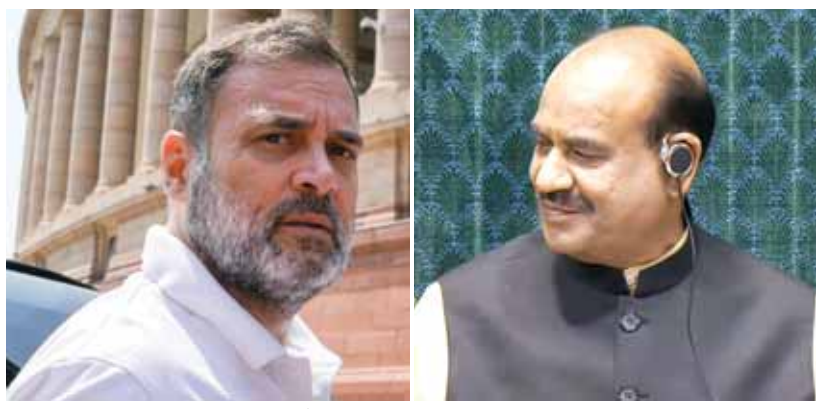
He was speaking about me, and I do not know what he said about me, all unsubstantiated. I said, 'let me speak as you have spoken about me', but he did not say a word and just left. He adjourned the House when there was no need of it," said Rahul.

About 70 Congress Lok Sabha MPs, including deputy leader of Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi, party general secretary KC Venugopal and party's whip in the Lok Sabha Manickam Tagore, met the Lok Sabha speaker and raised the "denial" of opportunity to Gandhi to speak in the House. Speaking with reporters in Parliament House complex, Gandhi said there is a convention that the Leader of Opposition is allowed to speak, but whenever he gets up to speak he is not allowed to speak.

"So, in what manner is this House being run? We are not being allowed to speak. I have not done anything, I was sitting quietly, I did not speak anything. In the last 7 to 8 days, I have not been allowed to speak," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said. In a democracy, the opposition has a place and the government has its own place but here there is no place for the opposition, he alleged.

Rahul said he wanted to speak on Maha Kumbh last week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made a statement on it but he was not allowed to speak.

"I wanted to state that it is good that Kumbh happened and I wanted to speak about unemployment but I was not allowed to speak.



Right to left: Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla PTI

VP Jagdeep Dhankhar stresses harmony among institutions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday said the executive, legislature and judiciary are not pitted against each other and they have to function in tandem with checks and balances.

He made these comments in Rajya Sabha a day after saying "things would have been different" if the mechanism for judicial appointments referring to the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) had not been struck down by the Supreme Court.

The reference to NJAC on Tuesday in the Upper House came amid a row over the discovery of wads of currency notes at the New Delhi home of Justice Yashwant Varma.

Dhankhar had called a meeting of leaders of various political parties to discuss the fallout of the row and the way forward. "I need to indicate to the House that we yesterday had a very fruitful interaction on the issue that is agitating the minds of the public," he said.

Leaders of various political parties including Leader of the House and Union minister Jagat Prakash Nadda and Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge were present at the meeting. "Without going into the details, the deliberations were consensual, reflecting cooperation, concern and the issue is not between institutions inter se. It is not that the executive, legislature or judiciary are pitted against each other," he said. "All the institutions in the country have to function in tandem, in togetherness and also there are checks and balances which are well meant," Dhankhar said.

Leaders of various political parties including Leader of the House and Union minister Jagat Prakash Nadda and Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge were present at the meeting

Without giving details of the deliberations, the chairman said both Leader of the House and Leader of the Opposition said that after having wider consultations within their respective parties, they would come to him for further deliberations. "That was the conclusion after both Leader of the House and Leader of the Opposition had shared their thoughts along with others," he added.

India slams USCIRF report as biased

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India on Wednesday brushed aside a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and said its "persistent" attempts to cast aspersions on the country's vibrant multicultural society reflect a "deliberate" agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom.

In its reaction after the report also sought sanctions against Research and Analysis Wing(RAW), Ministry of External Affairs(MEA)described it as "biased and politically motivated" and said the efforts to "undermine" India's standing as a beacon of democracy and tolerance will not succeed, adding the USCIRF should be designated as an "entity of concern".

In its 2025 annual report, the USCIRF alleged that religious freedom conditions in India continued to deteriorate as attacks and discrimination against religious minorities continued to rise.

The USCIRF recommended to the US government to impose "targeted sanctions on individuals and entities, such as Vikash Yadav and RAW, for their culpability in severe violations of religious freedom by freezing their assets and/or barring their entry into the United States".

The US has charged Yadav, a former Indian government official, in the alleged foiled plot to kill Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun on American soil in 2023. In its recommendation, the USCIRF also called for designating India as a "country of particular concern" or CPC, for engaging in and "tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA)".

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the report once again continued its pattern of issuing "biased and politically motivated assessments." "The USCIRF's persistent attempts to misrepresent isolated incidents and cast aspersions on India's vibrant multicultural society reflect a deliberate agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom," he said.

India is home to 1.4 billion people who are adherents to all religions known to mankind. However, we have no expectation that the USCIRF will engage with the reality of India's pluralistic framework or acknowledge the harmonious coexistence of its diverse communities," he said. Jaiswal was responding to media queries on the USCIRF report. "Such efforts to undermine India's standing as a beacon of democracy and tolerance will not succeed. In fact, it is the USCIRF that should be designated as an entity of concern," he said.

Country boosts Defence manufacturing with ₹6,900 crore deal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Giving a boost to self-reliance in defence manufacturing, Ministry of Defence (MoD) on Wednesday here signed contracts worth ₹6,900 Crores with Bharat Forge Limited and Tata Advanced System Limited for the procurement of 155mm/52 Calibre Advanced Towed Artillery Gun Systems (ATAGS) and High Mobility Vehicle 6x6 Gun Towing Vehicles respectively.

Giving details, officials said the contracts were signed in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh.

They also said with the signing, total contracts worth ₹1.40 Lakh Crore have been signed by MoD for capital procurement till date in the current Financial Year 2024-25.

During the contract signing, the Project Director of ATAGS from DRDO's Armament Research and Development Establishment, Pune who played a pivotal role in the realisation of the project was felicitated by the Defence Secretary as an honour for his immense contribution.

The 155 mm/52 Calibre ATAGS will replace the vintage and smaller calibre guns and enhance the artillery capabilities of the Indian Army.

The procurement of this gun system marks a significant milestone in the modernisation of the Artillery Regiments, enhancing operational readiness. ATAGS, renowned for its exceptional lethality, will play a crucial role in bolstering the Army's firepower by enabling precise and long-range strikes. Being the first major procurement of towed guns from the private sector by the Indian Army, the project will provide a boost to the Indian gun manufacturing industry in particular and the indigenous defence manufacturing ecosystem as a whole.

Senior defence ministry officials have held deliberations with "bigwigs" from over 50 start-ups and MSMEs to understand key challenges affecting these ventures, and support them in accelerating innovation. The brainstorming sessions, under the chairmanship of Secretary (defence production) Sanjeev Kumar, were held here on March 24 and 25, the defence ministry said in a statement.

GE Aerospace delivers F-404 engine to HAL for Tejas jets

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

American defence major GE Aerospace on Wednesday said it delivered the first of 99 F-404 aircraft engines to the public sector aerospace conglomerate Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Tejas light combat jet programme.

The HAL is procuring the engines to power the Mk-1A variant of the Tejas jets.

In February 2021, the defence ministry sealed a ₹48,000 Crore deal with HAL for the procurement of indigenously designed 83 Tejas MK-1A jets for the IAF.

The deliveries were to begin in March last year. However, not a single aircraft has been delivered yet.

The start of supply of the F404-IN20 engines by the American aircraft defence major is expected to help the HAL start delivery of the jets to the IAF.

Defence sources indicated that delay in the delivery of the engines by GE Aerospace was one of the reasons for HAL to miss the deadline for supply of the Tejas jets to the IAF.

It is learnt that the engine has been delivered to the HAL by the American company at its manufacturing facility in Lynn near Massachusetts.

The engine is expected to reach India by early next month.

GE Aerospace's F404 family is known to be one of the most effective aircraft engines and it powers thousands of combat jets worldwide.

"On Tuesday, we were excited to deliver the first of 99 F404-IN20 engines to our valued customer Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft Mk 1A fighter jet," GE Aerospace said in a statement.

"It is an important milestone in our 40-year relationship with HAL and in our efforts to ensure a strong future for India's military by developing next-generation fighters while enhancing the country's defence manufacturing capabilities," it said.

The F404-IN20 engine is a tailored design for India's single-engine fighter programme with the highest thrust within the F404 family and a higher-flow fan, unique single-crystal turbine blades, and numerous special components, the company said.

GE Aerospace and Tejas teams collaborated closely for several years to customise the engine for the needs of the Indian Air Force. "The F404 demonstrated it was an excellent fit for the Tejas LCA. On its first test flight in 2008, the aircraft climbed to numerous mission altitudes and achieved Mach 1.1 speed," the engine maker said.

GE Aerospace said by 2016, it fulfilled its commitment to HAL and delivered 65 F404-IN20 engines for the Tejas LCA. "With no additional engine orders on the horizon, the production line for F404-IN20 was shut down."

"However, when HAL ordered an additional 99 engines in 2021 for the Tejas Mk1A LCA, our team began the complex task of restarting the F404-IN20 production line, which had been dormant for five years, and re-engaging the engine's global supply chain," it said.

Indigenously developed Tejas jets are expected to be the mainstay of the IAF in coming years. In November last year, the defence ministry accorded an initial approval to procure an additional batch of 97 Tejas jets for the IAF.

The Tejas aircraft is a potent platform for air combat and offensive air support missions while reconnaissance and anti-ship operations are its secondary roles. GE Aerospace said restarting a jet engine production line is a challenging process.

"Restarting the F404-IN20 engine line during the COVID pandemic was even more challenging."

"With a high focus on safety and quality, and a remarkable commitment from our supply chain teams and our suppliers and partners, we have managed to restart the line," the company said.

"Our proprietary lean operating model, flight deck, helped us alleviate bottlenecks and identify solutions to improve manufacturing processes and turnaround time," it said.

The company said it is working closely with its suppliers to ramp up production on parts and materials for the F404-IN20.

"We will continue to work together with our suppliers to keep the production line efficient, maintain the highest standards of safety and quality, and deliver to our customer," it said.

"This week's first engine delivery is a testament to what we have accomplished with HAL over the past 40 years, and a symbol of our combined potential to ensure a strong future for India's military," it added.

UNDP launches third edition of Inspiring India magazine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The third edition of United Nations Developement Programme (UNDP) flagship magazine, Inspiring India highlights stories of inspiring leaders, changemakers, and groundbreaking innovations driving progress across India.

According to a press release, the magazine features a special message from Jagat Prakash Nadda, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, and Minister of Chemicals and Fertilisers.

The magazine brings together stories showcasing transformative initiatives like immolations in digital health with U-WIN, growing entrepreneurial ecosystem with a feature on Nikhil Kamath, co-founder of Zerodha, and his WTFund, Nigar Shah, the trailblazer scientist behind India's first solar mission and an inspiration for women in STEM and about women farmers in Telangana pioneering an ingenious new seed storage method in response to climate change disruptions.

The magazine also features UNDP India Youth Champion Sanjana Sanghi reflection on young artists and Bhumi Pednakar, UNDP National Advocate for SDGs thoughts on how small actions and mindful choices can drive sustainable change.

"This edition marks the third in the Inspiring India series, and we at UNDP are excited for you to explore the incredible stories of innovation within."

"With these interviews and features, we invite you into a world where simple solutions spark extraordinary change. It is a way of life in India, where even the smallest actions can create a better future for us all," said Angela Lusigi, Resident Representative, UNDP India.

Magazine includes an exclusive interview with UNDP Goodwill Ambassador Michelle Yeoh, advocate for gender equality globally, it also spotlights a compelling story on the Jaipur Foot and its impact on mobility and dignity for persons with disabilities.

CAG signs MoU with BISAG-N Gandhinagar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

For leveraging advanced technologies in Geographic information systems (GIS) and Remote Sensing, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India on Wednesday signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Bhaskaracharya National Institute of Space Application and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N), Gandhinagar.

The MoU was signed by T.P Singh DG-BISAG-N and S Ramann Deputy CAG/CTO, in the presence of K Sanjay Murthy, CAG. Speaking on this occasion, Murthy stated that collaborating with such a technically Atma-Nirbhar organisation such as BISAG-N will not only enhance the audit capabilities but also will showcase the technical capabilities of our public institutions.

"We strive to develop this product as part of the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)", he said.

The partnership with BISAG-N will provide CAG with geo-spatial consultancy services to enhance audit processes by integrating cutting-edge tools and techniques. This collaboration aims to strengthen the audit framework while developing customized geo-spatial solutions leveraging AI, Machine Learning, and Big Data Analytics for audit-related projects. It seeks to provide technical guidance for the integration of geo-spatial tools into audit methodologies and conduct joint research in geo-spatial analysis, remote sensing, and satellite image analytics for audit applications.

It will also focus on identifying and developing case studies related to geo-spatial applications in audit, as well as organising training and capacity-building programs for CAG officials.

This partnership reflects CAG's commitment to incorporate state-of-the-art technological solutions and holistic skill development in auditing, further reinforcing its role in ensuring financial accountability and governance in India.

PIONEER PHOTO

Parliamentary panel slams Centre over PM SHRI scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Not releasing funds to states which have not agreed to implement the PM SHRI schools scheme is not factual and justified, a parliamentary panel has noted.

The observations by the committee come amid an ongoing war of words between the Centre and the Tamil Nadu government over stoppage of funds worth over ₹2100 Crore after the state refused to implement new National Education Policy (NEP) objecting to the three-language formula.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education,Women, Children, Youth and Sports, headed by Congress' Digivjay Singh, recommended that the Ministry of Education should re-evaluate Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) funding allocations and ensure that none of the states are placed in disadvantageous positions for not accepting NEP 2020 or PM SHRI scheme.

"The Committee has taken serious note of the non-release of SSA funds to certain states which have not signed MoUs for implementation of PM SHRI scheme."

"The total funds pending under this scheme to the states are considerable, with over ₹1,000 Crore to West Bengal, ₹859.63 Crore to Kerala and ₹2,152 Crore to Tamil Nadu.

"The committee also notes that 33 out of 36 states and Union territories have signed the MoU for PM SHRI and are implementing the scheme and developing NEP exemplar schools, so as, to create an equivalence in assessment and curriculum at the national level," said the report tabled in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Committee observed that states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have demonstrated strong educational outcomes with GER, significantly above national average

The committee recommended the department to resolve the issue amicably with the state governments concerned and release the pending funds on priority basis.

"The department has also informed the committee that PM SHRI is the model school scheme developed under the NEP and the SSA is the program to achieve the NEP goals."

"This appears to be the reasoning behind the decision to halt SSA grants to states not signing the PM SHRI MoU.

"However, the Committee takes the view that this reasoning is not factual or justified. The SSA predates PM SHRI and is intended to help states to achieve the targets of the Right to Education Act..."the RTE is a law duly passed by Parliament and confers education as a fundamental right onto every child. The SSA, as a scheme that enforces the fundamental right-based RTE, cannot be bypassed by the NEP, which was an executive policy statement," the report said.

The committee observed that states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have demonstrated strong educational outcomes with a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), significantly above the national average.

"However, underfunding and delays in transfer of SSA funds have constrained further advancements in their school infrastructure, teacher training, and student support. These states have been compelled to use their own funds to pay salaries to teachers and resource personnel due to delays in release of central allocations," the panel said in its report.

"During FY 2024-25, state like Tamil Nadu was allocated ₹3,586 Crore under SSA, with the Union government's share expected to contribute ₹2,152 Crore, but this amount has not been released despite repeated requests by the state governments.

The withholding of funds is severely impacting teachers' salaries, RTE reimbursements, and transportation for students in remote areas.

"The committee further observes that withholding the funds under SSA to states for not entering into MoU for separate schemes like PM SHRI is not justifiable," it added. The panel has recommended immediate release of pending SSA funds to states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal to prevent disruption in salaries, teachers training programs, and school infrastructure maintenance.

"Department should re-evaluate SSA funding allocations and ensure that none of the states are placed in disadvantageous positions for not accepting NEP 2020 or PM SHRI scheme. The committee also recommends the department to ensure an objective, need-based model to ensure equitable fund distribution across states," the report said.

GMDA conducts demolition drive on Sheetla Mata road in Gurugram

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

The Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) intensified its action against encroachment and conducted the first-ever enforcement drive on Sheetla Mata Road on Wednesday. Several complaints had been received from citizens regarding illegal developments along this key stretch which were also hampering traffic movement during peak commuting period.

Additionally, Shyamal Misra, Chief Executive Officer, GMDA, had also directed that necessary action must be taken to clear the rampant encroachment on Sheetla Mata Road which is amongst the key roads in the city. The Enforcement Wing of GMDA led by DTP GMDA, RS Batth in coordination with Mohit Sharma, Nodal Officer, Streets for People Gurugram, and other MCG officials launched a large-scale anti-encroachment drive on Wednesday, removing unauthorised structures and reclaiming public land.

Over 50 police personnel were also present during the drive. The complete stretch from CRPF Chowk up to Sheetla Mata Mandir was covered wherein illegal tin sheds constructed by 70 shopkeepers were demolished. Their material or products which were on display and other encroachments in front of their shops were cleared to free up the road portions. Additionally, advertisement boards and tin sheds which were set-up on the box drains of GMDA were also removed. "Prior announcements were made for two days to intimate all shop owners to clear all encroachments made on the 30-meter wide master sector roads of GMDA. It was found that approximately five-meter area on both sides of the road were illegally taken over by shopkeepers. All unauthorised structures were razed to clear up the public spaces and ensure the Government land is free of any encroachment," said DTP GMDA.

The Authority further plans to develop Sheetla Mata Road as a model road and will also build footpaths and drains to support safe pedestrian movement and enhance drainage network respectively. DC Gurugram in the meeting chaired on Tuesday directed departments to address the issue of waterlogging which occurs on this stretch during monsoon season.

Maharashtra grants ₹130 crore to revive ND Studio

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

In a major initiative that came four months after its take-over, the Maharashtra government has sanctioned ₹130 Crore to revive the iconic ND Studio—founded by national-award winning Art Director Nitin Chandrakant Desai at Karjat in the Raigad district—and run it on the lines of the Film city in Mumbai.

Located 60 km away from downtown Mumbai, the sprawling 45 acre-ND Art World studio complex at Karjat in Raigad district—which was founded Nitin Desai in 2005—was taken over in November 2024 by the state-run Maharashtra Film, Theatre and Cultural Development Corporation (MFTCDC) after the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) approved the resolution plan.

The debt-trapped Nitin Desai—who had worked as a creative director for iconic films like "Devdas", "Lagaan", "Jodhaa Akbar", "Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam" and Prem Ratan Dhan Payo", was found hanging at his studio in Raigad district of Maharashtra on August 2, 2023. After Nitin Desai's suicide, his uncle Shrikant Desai had approached the Maharashtra government for revival of the ND Studio.

In a message posted on "X" about the Maharashtra government's decision to sanction Rs 130 crore for revival of ND Studio, chief minister Devendra Fadnavis wrote: "The Maharashtra Government has entrusted ND Art World, founded by legendary art director Nitin Desai, to Filmcity Mumbai for operation. A ₹130 Crore package—₹120 Crore for development and ₹10 Crore for operations—has been allocated to preserve this cultural landmark".

Fadnavis, who earlier presided over a

meeting of the State Cultural Affairs department — said, "With these initiatives, Maharashtra continues to strengthen its film industry, cultural heritage, and sustainable infrastructure, fostering growth and innovation in the sector"

Fadnavis and his two deputy chief ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, who were among those present at the meeting – handed over a cheque of ₹130 Crore to MFTCDC's Managing Director Swati Mhase Patil.

The MFTCDC—which runs the Dadasaheb Phakle Chitranagari known popularly known as the Film City at Goregaon (East) in north Mumbai – will execute the various initiatives relating to the revival of the ND Studio.

Under the proposed take-over deal, the state government will take over the ND Art World studio complex, after paying off all the dues, creditors, lenders and others. It plans to revive the studio complex to its original glory. The vicinity has now been classified by the state government as a 'no-development zone' for any private projects.

It may be recalled that a week after the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) ordered the initiation of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP)" against his company over repayment of accumulated debt totalling to ₹252.48 Crore, Nitin Desai was found hanging at his ND Studios at Karjat in Raigad district.

The NCLT—which subsequently initiated Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) against ND Studio due to a debt of ₹252.48 Crore—had on July 25 2023 had appointed Jitender Kothari as the interim resolution professional to carry out the steps mentioned under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

Suvendu Adhikari slams CM Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari has launched a scathing attack on the Mamata Banerjee Government for playing fraud while preparing Other Backward Castes (OBC) lists by mischievously enlisting the Muslims and eliminating or keeping out the Hindus from the report.

Referring to a survey conducted by the State Government — in the backdrop of its submission before the Supreme Court that by the month of July the State would complete a fresh survey to identify the OBCs — Adhikari said "the Government is preparing a completely phony Muslim specific report. This illegal act is being done at the instance of (Chief Secretary) Manoj Pant who is getting the BDOs and the Imams to include only the Muslims in the list and even in that case new fictitious communities are being created to fill up the survey report where the other communities including the Hindus are being ignored."

The State in an appeal before the Apex Court taken three months to conduct a fresh survey after a Division Bench of Calcutta High Court had earlier revoked the OBC status of 77 Muslim communities which were included in the OBC category since 2010. This to the prejudice of a vast section of the OBCs in Hindu and other non-Muslim communities who were not included in the earlier list.

The new survey that will be submitted before the Supreme Court was being conducted by the Mamata Banerjee Government so as to divert the resources from the Hindu OBCs without scientific data, Adhikari said adding "they are creating made-up communities with no social substantiality and existence. This is a clear attempt at appeasement under the guise of welfare, with an eye on the next year's Assembly elections."

> The Government is preparing a completely phony Muslim specific report. This illegal act is being done at the instance of (Chief Secretary)
>
> — SUVENDU ADHIKARI, BJP LEADER

He said, "here Mamata Banerjee is bragging about bringing 98 per cent Muslims under reservation and there she is accusing the Opposition of going to the Court to stop her welfare initiatives for minorities. This she is doing to polarise and consolidate the Muslim votes that according to the Trinamool Congress account for 33 per cent of voters."

On his social media handle, Adhikari posted images of one Sk Lutfar who has been identified as "Muslim Darji" in a prescribed form. "There is no such community and her Government is creating such fictitious and fake communities," he said.

"Annexed herewith are the Forms of the fresh survey in my Assembly Constituency Nandigram. Just look at the names being filled in the column specified for the Community Name, on the Benchmark Sample Survey Form. These 'community names' were never ever heard before as existing Communities and are completely make-believe, fictitious and imaginary," he said.

Incidentally the Chief Minister had last week informed the State Assembly that 2 to 3 lakh vacant posts would be filled up after the legal battle over the quota issue ended.

"She wants to carry this tangle till the elections, if the Government wins then she will claim that she has done a great job for the Muslims — who have however not specifically demanded any reservation from her — and if she loses she will go to the Muslim localities with the message that the Opposition would not allow her to do her bit for them."

This was a dirty game of appeasement and divisive politics being played by the Chief Minister which was spiked by the Calcutta High Court which wondered as to how a community which constituted only about 30 percent of the total population could have more than 75 per cent of total number of OBCs, Adhikari said demanding the Central Government and central OBC Commission to be made a party to the case.

Major crude oil reserve discovered in Ballia

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Ballia

A significant crude oil reserve has been discovered in Ballia on land owned by the family of renowned freedom fighter Chittu Pandey. The find comes after a three-month survey in the Ganga basin, which confirmed the presence of oil reserves at a depth of 3,000 metres.

The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has leased six-and-a-half acres from Pandey's family for three years, paying ₹10 Lakh annually. ONGC officials confirmed that drilling must reach 3,001 metres to access the reserves. The excavation process, which requires 25,000 litres of water daily, is progressing rapidly and is expected to be completed by the end of April.If the exploration is successful, ONGC plans to drill additional wells at other identified locations in the Ganga basin. This could significantly impact the region's economy by increasing land value and providing financial benefits to farmers.

Neel Pandey, a descendant of Chittu Pandey, stated that ONGC has agreed to pay ₹10 Lakh annually for three years, with an option to extend the lease for another year. If oil is found in commercial quantities, ONGC will acquire additional land at premium prices, bringing substantial economic gains to local farmers. The drilling effort is the first of its kind in Ballia and could provide a significant boost to Uttar Pradesh's fuel resources and revenue.

ONGC has obtained environmental clearance to conduct drilling across a 302-square-kilometre block. Its exploration license is valid until April 2026, with the corporation investing ₹85 Crore to drill one well. The drilling site is located between NH-31 and the Ganga River in Sagarpali village, near Vaina Rattu Chak, the ancestral home of Chittu Pandey, who played a key role in the Quit India Movement in Ballia. The drilling process may take 5-6 months. If hydrocarbon indications are found, the well will be tested through perforation in the production casing, a process that usually takes 7-10 days. Should the well prove to be a viable hydrocarbon-bearing structure, it will be sealed for future development.

As of April 2021, India's estimated crude oil reserves stood at approximately 587.335 Million metric tonnes. The western offshore region accounts for the largest share of these reserves, followed by Assam and Gujarat. The Ballia discovery adds to the country's ongoing hydrocarbon exploration efforts, with potential long-term benefits for energy production and economic growth.

Police raids multiple locations in Kashmir valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Jammu

A day after two Hurriyat Conference constituents severed their ties with the separatist conglomerate, sleuths of Jammu and Kashmir Police on Wednesday conducted fresh raids at multiple locations in the Kashmir valley, including at the residences of former Hurriyat Chief Abdul Gani Bhat, as part of their investigations into the activities of proscribed organisations.

The searches were conducted over two-days at multiple locations in the Kashmir Valley, including Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag.

The cases, registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), pertain to banned organisations, including Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference (Bhat Group), Jammu and Kashmir Muslim League (Masrat Alam Group) and Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party (Shabir Shah Group), police said.

The raids were conducted at the two residences of Bhat, one in Baramulla and the other at Wazir Bagh in Srinagar, the officials said.

Bhat heads the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference (Bhat Group), a Hurriyat Conference constituent.

Nine Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sukma

As many as nine Naxalites carrying a collective reward of ₹26 Lakh on their heads surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Wednesday, police said.

The surrendered Naxalites included six women, said Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan.

They turned themselves in before senior police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officials here citing disappointment with the "hollow and inhuman" Maoist ideology and growing differences within the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist), he said.

Naxalites are on the backfoot with increasing pressure of the security forces and establishment of police camps in interior areas, the SP said.

The surrendered Naxalites were also impressed by the 'Niyad Nellanar (your good village)' scheme of the state government aimed at facilitating development in remote villages, Chavan added.

Of the surrendered ultras, Bandu alias Bandi Madkam (22), a member of the People's Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA) company number two of the Maoists, was carrying a reward of ₹ eight Lakh on his head, he said.

IIT research scholar harassed, beaten up inside police station

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

A research scholar from Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur was heckled, harassed and badly beaten up inside a police station in Murshidabad district where the victim had gone to lodge a general diary about his missing bank passbook.

According a complaint filed by Iman Kalyan a PhD scholar at IIT Kharagpur early this week when he went to Domklal Police Station in Murshidaad district to register a general diary regarding the loss of his bank passbook he was severely beaten up by a Sub Inspector of Police Ujwal Biswas also referred to as Mejo Babu.

"I live at Domkal town and am a research scholar at IIT Kharagpur , when I discovered that my passbook was missing I rushed to the police station in order to get a general diary registered, there the staff told me to get my documents stamped by the bank authorities, when I told that my bank was at Kharagpur IIT where I am a research scholar they refused to receive the GD, subsequently following an argument the Mejo Babu called me to a side room not covered by the CCTV camera, there he not only hurled filthy languages on me but also severely beat me up, later when my parents who rushed to the police station hearing the news were also ill-treated," Kalyan said adding he got a first aid done from the nearby government hospital and then registered a complaint with the Sub-Divisional Magistrate and the Sub-divisional Police Officer.

"If this is done to an IITian then what treatment a common man gets," the victim wondered while one of his colleagues said a meritorious person that he was he could easily return being an IPS or WBPS officer in a matter of two years and get the SI to salute him in public. Referring to the incident the both the SDM and the Superintendant of Police assured action. "An inquiry has been ordered and action will be taken if the officer is found guilty," the senior officials said.

This is the second such incident in a matter of a few months when a retired Inspector General of Police Pankaj Dutta was made to sit inside a Kolkata police station for several hours and humiliated by a sub inspector who lifted his legs on the table in front of him and also blew smoke from a cigarette on his face. Humiliated and hurt Dutta — a diehard critic of the Mamata Banerjee Government and its police force — allegedly went into depression and suffered a severe cerebral stroke a couple of days later and died at Varanasi. He had played a frontal role in the movement following the brutal rape and murder of a lady doctor inside the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital last year.

Why Maharashtra not releasing probe report on hair loss among Buldhana people: Congress

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

The Maharashtra Congress on Wednesday demanded to know as to why there has been a delay in releasing an inquiry report on the incidence of sudden hair loss among thousands of people in three tehsils of Buldhana district in Vidarbha region.

"Thousands of people in three talukas of Buldhana district have been suffering from severe hair loss, with cases of baldness increasing. What is causing this? While an investigation is needed, three months have passed, and the state government has yet to release a report on the reasons behind the hair loss and baldness. The government has been evasive in its approach," Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee President Harshvardhan Sapkal said.

"What happened to the inquiry report on hair loss in Buldhana district? Why is the state government suppressing the matter," Sakpal asked.

Talking to media persons here, Sapkal said that in mid-December, cases of severe hair loss and baldness emerged across 19 villages in three talukas of Buldhana district. "Despite this, the state government has not provided any scientific explanation. Instead, the government now claims that people's hair is growing back, raising the question: should we ask the government what oil they used? Instead of answering why hair loss occurred, they are avoiding the issue," he said. "The affected region falls under a saline belt, and after complaints, the state government conducted an investigation. However, they claim the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) report is still pending. Why is the state government not following up with the ICMR on the issue? Or is the government either trying to suppress or manipulate the report," Sapkal wondered.

> There seems to be a powerful figure behind this, and efforts are being made to protect them. The state government should stop playing with people's lives
>
> — HARSHVARDHAN SAPKAL, CONGRESS LEADER

Sakpal said that this was not a political issue but a serious public health crisis. "There seems to be a powerful figure behind this, and efforts are being made to protect them. The state government should stop playing with people's lives," he warned.

Dr Himmatrao Bawaskar, the Managing Director of Bawaskar Hospital and Research Centre in Raigad, who conducted a research on the issue, feels that the incidence of hair loss among the people in three tehsils of Buldhana district because of the selenium content found in wheat procured from Punjab and Haryana and distributed through ration shops under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

"The primary cause of the outbreak was linked to wheat imported from Punjab and Haryana, which has been found to have a significantly higher selenium content than locally produced wheat. Our analysis of wheat from the affected region revealed that it contained 600 times more selenium than the locally grown variety. This high selenium intake is believed to be the cause of the alopecia cases," he said.

The blood, urine, hair samples and stool samples taken from people in the affected areas, were examined as part of the research.

"Further examination of the wheat revealed that the selenium content was not a result of external contamination but was inherent in the grain itself…we found the bags of wheat had come from Punjab and Haryana. The state government must check the samples before it is distributed to the people through PDS," Dr Bawaskar said.

Quoting the findings of Dr Bawaskar's research, Sakpal said: "Dr Bawaskar's findings pointed to contaminated wheat made available to people through PDS. Laboratory tests confirmed that the contaminated wheat was the cause of hair loss. The wheat contained an alarming 14 per cent selenium, far exceeding safe limits. Research shows that selenium levels up to 1.9 per cent are not harmful, but excessive selenium can cause nausea, itching, and even diabetes-related issues. Dr Bawaskar submitted his findings to the state government, but his report was dismissed outright".

UP government study finds spiritual music reduces surgical stress

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

A pioneering study by the Uttar Pradesh government has found that spiritual music can significantly alleviate stress and anxiety in patients undergoing surgery. Conducted by researchers at Maharani Laxmi Bai (MLB) Medical College, Jhansi, the study has been recognised internationally and published in the prestigious US-based journal Cureus.

The research, involving 150 surgical patients, explored the effects of music on mental and physiological stress. Patients were divided into two groups - one listened to Hindu spiritual music, while the other was given instrumental music of their choice. The results showed a notable reduction in stress levels among those exposed to spiritual music, along with improved post-operative recovery.

According to the study, patients who listened to spiritual music had better heart rate and blood pressure control during surgery. Their levels of cortisol, a primary stress hormone, were significantly lower than those in the other group. Additionally, these patients reported fewer post-operative complications such as nausea and vomiting, indicating a holistic impact on their well-being.

The research team, led by Professor Anshul Jain, Head of the Department of Anesthesia at MLB Medical College, included Dr Brijendra Verma, Dr Pankaj Sonkia, Dr Saurabh Agarwal, Dr Pushpendra Agarwal (Jalaun), Dr Paras Gupta (Jalaun) and Dr Charu Thakur. The study followed rigorous scientific protocols and is registered with the Clinical Trials Registry of India, further validating its credibility.

Dr Pankaj Sonkia, Assistant Professor in the Department of Surgery, emphasised that spiritual music's impact on surgical stress is not just anecdotal but scientifically measurable. "We have long known that faith plays a crucial role in emotional healing. Now, we have evidence that spiritual

music - particularly mantras, bhajans and aartis - can have a profound physiological effect, helping patients cope better with surgery," he stated.

The study's findings align with growing global research into music therapy as an adjunct to medical treatments. Several international hospitals have begun integrating controlled music exposure into pre- and post-operative care to enhance patient comfort and recovery.

Dr Anshul Jain noted, "Science and spirituality are often seen as two distinct domains, but this study proves otherwise. The vibrations and rhythms in spiritual music can create a calming effect, reducing stress hormones and stabilising vital signs. This could be a game-changer in pre-operative care."

With the success of this research, medical experts suggest that hospitals in India and abroad could adopt spiritual music as a non-invasive and cost-effective method to manage surgical stress. The study could also pave the way for further research into music therapy for various medical conditions, including anxiety disorders, chronic pain, and cardiac rehabilitation.

Experts believe that integrating such therapeutic interventions into mainstream medical practices could revolutionise patient care, blending ancient wisdom with modern science.

If implemented widely, this approach could offer an effective, drug-free way to ease surgical stress, setting a new benchmark in holistic healing.

The spiritual compositions used in the study included some of Hinduism's most revered chants and hymns, known for their calming and meditative effects.

THE PLAYLIST FEATURED

- Om Gan Ganapataye Namah
- Twameva Mata Cha Pita Twameva
- Gayatri Mantra
- Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram
- Mahamrityunjaya Mantra
- Om Jai Jagdish Hare
- Hanuman Chalisa (slow recitation)
- Sriramchandra Kripalu Bhajaman
- Achyutan Kesavan Krishna Damodaran
- Hare Ram Hare Krishna Mantra

Editor's TAKE

Mending ties with China

The ongoing talks with China are a step in the right direction to resolve pending issues

As the saying goes, you can choose your friends, but changing your neighbors is no easy feat. That's why maintaining good relations with them is crucial. However, this is often easier said than done—especially when the neighbor in question is China, making the task even more challenging. But the effort must always be there to achieve this end. India and China recently engaged in discussions aimed at resolving outstanding bilateral issues and enhancing cooperation in areas such as border management, trans-border river sharing, and the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage. Though the talks may not resolve the issues but talking about it does help in reaching a solution.

The Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) meeting in Beijing was a step toward normalising relations between the two nations following their agreement to disengage military forces in the Ladakh sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The discussions at the WMCC meeting revolved around implementing agreements reached during the Special Representatives' meeting on the boundary question in December. The talks were described as "positive and constructive," with both sides exchanging views on early resumption of cross-border cooperation, including religious pilgrimages and data-sharing on trans-border rivers. Additionally, the two nations explored measures to strengthen diplomatic and military mechanisms to ensure peace and stability along the border. Both sides also agreed to make substantial preparations for the upcoming meeting of the special representatives, which will take place in India later this year.

Resolving border tensions would create a stable environment for trade and investment. Both countries are major economies, and fostering better relations could lead to increased economic exchanges, benefiting businesses and consumers alike. Given their influence in regional geopolitics, improved India-China relations would contribute to broader stability in Asia. A peaceful resolution of disputes would also help mitigate security concerns and reduce military expenditures.

Resuming the Kailash-Mansarovar yatra would promote cultural ties and strengthen people-to-people exchanges. Such initiatives foster goodwill and mutual understanding between the people of both countries. India's push for resuming data-sharing on trans-border rivers is crucial, particularly given China's plans to develop hydropower projects on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra. Cooperative management of water resources would help in flood control, irrigation, and sustainable use of river systems.

An agreement on effective border management mechanisms would ensure peace and prevent potential flare-ups along the LAC. Confidence-building measures would allow both countries to focus on development rather than military posturing. Despite the progress in discussions, several challenges remain, including the final resolution of the border dispute, withdrawal of forces from key friction points, and rebuilding trust after the Galwan Valley clash in 2020. However, continued dialogue, coupled with diplomatic and military coordination, is essential for lasting peace. The latest round of talks between India and China signals a willingness to mend strained ties and find common ground. If both nations successfully resolve their differences, they stand to gain economically, strategically, and diplomatically. A cooperative approach will not only benefit the two countries but also contribute to regional and global stability. Moving forward, sustained engagement and trust-building measures will be crucial in shaping the future of India-China relations.

India's rise to AI global leadership

India's rise as a leader in AI is all about driving innovation, however, its true success lies in making AI accessible, inclusive, and transformative, write VINAY PATHAK and SANDEEP JOSHI

The journey of Artificial Intelligence (AI) from an unattainable goal to becoming a real-world changer has happened within a short period. For an emerging nation like India, AI is more than just a technological breakthrough, it is a powerful catalyst poised to reshape the country's future.

In recent decades, India has been employing AI step by step, simultaneously starting with school studies and competing with countries that are front-runners in the global AI arena. The path, which is marked by commitment, far-reaching planning, and the promotion of equal economic growth, demonstrates the country's readiness to employ the latest technology for the common good. At present, India is not only one of the key participants in the global AI revolution but is also one of the primary developers.

This became evident with India playing a crucial role at the recent AI Summit in Paris, where India showcased its noteworthy progress in the field of AI.

India's journey to the top of AI is profoundly linked with the wider narrative of development and progress. The first corners of AI research in India were practised at the campuses of top colleges and research laboratories. Undergraduate and graduate students at institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) are the ones who started an AI era in India by exploring the possibilities of machine learning, neural networks, and data analytics. They were just small-scale attempts. Nevertheless, they had laid the basis for a national movement.

India's emergence as a powerful force in the IT revolution not only placed the nation on the global stage but also laid the foundation with robust, flexible infrastructure, transforming emerging technologies into tangible realities. Indian IT professionals, known for their problem-solving skills, started using AI in real-life applications, from healthcare diagnosis to stock market predictions, as early as in the first decade.

As the capabilities of AI is become more evident day by day, cities in the different part of nation start adopting technology to address challenges and improve governance. potential of AI became increasingly evident, cities and states across nation start adopting technology for improvement of governance and to address challenges.Today, AI-driven initiatives are transforming urban landscapes, making cities smarter, more efficient, and more liveable. Lucknow, designated as India's first AI city, is fostering technological advancements and economic growth through AI-centric infrastructure. Maharashtra is leveraging AI in agriculture, healthcare, and education, with predictive analytics for crop management, telemedicine services, and personalised learning platforms. Tamil Nadu Artificial Intelligence Mission (TNAIM) aims to position the state as a leading AI hub, focusing on governance, social welfare, and economic development. Karnataka is at the forefront of AI adoption in education and governance, while Kerala is advancing AI research with its Digital University developing an indigenous AI processor. Gujarat emphasises sustainable AI practices, focusing on energy-efficient technologies, and Andhra Pradesh is building AI-enabled cities like Visakhapatnam. West Bengal is innovating for safer roads with AI-driven traffic management systems in Kolkata, and Telangana has established an Applied AI Research Centre in Hyderabad. Even smaller states like Goa and Sikkim are leveraging AI for traffic management, addressing unique urban mobility challenges. There are numerous stories where India is leveraging AI for its holistic development and social progress.

These city and state-level initiatives are part of a larger national movement driven by visionary policies and initiatives. The "AI for India 2030" initiative provides a structured approach to integrating AI across the socio-economic fabric of the country. By focusing on sectors like agriculture, healthcare, and urban planning, this initiative aims to contribute significantly to the economy and improve the quality of life for millions.

The digital Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj highlights India's innovative use of AI capabilities to handle massive gathering of public by AI-powered tools.

On one hand it helped in the security and seamless operation and on the other hand set a global benchmark for event management.

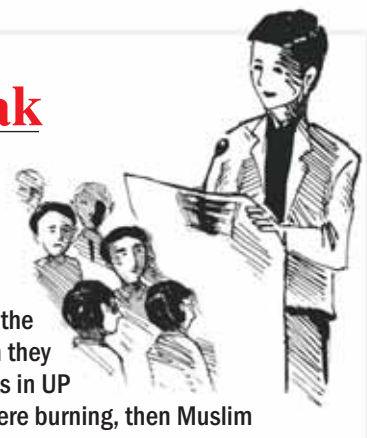
India's role in AI is not surprisingly only a technological one; today it is a socially responsible one too. As a leader in the world, India acknowledges AI's ethical dimensions and, thus, is aiming to build a framework that will ensure transparency, fairness, and responsibility in the development of this innovative technology. The country's increasing focus on making AI a useful tool for social welfare, sustainable development, and inclusive growth has made it a role model for the rest of the world. This dedication was vividly demonstrated at the recent AI Summit in Paris where India was a spearhead in shaping international policies on AI regulation and democratisation. In Paris India co-chaired debates on the proper use of AI, thus contributing to the signing of a joint declaration with other 57 countries. The Summit emphasised the need for the establishment of a governing body that could warrant the ethical and sustainable development of AI innovation. The invitation for India to co-chair the AI Summit is a strong demonstration of the world's realisation of India as a leader in AI and of its commitment to ethical innovation. The world leaders are convinced and have strong faith in leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that he is capable to democratise AI regulatory body or framework to neutralise the biasness of data.

On the domestic front, while the Union Budget allocated ₹500 Crore for AI education, another major accomplishment was made when Meta announced the gigantic underwater cabling project for boosting digital infrastructure. Furthermore, the CEO of OpenAI, Sam Altman, had a meeting with India's IT Minister, where they discussed expanding the ecosystem of AI, a move that showed India's commitment to becoming a global leader in the AI revolution.

Rapid developments in the field of AI in India puts the country at a special vantage point of responsibility. The nation's achievements stand as a model for other developing countries as to how technology can be used for inclusive and sustainable development. Grounded in grassroots innovation and an international vision, India has the potential to be a driving force in the design of the next generation of AI. India's commitment to ethical practices in research and international sharing of knowledge places it in a strong position to handle this complex landscape. As India gains prominence on the global stage, it also shares the responsibility of steering the AI revolution with both vision and strategic foresight. This is a testament to India's indomitable will and commitment to build a better tomorrow for all.

(Vinay Pathak is assistant professor, IIIT and Sandeep Joshi is senior tech journalist. Views expressed are personal)

Leaderspeak



In Uttar Pradesh, Muslims are the safest. If Hindus are safe, then they are also safe. If there were riots in UP before 2017, if Hindu shops were burning, then Muslim shops were also burning. If Hindu houses were burning, then Muslim houses were also burning. And after 2017, the riots stopped. They will have the freedom to practise all religious customs. But can 50 Hindus be safe among 100 Muslim families? If there is smoke or someone is being hit, we should be careful before we get hit.

YOGI ADITYANATH, CHIEF MINISTER OF UTTAR PRADESH

A small inconvenience for a safer, better world

SECOND Opinion

ASHA IYER KUMAR

The late-night flight from Dubai to Chennai landed smoothly. My mind was full of expectations about a large family gathering at a wedding the next day. As I walked out after immigration clearance, I saw a customs officer flagging someone frantically. I presumed it was for someone behind me, but he accosted me and asked, "Are you carrying any gold?"

"No, no, nothing except what I am wearing," I blurted. "The bangles you are wearing seem to be new."

"No, these are my everyday bangles," I said wrenching a bangle from my wrist and showing him the white film of soap settled in the grooves.

"If you are hiding any gold with you other than this, you must declare it now," the officer said, a tad menacingly.

I yanked my mangalsutra out. "Don't show, just answer me." The instruction wasn't rude, but it was firm. He called a lady subordinate and asked her to take me for a full-body frisk. Did he think I was smuggling gold? Did I look like a carrier?

The lady did a full pat down. It was a first for me in 27 years of living abroad and multiple times entering the country through various airports. I should have been outraged for being obliquely seen in a shadow of doubt, but I was not.

Startled but not overly perturbed, I let the officials do the search and be convinced that I was not a partner in any crime like the one Kannada actress Ranya Rao had been caught for in Bengaluru. I had an obligation as a law-abiding citizen to let the officers perform their duty. I could not blame them. Smugglers came in all sizes, shapes and genders these days and they carried out daring acts that belied stereotypes. A lone woman traveller from Dubai could be anything but innocent, and the keepers of law had every right to make sure no guilty got away even if a few innocents got inconvenienced.

On my return flight to Dubai, I was stopped again at the security checkpoint. I was asked to open my cabin baggage, much to my disappointment. I had been very diligent in my packing, making sure I did not carry any prohibited articles in the hand baggage, and yet, I was called up to open my bag and spill its contents. What had shown up in the scanner was the jewellery I had carried for the family wedding. They asked me to hold up each piece to see if there was anything dangerous. None, whatsoever. "Are they real?" a junior officer asked.

I laughed good-naturedly. "Who wears original jewellery these days, sir? Especially when we have pretty ones in imitation?" The senior officer did not find my quip amusing and pointed at a plastic bag in which I was carrying my lunch, and asked, "What's in the box?"

"Curd rice," I said. He asked me to open it. I opened it without batting an eyelid. When I was cleared, I was left with two trays full of assorted items waiting to be repacked. I was annoyed, but only slightly.

I felt pity for all those who went through the ordeal, along with my understanding of how the security personnel themselves bore the brunt of public irritation for following the protocol and making sure that nothing went wrong because of their oversight. As I stood there watching the officers work, I realised that the people in uniform were doing exactly what they were trained to do-ensuring that no one got away with jeopardising the safety of others. They were upholding a system designed to protect everyone, even when it meant inconveniencing some innocent travellers in the process.

Why do we feel affronted and targeted when we are asked to follow rules? As much as we may hate the hassle, isn't it a small price to pay for the peace of mind that comes with knowing these checks are in place? It is about understanding that the system is not designed to harass us, but to protect us, or to maintain law and order in society. The obligation to follow rules is incumbent upon us. As I read a small poster on the cockpit door from my second-row seat, I was reminded that everyone had rules to follow. I felt a quiet gratitude for those who dedicated themselves to keeping us safe-on the ground and in the sky.

"Flying is a serious profession. Do not carry your worries beyond this point," the signage read. By the same token, let us not carry resentment against those who uphold the rules, for, more often than not, their vigilance is the reason the world still has some order.

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

Letters to the Editor

The perils of suppressing democracy

Madam —The turmoil in Turkey (26-3-25) should serve as a warning to all those who attempt to establish a dictatorship under the guise of cleansing democracy. It is perhaps a human weakness to suppress opposition and expect unquestioning praise, even for one's misdeeds and mistakes.The process often begins with subjugating the media, followed by suppressing freedom of expression.

Critics and dissenters are then imprisoned under various pretexts. To maintain public support, a particular group is often vilified as an "evil force," while people's attention is skillfully diverted from the audacious actions of the ruler. When things spiral out of control, religion is invoked to silence dissent.Such tactics are evident in many countries today. However, history provides an unmistakable lesson: authoritarian rule—whether by an individual or a group—is always short-lived.

Recent events in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have demonstrated this inevitable truth. People may tolerate misgovernance for a long time, hoping for correction, but when reforms fail to materialise, they react sharply—often with an unstoppable force. The absence of an effective opposition weakens democracy and leads to regression. Citizens must remain vigilant and act wisely.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

Parliament meet to discuss Waqf

Madam—The Central government has called a meeting of all Members of Parliament to discuss the Waqf Amendment Bill 2024 in a conference room within the Parliament complex. The meeting will provide MPs with a briefing on the proposed amendments to Waqf laws. The government is presumably keen on explaining the contents of the Bill before presenting it to Parliament, amidst growing Opposition.

The Waqf Amendment Bill has sparked controversy across the nation, with many groups accusing the Centre of acting against the interests of the Muslim community. Various Muslim organisations, including the prominent Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind, have raised objections.

They argue that the amendments could lead to the mismanagement of waqf properties and undermine the autonomy of the Muslim community in managing its charitable endowments by insisting that non-Muslims be made part of waqf boards.The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has been vocal in its opposition, declaring that it will organize large-scale protests in different parts of the country. The Waqf Amendment Bill 2024 has ignited nationwide controversy, with strong opposition from Muslim organisations. As the government prepares to present the Bill, protests loom, highlighting deep divisions and the potential for significant political and social repercussions.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Chinese company surges ahead of Tesla

Madam—It is often said that an industrialist or businessman should not abandon their business to become a permanent player in the game of politics. Instead, they should fulfill their political responsibilities solely through donations to their preferred parties. If they fail to do so, their business and trade may suffer the consequences.Take the case of the world's richest man, Elon Musk. For the past year, he has openly aligned himself with Donald Trump ever since Trump became the Republican Party's presidential candidate. Now that Trump has assumed the presidency, it almost seems as if Musk has become the unofficial Vice President of America. He has carried out mass layoffs, resulting in hundreds of thousands of workers losing their jobs.

US foreign aid has been halted, and illegal immigrants have been expelled and subjected to harsh treatment. But interestingly enough, Tesla has fallen behind its Chinese competitor, BYD. Meanwhile, Tesla's sales have been steadily declining, partly due to Musk's open support for right-wing political groups.

In contrast, BYD has aggressively expanded into overseas markets, including Europe, with new compact electric models and advanced charging technology. It seems that China is quietly benefiting from the outspoken and disruptive nature of Musk and Trump.

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

JUDICIARY UNDER SCRUTINY: THE NEED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Apropos of the headline "Dhankhar holds meet over cash controversy" (March 26), the controversy surrounding the unaccounted cash found at the residence of Delhi High Court Judge Yashwant Varma is bound to have far-reaching implications. This issue raises serious concerns about the erosion of public faith in the judiciary.

The first political fallout of this controversy is the renewed debate over the implementation of the NJAC Act, 2014, which seeks to replace the Collegium system.

The Supreme Court, as the guardian of the law, has the responsibility to uphold the integrity of the legal system. The Collegium system has once again come under scrutiny following the discovery of substantial unaccounted cash at Justice Varma's official residence—an issue that remains uninvestigated even after two weeks.

Speculation suggests that any in-depth inquiry into this matter could expose deeper systemic issues within the judiciary. The absence of accountability in the institution is fostering public disillusionment. Citizens' trust in the Indian judiciary may wane due to the lack of an alternative mechanism.

There should be no political interference or debate regarding the implementation of the NJAC Act, 2014, especially when the Collegium system is plagued by opacity. Instead, the recruitment of judges could be entrusted to the UPSC through the Civil Services Examination to address the existing vacancies across the country.

Why should the elected government not have a say in the appointment of judges and be credibly entitled to participate in the process? Moreover, it is perplexing why the NJAC Act, passed by Parliament a decade ago, remains unimplemented.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

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

The spiritual marvel of Maha Kumbh

Maha Kumbh is a monumental event of immense scale and spiritual significance, marked by seamless organisation, the unwavering faith of pilgrims, and the extraordinary vision that brings this sacred gathering to life.

FIRST Column

NIRUPAM BAJPAI

My wife, Sagun and I flew from New York to join the millions of devotees at the Maha Kumbh and had a remarkable experience visiting Prayagraj. This Maha Kumbh, to my mind. Is a 'Maha Yagya' that has attracted hundreds of millions of devotees to this revered land for an event occurring after 144 years! Incidentally, Prayagraj or Tirth Prayag happens to be my birthplace which I visited after a gap of 33 years!

Being there in person was a remarkable experience. As far as the eye could see, human beings from all parts of India and the world converged there to take a holy dip in Maa (mother) Ganga.

Statistics bears testimony to the fact that the Maha Kumbh's organisation was an incredible feat. The arrangements made by the local administration, especially by the team led by the Mela Adhikari, Maha Kumbh under the direction of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and senior officials, were exceptional to say the least. Of course, PM Modi's vision, planning, detailing, strategising and leadership were imprinted all over the Maha Kumbh as well.

The establishment of a temporary city with roads, pontoon bridges, tens of thousands of tents, walking paths, cleanliness, safety and security, water and sanitation and large-scale availability of food for the devotees were some of the key highlights. The widespread use of digital technology helped in every conceivable way.

This was no mean feat, managing to have tens of millions of devotees come in, day in and day out, for 45 straight days and to provide them with all the necessary facilities is a humongous job, one that was done with utmost care and professionalism by the state government officials in-charge on the site.

We stayed in a tent of the Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (UPSTDC) which had all the amenities one would have asked for, including spotlessly clean bed sheets, pillows, quilts, and towels, access to hot water in the bathroom, a very effective room heater, a fire extinguisher, TV, several phone charging points, cupboards, a table and a chair, drinking water all in a well-lit tent which could be locked for ones belongings to be safe. UPSTDC also provided very good vegetarian food (breakfast, lunch and dinner) to everyone staying in their tents.

My wife and I were blessed by taking a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. Millions of devotees thronged the banks of the Ganga to seek Mata (mother) Ganga's blessings.

At the Sangam, the confluence of the green waters of River Ganga and the blue waters of River Yamuna were clearly seen coming together. It is believed that River Saraswati is also part of this Sangam.

We carried the sacred water of Maa Ganga back with us to the US. Ganga jal is considered pious and is an integral part of the puja samagri of every Hindu household. Having taken the holy dip in the Triveni Sangam and seeing the incredible enthusiasm among our fellow Hindus, we felt energised, spiritually uplifted, and of course very emotional.

We prayed to Maa Ganga for the good health and happiness of everyone in our family, and a bright future for Bharat (India) and all 1.4 Billion Bharatiyas (Indians). While in the waters of Maa Ganga, I realised how incredibly blessed I was to have been born in Prayagraj and for my father and grandfather to have lived in Prayagraj for almost two decades.

After our snan in the Triveni Sangam, we also performed a puja of Maa Ganga on one of the boats stationed there with a priest. We recited Sanskrit shlokas, and offered milk, water and some sacred materials to Maa Ganga.

We also went around the various Akharas, including the Kinnar Akhara and the Gau Seva Akhara etc. It was amazing to see how well planned and decorated these Akharas were, and tens of thousands of devotees were thronging them to seek blessings of the leaders of these Akharas.

All through this journey of eight-plus kms, we saw numerous free food distribution centers and hundreds of volunteers serving food to those who stood in long ques to be seated and then served meals.

Our experience at the Maha Kumbh included wide-ranging discussions with many, among others, over the last two days, besides visiting the Triveni Sangam for the holy dip, we witnessed the Ganga Aarti, prayed at the Hanuman and the Patalpuri temples, saw the digital Maha Kumbh Gallery, visited the Akshay Vat, Parmarth Niketan, the Shivalaya Park, the Kinnar Akhara, and Gau Seva Akhara etc.

The Digital Maha Kumbh Experience Center was a very well-put-together digital centre with vital historical, religious and astronomical information about the Ardh Kumbh, Poorna Kumbh, and Maha Kumbh.

In Uttar Pradesh's journey to become a trillion-dollar economy, tourism, and especially religious tourism, is playing, and will continue to play, a significant role in boosting the size of the State economy.

The Maha Kumbh which lasted for 45 days, is estimated to infuse approximately $40 Billion into the State economy!

As of the last count, a staggering number of 660-plus million devotees had taken a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam at Prayagraj. Of this colossal figure, 175 Million devotees (30 per cent of the total so far) took the dip during the five auspicious days: Paush Purnima (17 Million), Makar Sankranti (35 Million), Mauni Amavasya (76 Million), Basant Panchami (27 Million) and Maghi Purnima (20 Million).

I met the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath ji in Lucknow on February 9 and told him that the arrangements made by his government in Prayagraj were very praiseworthy and met all the requirements of hundreds of millions of devotees that were coming for the Maha Kumbh.

I strongly believe that neither any other Indian state nor for that matter, any country in the world can organise such a colossal event. A visionary and bold leadership at the federal and the state level along with years of planning, detailing, interdepartmental coordination, widespread use of technology, including AI, deployment of tens of thousands of volunteers, sanitation staff, security personnel, construction workers, and many others could make this event possible. All in all, I would give them an A+.

At Columbia University, I plan to undertake a detailed case study of the Maha Kumbh with a special focus on the use of ICT tools and platforms (digital Maha Kumbh) in the Maha Kumbh's organisation, monitoring, data driven decision making, safety and security and so much more.

For people in the US, it is unfathomable to even imagine that over 660 Million people could visit, over 45 days, a small stretch of land at the banks of the river Ganga to take a holy dip.

By the final count, the total number of devotees who visited the Maha Kumbh was almost double the population of the United States, which stands at 335 Million.

Maha Kumbh is seen here in the US as nothing short of a miracle, wherein, daily, tens of millions of devotees, from out of town, have been coming to Prayagraj and after seeking the blessings of Maa Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, return on the same day, or at best the next day to their homes. This is seen as a once in a lifetime spiritual journey for the Hindus who have been coming to Prayagraj from all parts of India and the world.

For people in the US, it is rather scary to even imagine being a part of such large gatherings, let alone being there in person.

(The writer is a development economist at the Columbia Climate School at Columbia University and a Padma Shri awardee. Views expressed are personal)

Geostrategic communication: Need for a new global information order

CHAITANYA K PRASAD

The way we interact, negotiate, and perceive the world has undergone an astronomical shift. From backroom diplomacy to high-profile summits, from hushed alliances to social media-driven narratives, the landscape of global communication is more intricate, focused and instant. Yet, the structures guiding this flow of information remain relics of a bygone era.

The world has evolved, but the framework governing its communication has not. It is time to reimagine and reframe, a new global information order is not just desirable, but essential.

As the world steps into this new chapter of geopolitical shifts, communication strategies are becoming more sophisticated, dynamic, and multidimensional. The need of the hour is to analyse new institutional structures in the shifting political landscape and the major geopolitical developments. The evolving political climate is challenging traditional paradigms, compelling communication specialists, diplomats, and policymakers to rethink how messages are crafted, delivered, and received on a global stage. The era demands a communication framework that not only transcends borders but also bridges communication gaps with precision authenticity and timeliness. The last real effort to balance global communication came in the 1970s with the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Born from the recommendations of the MacBride Commission, NWICO sought to challenge media hegemony and build a more equitable information ecosystem. But the world has moved light-years ahead since then. Digital revolutions, social media, AI-driven content, and the collapse of traditional media gatekeeping have rewritten the rules. Information today is less about access and more about credibility, control, and interpretation. The question is no longer who gets to speak, but how narratives are crafted, consumed, and manipulated. We now live in a world of instant gratification, where attention spans are shorter than ever. Information is expected to be quick, simplified, and emotionally engaging. This 'instant noodle syndrome' of communication has transformed how global narratives unfold. In the middle of a geopolitical crisis, or sudden diplomatic shifts, the first response is not from policymakers but from trending hashtags and viral videos. Public perception forms in real-time, often before official statements are drafted. This new reality demands a shift in approach. Diplomacy and governance can no longer afford to treat communication as an afterthought. Strategic messaging must be an integral part of decision-making from the start, ensuring that global narratives are shaped with intention rather than left to the chaos of digital virality.

Geopolitical alliances have been positioned on the pillars of economic cooperation, security, socio- economic issues, commitment to equity, inclusiveness, participation and cooperation. In an era where information is power, their role must expand to shaping global communication standards. Misinformation, propaganda wars, and AI-generated "deepfakes" have turned digital spaces into battlegrounds. By pooling their resources, alliances could lead the charge in crafting a framework that promotes transparency, accountability and digital responsibility.

An information-sharing network between alliances and institutions could facilitate counter-coordinated disinformation campaigns. A standardised approach to AI-driven content moderation could set ethical boundaries for algorithmic influence. More importantly, these alliances can ensure that information remains a tool for progress rather than a weapon of manipulation.

As we stand at this technological crossroads, the question is no longer whether AI will transform communications-it already has. The real question is how we shape this transformation to serve humanity's best interests. The challenge lies not just in leveraging AI but in redefining communication itself in an era where technology and human intellect must coexist harmoniously. Ultimately, AI's most profound impact may be its ability to compel us to re-examine what meaningful human connection looks like in a digital world. As we harness AI to amplify our messages, we must ensure we do not lose sight of communication's essence-the human touch that transforms information into understanding and dialogue into trust.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a futuristic concept, it is the present. AI writes news articles, curates social media feeds, and even shapes political narratives. While it enhances efficiency, it also raises critical concerns. Who controls the algorithms? What biases are embedded in machine-generated content? Without a global framework, AI-driven information dissemination is an unchecked force that can either unify or divide societies.

At the same time, Gen Z-the digital-native generation-has become an undeniable force in global discourse. Their ability to mobilise, influence, and disrupt traditional narratives through social media is unmatched. A new information order must account for this shift, incorporating digital literacy, responsible AI governance, and fact-checking mechanisms into the larger conversation.

A new information order cannot be an abstract idea, it needs a tangible structure. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) should spearhead discussions on an international information governance framework, establishing a 'Threshold Agreement for Global Communication.' Such an initiative should include Ethical Standards for AI-generated content to ensure transparency and reduce algorithmic biases. It must also introduce a crisis communication protocol to prevent misinformation spirals during global emergencies. Additionally, a global fact-checking consortium should be established to unite journalists, researchers, and policymakers in a collaborative effort to combat digital disinformation. Lastly, balanced digital sovereignty measures are essential to allow countries to maintain narrative control without suppressing free speech.

What we acquire is a renewed collaborative effort to establish a new "Global Information order", a platform established institutionally to bridge the gap in the medium and message equation. The 7Rs in communication ie, relevance, relatability, response, revival, reconnection, reconstruction, and reposition need to be mainstreamed in the geopolitical setting. The new global order must work towards the framework that calibrates perceptions, builds relationships and drives action based on mutually agreeable communication tools. This mode should integrate rather than disconnect and create gaps and place a narrative that addresses opportunity, experiences and the vision of mutual coexistence. The changing geopolitical reality of 2025 highlights the need for adaptability in communication. Traditional media must evolve to remain relevant, embracing digital innovations and audience-centric approaches. Meanwhile, social media must grapple with issues of misinformation, polarisation, and echo chambers, striving to become a platform that unites rather than divides. In this era, communication is no longer just about delivering a message,it is about shaping perceptions, building relationships, and driving action.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to communicate effectively will be one of the most powerful tools in navigating the complexities of a neo-geopolitical era. For too long, communication has been seen as a mere tool, a final step to package decisions and policies for public consumption. That mindset is outdated and ineffective. In today's world, perception is as powerful as policy, and messaging is as critical as the action itself. Strategic communication must be embedded into policymaking from the outset, ensuring that every decision carries a clear, coherent, and credible message. A new global information order is not about control, it is about coherence. It is about ensuring that in an age of instant narratives, the truth is not lost in the noise. It is about fostering a communication ecosystem that is resilient, transparent, and aligned with the evolving digital landscape. The world has already changed. Now, it is time for our information order to catch up.

What we need is a renewed collaborative effort to establish a new "Global Information order", a platform established institutionally to bridge the gap in the medium and message equation.

(The writer is former civil servant. Views expressed are personal)

Overcoming our addiction to sugar and salt

RAVI VALLURI

Oh, I am a sweets person, or "I prefer salty food." But have we pondered what is at the root of these cravings? Can a salty person become a sweet person, or vice versa?

Invariably craving for sugary and salty foods arises from various factors, which include stress, dehydration, sleep deprivation, nutritional deficiencies, emotional upheavals such as tragedies, illness, separation, bulimia, premenstrual syndrome or an individual unable to achieve his/her goals in life.

Such foods trigger the release of dopamine which tends to provide a temporary sense of comfort or rush of energy. It is pyrrhic and provides a temporary high to the mind which has a long-term impact on the gut and our physical and mental wellbeing. Upon quitting alcohol, I developed a strong craving for sweets. Sweets were to replace spirits as I embarked on my journey of sobriety.

Now I am making a serious attempt to kick this habit. The mind yearns for something sweet after every meal. By eating refined sugar not only does an individual add weight at all the wrong places in the body which makes him or her appear ungainly, sugar is also hazardous for the gut.

"How will you do yoga watching me gorging a delicious pastry," my Yoga teacher admonished me.

The problem begins at the level of the abdomen and slowly, but surely spreads to various parts of the body. Sugar addiction is as deleterious as being hooked on cocaine. A close relative, also a doctor by training, talking about her husband, a former alcoholic, mentioned, "So long as he does not drink, sweets are fine."

But excessive consumption of sweets is equally dangerous to the body. Be it white or brown, sugar remains an anathema. The same applies to the excessive intake of salt. Excessive salt causes high blood pressure and cardiac-related ailments. Recently I read a thought-provoking article by a runner. For the last forty years, this gentleman had been running incessantly across the country and was sprightly and fit.

He also advocates running barefoot quite like the celebrity Milind Soman. The runner champions a no-sugar and no-salt diet. "Humans get adequate quota of salt from the vegetables we partake," says the runner.

Excess of sugar causes Diabetes Mellitus or DM. The disease is a chronic condition that is associated with abnormally high levels of sugar (glucose) in the blood. The common symptoms associated with diabetes are reflected in excessive urination, uncontrolled thirst, weight loss, pangs of hunger, fatigue, skin-related problems, tardy healing of wounds and injuries, yeast infection and tingling or numbness in feet and toes. Diabetes, like high blood pressure, is a silent killer if left untreated.

Therefore, a combination of dietary habits, change in lifestyle patterns and a positive approach to life is paramount to combat the Scylla and Charybdis of diabetes and blood pressure.

Overweight people, obese individuals, those leading a sedentary lifestyle, humans with a family history of diabetes, those suffering from hypertension and hypotension, low levels of HDL (efficacious cholesterol) and elevated triglycerides are all prone to be afflicted by Diabetes Mellitus.

Madhumeha Mukt Bharat is a Nationwide Stop-Diabetes Movement under the aegis of Swami Vivekanand Yoga Anusthana Samsthana (SVYASA), Bengaluru, to spread awareness about diabetes and to aid in its prevention among a wide cross-section of Indians across the country, using the ancient holistic approach of yoga.

The Art of Living is supporting SVYASA in their noble efforts to promote health and harmony. Therefore, on World Diabetes Day that is on November 14, an event was flagged off, the first training programme for Yoga Teachers for Diabetes Management was held at the Bangalore Ashram of the Art of Living.

Several other schools of yoga and other organisations too participated in the workshop. Around 100 teachers of the Art of Living are being identified to tackle the menace of diabetes and provide holistic treatment through yoga. There is a Zen story about a monk named Haku as he learned from his master about the impermanent and temporary nature of life as one feels after drinking a coke, eating a pastry, or consuming a packet of chips.

Through the simple act of tasting salt and sugar, Haku grasped the truth that beneath the changing phenomena of life, there is an enduring essence. Giving up salt and sugar required training of the mind. This is simple Zen story which ignites our minds to reflect on the nature of existence, reality and impermanence of human life.

To begin with we need to train our minds to unflinchingly say no to sugar and salt. Can we? Maybe the mind would resist this change, but certainly, humans can take baby steps by reducing the quantities significantly and will soon see radical changes in their bodies, minds, and souls.

By consciously reducing our intake of sugar and salt, we take the first step toward a healthier body and mind. With discipline and awareness, we can break free from cravings and embrace a more balanced, fulfilling life.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. Views expressed are personal)

Palestinians protest Hamas in rare public show

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Cairo

Palestinians chanted against Hamas during an anti-war protest in the Gaza Strip, according to videos circulating online in a rare show of public anger against the militant group, which has long repressed dissent and still rules the territory 17 months into the war with Israel.

The videos, which appeared to be authentic, showed hundreds of people taking part in an anti-war protest in the heavily destroyed northern town of Beit Lahiya on Tuesday.

People held signs saying "Stop the war," "We refuse to die," and "The blood of our children is not cheap."

Some could be heard chanting: "Hamas out!" Other videos appeared to show Hamas supporters dispersing the crowds.

"We are sick of the bombing, killing and displacement," Ammar Hassan, a young man from Beit Lahiya who took part in the protest.

He said it started as an anti-war protest with just a few dozen people but then swelled to more than 2,000, with people chanting against Hamas.

"It's the only party we can affect," he said over the phone. "Protests won't stop the (Israeli) occupation, but it can affect Hamas," he said.

Palestinians walk amid the destruction caused by the Israeli air and ground offensive at Al-Shati camp, Gaza City PTI

"The protest was not about politics. It was about people's lives," said Mohammed Abu Saker, a father of three from the nearby town of Beit Hanoun, who joined the demonstration.

"We want to stop the killing and displacement, no matter the price. We can't stop Israel from killing us, but we can press Hamas to give concessions," he said.

A statement released by family elders from Beit Lahiya expressed support for the protests against Israel's offensive and its tightened blockade. They also said the community fully supports armed resistance against Israel and rejects "any attempt to exploit legitimate popular demands by a fifth column," apparently referring to opponents of Hamas.

The protests erupted a week after Israel ended its ceasefire with Hamas by launching a surprise wave of strikes that killed hundreds of people. Earlier this month, Israel halted deliveries of food, fuel, medicine and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians.

Israel has vowed to escalate the war until Hamas returns the 59 hostages it still holds 24 of whom are believed to be alive. Israel is also demanding that the group give up power, disarm and send its leaders into exile. Hamas has said it will only release the remaining captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, a lasting ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

The war was triggered by Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack into Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted 251. Hamas has said only a handful of its top commanders knew about the attack ahead of time.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 50,000 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were civilians or combatants. Israel's bombardment and ground operations have caused vast destruction and at their height displaced some 90 per cent of Gaza's population.

Hamas won a landslide victory in the last Palestinian elections, held in 2006. It seized power in Gaza from the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, dominated by the secular Fatah movement, the following year after months of factional unrest and a week of heavy street battles.

Rights groups say both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas violently suppress dissent, quashing protests in the areas they control and jailing and torturing critics.

US intelligence officials to appear at House hearing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

President Donald Trump's top intelligence officials will brief House lawmakers Wednesday on global threats facing the US - though they'll likely be questioned again over their use of a group text to discuss plans for military strikes in Yemen.

CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard and FBI Director Kash Patel are among those who were asked to testify before the House Intelligence Committee as part of its annual review of threats facing the US.

At a similar hearing on Tuesday before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Gabbard briefed lawmakers on her office's threat assessment, noting that China, Russia, Iran and North Korea continue to pose security challenges to the United States, as do drug cartels and transnational criminal organisations.

The presentations from top Trump appointees reflect Trump's foreign policy priorities, including a focus on combating the flow of fentanyl, illegal immigration and human trafficking, and are taking place as Trump attempts to work out a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine three years after Russia's invasion.

Tuesday's hearing was dominated by questions about Ratcliffe and Gabbard's participation in a group chat on Signal in which they discussed plans to strike Houthi rebels in Yemen. The group included a journalist, The Atlantic editor-in-chief named Jeffrey Goldberg.

Gabbard and Ratcliffe have said no classified information was included in the messages, but Democrats have decried the use of the messaging app, saying that any release of information about timetables, weapons or military activities could have put US servicemembers at risk.

At Tuesday's hearing they asked Patel, who was not a participant in the text chain, if he would investigate.

Russia convicts 23 captured Ukrainians on terrorism charges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

Russia on Wednesday convicted 23 captured Ukrainians on terrorism charges stemming from the fighting in Ukraine in a trial that Kyiv denounced as a sham and a violation of international law.

The defendants included 14 current or former fighters of the elite Azov brigade, which Russia designated a terrorist group, and nine women and one man who worked as cooks or support personnel, according to Russian media reports and rights activists.

Twelve defendants were not in court 11 had returned to Ukraine in two prisoner exchanges and were convicted in absentia. One more died in custody last year.

All had been charged with staging a violent coup d'etat and organising activities of a terrorist organisation. Some faced an additional charge of training to carry out terrorist activities.

They were given sentences ranging from 13 to 23 years in prison.

Memorial, a prominent Russian rights group that won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2022, has designated all the defendants as political prisoners.

According to Memorial, some of them were captured in 2022 during fighting in the port city of Mariupol, where they held out at the Azovstal steel mill, besieged by Russian troops.

Others were detained as they tried to leave the city after it was overrun by Russian forces, the group said.

Ukraine's human rights envoy, Dmytro Lubinets, denounced the proceedings when they began in June 2023 as "another sham trial" held for Russia's "own amusement."

"Russia' and fair justice' have nothing in common. The world must respond to such shameful sham trials of Ukrainian defenders," Lubinets said.

"It is obvious to everyone that those who should be in the dock are not those defending themselves but those who initiated the aggression, those who invaded foreign land with weapons and those who arrived with tanks on the territory of an independent state!"

Ukraine ready to proceed with ceasefire: Zelenskyy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv

Ukraine is ready to proceed with a ceasefire prohibiting attacks on energy infrastructure, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, in line with a deal that was brokered by the United States during three days of negotiations with Ukrainian and Russian officials in the Saudi capital.

Speaking in a video address late Tuesday, Zelenskyy said Ukraine had agreed with US negotiators "that a ceasefire for energy infrastructure can start today."

But, he warned, any strikes on Ukraine's energy facilities by Moscow would draw "strong retaliation."

The comments underscored the tenuous agreements that came out of the three days of separate US-Ukrainian and US-Russian talks in Riyadh.

Washington said it had agreed with the warring parties to implement a pause on attacks on energy infrastructure as well as taking steps to ensure safe navigation for ships in the Black Sea. Those talks were part of a broader effort toward a limited, 30-day ceasefire that Moscow and Kyiv agreed to in principle last week but has thus far failed to materialise as both sides continue to launch drone and rocket attacks against the other.

While Zelenskyy on Tuesday thanked the US for its efforts to strike an agreement, questions remained over some key details and a comprehensive peace deal to end the three-year war still looked distant.

Russia links the Black Sea deal to sanctions relief

On Tuesday, the White House said in separate statements that the sides had "agreed to ensure safe navigation, eliminate the use of force, and prevent the use of commercial vessels for military purposes in the Black Sea." Details of the prospective deal were not released, but it appeared to mark another attempt to ensure safe Black Sea shipping after a 2022 agreement that was brokered by the UN and Turkiye but halted by Russia the next year.

The comments underscored the tenuous agreements that came out of the three days of separate US-Ukrainian and US-Russian talks in Riyadh

After the White House issued its statement Tuesday, the Kremlin warned that a potential Black Sea deal could only be implemented after sanctions against the Russian Agricultural Bank and other financial organisations involved in food and fertiliser trade are lifted and their access to the SWIFT system of international payments is ensured.

Zelenskyy on Tuesday evening reacted to those demands, casting them as an example of Moscow "manipulating, twisting agreements and lying" about the terms of the agreement.

"There are absolutely clear statements that have been published by the White House, everyone can see what is stated there," Zelenskyy said. "And there is something that the Kremlin is lying about again: that supposedly the (ceasefire) in the Black Sea depends on the issue of sanctions."

In an apparent reference to Moscow's demands, the White House said Tuesday the US "will help restore Russia's access to the world market for agricultural and fertiliser exports, lower maritime insurance costs and enhance access to ports and payment systems for such transactions."

Russia launches drone attack on Zelenskyy's hometown

Kryvyi Rih, Zelenskyy's hometown, came under the "most massive kamikaze drone attack since the beginning of the war" on Tuesday night, the city administration head, Oleksandr Vilkul, wrote on Telegram.

Although no people were killed or injured, civilian infrastructure was widely targeted, Vikul said, including an administration building, warehouses, an industrial enterprise and a fire station. Multiple fires were sparked across the city, he said.

France, Indonesia vow to boost safety in Indo-Pacific

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jakarta

France and Indonesia's top diplomats inked a new maritime security project on Wednesday aiming "to ensure peace and safety" at sea in the Indo-Pacific region.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot's visit to Jakarta, his second stop in his four-day Asia tour after Singapore, comes amid ongoing trade tensions between the European Union and Beijing.

He told reporters on Wednesday that the Indo-Pacific Port Security Project "is close to my heart," promising France's support. Neither he nor his Indonesian counterpart Sugiono shared what the project will entail. Earlier this month, during a discussion of the project at the Ottawa Conference on Security and Defence, Indonesia's naval chief of staff, Admiral Muhammad Ali, said it would address various maritime security challenges, including piracy, terrorism, and illegal activities at sea, and would likely involve collaboration among countries in the Indo-Pacific.

Sugiono, who like many Indonesians uses a single name, said the "maritime collaboration is important to realise a stable, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific." he said the project will support Indonesia as the world's largest archipelago nation with more than 17,000 islands, with a focus on two Indonesian ports in Jakarta and Surabaya cities "in their sustainability and security." The two diplomats, who signed the project's agreement at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations headquarters in the Indonesian capital, said they also discussed strengthening their strategic partnerships and enhancing cooperation in various fields. Military cooperation between France and Indonesia has grown in recent years.

French air force planes made a stopover in July In Jakarta as part of a visit to Southeast Asia that was meant to display France's commitment to security in the Indo-Pacific region.

Sri Lanka slams Britain's 'unilateral action'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Sri Lanka on Wednesday slammed the British government's "unilateral action" to sanction its three former military commanders, who led the campaign that crushed the LTTE in 2009, saying the move will complicate the national reconciliation process.

A UK foreign office statement Monday said Sri Lanka's three military commanders - former Army Commanders Gen Shavendra Silva, Jagath Jayasuriya and former Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda - were among those sanctioned and subjected to UK travel bans and asset freezes.

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

In a statement on Wednesday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "such unilateral actions by countries do not assist but serve to complicate the national reconciliation process underway in Sri Lanka".

"The government is in the process of strengthening domestic mechanisms on accountability and reconciliation and any past human rights violations should be dealt with through domestic accountability mechanisms," the ministry said.

Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath conveyed Sri Lanka's position to British High Commissioner Andrew Patrick, it added.

"I categorically reject the UK government's allegations of widespread human rights violations during the military operations," former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, who is credited for his political leadership to end the LTTE's campaign, said in a statement.

He accused the British politicians of doing vote bank politics on Sri Lanka to win the votes of the Tamil community domiciled in the UK.

He said that the LTTE killed 27,965 Sri Lankan troops and police in their violent campaign, "not to mention the lives of many civilians".

He said in 2021 and 2023, the UK legislated to protect their forces from prosecution by interested parties.

"Hence, I expect the present government to resolutely stand by and defend former armed forces personnel who face persecution by foreign governments and organizations for doing their duty to safeguard Sri Lanka's national security," Rajapaksa added.

Rights abuses alleged on both government troops and the LTTE during the final battle in 2009 caused four UN rights resolutions, which called for international mechanisms for the prosecution of alleged perpetrators.

Sri Lanka outrightly rejected resolutions and said local mechanisms would be set up. Rights groups charge that only minimal progress has been made despite pledges. The UK government's sanctions on General Silva follow a similar action against him by the US State Department in 2020.

In 2023, Canada sanctioned two former presidents, Mahinda and Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The two Rajapaksa brothers led the military campaign which crushed the LTTE, ending their three decades of armed struggle to create a separate Tamil homeland in the north and east regions.

General Silva and Karannagoda were key commanders in the three-year campaign.

Syria can return to violence or to peace says UN envoy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

Three months following the overthrow of President Bashar Assad, Syria is at a crossroads, the top UN envoy for the country said.

Geir Pedersen told the UN Security Council that Syria can return to violence or start an inclusive transition and end decades of conflict. He said the road back to conflict, fragmentation and violations of Syrian sovereignty by external powers "must not come to pass". The other road, which would restore Syria's sovereignty and regional security, is "viable" but "requires the right Syrian decisions" and international support, Pedersen said.

Syria's civil war had gone on for 13 years when a lightning insurgency led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, overthrew Assad in December, ending his family's more than 50-year rule.

Former HTS leader Ahmad al-Sharaa was announced as the country's interim president after a meeting of armed groups that took part in the offensive.

Pedersen spoke weeks after clashes between al-Sharaa's security forces and armed groups loyal to Assad spiralled into sectarian revenge attacks that killed hundreds of civilians, most of them Alawites, a minority sect to which Assad belongs. It was the worst violence since December. Pedersen told the council that while the situation was "comparatively calmed" after several days, the UN continues to receive reports "of harassment and intimidation, including with heavy sectarian overtones".

He said the interim authorities announced an independent investigation. Pedersen said he stressed that it must be transparent, in line with international standards, and its findings made public.

The UN special envoy, who will return to Damascus shortly, highlighted several priority areas for action and attention.

The latest atrocities, he said, "laid bare the urgent need for credible and efficient accountability for crimes" committed over decades. He said the UN and the international community will be watching whether the soon-to-be-announced transitional government and transitional legislative council reflect Syria's diversity and include both men and women.

Geir Pedersen told the UN Security Council that Syria can return to violence or start an inclusive transition and end decades of conflict

He said his team was consulted on a temporary constitution and gave advice on international best practices and norms. "Some of this was taken on board, some was not," he said.

In mid-March, al-Sharaa signed a temporary constitution that leaves the country under Islamist rule while promising to protect the rights of all Syrians for five years during a transitional phase.

"Some Syrians have commended the effort to fill the constitutional vacuum, and noted the incorporation of international human rights norms.

Wildfires ravage southern South Korea, killing 24 people

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

Wind-driven wildfires that were among South Korea's worst ever were ravaging the country's southern regions, killing 24 people, destroying more than 200 structures and forcing 27,000 people to evacuate, officials said Wednesday.

The death toll included a pilot who died after a helicopter crashed during efforts to contain wildfires in the southeastern town of Uiseong, one of the areas hardest-hit. The aircraft had no other crew members.

The National Fire Agency said at least 26 other people sustained varying degrees of injuries.

An ancient Buddhist temple, houses, factories and vehicles were among the structures destroyed in the wildfires that have burned 43,330 acres, the government's emergency response centre said.

In a televised address, South Korea's acting President Han Duck-soo said the wildfires that began last Friday were causing worse damage than many other past wildfires.

"Damages are snowballing," Han said. "There are concerns that we'll have wildfire damages that we've never experienced, so we have to concentrate all our capabilities to put out the wildfires in the rest of this week."

President Han Duck-soo said crews were struggling to extinguish the wildfires because strong winds swept the areas overnight.

Han said about 4,650 firefighters, soldiers and other personnel were working Wednesday to extinguish the wildfires with the help of about 130 helicopters.

The remains of burnt-out pavilions are seen at the Gounsa temple in Uiseong, South Korea PTI

President Han Duck-soo said that "a small amount" of 5-10 millimetres of rain was expected Thursday.

Observers say the ongoing wildfires are the third biggest in South Korea in terms of land burned.

Officials in several southeastern cities and towns had ordered residents to evacuate Tuesday as firefighters struggled to contain multiple blazes fuelled by dry winds.

The largest fires were in Andong, the neighbouring counties of Uiseong and Sancheong, and the city of Ulsan, according to South Korea's Interior Ministry.

Earlier on Tuesday, officials had said firefighters had extinguished most of the flames from the largest wildfires in those areas, but wind and dry conditions allowed the blazes to spread again.

But efforts to fight the fires were partially suspended overnight as the winds strengthened.

The blaze in Uiseong destroyed nearly half of more than 30 structures at Gounsa, a temple which was said to be originally built in the 7th century.

Among the destroyed structures were two state-designated "treasures" a pavilion-shaped structure built on a stream built in 1668 and a Joseon Dynasty structure built in 1904 to mark the longevity of a king.

The temple's another state-designated "treasure," a stone Buddha statue reportedly manufactured in the 8th century, was evacuated to a safe place, according to government and Buddhist officials.

The Justice Ministry said it protectively removed 500 inmates from a detention centre in Cheongsong, another southern town, but no damages were reported to the facility.

The Korea Forest Service said it had raised its wildfire warning to the highest "serious" level nationwide Tuesday, requiring local governments to assign more workers to emergency response, tighten entry restrictions for forests and parks, and recommend that military units withhold live-fire exercises.

The 18 dead include four firefighters and government workers who were killed in Sancheong on Saturday after being trapped by fast-moving flames driven by strong winds, according to officials.

Government officials suspect human error caused several of the fires, possibly due to the use of fire while clearing overgrown grass in family tombs or sparks from welding work.

Jay Bhattacharya confirmed as NIH head

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Indian-American scientist Jay Bhattacharya has been confirmed by the US Senate as the Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the country's top health research and funding institutions. Bhattacharya, a professor of Health Policy at Stanford University, was confirmed by a 53-47 vote on Tuesday, according to the official website of the US Senate. US President Donald Trump, then the President-elect, nominated Bhattacharya as the 18th NIH Director in November last year.

"Dr Bhattacharya will work in cooperation with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. To direct the Nation's Medical Research and to make important discoveries that will improve Health, and save lives," Trump had said.

During his hearing, Bhattacharya said he understands science and public health have become politicised, and many no longer trust health officials or experts, according to The Hill. The NIH should support science which is "replicable, reproducible, and generalisable," Bhattacharya said. "Unfortunately, much of modern biomedical science fails this basic test," the news portal quoted him as saying. "If confirmed, I will carry out President Trump and (Health and Human Service) Secretary Kennedy's agenda of Making America Healthy Again and committing the NIH to address the dire chronic health needs of the country with gold-standard science and innovation," he said.

In a statement on Tuesday, Stanford Medicine "proudly" congratulated Bhattacharya on his appointment and called his commitment to public service "commendable". "As an institution, we are staunch supporters of the NIH's mission, which continues to advance the frontiers of medical knowledge and unlock new possibilities for health improvement," it said.

IMF approves loan for Pakistan to address climate change

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

The International Monetary Fund approved a loan of $1.3 Billion for Pakistan to address climate change while also reaching a staff-level agreement on the first review of the already agreed $7 Billion loan.

The new agreement spans over 28 months under the Climate Resilience and Sustainability Facility which aims to help nations address climate challenges while committing to reforms.

Additionally, freeing $1 Billion for the country under the $7 Billion bailout programme would bring the total disbursements to $2 Billion.

"The IMF team has reached a staff-level agreement (SLA) with the Pakistani authorities on the first review of the 37-month extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), and on a new 28-month arrangement under the IMF's (Resilience and Sustainability Trust) with total access over the 28 months of around $1.3 Billion," Nathan Porter, mission chief to Pakistan, said on Tuesday.

"Upon approval (by the IMF board), Pakistan will have access to about $1 Billion under the EFF, bringing total disbursements under the programme to about $2 Billion," he added.

According to Radio Pakistan, the two agreements giving access to about 2 billion dollars is a "testament to Pakistan's significant strides in economic reforms, focusing on tax equity, monetary stability, energy sector transformation, and climate resilience."

The IMF in its statement also appreciated Pakistan for its efforts to bring stability.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client **Sh. Amit Yadav owner of the PROPERTY NO. A-10, KNOWN AS B-1/10, AREA 50 SQ. YDS., KHASRA NO. 68/7, HASTSAL, RAVINDER VIHAR, UTTAM NAGAR, 110059 and.Sh.Amit Yadav purchase property from Smt. Geeta vide Notarized GPA, ATS and will dated 04.05.2024 Now Sh. Amit Yadav wants to sell aforesaid property.** And It is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property,shall be deemed as null and void.If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile :- 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all that my client Mrs. Harvinder Kaur W/o Sh. Surinder Singh R/o MD-6, First Floor, Pitampura, North West Delhi,Delhi-110034 have disowned/ debarred her daughter Avneet Kaur @ Avneet Kaur Ahuja and son in law Harpreet Singh @ Harpreet Singh Ahuja from all her movable & immovable properties and severed all relations with both of them due to their misconduct. Any person dealing with them shall be doing at his/her own risk.

PRAVEEN RASTOGI
(Advocate)

Form No. 77

COURT NOTICE
(U/o 5 Rule 20 CPC)
IN THE COURT OF Sh. Rajinder Pal Singh
Mahila Court/Mahila FT/Women and Children Special Court Panipat

Next Date, Purpose of case, Orders and Judgments as well as other case information is available on http://ecourts.gov.in

Navneet Kumar
Vs.
Pooja Maurya

CIS No. HMA-95-2023
CNR No. HRPP01-004930-2023
Next Date:- 05-05-2025

PUBLICATION ISSUED TO:
Pooja Maurya
W/o Sh. Navneet Kumar D/o Sh. Pramod Kumar Maurya R/o UP Saidpur Village, Rastipur 233221, Uttar Pradesh & Presently at Room No. 5, Thorumalashettihally Govt. Primary School, Bangaluru-560067

Whereas it has been proved to the satisfaction of the Court that the defendant(s)/respondent(s) above named cannot be served in the ordinary way of service. Hence, this proclamation under order 5 Rule 20 CPC is hereby issued against him/them and should appear personally or through their counsel on **05-05-2025** at **10:00 a.m.**

Take notice that, in default of his/their appearance on the day before mentioned, the above said case will be heard and determined in his/their absence according to law.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Court, this **18-03-2025.**

SEAL

Mahila Court/Mahila FT/Women and Children Special Court, Panipat

COURT NOTICE

IN THE COURT OF SH. RAVINDER SINGH-1, LD. JUDGE, FAMILY COURT-02, DISTRICT EAST KARKARDOOM COURTS, ROOM NO. 45, DELHI

IDA 7/2023

DIKSHANT NARULA
VS
AMITA SYDNEY
J (Cri)3

To

AMITA SYDNEY W/O SH. DIKSHANT NARULA, D/O SH. MORWIN SYKDNEY, R/O H. NO. 99 960, CIVIL LINE, EKTAPURAM, MISSION, MEERUT, UTTAR PRADESH-250003.

ALSO AT:
2069/4, JAGRITI VIHAR, NEAR DEEWAN PUBLIC SCHOOL, MEERUT, U.P.-250004.

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons, it is hereby notified that, if you shall not defend the case on **22.04.2025 at 10 am** the day fixed for final disposal, it will be heard and determined **ex-parte**.

Given under my hand and seal of the court on this 03.03.2025.

JUDGE
Family Court-02, District East, Karkardoom Courts, Delhi

SEAL

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences
Sadiq Road, Faridkot -151203 Ph. 01639-256232, 256236

Advt. No.BFU-25/09

VACANCIES

Online applications are invited w.e.f **28-03-2025 to 17-04-2025** from eligible candidates through University website i.e **www.bfuhs.ac.in** for the recruitment to the posts of **Clinical Psychologist (UR-01, SC (M/B) Female-01)** on regular basis under Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot. For Application form, fee, specialty wise detail of posts, Category wise distribution and other terms & conditions, visit University website: **www.bfuhs.ac.in**

Sd/-
REGISTRAR

nil/12/274/2023/42978 Dated CHD :- 3/26/2025

INDIAN RAILWAYS
भारत सरकार **GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**
रेल मंत्रालय **MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS**
(रेलवे बोर्ड) **RAILWAY BOARD**
E-TENDER NO. 2025RS19542TC

Principal Executive Director, Railway Stores (S), Ministry of Railways. Railway Board, Government of India invites e-tender for Procurement of 08 Nos Rakes of Flat Multi-Purpose (FMP) Wagons (6 Nos. FMP Car A+ 39 Nos. FMP-Car B-one rake consists of 45 wagons) type FMPA and FMPB to RDSO Drg No WD-19066-S-02, Alt.8 or latest (Car-A) & WD-19067-S-02, Alt. 9 or latest (Car-B).

2.0 The interested tenderers are advised to visit the website **http://ireps.gov.in** for details of the tender and submission of their e-bids.

3.0 **No manual offers will be accepted against e-tender.**

4.0 **Tender will be closed at 15.00 hours on 23.04.2025.**

5.0 Any corrigendum to this tender will be published on the website **http://ireps.gov.in** only and not in print media.

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 940/25

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences
Sadiq Road, Faridkot -151203 Ph. 01639-256232, 256236

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-tender are invited for the procurements of following items upto 21-04-2025
1) Repair of AC Plant 2 Nos. 190 Ton Carrier Make at GGSMC&H, FDK 2) (CMC) for 1.5 Ton Window & 1.5 Ton & 2 Ton Split Air Conditioners for BFUHS. Approximate 750 No.) 3) Supply & installation of LT Panel, Main Cable & power point in OPD Block at GGSMC&H, FDK 4) (CMC) for 218.50 Ton Ductable HVAC unit for Neurology & Neuro surgery, 2 no. lecture theatres, Blood Bank & ICCU Medicine at GGSMC&H, Faridkot.(For Three Year).5) Replacement of car door set, linding door with panel, header and skill, ARD with batteries for 2no. Lifts make ECE 8 person at BFUHS

E-tender are invited for the procurements of following items upto 09-04-2024
1) Providing Fire Fighting & Fire Detection Service for Super Specialty Block in GGSMC&H, FDK. 2) Providing & fixing Automatic Sprinkler System of Fire Safety in Mother Block of MCH Building at GGSMC&H, FDK.3) Providing 11KV Substation including DG Set, Transformer and Electrical Work for Super Specialty Block at GGSMC&H, FDK.

Note:- Tender Document can be downloaded from **http://eproc.punjab.gov.in** and **www.bfuhs.ac.in**

Registrar

00/12/402/2023/42975 Dated CHD :- 3/26/2025

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Anita Mishra W/O Late. Ram Roop Mishra, R/O A-5, GALI NO-7, CHANCHAL PARK BAKKARWALA, Bakkarwala, West Delhi Delhi, 110041,have changed the name of my minor daughter namely Gracy Mishra aged 17 years and she shall hereafter be known as GUNJAN MISHRA.

PD(1747)C

I, Minkee Pandey, W/o- No.17021300N Sep Sandeep Pandey, R/o- Vill- Gogahi, PO- Gogaura, PS- Dhansoi, Dist- Buxar, Bihar- 802117, declare that in my husband's service documents my D.O.B. is wrongly written as 26/12/1990, whereas my correct D.O.B. is 28/12/1990, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(1748)C

I, No. NTR-16800H Lt Col Amit Kumar, R/o- H.No.-213, Lane No.-12, Sainik Nagar, RBL Road, Lucknow, U.P. have changed my son's name from Gatik to Gatik Yadav, vide affidavit dated 26/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1749)C

I, No. NTR-16800H Lt Col Amit Kumar, R/o- H.No.-213, Lane No.-12, Sainik Nagar, RBL Road, Lucknow, U.P. have changed my son's name from Kaartikeya to Kaartikeya Yadav, vide affidavit dated 26/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1750)C

I, Lukalapu Urmila, W/o 14880087P Sep Lukalapu Tarakeswararao, R/o- Bereji Center(Hiramandalam), Dist- Srikakulam, A.P, declare in my husband's service document my name is wrongly written as Siripuram Urmila whereas my correct name is Lukalapu Urmila which may be amended accordingly.

PD(1751)C

I, Shashi Kiran, W/o JC- 805529L Sub/Instr(SPL) Avinash Mishra, R/o- 42, Onkardutt Colony, Maheshwar Road- Dhamnod, PO- Dhamnod, Dist- Dhar, M.P- 454552, have changed my name from Shashi Kiran to Shashikiran Mishra, vide affidavit dated 26/03/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1752)C

I, JC - 542992L rank - Subedar Sunil Kumar presently residing at WARD NO-04, SANTRIYA PO- KHANPUR, DIST- JHUNJHUNUN , RAJASTHAN - 333516 have changed my daughter's name from KM RITIKA to RITIKA vide Affidavit No. IN-DL49176661237814X dated 12.03.2025 before Notary Public at New Delhi.

PD(1753)C

कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, (यांत्रिकी शाखा), भोपाल

क्रमांक 175/यां.वि./25 — भोपाल, दिनांक 25.03.2025

निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना

निम्न कार्य हेतु म.प्र. लोक निर्माण विभाग में पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों से ऑनलाईन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। विस्तृत विवरण website **https://www.mptenders.gov.in** पर है।

क्र.	निविदा क्र.	कार्य का संक्षिप्त विवरण	अनुमानित लागत (रू. में)	निविदा क्रय करने का अंतिम दिनांक	समय
01	2025_UAD _411830_1	CONSTRUCTION OF WELCOME GATE AND BEAUTIFICATION ON NARMADAPURAM ROAD (RAJA BHOJ DWAR) IN BHOPAL	6,01,27,844/-	23-APR-2025	05:30 PM

नोट – संशोधन केवल वेबसाईट पर ही देखे जा सकेंगे, समाचार पत्रों में प्रकाशित नहीं होंगे।

Superintending Engineer
Municipal Corporation Bhopal
Distrcit Bhopal

नि.क्र. 1578/024/025

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client **Ms. Israt Purchasing 2nd Floor Without Roof,Plot No.33,Area 60sq.Yds.,Khasra NO.30/12/2 & 30/19,Village Hastsal Vikas Nagar Extn.Uttam Nagar,New Delhi-110059 from Sh.Kamal Sharma, Since the aforementioned property was purchased by Kamal Sharma & father,Yashpal Sharma, from Gagan Sharma through anotarized GPA,ATS and Will dated 05.07.2017, Yashpal Sharma passed away on 07.04.2022.After his death, the said property was inherited by his legal heirs: 1. Jyoti Kohli (daughter) and 2.Kamal Sharma(son)Subsequently,Jyoti Kohli transferred her share in the aforementioned property in favor of her brother Kamal Sharma through the relinquishment deed number 2025/25/I/1838 dated 17.01.2025.and Kamal Sharma haven't original survivor certificate of Yashpal Sharma.** And It is informed that any deal withsaid documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void.If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile :- 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public that my client, Axis Bank Limited, having its branch at Ground Floor, Tower-I, Axis House, Sector-128, Noida, G.B. Nagar (U.P.), is inclined to grant a loan facility to Mr. Devender Kumar against a freehold residential apartment bearing No. A-2402, located on the 24th floor, along with three (3) covered car parking spaces No. A/B1-018, A/B1-019 and A/B3-020, each measuring 34.05 sq. ft. - in Tower-A. The said property has a super area of 3,858 sq. ft. (carpet area: 2,409 sq. ft.) and is part of the group housing building known as **"Araya"**, situated in Sector-62, within the revenue estate of Village Ghata, Tehsil Wazirabad, District Gurugram (Haryana) (hereinafter referred to as the **"Said Property"**). Furthermore, Mr. Devender Kumar, son of Late Mr. Rati Ram, is the recorded owner of the Said Property by virtue of a Sale Deed dated 02.01.2025. However, the original Conveyance Deed dated 09.02.2021, bearing Document No. 8204, in respect of the Said Property, has been lost or misplaced. If any person has found the aforementioned document, they are requested to contact us within 15 days from the date of this notice at the number provided below. Failure to do so shall absolve my client, Axis Bank Limited, of any responsibility in this regard.

Himanshu Ahuja (Advocate)
Contact No.: 9810310373, 011-41830049
E-mail Address: alolegals@gmail.com

IN THE COURT OF
Munsiff/Sub-Registrar, Srinagar
Next Date, Purpose of Case, Orders and Judgments as well as other case information is available on http://ecourts.gov.in
PUBLICATION NOTICE UNDER ORDER 5 RULE 20 CPC

File No.: 922/2024

Suresh Sehgal & Ors
Vs.
Susheel Rattan & Ors
(Suit for Permanent, Perpetual, and Mandatory Injunction)

NOTICE TO:

1. Susheel Rattan, W/o Col Kanwal Rattan, R/o Vassant Vihar New Delhi, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar Srina
2. Rajiv Rattan, S/o Col Kanwal Rattan, R/o Vassant Vihar, New Delhi, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar (rajivrattan 1948@gmail.com)
3. Kumkum Marathe, D/o Col Kanwal Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar 4. Rajesh Rattan, S/o Keval Rattan, R/o Vassant Vihar, New Delhi, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar (rattan.rk@gmail.com)
5. Renu Rattan, D/o Keval Rattan, R/o Nizamuddin West, New Delhi, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar (removepoverty1@gmail.com)
6. Iran Rattan, W/o Arun Rattan, R/o Nizamuddin West, New Delhi, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar
7. Aditya Rattan, S/o Arun Rattan, R/o Nizamuddin West, New Delhi, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar (rattanaditya@gmail.com)
8. Radhika Sethi, D/o Col Keshav Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar
9. Aditya Rattan, S/o Col Keshav Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar
10. Mira Rajiv Midha, D/o Col Anmol Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar
11. Sidharath Rattan, S/o Col Anmol Rattan, R/o Pune Maharashtra, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar (sidharathrattan@gmal.com)
12. Sanjay Rattan, S/o Col Anmol Rattan, R/o Bengaluru Karnataka, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar (srattan46@gmail.com)
13. Shubhi Rattan, S/o Col Prem Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar
14. Sai Rattan, S/o Col Prem Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar (sairattan@yahoo.com)
15. Vishal Rattan, S/o Col Prem Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar
16. Ranu Rattan, W/o Col Shyam Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar
17. Sita Rattan, D/o Col Shyam Rattan, R/o E-9/3 DLF, Phase 1, Gurugram Haryana, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar
18. Nitya Mehra, D/o Col Shayam Rattan, R/o 16-Eastern Avenue, Maharani Bagh, New Delhi, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar (nityamehra@hotmail.com)
19. Nandita Narayan, D/o Col Shyam Rattan, R/o Narayan Road, New Delhi, A/P Shivpora, Srinagar
20. Uma Rattan, W/o Col Adrash Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar (adarshumarattan@gmail.com)
21. Ashok Khosla, S/o Kamla Khosla, D/o Wazir Ram Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar (akhosla@gmail.com)
22. Abha Charanjiva, D/o Vimla Rattan, R/o Shivpra, Srinagar (acharanjivi@yahoo.com)
23. Anita Chandradath Singh, D/o Vimla Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar 24. Asha Prakash, D/o Vimla Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar
25. Chetan Prakash, S/o Vimla Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar
26. Meenakshi Premchand, D/o Vimla Rattan, R/o Shivpora, Srinagar (minoo-15@hotmail.com)
27. Kavita Bogad, D/o Pramulla Pandit (Rattan), R/o Silver Oaks, Estate A/P Shivpora Srinagar Bhul Bhai Road, Mumbai, (kavitaboga@gmail.com)

Whereas, it has been proved to the satisfaction of the Court that the defendants, above named, cannot be served in the ordinary way of service. Hence, this proclamation under Order 5 Rule 20 CPC is hereby issued against them and they should appear personally or through their counsel on 02.04.2025 at 10:00 AM.

Take notice that, in default of their appearance on the day before mentioned, the above said case will be heard and determined in their absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Court, this 03.02.2025.

SEAL

(Adnan Manzoor Naqashbandi)
Munsiff/Sub-Registrar
Srinagar

INTERLOCKING OF SEVEN LC GATES

E-Tender Notice No. RN-ST-30-2024-25; Date: 24-03-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work. **Name of Work**: Interlocking of Seven LC gates with TVU more than 20000 in Rangiya Division. Tender Value: ₹4,52,15,824.59; Earnest Money: ₹3,76,100.00. **E-tender will be closed** at 15:00 hrs. on 16-04-2025 and **Opened** at 15:30 hrs. on 16-04-2025 at Sr. DSTE/ Rangiya's office. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in.

DRM (S&T)/Rangiya
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a smile"

Lost and Found

I, Harvinder Singh Dogra S/o SH. Joginder Singh Dogra R/o B - 56, Pandav Nagar, Delhi - 110092 do hereby solemnly affirm and inform that I am the owner of property no. - B - 56, Measuring area 52.25 Sq. Mtrs.out of Khasra No. 470/23/9, Situated at the abadi of B - Block, Pandav Nagar, Delhi - 110092. I have lost my Original Sale Deed dated 21 - 05 - 1971, Vide Registration No. 7953, in Book No.1, Volume No. 376, on Pages 44 to 46, Dated 21 - 05 - 1971 in the office of Sub - Registrar IV Delhi executed by Shri Chetan Lal in favour of S. Joginder Singh in respect of above said Property. All other Previous chain of documents before 1971 related to the above said plot. I have already lodge a Lost Report in this regard on dated 24 - 03 - 2025. L.R. No. 2697748/ 2025. I have not mortgage the above said original documents with any Bank or any other financial institution in any manner, and I have not taken any Loan against the above said Property. Harvinder Singh Dogra

Harvinder Singh Dogra

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that **Mrs. Usha Sharma** W/o Mr. Sunil Sharma and **Mr. Shivam Sharma** S/o Mr. Sunil Sharma who are the owners of the **Residential House No. 99, area measuring 172.33 Sq. Yards i.e. 144.08 Sq. Meters, situated at Rajbagh Colony, in the Village Pasonda, Pargana Loni, Tehsil and Dist. Ghaziabad, U.P.** vide **Gift Deed dated 21.05.2024 (Doc No. 6276)** executed by **Mr. Sunil Sharma** S/o Mr. Om Prakash Sharma and same to be finance & mortgage by **SMFG India Credit Co. Ltd. (Formerly Fullerton India Credit Co. Ltd.), Noida.** So, 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
B-93B, Second Floor, Opp. SBI Bank Sector 2,Noida,UP-201301Contact#0120-4269379

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is publically notified that Smt. Vasantha Srinivasan wife of late Shri T.T.Srinivasan R/o SFS Flat No. 180-B Pocket-B 1st floor, Mayur-Vihar Phase-2, Delhi. has lost/misplaced the original NOC for water and electricity of the said premises. An FIR in this regard has been lodged at police station,Crime branch Delhi vide FIR/LR No. 2680511/2025 dated 18/03/2025 .Any person(s) found to have the original documents, File No.F116(147) 87/SFS/TP/II please contact the above address/mobile no. 8130456364 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. person(s) claiming any right/interest can personally inform or write to **Dy. Director, SFS Housing Vikas Sadan, INA New Delhi 110023**

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (U.P.)
Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender are invited from eligible firms/contractors for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official Website: **www.noidaauthorityonline.in & https://etender.up.nic.in.** Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/ amendments & corrigendum etc.

S. No.	Job No.	Name of Work	Amount (Rs.)
1.	27/GM/SM (NTC)/ 2024-25	P/F Road Safety Item on Road Between Sector-62 & 63 From Model Town to Underpass Sector-71, Noida	7653683.96
2.	07/DGM (NTC)/SM (NTC)/ 2024-25	P/L Thermoplastic paint and road safety items on FNG road from Parthala Gol Chakker to NH-9, Noida	6083768.00
3.	12/DGM (NTC)/SM (NTC)/ 2024-25	P/L Thermoplastic paint in internal road Phase-II, Noida	7022380.00
4.	13/DGM (NTC)/SM (NTC)/ 2024-25	P/L Thermoplastic paint and road safety item on elevated road X-ing to Hosiyarpur T-point between Sector-53 and 33, 34 and Adobe X-ing Sector-54 T-point between Sector-22 and 24, Noida	5684078.00

Which can be uploaded from **01.04.2025 to 07.04.2025 upto 5:00 PM.** Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on **date 08.04.2025 at 11:00 AM.**

General Manager (NTC)
Noida

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

HARYANA SHEHRI VIKAS PRADHIKARAN

PUBLIC NOTICE

As per the decision of the Full Bench of Hon'ble High court of Punjab and Haryana in CWP No. 22252 of 2016 titled as Rajiv Manchanda Vs. State of Haryana and others, reservation policy dated 04.12.2015 upheld by the Hon'ble High Court in CWP No. 22252 of 2016 titled as Rajiv Manchanda Vs. State of Haryana and others and affidavit filed by the Chief Administrator, HSVP, Panchkula in the Hon'ble High Court in CWP No. 22136 of 2015 titled as Adesh Aggarwal & CWP No. 14164 of 2017 Dalip Singh Vs. State of Haryana, Haryana Shehri Vikas Pradhikaran hereby invites applications from landowners (Outsees) whose land was acquired for the development of Sectors post 10.09.1987 in Urban Estate, Sonipat/Gohana i.e. Sector 23, 12, 7 Sonipat and Sector-7, Gohana.

In view of the mandate of the Hon'ble High Court in Rajiv Manchand's case (Supra), a detailed exercise was carried out in all the sectors with respect to the plots available to be offered to oustees in terms of the reservation policy dated 04.12.2015, which had been upheld by the Hon'ble Court in Rajiv Manchand's case (Supra). The entire details as regards the availability of plots in respective sectors and the plots reserved for the oustees (Subject to their availability in sectors) in terms of policy dated 04.12.2015 was also placed before the Hon'ble Court in the affidavit filed in CWP No. 22136 of 2015 titled as Adesh Aggarwal & CWP No. 14164 of 2017 Dalip Singh Vs. State of Haryana. In view thereof, the last and final advertisement for settling the claims of oustees is being issued in respect of plots available in respective sectors in terms of policy dated 04.12.2015, 11.08.2016 and 08.05.2018. No further advertisement shall be issued.

The oustees are requested to apply along with application money **Rs. 50,000/-.** The Claims of oustees shall be decided in terms of policy dated 04.12.2015, 11.08.2016 and 08.05.2018 and thus, the oustees shall duly read the terms and conditions therein before applying against the advertisement.

For detailed terms and conditions, terms of payment, policy guidelines and Sector wise & category wise detail of the plots are available on the HSVP website i.e. **(www.hsvphry.org.in)**

The scheme will start w.e.f **27.03.2025** and close on **27.05.2025 at 5:00 PM.** For any other details may contact Estate Officer, HSVP, Sonipat.

Estate Officer, HSVP, Sonepat. — **Administrator, HSVP, Rohtak.**

RO 33263-C-27-7

THE KANGRA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LTD.
C-29, Community Centre, Pankha Road, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058
Phone : 011-25611042, 25611043, 25611044
E-mail: legal@kangrabank.com, legal1@kangrabank.com Website : www.kangrabank.com

APPENDIX IV
[See rule 8(1)]
POSSESSION NOTICE
(For immovable property)

Whereas,

The undersigned being the Authorised officer of **"The Kangra Co-operative Bank Ltd."**, Head office at, C-29,Community Centre, Pankha Road, Janak Puri, New Delhi - 110058, having its registered office at 1916, Chuna Mandi, Pahar Ganj, New Delhi-110055, under The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, **(54 of 2002)** and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule [3] of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Bank had issued a demand notice on dated 18-12-2024, calling upon the borrower & mortgagor **Sh. Aman Gulyani S/o. Sh.Bhagwan Dass Gulyani R/o. 141-A, Old Gupta Colony, Near Geeta Bhawan Mandir, Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-110009and calling upon the Mortgagor & Surety Smt.Vandna Gulyani W/o. Sh.Aman Gulyani 141-A, Old Gupta Colony Near Geeta Bhawan Mandir, Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-110009** to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs.15,72,796/- (Rupees Fifteen Lakhs Seventy Two Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety Six Only), together with further interest, penal interest and other charges as are applicable to this Loan account from time to time, from the date of the notice till the date of payment, with in 60 days from the date of receipt of the notice.

The above mentioned borrower, Co-mortgagor & Surety having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower, Co-mortgagor, Surety and the public in general that the Bank has taken **Symbolic Possession** of the property described here in below in exercise of powers conferred under sub-section (4) of section 13 of The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, read with rule [8] of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, on this 21st day of March' 2025.

The borrower, Co-mortgagor & Surety in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the mortgaged property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of **"The Kangra Co-operative Bank Ltd.", for an amount of Rs.15,72,796/-** together with further interest, penal interest and other charges as are applicable to this Loan account from time to time, from the date of notice till the date of realization together with all the costs incurred by the Bank in realizing the said amount.

The borrower,Co-mortgagor & Surety attention is also been invited towards provisions of Sub-Section (8) of Section 13 of The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, in respect of time available, to redeem the below mentioned mortgaged property/Secured Asset.

DISCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY

The property under consideration is a Built Up Third floor with roof rights area measuring 88-1/3 Sq.Yds.	All that part and parcel of the ENTIRE THIRD FLOOR WITH ROOF/TERRACE RIGHTS, BEING PART OF FREEHOLD BUILT-UP PROPERTY BEARING NO.141-A, BUILT ON LAND MEASURING 88-1/3,SQ. YDS. OR SAY 74 SQ. MTRS., SITUATED IN THE AREA OF VILLAGE RAJPUR CHHAONI, ABADI KNOWN AS OLD GUPTA COLONY, DELHI-110009. Falling Under the Registration of Sub-Registrar VIA, Delhi.

(MEENAKSHI VATS)
AUTHORISED OFFICER
THE KANGRA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LTD.
HEAD OFFICE AT, C-29, COMMUNITY CENTRE, PANKHA ROAD, JANAKPURI, NEW DELHI-58.

DELHI.
DATED : 21-03-2025

THE KANGRA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LTD.
C-29, Community Centre, Pankha Road, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058
Phone : 011-25611042, 25611043, 25611044
E-mail: legal@kangrabank.com, legal1@kangrabank.com Website : www.kangrabank.com

APPENDIX IV
[See rule 8(1)]
POSSESSION NOTICE
(For immovable property)

Whereas,

The undersigned being the Authorised officer of **"The Kangra Co-operative Bank Ltd."**, Head office at, C-29,Community Centre, Pankha Road, Janak Puri, New Delhi - 110058, having its registered office at 1916, Chuna Mandi, Pahar Ganj, New Delhi-110055, under The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, **(54 of 2002)** and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule [3] of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Bank had issued a demand notice on dated 18-12-2024, calling upon the borrower **Sh. Gaurav Saini S/o. Sh. Mange Ram Saini R/o. B-1/176, Baba Colony, Burari Delhi-110084, also at Sh.Gaurav Saini S/o.Sh.Mange Ram Saini, Village Mazari, Deoband, Distt. Saharanpur, U.P. and Sh.Gaurav Saini S/o.Sh.Mange Ram Saini, C/o. Innovary Marketing Solutions Pvt.Ltd. G-67/B, Abdul Fazal Enclave Part-2, Jamia Nagar Shaheen Bagh Okhla, New Delhi-20 and calling upon the Mortgagor/Surety Smt.Suman W/o. Sh. Mange Ram, B-1/176, Gali No. 1/N, Baba Colony, Burari, Delhi-110084,** to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs.9,87,376/- (Rupees Nine Lakhs Eighty Seven Thousand Three Hundred and Seventy Six Only), together with further interest, penal interest and other charges as are applicable to this Loan account from time to time, from the date of the notice till the date of payment, with in 60 days from the date of receipt of the notice.

The above mentioned borrower, mortgagor & Surety having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower, mortgagor, Surety and the public in general that the Bank has taken **Symbolic Possession** of the property described here in below in exercise of powers conferred under sub-section (4) of section 13 of The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, read with rule [8] of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, on this 21st day of March' 2025.

The borrower, mortgagor & Surety in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the mortgaged property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of **"The Kangra Co-operative Bank Ltd.", for an amount of Rs.9,87,376/-** together with further interest, penal interest and other charges as are applicable to this Loan account from time to time, from the date of notice till the date of realization together with all the costs incurred by the Bank in realizing the said amount.

The borrower, mortgagor & Surety attention is also been invited towards provisions of Sub-Section (8) of Section 13 of The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, in respect of time available, to redeem the below mentioned mortgaged property/Secured Asset.

DISCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY

The property under consideration is a Built Up Second floor without roof rights area measuring 125 Sq.Yds.	All that part and parcel of the SECOND FLOOR, BUILT-UP PROPERTY, PART OF PROPERTY BEARING NO.B-1/176, AREA MEASURING 125 SQ.YDS., WITHOUT ITS ROOF RIGHTS., PART OF KHASRA NO.680, SITUATED IN THE AREA EXTENDED LAL DORA OF VILLAGE BURARI, DELHI-110084, ABADI KNOWN AS GALI NO.1/N, B-BLOCK BABA COLONY, BURARI, DELHI-110084, WITH STAIRCASE COMMON IS GROUND FLOOR TO TOP FLOOR. Falling Under the Registration of Sub-Registrar-I, Delhi.

WHICH IS BOUNDED AS:- EAST : OTHER PROPERTY, WEST : OTHER PROPERTY, NORTH : ROAD 6FT., SOUTH : ROAD 12 FT..

(MEENAKSHI VATS)
AUTHORISED OFFICER
THE KANGRA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LTD.
HEAD OFFICE AT, C-29, COMMUNITY CENTRE, PANKHA ROAD, JANAKPURI, NEW DELHI-58.

DELHI.
DATED : 21-03-2025

THE KANGRA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LTD.
C-29, Community Centre, Pankha Road, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058
Phone : 011-25611042, 25611043, 25611044
E-mail: legal@kangrabank.com, legal1@kangrabank.com Website : www.kangrabank.com

APPENDIX IV
[See rule 8(1)]
POSSESSION NOTICE
(For immovable property)

Whereas,

The undersigned being the Authorised officer of **"The Kangra Co-operative Bank Ltd."**, Head office at, C-29,Community Centre, Pankha Road, Janak Puri, New Delhi - 110058, having its registered office at 1916, Chuna Mandi, Pahar Ganj, New Delhi-110055, under The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, **(54 of 2002)** and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule [3] of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Bank had issued a demand notice on dated 03-01-2025, calling upon the borrower **Sh. Sushil Mehta S/o. Sh.Ashok Mehta R/o. H.No.1357, Gali No.5A, B-Block, Baba Colony, Burari, Delhi-110084 also at Sh.Sushil Mehta S/o. Sh.Ashok Mehta C/o. M/s. Mehta Electricals Khasra No.841, Gali No.6, Upkar Colony, Burari, Delhi-110084 and calling upon the mortgager Smt.Asha Mehta W/o. Sh.Ashok Mehta, R/o. H.No.1357, Gali No.5A, B-Block, Baba Colony, Sant Nagar Burari, Delhi-110084,** to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs.18,89,107/- (Rupees Eighteen Lakh Eighty Nine Thousand One Hundred Seven Only), together with further interest, penal interest and other charges as are applicable to this Loan account from time to time, from the date of the notice till the date of payment, with in 60 days from the date of receipt of the notice.

The above mentioned borrower, mortgagor & Surety having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower, mortgagor, Surety and the public in general that the Bank has taken Symbolic Possession of the property described here in below in exercise of powers conferred under sub-section (4) of section 13 of The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, read with rule [8] of The Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, on this 21st day of March' 2025.

The borrower, mortgagor & Surety in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the mortgaged property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of **"The Kangra Co-operative Bank Ltd.",for an amount of Rs.18,89,107/-** together with further interest, penal interest and other charges as are applicable to this Loan account from time to time, from the date of notice till the date of realization together with all the costs incurred by the Bank in realizing the said amount.

The borrower, mortgagor & Surety attention is also been invited towards provisions of Sub-Section (8) of Section 13 of The Securitisation and Reconstruction of the Financial Assets & Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, in respect of time available, to redeem the below mentioned mortgaged property/Secured Asset.

DISCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY

The property under consideration is a Built Up Property with roof rights area measuring 62.70 Sq.Mtrs.	All that part and parcel of the HOUSE NO.1357, KH.NO.94/23 & 94/24, GALI NO.5A, B-BLOCK, BABA COLONY, BURARI, COLONY REGN NO.196, GIS ID NO. OF GEO-COORDINATES FILE DDA/GIS/29062021042547/321198 AND MEASURING 62.70 SQ. MTR. HAVING FLOOR 04 and Floor wise details of the property : GROUND FLOOR (STILT PARKING) : 62.70 SQ.MTRS., FIRST FLOOR : 62.70 SQ. MTRS., SECOND FLOOR : 62.70 SQ. MTRS. THIRD FLOOR : 58.06 SQ. MTRS.. Falling Under the Registration of Sub-Registrar-I, Delhi.

Which is Bounded as :- NORTH : GALI 14 FT., SOUTH : OTHERS PROPERTY, EAST : OTHERS PROPERTY, WEST : OTHERS PROPERTY.

(MEENAKSHI VATS)
AUTHORISED OFFICER
THE KANGRA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LTD.
HEAD OFFICE AT, C-29, COMMUNITY CENTRE, PANKHA ROAD, JANAKPURI, NEW DELHI-58.

DELHI.
DATED : 21-03-2025

Maharashtra emerging as national EV capital: Fadnavis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said the state is emerging as the "national capital" of electric vehicles (EVs) with major manufacturing plants coming up in Pune and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar.

Speaking during Question Hour in the legislative council, he said the shift to EVs from conventional vehicles will reduce air pollution.

"Maharashtra is becoming national capital of electric vehicles. This is primarily because significant EV manufacturing plants are being established in Pune and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar," he said.

"The contribution of vehicles (running on petrol or diesel) to air pollution is the highest. A shift towards electric vehicles will help reduce this problem," the chief minister added. Both private and public transport sectors are increasingly adopting EVs and more than 2,500 electric buses are being added to the public transport sector in the state in a phased manner, Fadnavis said.

Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis PIONEER PHOTO

"The number of electric vehicles being registered in the state is steadily rising. Over 50 per cent of newly registered vehicles are now EVs," he said.

The government was also building supporting infrastructure including a large-scale EV charging network across the state, the CM said.

Mother Dairy launches high protein milk in Delhi NCR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Mother Dairy on Wednesday launched 'Promilk', a protein-rich milk product priced at ₹70 per litre, targeting the country's protein deficit population in the Delhi-NCR region.

The new cow milk product contains 40 grams of protein per litre, four per cent fat, and 11.5 per cent solids-not-fat (SNF) and is fortified with vitamins A and D.

It will be available in 500 ml and one-litre packaging through offline and online retail outlets starting Thursday.

The company's Managing Director Manish Bandlish said that the product aims to address nutritional chall-enges, noting that 70-80 per cent of Indians struggle to meet daily protein requirements, with 93 per cent unaware of their nutritional needs.

"Protein is a vital part of a balanced diet," Bandlish said at the launch event.

Promilk offers 30 per cent more protein than standard milk, providing a convenient nutrition solution, while maintaining familiar taste.

The company's initial target is 50,000 litres daily and plans to expand beyond Delhi-NCR based on initial market response.

The new cow milk product will be available in 500 ml and one-litre packaging through offline and online retail outlets starting from 28th of March

Mother Dairy also intends to introduce additional 'Pro' range products like curd and paneer within three months.

A subsidiary of the National Dairy Development Board, Mother Dairy collects milk from 10 Lakh farmers across 12 states and operates 40 Lakh retail outlets nationwide.

Bandhan Bank signs MoU with Indian Air Force

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Private lender Bandhan Bank on Wednesday said it has inked an MoU with the Indian Air Force to provide corporate salary accounts to the defence personnel.

The 'Bandhan Bank Shaurya Salary Account' will have features like zero balance savings account, protection for self and family, and attractive interest rates, the lender said in a statement. "Bandhan Bank, with its pan Indian presence, is deeply committed to support the nation through every initiative. We are excited to strengthen our partnership with the IAF to deliver superior banking experience," Executive Director and Chief Business Officer Rajinder Babbar said.

The Reserve bank of India (RBI) has appointed Bandhan Bank as an agency bank. The lender has been also authorised by the Central Board of Direct Taxes for collection of taxes, and disbursement of central civil and railway pensions.

NITI Aayog working to improve India's penetration into global value chains for MSMEs' growth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

NITI Aayog is working on a programme to improve India's penetration into global value chains for growth of domestic micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), CEO of the government think-tank B V R Subrahmanyam said on Wednesday.

Observing that MSMEs are more affected by regulations than large companies, he said the prime minister has taken a major step towards deregulation and a task force under the cabinet secretary is working on it.

Subrahmanyam was addressing a gathering after launching 'the Digital Excellence for Growth and Enterprise', or 'Dx-EDGE', a platform to empower MSMEs with the tools, knowledge and ecosystem needed to become future-ready, competitive and resilient.

Dx-EDGE is a national initiative spearheaded by CII with the support of NITI Frontier Tech Hub (NITI FTH) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to drive digital transformation across India's MSMEs.

The NITI Aayog CEO further said it is a fact that some of the big manufacturers have moved to India, and cited the example of mobile phones, terming it as a success story of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) initiatives. The other side of the story is, he said, that 95 per cent of what goes into mobile phone manufacturing is being imported.

"We are working on to get the ecosystem to India. NITI is working on a programme to improve India's penetration of global value chains. To penetrate into global value chains, you need to have the ecosystem here, which means the intermediate routes. They are not final products.

They go into some other product. Bulk of global manufacturing is of intermediate products. And who makes these intermediate products, largely MSMEs," Subrahmanyam said.

He also said the CII and NITI Frontier Tech Hub Dx-EDGE platform marks a transformative leap in India's digital journey, designed to empower MSMEs with cutting-edge technology and digital mastery. By establishing a nationwide network of digital transformation facilitation centres, this initiative democratises access to skills and innovation, enabling MSMEs to scale sustainably, enhance global competitiveness, and play a pivotal role in realising the Viksit Bharat vision, Subrahmanyam said.

Speaking on the occassion, S C L Das, Secretary, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, said that frontier tech, digitalisation and technology have become a necessity to survive the global headwinds and emerging challenges and grow to become a developed nation.

He said that the government has been consistently providing enablers aligned with the national vision of Visit Bharat.

The secretary said that MSMEs have to be at the centre of the journey towards domestic growth, growth of exports, adaptability for climate change, for having the required resilience and technological growth. Talking about Dx-EDGE, Das said that it is a significant and novel step in the right direction, which has been designed the right way, with Public-Private-Academia Partnership (PPAP).

He said that this particular design approach is going to be the key factor towards its success.

Debjani Ghosh, Distinguished Fellow, NITI Aayog and Chief Architect, NITI FTH, said that future-proofing MSMEs through digital adoption is no longer a luxury — it is a necessity for realising the Viksit Bharat goal.

"With Dx-EDGE, we are building an exciting ecosystem-led approach to empower MSMEs to embrace technology, strengthen resilience and thrive in an increasingly digital world. This initiative is a key pillar of NITI Frontier Tech Hub's vision to accelerate India's transformation into a frontier tech nation, ensuring that no enterprise is left behind in the digital revolution," she said.

T G Sitharam, Chairman, AICTE, noted that more and more youth are entering the workforce and underlined the need to create jobs. Underlining India's strength in STEM education, he said that India has delivered engineering and management education to the world.

SEBI keeps flexible workspace operator WeWork India's IPO in abeyance

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

SEBI has put the initial public offering (IPO) of premium flexible workspace operator WeWork India Management Limited in "abeyance", an update with the markets regulator showed on Monday. The Embassy Group-promoted firm, which filed its draft IPO papers on January 31, planned to offer 4.37 crore shares through an Offer for Sale (OFS) route.

Under the OFS, promoter Embassy Buildcon LLP and investor 1 Ariel Way Tenant Limited proposed to offload shares, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). Without specifying reasons, Sebi stated that the "issuance of observations (has been) kept in abeyance," according to an update on its website.

In its draft papers, the company stated that the object of the offer is to achieve the benefits of listing the equity shares on the stock exchanges. Launched in 2017,

WeWork India has played a significant role in the growth of the flexible workspace sector in India and has been a key contributor to the evolution of flexible workspace products and services

WeWork India Management is a leading premium flexible workspace operator in the country. It provides flexible, high-quality workspaces to customers, which include companies of all sizes — large enterprises, small and mid-size businesses, startups, as well as individuals.

It leases primarily Grade A office space from leading developers across Tier 1 cities and design, build, and operates them as flexible workspaces. WeWork India has played a significant role in the growth of the flexible workspace sector in India and has been a key contributor to the evolution of flexible workspace products and services. JM Financial, ICICI Securities, Jefferies India, Kotak Mahindra Capital Company and 360 ONE WAM are responsible for managing the public issue.

Sensex falls by 728 points

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Stock markets snapped the seven-day winning run on Wednesday with benchmark Sensex tanking 728 points due to profit-taking in banking and IT shares ahead of monthly expiry of derivatives contracts.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 728.69 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 77,288.50 as 25 of its components closed in the red. During the day, it slumped 822.97 points or 1.05 per cent to 77,194.22. The NSE Nifty dropped 181.80 points or 0.77 per cent to 23,486.85.

In the past seven trading days, the BSE benchmark index jumped 4,188.28 points or 5.67 per cent.

The Nifty surged 1,271.45 points or 5.67 per cent during the same period.

From the Sensex pack, NTPC, Tech Mahindra, Zomato, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, Infosys, Maruti, State Bank of India, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Reliance Industries, Hindustan Unilever, and HDFC Bank were the losers.

IndusInd Bank, HCL Tech, Titan, Mahindra and Mahindra and Power Grid were the gainers.

"The market experienced profit-booking after the recent gains, on the back of next week's US tariff announcements. The sectors with higher exposure to the US market, like pharma and IT, have witnessed some selling pressure," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

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

European markets were trading lower. US markets ended higher on Tuesday.

"Markets declined after a brief pause amid mixed cues. Following an initial uptick, Nifty remained range-bound in the first half, but profit-booking in select heavyweights dragged the index lower as the session progressed. Participants are booking profits ahead of the March derivatives contract expiry, while concerns over tariff discussions continue to weigh on sentiment," Ajit Mishra SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. The BSE smallcap gauge declined 1.45 per cent and midcap dipped 0.67 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, oil and gas dropped the most by 1.52 per cent, followed by realty (1.37 per cent), utilities (1.32 per cent), energy (1.29 per cent), bankex (1.08 per cent), BSE Focused IT (1.12 per cent), IT (1.11 per cent) and teck (0.77 per cent).

Capital Goods emerged as the only gainer. As many as 3,115 stocks declined while 919 advanced and 109 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹5,371.57 Crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.58 per cent to USD 73.44 a barrel. The BSE benchmark gained 32.81 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 78,017.19 on Tuesday. The Nifty eked out gains of 10.30 points or 0.04 per cent to 23,668.65.

India's exports bound to grow despite global uncertainties, says DGFT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's exports are bound to grow in the coming years despite uncertainties over global trade and tariff, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said that exporters should tread the path pragmatically and wisely to navigate the current global trade contours.

He also said that the current scenario presents a "golden" opportunity for India to do a variety of things which will propel exports and increase manufacturing competitiveness.

Despite the "uncertainties relating to trade and tariff, our exports are bound to grow in future years," he said at the Sourcex India 2025 show. It was organised by the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO). US President Donald Trump has imposed reciprocal tariffs or import duties on countries like China and has pledged to impose these levies on India also on April 2.

Certain exporters have raised concerns that imposition of duties by the US on sectors like engineering and pharma will hurt shipments to America, which is the largest trading partner of India.

Sarangi said that in the current year, India's exports in goods and services will cross $800 Billion. Last year it was $778 Billion.

"While we see a temporary blip in exports (in the recent) months, in the longer run, our exporting communities have been giving us an impression that the number of order enquiries which they are receiving is fairly positive and that gives me the confidence that our exports will increase vis-a-vis our current levels," Sarangi said.

He added that steps like production linked incentive schemes to promote ease of doing business and boost domestic manufacturing are helping the domestic industry.

India's goods exports dipped for the fourth consecutive month by 10.85 per cent to $36.91 Billion in February. It was $395.63 Billion during April-February this fiscal. Services exports during the period are estimated at $354.90 Billion.

Speaking at the event, Federation of Indian Export Organisations Director General Ajay Sahai said that despite tariff-related concerns, India's exports will register a healthy growth rate. "The order books are pretty good and the removal of tariff uncertainties will further push the shipments," Sahai said.

DLF buys nearly 50 per cent stake in DLF Urban from GIC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Real estate major DLF has acquired nearly 50 per cent stake in its arm DLF Urban Pvt Ltd from Singapore-based GIC for ₹497 Crore.

With this deal, DLF will have 100 per cent stake in DLF Urban Pvt Ltd, which has already completed a luxury housing project in the national capital.

DLF's wholly-owned subsidiary DLF Home Developers Ltd (DHDL) has "acquired 49.997 per cent of the total paid-up equity share capital and compulsorily convertible debentures held by Reco Greens Pte Ltd in DLF Urban Pvt Ltd, a subsidiary of DHDL."

Reco Greens Pte Ltd is a subsidiary of Singapore sovereign wealth GIC.

A Securities Purchase Agreement was executed on March 25, 2025 amongst DHDL, Reco and DLF Urban Pvt Ltd (DUPL), DLF said in a regulatory filing on Tuesday.

Post this acquisition, the holding of DHDL in the share capital of DUPL has increased from 50.003 per cent to 100 per cent. Consequently, DUPL has become a wholly-owned subsidiary of DHDL and also of DLF Ltd.

The cost of acquisition stood at ₹496.73 Crore.

DUPL is involved in the real estate industry and has developed a residential project called 'One Midtown', according to a regulatory filing on Tuesday.

According to sources, the DUPL owned the land on which the 'One Midtown' housing project has been developed. The project is complete now and most of the sales have already happened, they added.

DLF has purchased the equity from GIC for facilitating exit to the Singapore firm from this project, sources said. Beyond this project, DUPL does not own any other land parcel.

Wipro bags 500 million pound deal from UK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

IT services company Wipro on Wednesday announced that it has clinched a 500-Million pound ($644.7 Million), 10-year strategic deal from British insurer Phoenix Group.

Announcing the blockbuster deal, Wipro said the project is designed to deliver life and pension business administration for the ReAssure business and accelerate Phoenix Group's operational transformation.

As per the contours of the deal, Wipro's existing FCA-regulated entity Wipro Financial Outsourcing Services Limited (WFOSL) will deliver comprehensive life and pension administration services to Phoenix Group's ReAssure customers.

As part of the "transformational" initiative, a number of Phoenix employees will transition to Wipro, the release said but did not divulge the exact numbers.

"Wipro Limited, a leading technology services and consulting company, today announced that it has won a £500 million, 10-year strategic deal with Phoenix Group, the UK's largest long-term savings and retirement business," the release said.

These services will cover policy administration, claim processing, customer service support, data management and reporting, compliance and regulatory support, as well as platform technologies.

"Wipro's expertise in technology and service makes them ideally placed to help us deliver outstanding service and value for our ReAssure customers on their journey to and through retirement. We are delighted to have them join us as one of our ecosystem of strategic partners for this phase of our transformation journey," Andy Briggs, Phoenix Group CEO, noted.

Omkar Nisal, CEO — Europe, Wipro Limited, and Non-Executive Chairman of WFOSL, said the "landmark deal" further underscores the company's commitment to helping financial institutions deliver exceptional client experiences and further cements its position as a key player in the Life and Pension Third Party Administration (TPA) provider sector in the UK.

INBRIEF

VC DR KARAMJEET SINGH INAUGURATED WORKSHOP ON SKILL BASED TRAINING OF YOUTH ON VERMICOMPOSTING

Amritsar: Dr Karamjeet Singh, Vice-Chancellor, Guru Nanak Dev University inaugurated the five days workshop on skill based training of Youth on Vermicomposting, Apiculture and Fish Farming held at Guru Granth Sahib Bhawan of the University. This workshop is being organised by the Department of Zoology under Environment Education Program of Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change, GOI and implemented by Punjab State Council for Science and Technology, State Nodal Agency .

DELHI COLLEGES, SHINE AT HSBC'S INDIA BUSINESS CASE PROGRAMME

Teams from these colleges will head to Hong Kong to participate in a programme. A uniquely designed programme focusing on career preparedness of undergraduate students. The programme sees participation from nearly 8,000 students. The 11th edition of HSBC's career readiness initiative, The India Business Case Programme, concluded in March 2025.

GRAPHISADS ENTERS LANDMARK AGREEMENT TO MAINTAIN, MONETIZE 100+ PUBLIC UTILITIES IN NDMC ARE

New Delhi: Graphisads Ltd, one of India's leading outdoor media owners and advertising agencies, has entered into an agreement with the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) to operate, maintain and generate advertising revenue from 100+ public utilities located in the NDMC area.

ARYANS GROUP ANNOUNCES ₹40 CRORE AID FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVES, CANCER HOSPITAL

New Delhi: Aryans Group of Companies has pledged ₹40 Crore in financial assistance to various organisations, including ₹15 Crore for defense research, ₹20 Crore for the Nirmala Gajanan Foundation, and ₹5 Crore for the Sahyadri Devrai Foundation. The company also announced plans to establish a cancer hospital in Pune.

GNDU TO ESTABLISH SKILL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE IN COLLABORATION WITH NSDC

Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University set to establish a Skill Development Centre under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Government of India. This follows a visit by Dr Sandeep Singh Kaura, Adviser to the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) for the Skill India International Mission, who met with Vice-Chancellor Dr Karamjeet Singh and other officials.

Argentina secures World Cup spot

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Buenos Aires

Defending champion Argentina celebrated throughout Tuesday as the team secured its place at the 2026 World Cup hours before an historic 4-1 win over archrival Brazil. Bolivia's failure to beat Uruguay meant Argentina had enough cushion in South American qualifying to secure one of the continent's six direct spots for the 48-team World Cup set to be co-hosted next year by the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

After Bolivia's 0-0 draw with Uruguay at El Alto, about 85,000 raucous Argentina fans kicked off the festivities at the Monumental de Nunez Stadium despite the absence of Lionel Messi. They were chanting into the night in Buenos Aires, now more confident their team can defend the World Cup title.

For Brazil, its worst deficit in South American World Cup qualifying history compounded pressure on coach Dorival Júnior. Brazil is in fourth place in South American qualifying with 21 points, 10 behind Argentina but only two behind second-place Ecuador, which was held to a 0-0 draw by Chile.

Third-place Uruguay and fifth-place Paraguay also have 21 points, and Colombia is one point behind them in sixth. Seventh-place Venezuela has 15 points after a 1-0 win over 9th-place Peru.

Brazil was missing three regular starters — goalkeeper Alisson, defender Gabriel Magalhães and midfielder Bruno Guimarães — and wasn't really competitive from start to finish.

It's the first time Argentina has won both matches against Brazil in a World Cup qualifying tournament. The home victory was also Argentina's first against the Brazilians since qualifying for the 2006 World Cup.

Argentina has led South American qualifying from the start, with few hiccups and major away wins at Brazil and Uruguay. But coach Lionel Scaloni has not fielded 37-year-old Messi in several games, which still raises doubts on whether the star will play at the World Cup next year.

Messi has an injury to his adductor and was not included in Argentina's squad for the two latest matches.

ARGENTINE FLAIR, BRAZILIAN DESPAIRStriker Julián Álvarez said Argentina's big win "is historic because of the rival, the context, what was said, the great match we played and because we are qualified to the World Cup."

"Very humbly we did our work," he said.

Argentina scored its two first goals in only 12 minutes of play, both thanks to accurate passing and some clumsy Brazilian defending.

Alvarez netted the first in the 4th minute after Marquinhos, Murillo and Guilherme Arana failed to reach the ball. The Argentina striker shot between the legs of goalkeeper Bento from close range.

Argentina scored again eight minutes later with Enzo Fernández, once again from close range after a low cross by Gonzalo Molina. Brazil got one back via Matheus Cunha in the 26th after a mistake by Cristian Romero, who lost the ball to the Brazilian by the edge of the box. Enzo Fernandez found Alexis Mac Allister bursting into the penalty box unmarked 11 minutes later to make it 3-1 to Argentina.

During the break, Brazil sought to get some grip by boosting its presence in the midfield with Joao Gomes and the substitution of Murillo and striker Rodrygo. But it was to no avail, with Giuliano Simeone scoring for Argentina in the 71st after four Brazilian defenders failed to block a low cross in front of their goal.

"Everything we planned, from the first minute of play, did not happen," Brazil's coach told a news conference. "Argentina was much better in every way. I apologize to Brazil fans, we expected something very different from what we showed. It was a very difficult night for us."

Brazil captain Marquinhos said all players should have done better in Buenos Aires. "It isn't only about Dorival," Marquinhos said. "This is not only the coach's fault, it is the players too. We need to have our heads in the right place. They (Argentina) also had tough times before and they overcame it. We can do it too."

Ednaldo Rodrigues, the president of Brazil's soccer confederation, said he'd speak to the domestic media Wednesday, but didn't reply whether Dorival Júnior was going to be his main topic.

Argentine players celebrated with their fans, asking for "a minute of silence" for Brazil. Scaloni's team has not lost to their rivals since 2019.

Olympic venue plans in place for Brisbane 2032

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Brisbane

Ready. Set. Wait. It'll be another year or two before construction begins on the main Olympic stadium for the Brisbane 2032 Olympics.

And this is racing mode.

It's taken almost four years since the International Olympic Committee awarded the 2032 Summer Games to Brisbane to finalize a cohesive venue plan, and now the countdown is serious for the 7.1 billion Australian dollars (US$4.4 billion) construction program. Stephen Conry, chairman of the Brisbane 2032 independent infrastructure coordination authority, on Wednesday said "the likely date or year for shovels in the ground for the (main) stadium would be 2026, '27" after the design and approvals phase.

"There's a lot of work to be done when you start spending billions of dollars on infrastructure and development," added Conry, who led the 100-day review of all venue options and reported back to the state government this month.

"We have over seven years, plenty of time to build a stadium. We'll have it ready in 2031 and for a period longer than is required for preparation for the Games." Conry joined Andrew Liveris, the president of the Brisbane 2032 organizing committee, in pitching the Olympic construction and legacy plan to the Infrastructure Association of Queensland on Wednedsay, a day after state Premier David Crisafulli unveiled the latest concepts. A new 60,000-seat stadium built in inner-city parkland, a sailing venue on the Whitsunday islands near the Great Barrier Reef and a crocodile-inhabited rowing venue i n Rockhampton on Queensland's central coast are part of the program that Crisafulli launched with a theme that seemed universal among politicians and citizens: just get on with it. The original bid idea floated by then-Queensland premier Annastacia Palaszczuk to renovate a 130-year-old cricket stadium known as the Gabba to become the centerpiece of the Olympics was scrapped by her successor Steven Miles a year ago. Miles lost government last year to Crisafulli, who broke an election promise of no new stadiums but said it was in the best interests of the public.

Rather than shrink the scale, his government expanded it to cities and sites up and down the Queensland coast, factoring in international tourist destinations and relatively lesser-known regions. Some of them — the rowing for instance — may ultimately be rejected by international sports federations. But it's on the drawing board. The state government also aims to bring in private-sector funding for an indoor arena that will be outside the Olympic scope but could possibly become a venue for events in 2032. There's also the inclusion of a 25,000-seat aquatic center that will become home to a national academy is also in the Victoria Park precinct, and has been positively received by the swimming community.

Nigeria's World Cup qualifying hopes dealt major late blow

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Cairo

Nigeria conceded a last-minute goal in a major blow to its World Cup qualifying hopes, when Egypt and Morocco all but booked their places at next year's tournament.

Zizo's goal was enough for unbeaten Egypt's 1-0 win over Sierra Leone in Cairo on Tuesday, while Morocco looks assured of qualifying with a nine-point lead over its rivals after a 2-0 win over Tanzania.

Real Madrid's Brahim Díaz scored a penalty after Nayef Aguerd broke the deadlock on a rebound for Morocco's fifth win from five games in Group E.

Zizo struck just before the break for Egypt to maintain a five-point lead over Burkina Faso, which had defeated Guinea-Bissau 2-1 on Monday in Group A.

Nigeria's nightmare

Zimbabwe's Tawanda Chirewa scored in the final minute to silence the home fans in Uyo, Nigeria as the visitors claimed a 1-1 draw.

Nigeria star Victor Osimhen put the Super Eagles on course to claim just their second win in Group C after Friday's 2-0 victory over Rwanda had rekindled Nigeria's qualification hopes.

But the 21-year-old Chirewa, a late substitute, equalized in the 90th to earn Zimbabwe's draw.

Meanwhile, South Africa defeated Benin 2-0 to consolidate the top spot. Bafana Bafana leads with 13 points from six rounds, five clear of Rwanda (which drew with Lesotho 1-1) and Benin. Nigeria stayed fourth in the group with just seven points.

Only the nine group winners secure automatic qualification. The four best-placed runners-up will compete to be the African contender in FIFA's six-country playoff for the last two qualification spots at the World Cup next year in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Algeria makes a statement

Wolfsburg forward Mohammed Amoura scored a hat trick as Algeria defeated Mozambique 5-1 to open a three-point lead over the visitors in Group G. Guinea's qualification hopes are all but over after a 1-0 loss to Uganda, the team's third defeat leaving it eight points behind Algeria in fifth.

Cape Verde remained top of Group D with a 2-1 win in Angola, though Cameroon responded with Vincent Aboubakar scoring twice in a 3-1 win over Libya. Cape Verde stayed a point ahead of Cameroon.

Sudan's missed chance

Sudan lost control of Group B with David Sebit scoring in stoppage time to earn South Sudan a 1-1 draw.

It allowed both Congo and Senegal to take advantage, which they did with 2-0 wins over Mauritania and Togo, respectively.

Congo moved top of Group B on 13 points, one ahead of unbeaten Senegal and Sudan. Sudan dropped to third on goal difference.

Black Stars twinkling

Ghana moved atop Group I by scoring a total of eight goals in back-to-back wins over Chad and Madagascar, helping ease the disappointment of failing to qualify for the Africa Cup of Nations in November.

Otto Addo's team eased to a 5-0 rout of Chad in Accra on Friday, then enjoyed a 3-0 win over Madagascar on Monday to seize control of the group.

Comoros, the surprise early leader, stayed three points behind Ghana on Tuesday with a 1-0 win over Chad.

Elephants hold on

Ivory Coast needed goalkeeper Yahia Fofana at his best as it held on for a 1-0 win over Gambia on Monday to stay a point above Gabon atop Group F.

Sébastien Haller's early goal was enough for the Elephants to win in Abidjan, keeping the team top after Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang had scored twice for Gabon to beat Kenya 2-1.

Lionel Messi to visit India in October

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Football fans in India will have another glimpse of Lionel Messi and his Argentine team in an exhibition match in Kerala in October, 14 years after the World Cup-winning captain first visited the country.

In November last year, Kerala Sports Minister V Abdurahiman had announced the news of Argentina visiting the southern state and playing two friendly matches in Kochi.

On Wednesday, HSBC India became the official partner of the Argentine team to collaborate and promote football in India, and announced that the match will be held in October.

"Under this partnership, the Argentina national football team, including legendary player Lionel Messi, will visit India for an international exhibition match in October 2025," a release from HSBC India said.

"The Argentine Football Association (AFA) and HSBC have today announced the signing of a new one-year partnership for India and Singapore, covering the competitive season in 2025 ahead of the 2026 World Cup qualification final matches."

Messi's first visit to India was to play a World Cup qualifying round match against Venezuela in Kolkata in September 2011. Argentina won that match 1-0 at Salt Lake Stadium.

Sandeep Batra, Head International Wealth and Premier Banking HSBC India, said: "As we join forces with one of the most revered teams in the world of football, we look forward to creating unforgettable experiences for fans and customers alike, and supporting the Argentine team in their journey towards the World Cup 2026."

Argentine Football Association President Claudio Fabian Tapia said: "A new milestone has been achieved for the international expansion of AFA, opening new opportunities with HSBC both in India and in Singapore.

"This agreement looks after our team and we look forward to consolidate our agreement and extend in multiple regions as we progress in the 2025 and 2026. We welcome HSBC as the new partner of the Argentina National Team."

Iran qualifies for 2026 World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Tehran

Iran qualified for the 2026 World Cup after Mehdi Taremi scored twice in a 2-2 draw with Uzbekistan.

The Inter Milan striker scored his second goal in the 83rd minute on Tuesday, giving Iran the point it needed to qualify to a fourth straight appearance at the World Cup and a seventh overall.

The 48-team tournament will be hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. Relations are tense between Iran and the United States.

President Donald Trump has linked the actions of Yemen's Houthi rebels to Iran, warning Tehran it would " suffer the consequences " for further attacks by the group. It's unclear how the strained relations will impact the Iranian team's preparations.

Uzbekistan, three points behind Iran in Group A, would have qualified for the first time with a victory and twice took the lead at the Azadi Stadium.

Khojimat Erkinov struck after 16 minutes but Taremi put Iran back on level terms seven minutes into the second half by firing an unstoppable volley into the roof of the net from the edge of the area.

Immediately, Abbosbek Fayzullaev restored Uzbekistan's lead but, Taremi responded, this time from close range, to send Iran to the World Cup where it will attempt to progress past the group stages for the first time.

The 48-team tournament will be hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico. Relations are tense between Iran and the United States

The top two from each of the three groups of six in Asia are guaranteed a place, while the teams that finish third and fourth will advance to a further stage to compete for two more places.

Third-placed United Arab Emirates defeated bottom team North Korea 2-1 to move four points behind Uzbekistan while Asian champion Qatar is out of the running for automatic qualification after a 3-1 loss in Kyrgyzstan.

Socceroos move closer to qualification

Earlier, Australia took a big step toward securing a spot at tournament with a 2-0 win over China in Hangzhou that also ended the hosts' hopes of automatic qualification.

First-half goals from Jackson Irvine and Nishan Velupillay were enough for the Socceroos. Australia is second, three points clear of third-place Saudi Arabia, which drew 0-0 at already-qualified Japan. China has yet to return to the World Cup since its 2002 debut and remains bottom of the group, level on six points with Bahrain who lost 1-0 in Indonesia.

Saudi Arabia is still in the hunt for a seventh appearance after a battling goalless draw in Japan. The hosts dominated at Saitama Stadium but were unable to get the breakthrough.

South Korea drops points again

In Group B, South Korea stayed top but dropped two points for the second time inside a week, drawing 1-1 at home to Jordan.

Naveen Pulligilla, Musa Sherif, win Kenyan NRC RC3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nairobi

Hyderabad's Naveen Pulligilla and co-driver Musa Sherif of Kasargod have become the first all-Indian team to participate in the World Rally Championship (WRC) and win the RC3 Kenyan National Rally Championship here. The duo competed in the iconic Safari Rally Kenya 2025, which is a part of WRC. Naveen and Musa, driving a Ford Fiesta Rally3 machine for the Africa Eco Motorsport team, were leading the WRC3 class with just two stages to go and were on the verge of a debut. But they encountered mechanical issues with the lower arm and were forced to pull out.

However, by that stage, they had already clinched the Kenyan Rally Championship title which concluded after 19 stages.

"The terrain isn't just challenging, it's a shock for any first-timer, with boulder-strewn routes and unpredictable conditions. Despite that, we managed to maintain pace and stay within three minutes of the top WRC cars," said Naveen, who is planning to take part in two more WRC rounds in Saudi Arabia and Sardinia.

Musa said, "The terrain was brutal, but we pushed through to make history as the first all-Indian team in WRC."

Naveen, a regular in INRC for the last couple of years, took part in the Asia Pacific Rally Championship in New Zealand in 2024 and is known for his precise and aggressive driving style.

Musa has over 33 years of rallying experience. As India's most decorated co-driver, he has participated in more than 330 rallies, including 91 international events, and has secured 10 national titles. He is the reigning 2024 Indian National Rally Champion co-driver.

The Safari Rally Kenya is known for its demanding terrain, landscape and unpredictable weather. The first Indian duo completed 19 of the 21 challenging stages, with 383.10 km of competitive sections in a total rally distance of 1,381.92km.

Winner team of FIFA World Cup to earn $125 million

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Zurich

The winner of FIFA's first 32-team Club World Cup in the United States could earn $125 Million as details of a $1 Billion prize money fund were finally published Wednesday.

FIFA said it allocated $525 Million in guaranteed fees for teams taking part in the June 14-July 13 tournament, ranging from $38.19 Million to the top-ranked European team – likely Real Madrid – to $3.58 million for the Oceania representative Auckland City.

A further $475 Million is earned by results in the 63 games, with $2 Million paid for winning group stage games, $7.5 Million for playing in the round of 16 and $40 Million to the team that wins the final at MetLife Stadium near New York.

The golden trophy has been sitting in the Oval Office at the White House this month after FIFA President Gianni Infantino delivered it to President Donald Trump. The prize fund was delayed until a global broadcast deal was belatedly agreed in December with streaming service DAZN, which then got a major investment from a state-backed sports agency in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia also was confirmed in December by FIFA as host of the men's 2034 World Cup. Each of the 12 European teams in the Club World Cup lineup will be paid at least $12.81 Million as an entry fee.

Payments will be decided by "a ranking based on sporting and commercial criteria," FIFA said without providing details. Manchester City, Bayern Munich, Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea also qualified by either winning a Champions League title from 2021 to 2024, or having consistent results in the competition over those four seasons.

Countries were capped at two entries, unless they had three Champions League winners. Salzburg of Austria qualified as the final European team, despite never advancing beyond the round of 16, because higher-ranked clubs like Liverpool and Barcelona were blocked by the country cap.

The six South American teams each will get a $15.21 Million entry fee.

Teams from Africa, Asia and the CONCACAF region of North America — including Lionel Messi's Inter Miami, despite not winning the MLS Cup title last season — each will get $9.55 Million for playing.

Leon of Mexico is currently contesting its removal from the competition by FIFA because it is in shared ownership with Pachuca which also qualified.

Angry, disappointed after 0-0 draw with Bangladesh: Marquez

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Shillong

Angry and disappointed" at India playing out a 0-0 draw against Bangladesh in the AFC Asian Cup qualifying round match, head coach Manolo Marquez said his team has gone two-three steps back since the first match under him last year.

At the end of a scrappy contest between the two familiar rivals, Marquez admitted that his team played a "very bad game" in all departments.

"I am really angry and disappointed. If you ask me, maybe today is the most difficult press conference in my career. Because I don't want to say all the things that are in my head at this moment," the Spaniard said after the match on Tuesday night. "When we started in Hyderabad against Mauritius (in Intercontinental Cup in September 2024) with one training session, till now, before the game today, it was every time better. Today we took two or three steps back," he said in a hard-hitting press conference.

"Very, very poor performance of the Indian team, in the first half especially. It was better in the second half but not enough. We got one point, that's the best thing." Marquez mentioned the absence of a few injured players but said it was no excuse for the poor show.

"A lot of very important players, starters, they are not here. All of them injured. But this is not an excuse," he said, referring to the injuries to Brandon Fernandes, Manvir Singh and Lallianzuala Chhangte.

"First, it's a reality. But second, we need to improve always. Even playing good football, you need to improve always in all the areas, in defence, in attack, in transitions, in set-pieces, everything.

"Today was not our day. The best thing is that all four teams are with one point and we have five games. We start from zero in the second round."

Midfielder Lalengmawia Ralte said his team was "lucky" to have got a draw.

"I also agree that we are lucky not to concede a goal. And we are lucky to get the draw. We could have done so much better." Marquez, who took charge as India head coach in July 2024, dismissed the notion that his players are lacking in experience. "This is nothing about experience or not experience. This is how you enter in the game. The game started with one pass back. And the goalkeeper passed the ball to the (Bangladesh) striker. And the striker, without the goalkeeper, he sent the ball out," he said referring to Vishal Kaith's mistake early in the game.

"In this case, it was the goalkeeper. But practically, it was every single player. And I don't want to say this or that. Obviously, some players are better."

He was also asked about very few Indian players playing in striker's position in the Indian Super League teams.

"Nothing to say to the coaches (of ISL teams). They can put the players that they want. Even I played with a foreign striker," said Marquez who is also doubling up as FC Goa head coach. He will leave the FC Goa position and will solely be the India head coach after the play-offs matches of the ISL, with the final happening on April 12. When he was told that some matches of the ISL and Super Cup are left to be played in the domestic circuit, he said, "When you are disappointed, you are disappointed. But if you ask me, I expected this performance.

"You say about ISL and the Super Cup. Maybe it's not the best moment to put the players just after this FIFA window. But this is my opinion." In the March FIFA window, India played two matches, the international friendly against Maldives (3-0 win on March 19) being the other one.

Replying to another question, he said, "The players arrived at the national team with two days. They played two days ago, another seven days ago, another five days ago, another four.

LSG wary of SRH's ultra-aggressive batting approach

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hyderabad

Having lost their opening clash, Rishabh Pant's Lucknow Super Giants will be wary of Sunrisers Hyderabad's ultra-aggressive approach with the bat when the two teams face off in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Last year's runner-up SRH picked up from where they had left off in the opening clash to nearly break the record of the highest total in the IPL, handing the Rajasthan Royals a crushing defeat by 44 runs. The huge win also propelled SRH to the top of the points table for having the best net run rate and given their all-round firepower, the Pat Cummins-led side would want to maintain their dominance in the competition.

SRH went hammer and tongs against RR with their new recruit Ishan Kishan smacking a century and the other big guns firing as usual to make 286/6 in their last outing here at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Uppal.

Such batting approach could be terrifying for the opponents and SRH's remarkable consistency makes them the most feared batting unit in the IPL circuit.

The addition of Kishan to the mix of SRH's premier weapons in Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head and Heinrich Klaasen is another masterstroke. To top it off, Nitish Kumar Reddy too struck his runs at more than 200 against Rajasthan Royals.

Kishan appeared to be a man on a mission as he struck his maiden century in the IPL after being let go by Mumbai Indians, smashing six sixes and 11 fours in his 47-ball 106 not out.

In such circumstances, LSG will be required to have clear bowling plans as the smallest of error is proving costly in the IPL, which has already witnessed a new record being made — 119 sixes have been struck in the first five matches.

On their part, LSG, who lost to Delhi Capitals by one wicket in a thrilling finish showed a similar approach with the bat but they were guilty of losing their way in the middle overs, which proved to be costly. LSG lost six wickets and added only 76 runs in their last eight overs against Delhi Capitals and despite early wickets, they could not withstand the onslaught by the lower-order as Ashutosh Sharma's 66 not out handed his side a win.

LSG's new skipper Pant had a forgettable game of sorts in his first outing with the team, falling for a six-ball duck during their batting slide and he also missed a regulation stumping when DC needed six off the final over with one wicket in hand.

Nicholas Pooran was magnificent in his strokeplay but the tone was set by Mitchell Marsh — playing in this IPL only as a specialist batter — with his stunning attack on the DC bowlers.

While LSG would feel they did not do too many things wrong in the clash against DC, they would know a better show with the ball will be paramount against SRH who have been severe on all opponents. Apart from their senior spinner Ravi Bishnoi, LSG will also have high hopes from the unheralded duo of Manimaran Siddharth and Digvesh Rathi, who both bowled with control to snaffle a couple of wickets each against DC.

With Shardul Thakur outrunning DC's Mitchell Starc to find swing with the new ball which resulted in a couple of wickets, it was inexplicable why LSG did not turn to the senior all-rounder who bowled only two overs upfront when the opposition was running away with the games.

On these counts, LSG would be expected to come up with better plans.

Teams

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Atharva Taide, Abhinav Manohar, Aniket Verma, Sachin Baby, Heinrich Klaasen, Travis Head, Harshal Patel, Kamindu Mendis, Wiaan Mulder, Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Shami, Rahul Chahar, Adam Zampa, Simarjeet Singh, Zeeshan Ansari, Jaydev Unadkat, Eshan Malinga.

Lucknow Super Giants: Rishabh Pant (c and wk), David Miller, Aiden Markram, Aryan Juyal (wk), Himmat Singh, Matthew Breetzke, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Mitchell Marsh, Abdul Samad, Shahbaz Ahmed, Yuvraj Chaudhary, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Arshin Kulkarni, Ayush Badoni, Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Akash Deep, Manimaran Siddharth, Digvesh Rathi, Akash Singh, Shamar Joseph, Prince Yadav, Mayank Yadav, Ravi Bishnoi.

Iyer continues to evolve his game: Williamson

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

India middle-order mainstay and Punjab Kings' captain Shreyas Iyer continues to "evolve his game" while "adjusting brilliantly" to challenges such as facing short balls, believes New Zealand stalwart Kane Williamson.

Iyer began his captaincy stint for PBKS with a match-winning 97 not out, studded with nine sixes and five fours off 42 balls, against Gujarat Titans in their IPL clash here on Tuesday.

Williamson, a former Gujarat Titans player, heaped praise on the right-handed Iyer for his adaptability.

"What stands out about Shreyas is how he continues to evolve his game," said JioStar expert Williamson.

"For a period, teams targeted him with short balls, but now, he's adjusting brilliantly — getting deeper in his crease, deweighting his front leg, and dominating the short-pitched deliveries.

"What is most impressive is his ability to shift his weight forward again, making it difficult for bowlers who try the 'one-two' approach — going short, then full. He's now able to access all areas of the ground, which makes him such a formidable batter," Williamson added.

The New Zealand batting great termed Iyer's knock of 97 not out of "highest standard".

> It was a knock of the highest standard. From the very first ball, it was almost a highlight reel—he played the ball exactly where it was meant to be hit
>
> – KANE WILLIAMSON, CRICKETER

"It was a knock of the highest standard. From the very first ball, it was almost a highlight reel—he played the ball exactly where it was meant to be hit," he said.

"Anything outside off stump, he looked to access the offside, and he even struck sixes over cover against some of the best seamers in the world. Then, to take on Rashid Khan as well — that's one of the toughest challenges in the game.

"As a leader, to step in at Number 3, set the tone, and take on the opposition's biggest threats was remarkable. That innings was truly out of this world," Williamson added.

The Kiwi batter also praised Shashank Singh for his whirlwind knock of 44 not out off only 16 balls, which pushed PBKS' total beyond the reach of the Titans.

"Shashank is coming off an outstanding breakout season last year. He's incredibly still at the crease, has beautiful hands, and doesn't move excessively, yet he possesses so many scoring options," he said.

"He has the time to adjust to short-pitched deliveries — whether ramping it over the keeper or pulling off a length — but he can also hold his position and play powerful straight drives.

"The way he comes in during the death overs, with little time to settle, and takes on bowlers with confidence is exceptional. Whether it's Rashid Khan missing his length slightly and Shashank slapping it back over square — that's an incredibly difficult shot against someone of Rashid's calibre. It just speaks to the quality of the player," he added.

Maradona's ex-bodyguard arrested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Buenos Aires

A former bodyguard of the late Diego Maradona was arrested for allegedly withholding information and telling lies during his testimony at the trial of the soccer great's medical team.

Seven healthcare professionals are on trial at an Argentine court accused of negligence in Maradona's death in a house outside Buenos Aires on November 25, 2020.

On Tuesday, following a request from the prosecutor's office, the criminal court in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Isidro ordered Julio César Coria to be investigated for false testimony. He was arrested and remained in custody Tuesday afternoon.

Coria was one of the people who attempted to resuscitate Maradona.

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

Coria testified in court on Tuesday that when he entered Maradona's room, he saw nurse Gisela Madrid and psychiatrist Agustina Cosachov, both defendants in the case, performing CPR.

He added that Cosachov gave Maradona "mouth-to-mouth resuscitation" for a while. The trial prosecutor, Patricio Ferrari, warned the witness of contradictions in his statement.

The prosecution warned Coria that he lied when he denied in court having spoken with another of the defendants, neurosurgeon Leopoldo Luque.

"There are countless chats between Luque and Coria, which demonstrate a cordial and almost friendly relationship, and the witness denied having had any conversation," Ferrari said.

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

The 28-year-old daughter of Maradona, Jana, testified Tuesday that Luque and Coria suggested "home hospitalisation" when the clinic authorities recommended that Maradona remain hospitalised.

Rauf returns to Pakistan ODI squad vs NZ

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

Pakistan pacer Haris Rauf has joined the ODI squad in New Zealand after initially being dropped from the format for a three-match series against the Black Caps.

Haris and Shaheen Shah Afridi were named in the T20I squad but sidelined for the ODI series because of sloppy outing in the Champions Trophy where hosts Pakistan ended without a win.

But Haris emerged as Pakistan's leading wicket-taker — with seven scalps — in the just-concluded T20I series that the Kiwis won 4-1 as the team management had to rethink their decision.

Haris Rauf and Shaheen were dropped from the ODI squad because of poor form in the Champions Trophy in which hosts Pakistan ended without a win.

Salman Ali Agha not disheartened despite 1-4 defeat in New Zealand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

Pakistan's T20 captain, Salman Ali Agha, is not disheartened by the 1-4 defeat in the just-concluded series in New Zealand and believes that the new faces tried out in the matches will eventually come through.

"Look the conditions in New Zealand are normally challenging with the bounce, pace and movement in the pitches, so for players coming to play here for the first time it is always going to be difficult," he said after New Zealand won the fifth and final game in Wellington on Wednesday by eight wickets.

Salman, who is captaining the side in preparation for this year's Asia Cup and next year's T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, said the new players should settle down by then.

"It was not easy for them to bat in these conditions. There are some silver linings from the series and some concerns as well but we have to address them before we go into the Asia Cup later this year," he said.

Salman, who was in good form in the series and scored a half century on Wednesday, said that it was necessary for players to understand that with aggression and intent they also have to use their minds.

"We didn't play sensible cricket in the series most of the time and got out to bad shots. But with more exposure these new young players will learn and we have to be patient."

Pakistani selectors experimented by including plenty of youngsters in the T20 squad while dropping experienced batters like Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan.

Mohammad Haris, Hasan Nawaz, Irfan Khan Niazi, Abdul Samad, Omair bin Yousuf (who played on Wednesday), Jahandad Khan and Sufiyan Muqeem were the relatively new faces in the squad. Muqeem, a left-arm wrist spinner, played in his only game on Wednesday and ended with impressive figures of 2-0-6-2 despite a batting onslaught from Tim Seifert who scored 97 from just 38 balls with 10 sixes.

Pakistan's next T20 assignment is a home series against Bangladesh in April-May after the Pakistan Super League.

BCCI has no immediate plans to increase teams in WPL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Women's Premier League has "grown phenomenally" in the last three years but there are no immediate plans to increase the number of teams from the existing five, IPL chairman Arun Dhumal, who is also a part of the WPL committee, has said.

The WPL committee headed by BCCI president Roger Binny. The Board had plans to increase the number of teams after three seasons but it now wants to consolidate.

"To further strengthen this tournament for the time being, we want to consolidate before we take a call on further addition of any team. There are no immediate plans (to add teams)," Arun Dhumal said.

Having said that, Dhumal is pleased with the growth of the tournament.

"So, within three editions, WPL has grown phenomenally in terms of traction, for in-stadium attendance. All the broadcast numbers are very, very encouraging. And it has given new impetus to women's cricket worldwide.

"So, we are hoping this continues to grow. And this augurs very well for not only the tournament, but women's cricket in general," he added.

WPL has not yet been played in home and away format, like it is the case with the Indian Premier League. The BCCI combined smaller centres like Baroda and Lucknow with Mumbai and Bengaluru to host the latest edition that ended on March 15.

Mumbai Indians won their second title in three years beating Delhi Capitals in the final in Mumbai.

The BCCI had mopped up Rs 4670 crore from the sale of five teams representing Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, UP and Gujarat.

The media rights were sold for Rs 951 crore, making it the second biggest women's league in the world before a ball being bowled.

The crowd turnout for majority of the games was decent this season. Though the main goal of the league is to promote the women's game in India and unearth more talent. The competition has a lot of scope to improve on that front.

Iyer asked me not to worry about his century: Shashank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

Punjab Kings batter Shashank Singh's boundary-hitting spree in the final over of the Indian Premier League (IPL) match against Gujarat Titans left his captain Shreyas Iyer stranded on unbeaten 97 but the latter was not worried about his personal landmark.

Iyer missed his maiden IPL ton by a mere three runs but his 42-ball knock, which featured nine sixes and five fours, powered PBKS to a massive 243 for 5 and helped them win their season opener by 11 runs.

Shashank, who hit five of his six fours in the final over off Mohammed Siraj and took a double to collect 23 runs against the India pacer, said PBKS captain Iyer didn't ask him to rotate the strike.

"I didn't see the scoreboard, to be very honest. But after the first ball I hit (for a four), I saw the scoreboard and Shreyas was on 97," Shashank, who scored a 16-ball 44 not out, told the media after the match on Tuesday.

"I didn't say anything, he only came and told me 'Shashank don't worry about my hundred', because obviously I was going to say to him that should I give you a single or something.

"It takes a lot of heart and courage to say because obviously hundreds don't come easily in T20s especially in IPL," he added.

Shashank said Iyer's message was to keep attacking the bowler.

"Shreyas told me 'Shashank go and just (try and) hit every ball for a boundary for a four or a six'. That gave me even more confidence, obviously, it's a team game at the end of the day we all know," he said.

"But then at those situations it's difficult to be that selfless. But Shreyas was one. I know him since past 10-15 years. He is the same and he told me just to be calm, to play cricketing shots what I usually play, to maintain my balance and I think we had a good finish," added Shashank.

Meanwhile, Gujarat Titans spinner R Sai Kishore, who returned with figures of 4-0-30-3, said his side thought they were ahead in the game.

Chasing 244, GT remained in the hunt but were eventually overpowered by the mammoth target, finishing at 232 for five in their stipulated 20 overs.

"We were also surprised, to be honest. We thought we were on course. We thought we were ahead of the game, we thought so," Sai Kishore said.

"But in that situation, I think no matter what planning you do, if you are able to be fully zoned in in the present moment, that is the difference and these games happen." Sai Kishore rued that GT failed to hit more boundaries during the course of the innings.

"This is also the first game of the season. We will also learn together. We will come back really stronger. We will work on the areas we need to improve and we will again compete," he said.

"We were on course with Sai (Sudharsan) and (Jos) Buttler going very well. In the end, in the last five overs, to be honest, (Vijaykumar) Vyshak bowled brilliantly. All credit to Vyshak for the way he executed his yorkers.

"To be fair, I think those balls we could have, it's very easy for me to say, but we could have tried to hit more boundaries than just looking for sixes (and) that is the learning going forward and we will do that," he added.

Brilliant to see fearlessness of young Indian players: Stoinis

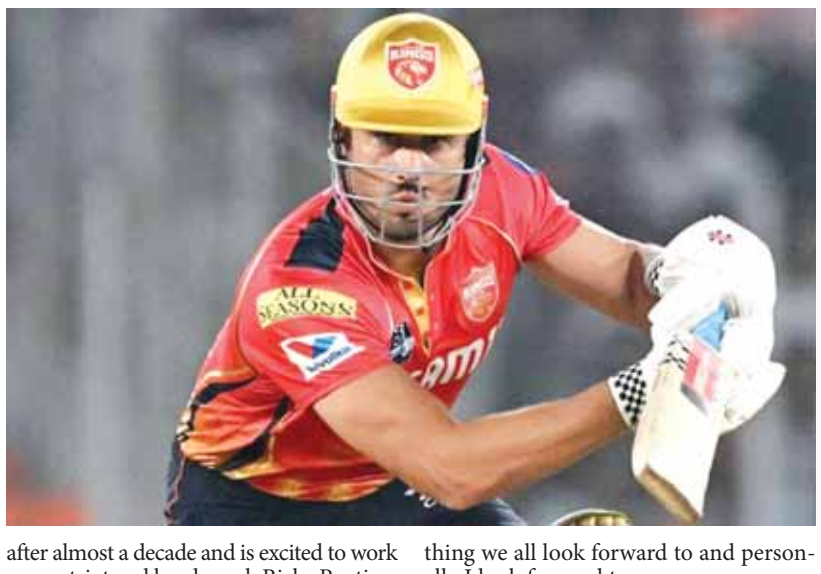
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis has been left supremely impressed by the quality of youngsters in the Punjab Kings squad as well as the Indian T20 set up on the sidlelines of the IPL.

After the retirement of stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja, the depth of Indian cricket has ensured that T20 team has built on the success of the 2024 T20 World Cup courtesy the likes of Tilak Varma and Abhishek Sharma.

At Punjab Kings camp, rookies like opener Priyansh Arya have already made a mark even though it is early days in the IPL. "There's great depth here (in Indian cricket). There always has been. And I think they're getting the chance to show their skills on a world stage," Stoinis said. "They are super confident. They've had almost the advantage of growing up with IPL, being under pressure from early stages in their career. It's brilliant to see how fearless they are with their cricket and especially (while playing for) Indian cricket (team).

"Some of the youngsters in the Punjab Kings camp who have never really played the IPL are very impressive," said the 35-year-old. Stoinis returns to the franchise after almost a decade and is excited to work compatriot and head coach Ricky Ponting.



"A lot of Aussie boys here, which is nice for me. So it does feel at home," he said referring to the likes of Glenn Maxwell, Aaron Hardie and Josh Inglis.

"It was my second year in the IPL that I moved to here. So yeah, it's all familiar. I love the IPL.

"It's a mainstay in the calendar. It's something we all look forward to and personally I look forward to.

It's exciting to have the opportunity to bring some success to this franchise," said the Perth based cricketer.

All phases of Kohli's career has served a purpose

Stoinis' connection with Virat Kohli goes back to their U-19 days when the Indian led his team to the World Cup title in 2008.

Stoinis said he remains in touch with the Indian superstar and has enjoyed tracking his remarkable career.

"We have known each other for a long time. We have got a mutual friend in Perth that has known him for a long time as well. So that's sort of how that relationship started.

"But yeah, what a great career it's been so far. It's definitely not finished. It seems like he's worn a few caps throughout his career in terms of being the young guy coming into an Indian team that forced his way in there at such a young age and showed such confidence in himself to crack into such a good team to then leading the team and almost changing the whole culture of Indian cricket and inspiring a lot of the young cricketers around India and around the world.

"And then a whole new phase of the fitness side of things as well that he inspired in the Indian set-up to now mentoring the new kids on the block. And he's got his family now as well.

"I think all of those phases have served a purpose, not only for himself, but as a mentor for the wider public and the cricket community. So always hats off to him, to be honest," added Stoinis.

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

Printed and published by Shobori Ganguli for and on behalf of CMYK Printech Ltd., Regd Office:- 201-205, 208-210, 2nd Floor, Pratap Bhawan 5, B.S.Z. Marg, New Delhi-110002 Phone: 011-46035729, 011-69342500 and printed at Jagran Prakashan Ltd, D-210, 211 Sector-63, Noida, Dist. Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) -201301,Phone: 0120-4615800 extension 142, Editor-in-Chief Shobori Ganguli AIR SURCHARGE of ₹ 2.00 East: Calcutta, North: Leh West: Mumbai & Ahmedabad South: Bangalore & Chennai. Central : Khajuraho. Lucknow Office: 4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226 016. Telephones: 0522-2346443, 2346444, 2346445.