

Riot sets Nagpur ablaze

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

people the "real history" of Sambhaji Maharaj to the people.

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

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

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Israel pummels Gaza, killing more than 400 Palestinians

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

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

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

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

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



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

indicating that Israel could soon launch renewed ground operations.

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

The attack during the Muslim holy

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

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PM Modi pens note for Sunita Williams

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

the letter.

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

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

He said he had met Massimino at a programme in New Delhi and Williams' name came up during the conversation.

"During the course of our conversation, your name came up and we discussed how proud we are of you and your work. Following this interaction, I could not stop myself from writing to you," he said.

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Trump, Putin talk Ukraine ceasefire, Zelenskyy unsure

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

President Donald Trump is to hold talks on Tuesday with Russian President Vladimir Putin as he looks to get buy-in on a US ceasefire proposal he hopes can create a pathway to ending Russia's devastating war on Ukraine.

The White House is expressing optimism that peace is within reach even as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy remains sceptical that Putin is doing much beyond paying lip service to Trump as Russian forces continue to pound his country.

The engagement is just the latest turn in dramatically shifting US-Russia relations as Trump made quickly ending the conflict a top priority - even at the expense of straining ties with longtime American allies who want Putin to pay a price for the invasion.

"It's a bad situation in Russia, and it's a bad situation in Ukraine," Trump told reporters on Monday. "What's happening in Ukraine is not good, but we're going to see if we can work a peace agreement, a ceasefire and peace. And I think we'll be able to do it."

In preparation for the Trump-Putin call, White House special envoy Steve Witkoff met last week with Putin in Moscow to discuss the proposal. Secretary of State Marco Rubio had persuaded senior Ukrainian officials during talks in Saudi Arabia to agree to the

ceasefire framework.

The US president said Washington and Moscow have already begun discussing "dividing up certain assets" between Ukraine and Russia as part of a deal to end the conflict.

Trump, who during his campaign pledged to quickly end the war, has at moments boasted of his relationship with Putin and blamed Ukraine for Russia's unprovoked invasion, all while accusing Zelenskyy of unnecessarily prolonging the biggest land war in Europe since World War II.

Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Tuesday that Trump and Putin will discuss the war in Ukraine but added that there are also a "large number of questions" regarding normalising US-Russia relations. The call will take place between 1 pm GMT and 3 pm GMT (9 am ET to 11 am ET), Peskov said.

Trump has said that control of land and power plants will be part of the conversation, which comes on the anniversary of Russia annexing Ukraine's Crimean peninsula 11 years ago. That bold land grab by Russia set the stage for Russia to invade its neighbour in 2022.

Witkoff and White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt suggested that US and Russian officials have discussed the fate of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant - Europe's largest - in southern Ukraine.

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

PM speaks Maha Kumbh, Opposition cries stampedes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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EPIC link to Aadhaar soon

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Linking of voter identity cards with Aadhaar will be done according to the existing laws and in line with the Supreme Court's (SC) directions. The Election Commission of India (ECI) will soon start technical consultations with the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).

This comes after the Chief Election Commission (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar along with Election Commissioners Dr Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Dr Vivek Joshi, meeting with the Union Home Secretary, Legislative Secretary (in the Law Ministry), the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) Secretary and the UIDAI CEO on the issue of voter identity card-Aadhaar seeding. The poll body meeting assumes significance in the view of the Opposition's allegations of fudging of electoral rolls data.

In a statement on Tuesday, the ECI said, Aadhaar established a person's identity. "Therefore, it was decided that the linking of Elector Photo Identity Card (EPIC) with Aadhaar will be done only as per the provisions of Article 326 of the Constitution, sections 23(4), 23(5) and 23(6) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and in line with the Supreme Court judgment (of 2023)," it said.

Accordingly, technical consultations between UIDAI and the EC's technical experts "are to begin soon", it added. The law allows voluntary seeding of voter rolls with the Aadhaar database. Section 23 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, as amended by the Election Laws

(Amendment) Act, 2021, provides for electoral registration officers to require an existing or prospective elector to provide Aadhaar for establishing identity on a voluntary basis.

Notably, the government told the Rajya Sabha in a written reply in April 2023 that linking Aadhaar details with voter identity cards had not started and noted that the exercise was "process driven" and no target or timelines was set for the proposed exercise.

Earlier, the Supreme Court considered the ECI's stand to deliberate on the demand for uploading polling booth-wise voter turnout data on its website and asked the petitioners to make representations before the poll panel in 10 days. A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and KV Viswanathan was hearing two PILs filed by Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Mahua Moitra and NGO Association for Democratic Reforms in 2019, respectively. Senior advocate Maninder Singh, appearing for the poll panel, said Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar wanted to meet and discuss the grievance. "Here is a new chief election commissioner now. The petitioners can meet him and it may be addressed," he said.

The CJ then said, "In the meanwhile, the counsel for Election Commission states that the petitioners (the NGO and the MP) may file a representation with the Election Commission and the EC will give them a hearing and inform them in advance. Let the representation be made in 10 days."

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Pollution worsening in Indian metros

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The national capital remained India's most polluted megacity by a wide margin during the 2024-25 winter with an average PM2.5 concentration of 175 micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m³). However, a Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) analysis found that PM2.5 pollution in the national capital declined in the 2024-25 winter (October 1 to January 31) compared to the 2023-24 winter (189 µg/m³). Kolkata was the second-most polluted megacity during the 2024-25 winter with an average PM2.5 concentration of 65 µg/m³.

Irrespective of their diverse geographic and climatic contexts, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai -- have seen worsening PM2.5 levels during the winter of 2024-25 (October 1, 2024-January 31, 2025). The overall level and the peaking points of pollution have, however, varied across cities depending on the meteorological conditions of different climatic zones.

The analysis showed that PM2.5 levels declined in Bengaluru, Mumbai and Kolkata compared to the previous winter but remained the same in Chennai and Hyderabad. The average PM2.5 levels during the 2024-25 winter were 52 µg/m³ in Hyderabad, 50 in Mumbai, 37 in Bengaluru and 36 in Chennai.

Delhi remains the most polluted megacity by a large margin during winter, even though its winter average has shown improvement over the previous winter

According to an analysis, Delhi with a winter average PM2.5 level of 175 µg/m³ remains the most polluted megacity by a large margin during winter, even though the winter average has shown improvement over the previous winter. Delhi's average PM2.5 concentration during winter increased by 1 per cent compared

to the average of previous three winters reaching 174 µg/m³, with peak pollution levels surging on November 18, 2024, to 602 µg/m³. In the other five megacities, the average winter PM2.5 level was 65 µg/m³ in Kolkata; 52 µg/m³ in Hyderabad; 50 µg/m³ in Mumbai; 36 µg/m³ in Chennai; and 37 µg/m³ in Bengaluru.

Delhi, located in the land-locked Indo-Gangetic Plains (IGP) with adverse meteorology, has recorded the highest level of pollution during winter, Kolkata - also at the tip of the IGP - ranks second. The megacities outside the IGP - Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru - despite having more advantageous climatic conditions and natural ventilation, have also experienced increases in average PM2.5 concentrations.

"When compared to the three-year average, Delhi remained the worst performer, with average winter pollution levels continuing to rise, even though by just 1 per cent higher than the average of the last three years," the analysis said.

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Justice after a 44-year-old massacre

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Firozabad

In a landmark judgment, a session's court has sentenced three individuals to death for their involvement in a gruesome massacre and dacoity that took place 44 years ago in Dihuli village of Thana Jasrana.

The crime, committed on November 18, 1981, saw a gang of dacoits led by Radhe and Santosha kill 24 people from the Dalit community and seriously injure nine others. The court found Rampal, Ramsevak, and Captain Singh guilty of murder and other serious offenses, imposing a death sentence on them. Additionally, Rampal and Ramsevak were fined ₹2 lakh each, while Captain Singh was fined ₹1 lakh.

As soon as the court pronounced the verdict, despair was evident on the faces of the three convicts. They broke down in tears, and their family members, who were waiting outside, also wept. Following the verdict, the police took them into custody and lodged them in jail.

The case had been pending in court for decades. During this time, several accused individuals died, while one was declared a fugitive by the court. The lengthy legal proceedings finally culminated in the historic verdict, bringing some closure to the victims' families and the community.

Following the court's ruling, the Dalit community in Dihuli erupted in celebrations, playing Holi to mark what they saw as justice delivered. Villagers Bhoop Singh and Chhote Singh stated that the brutal manner in which their community members were murdered has finally been answered with an appropriate punishment.

The convicts-Rampal, Ramsevak, and Captain Singh-can appeal the death sentence in the High Court within 30 days. The High Court will review the Sessions Court's judgment and may either uphold the death sentence or amend the punishment.

After the sentencing, the three convicts were taken to Mainpuri district jail, where they will be kept in the quarantine barracks

for 14 days. During this period, they will be closely monitored to ensure their physical and mental well-being. Jail authorities will observe whether they are eating, drinking, and sleeping properly. After the quarantine period, they will be moved to the regular prison barracks.

Even before the final sentencing, the three convicts spent a restless night in jail on Monday. According to jail personnel, they appeared anxious and worried about their fate. Among them, Captain Singh seemed the most disturbed. On Tuesday morning, all three followed their routine and prepared to leave for the court, but the fear of their impending punishment was visible on their faces. They had even eaten less food on Monday evening, dreading the worst.

The case marks one of the longest-running trials in the country, highlighting the slow but eventual course of justice. The verdict serves as a reminder that crimes of such magnitude do not escape the legal system, no matter how long they take to be resolved.

Summit to highlight Maha Kumbh mgmt by UP govt

Lucknow (PNS): A Public Health and Water Summit will be held in Lucknow on Wednesday, focusing on the success of Maha Kumbh and the management of the Yogi government. The event will bring together renowned scientists, water experts, environmentalists, and representatives from various government and non-governmental organisations nationwide.

The innovative measures taken for cleanliness, water supply, health services, and devotee convenience at Maha Kumbh have gained global attention. Initiatives such as water resource management, Ganga cleanliness, modern technology integration, and disaster preparedness were effectively executed with support from Namami Gange and the Rural Water Supply department. The summit will explore public health, water resource management, and environmental sustainability, highlighting how modern techniques and coordinated efforts ensured a seamless experience for crores of devotees while maintaining the purity of the Ganga.

During Maha Kumbh, the government took significant steps under the Namami Gange Mission to ensure clean and uninterrupted water flow in the Ganga. Key initiatives included ghat cleaning, sewage treatment plants, bio-toilets, and an

advanced waste management system.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the grand success of Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, which was held under his leadership. He said the event conveyed the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) to the global community.

In a post on the social media platform X on Tuesday, Adityanath wrote: "Under the visionary guidance of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, the grand, clean, safe, and well-organized Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj has sent a heartfelt message of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat, Sarvasamaveshi Bharat' (One India, Great India, Inclusive India) and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' to the world."

He further stated: "Faith can be a means of livelihood, and culture can be a factor in a nation's prosperity. Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj has set this example. I extend my gratitude to everyone involved in this grand event and my heartfelt thanks to the Hon'ble Prime Minister."

During the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament on Tuesday, Prime Minister Modi remarked in the Lok Sabha that the world had witnessed the grandeur of India through Maha Kumbh. He described it as an event driven by the devotion and determination of the people.

Member of gang linked to human trafficking, cyber fraud arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

A joint team from the cyber crime cell and Madeyganj police station arrested a wanted international cyber fraudster linked to a gang that deceived innocent individuals across India, authorities said here on Tuesday. The gang lured people with promises of data entry and sales marketing jobs in Bangkok (Thailand), only to then transport them to Myanmar where they were held hostage and forced to commit cyber fraud.

The police recovered four mobile phones, two passports, three ATM cards, 22 cheque books/passbooks, one SIM card, and other materials from the arrested accused's possession. The case emerged after Sultan Salahuddin Rabbani and Sadiq Mirza, residents of Madeyganj, filed an FIR accusing agents Javed Iqbal, Mohammed Ahmed Khan, Zeeshan Khan, and their associates. The victims were lured with promises of data entry work in Bangkok but were instead taken to Myanmar, where they were held hostage, had their passports stolen, and were coerced into participating in cyber fraud.

The victims were freed in a joint rescue operation conducted by the governments of Myanmar, Thailand, and China, initiated due to the disappearance of Chinese actor Wang Xing (XING XING) in Myanmar.

During a search operation, authorities discovered that people from various countries were being held hostage in call centres in KK Park, Myanmar, and were being forced into cyber fraud activities.

The operation led to the rescue of 540

victims, including 38 from Uttar Pradesh, who were brought back to India with the assistance of the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian Army.

The arrested accused, Javed Iqbal and Mohammed Ahmed Khan (alias Bhaiya), were sent to jail on March 15.

A police spokesperson said that another wanted accused, Zeeshan Khan (36), from Mansoor Nagar in Lucknow, was arrested on March 18 and sent to judicial custody.

During interrogation, the arrested accused revealed that their associate, Raffaq Rahi, employed as an HR personnel in Myanmar, was orchestrating the cyber fraud operations. Following Raffaq's instructions, the accused would lure victims to Bangkok with promises of data entry jobs, only to smuggle them into Myanmar, where their passports were seized, and they were forced into cyber fraud activities instead. The accused further revealed that individuals wanting to return home had to pay a ransom of Rs 3 lakh. The group earned \$500 per person by sending them abroad for forced cyber fraud. The gang used bank accounts purchased from people across India, with the stolen money transferred abroad to the gang's associates.

The fraudsters also used digital wallets like Ethereum and Tron to transfer the illicit money, which was later withdrawn through ATMs. The police found that around 41 cyber fraud complaints were linked to accounts operated by Javed Iqbal and his associates, covering several states across India.

Additionally, the two passports recovered from the accused were intended for individuals

who were being sent to Myanmar under the false pretense of data entry jobs in Bangkok.

YOUTH DUPED BY FRAUDSTER POSING AS BANK EMPLOYEE

A cyber fraudster posing as a bank employee allegedly duped a youth of approximately Rs 4.5 lakh in the Gomti Nagar Extension police station area. The accused lured the victim by offering a credit card with no annual charge, and after obtaining his personal details, withdrew money from three of his bank accounts.

The victim, Arvind Kumar, a resident of Sulabh Awas in Gomti Nagar Extension, reported the incident to the police. According to Kumar, on February 15, a man named Amit Shinde contacted him, claiming to be an employee of a private bank. He informed Kumar that his RuPay card was ready for delivery, and after Kumar provided his home address and other details, two messages appeared on his phone.

When Kumar inquired about the messages, the accused reassured him that they were part of the formalities. However, after the call ended, Kumar noticed that Rs 4.63 lakh had been withdrawn from his accounts. The accused had used the victim's personal information to access and transfer money from Kumar's accounts at three different banks.

Upon receiving the complaint, the Gomti Nagar Extension police registered a case and launched an investigation. The police, along with the cyber team, are working to track down the accused and gather further information.

Lawyers threaten to gherao office of police commissioner

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Three days after a violent clash between police and advocates inside the Vibhuti Khand police station, tensions remain high as the deadlock continues. The incident, which saw police allegedly thrashing Advocate Saurabh and other colleagues for advocating on behalf of detained lawyers, has sparked widespread outrage among the legal community. The lawyers, led by the Awadh, Lucknow, and Central Bar Associations, have demanded the withdrawal of all cases against them by 1 pm on Wednesday, or they will gherao the office of the police commissioner.

Advocates have accused the police of tarnishing their image by portraying them as lawbreakers. On Saturday, outraged lawyers took to the streets, protesting the mistreatment of their colleagues. A case was registered on the complaint of Advocate Saurabh, while a cross-FIR was filed against around 150 advocates for allegedly attacking the police.

The police had registered an FIR against 150 lawyers after the altercation. On Tuesday, the legal community observed a boycott of judicial work in both the High Court and District Court, as advocates discussed their next steps in emergency meetings. During an emergency meeting, 11 proposals were passed by the lawyers, including demands for the immediate withdrawal of cases and strict action against the police officers named in the FIR. The proposals also called for the suspension of the officers involved in the incident and for the FIR against the advocates to be declared false. The lawyers reiterated their demand for the implementation of an Advocate Protection Act and criticised the police statement, which they claimed was misleading.

A joint meeting held at the library hall, chaired by Lucknow Bar Association president Ramesh Prasad Tiwari and attended by key figures including Minister Braj Bhan Singh and Central Bar Association president Arvind Singh Kushwaha, emphasised these demands. The lawyers vowed to intensify their protest if their demands were not met, asserting that the police's actions were aimed at damaging their professional reputation.

LMC freezes Cancer hospital's bank a/c over ₹9 cr unpaid property tax

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Lucknow Municipal Corporation has seized the bank account of Kalyan Singh Super Speciality Cancer Institute & Hospital due to unpaid property tax totalling Rs 9,02,02,339 as of March 31, 2025, officials said on Tuesday. Despite multiple notices and personal follow-ups, the hospital management failed to clear the dues, prompting this strict action, they added.

According to officials, bills and demand notices were issued in accordance with legal procedures, and repeated efforts were made to contact the hospital administration. However, no payment was made, leading to the decision to freeze the hospital's bank account. "Under Sections 509 to 516 of the Uttar Pradesh Municipal Corporation Act, 1959, the government has the authority to seize movable assets in case of unpaid dues. Exercising this power, the corporation froze the hospital's bank account. Until a 'No Dues Certificate' is obtained from the Lucknow Municipal Corporation, no funds can be withdrawn from the seized accounts," an LMC official stated.

Lucknow Municipal Corporation officials confirmed that the bank accounts would remain frozen until the dues are fully paid.

"The corporation remains committed to taking similar strict actions in the future to ensure tax compliance," the officials said.

Couple beaten up, woman molested

Lucknow (PNS): A couple walking on foot was allegedly hit by two bike riders in the Husainganj area here. When the couple protested, the riders, along with their friends, allegedly beat up the couple and molested the woman. While running away, the accused allegedly hurled stones at the couple. A case was registered in this regard.

The victim, who is a resident of Raja Bazaar in Chowk, stated in his complaint that his relative had died on Sunday evening and he was going to Husainganj along with his wife to pay their last respect. He further said that while they were near Yojana Bhawan, Ravi and Kunal hit him with their

from behind. When he confronted them, they allegedly abused him and sped off.

"After a while, the bikers came back with their friends and beat me. When my wife tried to intervene, she was also beaten," he alleged. He further alleged that the accused molested his wife, pelted them with stones, and deprived them of money. However, seeking to downplay the incident, police termed it a brawl following a road accident.

According to Inspector Ram Kumar Gupta, a dispute between the two parties ensued following the accident. He added that the police were trying to track down the accused.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that my daughter's name is recorded as Anvi Sonkar in the Aadhaar card while it is Vaidika Sonkar in the birth certificate, which is correct. Now my daughter should be known and recognized everywhere by the name Vaidika Sonkar. Manish Sonkar, S/o Chedi Lal Sonkar Residence - 200 Madari Gali, Mahajani Tola, District - Ayodhya.

NOTICE

This is to inform that my mother Jeet Kaur died on 03-06-2007 and house no. 289/295 is situated in Moti Nagar Lucknow was mortgaged under loan by Piramal Capital and Housing Finance limited. All the dues of loan has been paid and I want the paper of this property to be issued (loan code - 193LUK01346). Bhagat Singh S/O Jeet Kaur R/O, 9 Vinayak Bhawan, A.P.Sen Road Charbagh Lucknow- 226001 (U.P)

NOTICE

On 07.03.2025, Shiv Narayan executed the deed in favour of Shri Subedar Yadav son of Ganga Prasad in Gata No. 446 Gha Akbarpur Bahar area Pargana and Tehsil Binkdi District Fatehpur on 12.09.1991. The said Shri Shiv Narayan was going to Binkdi with both the original deeds and other documents of the deed dated 20.09.1995 executed in favour of Smt. Sampat Devi, wife of the above Subedar Yadav. Which have fallen somewhere on the way. Samarjeet son Bhikhu Lal Pal Village Ghanvakheda, Police Station Kotwali Binkdi Fatehpur.

NOTICE

My sons MOHAMMAD OMAR KHAN's and MOHAMMAD JIBRIL KHAN's school documents needs correction in Parent's Name. Their father's name and mother's name need to be modified from MOHAMMAD SHORAB KHAN and SHABILA KHAN and the correct name should be written and read as SHORAB KHAN and SHABILA KHAN respectively. SHORAB KHAN, 529K/368, Khurram Nagar, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh-226022

NOTICE

I have changed my name from G A N G A SINGH To SURAJ THAPA for all future purposes, Suraj Thapa S/o Late Ganga Singh R/O 15/268, Civil Lines, Kanpur Nagar

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I, Gopal Chaturvedi S/o Shri Dinesh Chandra Chaturvedi, R/O Village - Bhawanipur Pratap, Post - Gudhani, District - Kannauj, hereby declare that due to an error, my name has been recorded as Neeraj Kumar Chaturvedi and my D O B as 01/01/1989 in my Aadhaar card, which is incorrect. My correct name is Gopal Chaturvedi, and my correct D O B is 07/07/1988.

सूचना

मैंने अपना नाम MOHD HASAN से बदलकर MOHAMMAD HASAN कर लिया है जिसमें मुझे इसी नाम से जाना पहचाना जाए, MOHAMMAD HASAN S/O AMEER HASAN R/O 105/94 CHAMAN GANJ SAIDABAD KANPUR U.P 208001

NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that I, Mohammad Azeem, son of Mohammad Shameem, resident of 3/19/25 Gourapatti, Kotwali Nagar Cantt, Ayodhya district, do hereby solemnly declare that in the passport no. R-6196505 issued on 01-01-2018, the name of the declarant is written as Azeem, whereas in the Aadhaar card it is Mohammad Azeem. In the future, I should be known and recognized by the name Mohammad Azeem.

NOTICE

I Khammpati Sree Ram Resident of H.No -1-21, Punukollu village, Pedapadu mandal West Godavari Dist. Andhra Pradesh have changed my name from Khammpati Sree Ram to Kambhampati Sree Ram vide affidavit no. 46aa335844 dtd. 12-03-2025 at Kanpur .

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Akanksha Manwar to Akanksha Sharma. Now I should be known by this name, Akanksha Sharma W/o Awadhesh Sharma, D/o Vinod Manwar, Resident Shivpuri Colony, Agra.

NOTICE

My Correct Name is Sri Raj Singh but unsoundly in Adhar card my name is wrongly mentioned Raj Singh in my school certificate name Sri Raj Singh. Sri Raj Singh S/o Ramkripal Singh R/O 4 B/110, Awasthi Colony Hanspuram, Naubasta, Kanpur Nagar

Butler Palace to be transformed into book café, cultural centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In a bid to preserve the historical heritage of the state, the Uttar Pradesh government has initiated the transformation of Butler Palace in Lucknow into a book café and cultural centre. As part of this initiative, the café will host various activities, including exhibitions, workshops, and an art gallery.

Originally built in 1915 by Raja Mahmudabad in memory of Sir Spencer Harcourt Butler, the then Deputy Commissioner of Awadh, Butler Palace holds significant historical value. To restore and repurpose it while preserving its original structure, the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) has launched the rejuvenation process. This public-private partnership

(PPP) project will be overseen by a special team formed by the LDA. According to the project timeline, the restoration and development of Butler Palace will be completed by March 2025. The plan includes site clearance, structural repairs, external façade conservation, basic wiring, and operational setup, all under the supervision of experts.

Additionally, efforts will increase public engagement and raise awareness about heritage conservation.

The book café at Butler Palace will not only provide study material but also offer snacks and beverages for visitors. To further enhance its role as a cultural hub, the palace will host various events, with support from coaching

institutes for its operations and promotion.

The renovated Butler Palace will serve as a venue for workshops and classes promoting local art, culture, and heritage. The space will also be available for exhibitions and film screenings, showcasing local artists and historical narratives. An art gallery will be set up to highlight the history of the palace and the surrounding region.

Additionally, a light and sound show depicting stories from Lucknow's history and folklore will be organised, offering an immersive experience for visitors. Butler Palace will be a centre for art exhibitions, craft fairs, and displays of local handicrafts.

Commercial Showroom for sale at MG Marg, Civil Lines, Allahabad

for more details Please Contact Mr. Soumitra Acharya (83840 75292)

Residential Bungalow for sale at Hastings Road, Allahabad admeasuring 9733 sq ft

for more details Please Contact Mr. Soumitra Acharya (83840 75292)

Govt cracks down on docs involved in private practice

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh government has begun cracking down on doctors involved in private practice despite being employed in government hospitals. A total of 17 doctors across several districts have been found engaged in private practice, prompting strong action from the state government. Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak has expressed displeasure over the matter and directed the principal secretary (Health) to initiate departmental action against the erring doctors.

In UP government-employed doctors are prohibited from engaging in private practice, with the government providing a non-practicing allowance (NPA) to doctors to discourage such practices. Despite this, several doctors have continued private practice, violating the rules.

According to Deputy CM Brajesh Pathak, the doctors identified include 10 medical officers from Balrampur district, six from Hathras, and one from Kushinagar. The government has mandated that departmental action be taken against these doctors, and the Principal Secretary (Health), Parth Sarthi Sen Sharma, has been instructed to carry out the necessary steps.

The doctors identified in the private practice violation include Dr Hira Lal, Dr Ramesh Kumar Pandey (Memorial District Hospital, Balrampur), Dr Rajesh Kumar Singh (paediatrician, Balrampur), Dr Pankaj Verma, Dr Umesh Kushwaha, Dr Nitin Chaudhary (Joint District Medical Officer, Balrampur), Dr PK Mishra (MIK District Women's Hospital, Balrampur), Dr Mahesh Kumar Verma, Dr Nagma Khan, Dr Jai Singh Gautam (Kauvapur Primary Health Centre, Balrampur), Dr Richa Kalra (Community Health Centre, Mursan, Hathras), Dr Sunil Kumar Verma (Primary Health Centre, Chandpa, Hathras), Dr Meenakshi Mohan (Community Health Centre, Kursanda, Hathras), Dr Brij Narayan Awasthi (Community Health Centre, Mhow, Hathras), Dr Mridul Jaju (Community Health Centre, Sikandraro, Hathras), Dr Danveer Singh (Kushinagar), and Dr SN Tripathi (Additional CMO). The state government has vowed to enforce strict action to ensure doctors adhere to the regulations and focus on their duties in government hospitals.

LU launches online course on universal human values

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The University of Lucknow, in collaboration with the National Coordination Committee for Induction Program (NCCIP) on Universal Human Values (UHV) and following UGC directives, has launched a six-day online short-term course (STC) on Universal Human Values. The programme, led by Vice-Chancellor Prof Alok Kumar Rai, is organised by the Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centre (MMTTC) to promote value-based education. MMTTC Director Prof Kamal Kumar and programme coordinator Dr Manisha Shukla are overseeing the initiative.

The inaugural session began with a welcome address from Prof Kamal Kumar. UGC Chairman Prof M Jagadesh Kumar Mamidala sent his blessings, and Dr Rajneesh Arora, President of NCCIP, delivered an address. Contributions from Dr Rajul Asthana and representatives of UGC, AICTE, and NCCIP enriched the event.

Dr Arora highlighted the need to integrate universal human values into the education system, aligning with UGC's mission to foster ethical, moral, and holistic learning. He also discussed UGC's ongoing efforts to promote these values in academia. The course has attracted over 75 participants nationwide. Many attendees praised the programme's relevance in nurturing a holistic, value-based approach to education and life.

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)

CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792
Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai- 600031.
Tel. : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

Notice under Section 13 (2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002

The following borrowers and co-borrowers availed the below mentioned secured loans from IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) The loans of the below-mentioned borrowers and co-borrowers have been secured by the mortgage of their respective properties. As they have failed to adhere to the terms and conditions of the respective loan agreements and had become irregular, their loan were classified as NPA as per the RBI guidelines. Amounts due by them to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) are mentioned as per respective notices issued more particularly described in the following table and further interest on the said amounts shall also be applicable and the same will be charged as per contractual rate with effect from their respective dates.

| Sr No. | Loan Account No. | Type of Loan | Section 13 (2) Notice Date | Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice |
|--------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | 118176889 | LOAN AGAINST PROPERTY | 27.02.2025 | 15,34,410.04/- |

NAME OF BORROWERS AND CO-BORROWERS : 1. ISHTIYAQU AHMAD 2. JALIL AHMAD 3. JARINA BANO

PROPERTY ADDRESS : ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF LAND NO. 1038 MIN., LAND AREA 840 SQ. FT. I.E. 78.07 SQ. MTRS., SITUATED AT VILLAGE: BALHAGHAT, ANDAR NAGAR PALLIKA, PARGANA & TEHSIL: SADARA, DISTRICT-PRATAPGARH, UTTAR PRADESH- 230001, AND BOUNDED AS:- EAST: HOUSE OF RAJJAN, WEST: HOUSE OF ASHIK ALI, NORTH: KACCHA RASTA 8 WIDE, SOUTH: HOUSE OF RAJJAB

| Sr No. | Loan Account No. | Type of Loan | Section 13 (2) Notice Date | Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice |
|--------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 2 | 126623668 | LOAN AGAINST PROPERTY | 15.02.2025 | 8,29,873.14/- |

NAME OF BORROWERS AND CO-BORROWERS : 1. MR. MITHAL LAL 2. MS. GIRJA DEVI

PROPERTY ADDRESS : ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF LAND NO. 48, ADMEASURING 1398.75 SQ. FT. I.E. 130 SQ. MTR., VILLAGE PURE KHUSI, PARGANA AND TEHSIL, SADAR, DISTRICT PRATAPGARH, NR. DEVGHAT GALI MOHANGANJ, UTTAR PRADESH- 230002, AND BOUNDED AS: EAST: KHET OF GANGA VISHVKARMA, ARUN KUMAR SINGH, WEST: CHAKMAR 83' WIDE, NORTH: ANSH NO. HAJA, SOUTH: ANSH NO. HAJA

You are hereby called upon to pay the amounts to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) as per the details shown in the above table with contracted rate of interest thereupon from their respective dates and other costs, charges etc. within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to initiate proceedings, under Section 13 (4) and section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, against the mortgaged properties mentioned hereinabove to realize the amount due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited). Further you are prohibited under Section 13 (13) of the said Act from transferring the said secured assets either by way of sale/lease or otherwise.

Date: 19.03.2025 IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with Place : UTTAR PRADESH IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)

Sd/- Authorized Officer

Police warn of action against those spreading rumours in Sambhal

...AFTER DENIAL OF PERMISSION FOR ANNUAL NEJA MELA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sambhal

After officials denied permission to the organisers for the annual 'Neja Mela', a police official on Tuesday said social media is being monitored and strict action will be taken against anyone spreading rumours.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Additional Superintendent of Police of Sambhal Shrish Chandra said, "It (Neja Mela) was a wrong tradition, it is not right to move forward with wrong traditions. They (the organisers) have been informed that it is not right to move forward with wrong traditions, that is why permission was not given."

He said objections had been raised saying it was not right to make a flag in the memory of invader Mahmud Ghaznavi's nephew and military commander Syed Salar Masud Ghazi, who came to the country with the aim of looting.

"That is why permission was not given. There is complete peace in the area and a flag march was also done," he said.

Asked what if the organisers move court, Chandra said they are free to go anywhere.

"All parties will be informed with facts that this Neja Mela was illegal and hence, permission was not granted (to it)," he said.

"Social media is being monitored. The Media Cell is also monitoring it. If anyone spreads rumours, strict action will be taken against the guilty persons," he said.

Shahid Hussain Masoodi, the president of the Nagar Neja Mela Committee told reporters, "This year also we had informed the sub-divisional magistrate 10 days ago that the shield (dhaaf) will be planted on March 18 and the Neja Mela will be organised at different places from March 25 to March 27."

"Yesterday, we met the Additional SP, he did not grant permission to organise the fair. In this matter, we will meet the senior officials of the district and talk to them," he said.

Shahzad Alam, a shopkeeper at Chaman Sarai, said, "I came to know today that the administration has refused permission for the Neja Mela. I have been seeing this fair for the last 30-35 years. Today for the first time I came to know that Salar Ghazi was a looter and murderer."

Sanjay Sankhydhar, a resident of Sambhal district, said this is the right decision of the administration. After



Security personnel conduct a flag march in view of protests over administration's restrictions on century-old Neja mela in Sambhal

PTI

Independence in 1947, these events, which are a symbol of slavery, should have been banned. It is now that permission for it has not been granted, he said.

Sankhydhar lauded the administration's step. He said Salar Ghazi looted Sambhal and destroyed ancient civilisation.

"The local festival here, Dhvaj Mela, is celebrated after Holi. In 2022 and 2023, this fair was named Sadbhavana Mela," he said.

The three-day Mela was scheduled to be held from March 25. However, the Sambhal district administration and police have issued orders disallowing the annual event. The Sambhal district has been tense since riots broke out on November 24 last year during protests against a court-ordered survey of the Mughal-era Shahi Jama Masjid. The mosque has been at the centre of a major row after a petition claimed that it was the site of an ancient Hindu temple.

Four people were killed and several others, including police personnel, were injured in the clashes.

The Sambhal police have firmly told the Neja Mela Committee that permission will not be granted for an

event to commemorate someone "who looted the country". They termed holding the event as treason, the officials said.

The fair, traditionally held on the second Tuesday after Holi, is preceded by the symbolic pitching of a 30-ft pole with a green flag on top in the Mela ground on the first Tuesday. However, this year, the administration has categorically refused to allow the event.

On Monday, members of the Neja Mela Committee met ASP Shirish at Sambhal Kotwali to seek permission for the event.

During the meeting, the ASP inquired from the committee members who the fair was dedicated to. The ASP firmly denied permission when he was told that it was in the memory of Ghazi. "The historical records are clear he was a commander under Mahmud Ghaznavi who looted Somnath and was responsible for massacres. No fair will be held in memory of a looter and murderer. If anyone attempts to pitch the pole, they will be considered treason," ASP Chandra reportedly told the committee and asked them to give an application to the magistrate if they wanted to hold the fair.

Meanwhile the painting work at the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal entered its third day on Tuesday, with the deadline set by the Allahabad High Court expiring on Wednesday.

The whitewashing of the outer wall of the Shahi Jama Masjid began on Sunday morning under the supervision of the ASI in line with a high court order, an advocate of the mosque committee said. The Mughal-era mosque here has been at the centre of a major row after a petition claimed that it was the site of an ancient Hindu temple. The mosque's president, Zafar Ali, expressed the hope that the work would be completed by the deadline. He hinted that if needed, they would request an extension of one or two days from the court.

Speaking to reporters, Ali stated, "We are hopeful that the work will be completed by tomorrow. However, if there is any delay, we will appeal to the Hon'ble court for additional time." He attributed the minor delays to the Holi holidays and preparations for Friday prayers. The ongoing work including painting and decoration is being carried out under the supervision of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

NSG mock drill at Mayawati's house triggers panic

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Amid the alleged internal strife going on in the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the major reshuffle in responsibilities, panic gripped the party leaders and workers when a team of National Security Guard (NSG) suddenly entered the house of party's president Mayawati here on Tuesday morning.

The team was followed by ambulances, fire tenders, etc, which also entered the bungalow occupied by the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister in Mall Avenue and later came out with an "injured person" lying inside.

During this time, the UP Police staff was also present inside and outside the house. The medical team was also present during this time. Everyone's eyes were fixed on the gate of the house, as they wanted to know what had happened that suddenly NSG commandos entered the house of the BSP chief and the ambulance also came out with someone "injured".

However, it turned out to be a mock drill at the house of the BSP supreme, who has NSG security. The mock drill was conducted by NSG commandos at her residence (9 Mall Avenue) to review security preparedness and to find out if the forces were ready to face any eventuality or emergency.

Security personnel, drivers, and NSG security personnel were involved in the entire exercise. Local police, fire department, and medical team were also present with ambulances, fire tenders, etc. After a while, NSG commandos and officers were seen coming out of Mayawati's residence.

There are only a few selected leaders in Uttar Pradesh who have got security from NSG. Among them are the current Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and the third is Mayawati herself. NSG commandos are always deployed in this residence for Mayawati's security.

Man returning home after wife's death dies in road accident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bareilly

A man returning home after hearing about his wife's death lost his life in a road accident in Mirganj area here, police said on Tuesday. The deceased, identified as Sanjay (28), was on a motorcycle with his younger brother Rinku (22) when an unidentified vehicle hit them on National Highway-24 late Monday night.

Sanjay died on the spot, while Rinku sustained serious injuries and is undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Bareilly, police said. "Sanjay, a resident of Ramuapur Raghuvir village in Bahraich's Kaiserganj police station area, was working as a labourer in Punjab. Upon receiving news of his wife's death, he immediately left for home with his younger brother. Unfortunately, he met with a fatal accident in Bareilly," said Superintendent of Police (North) Mukesh Chandra Mishra.

"Doctors declared Sanjay dead on arrival, while Rinku remains in critical condition...Sanjay's body was sent for post-mortem and has now been transported to Bahraich," he added.

The fatal accident took place when they reached Mirganj on NH-24, where a speeding unidentified vehicle rammed into their bike.

Both brothers were thrown onto the road along with the motorcycle due to the impact. The bystanders and locals informed the police, who arrived at the scene and rushed them to the hospital.

Sanjay married Pooja six years ago and the couple have a four-year-old daughter, the family members said.

The family was anticipating joy as Pooja was due to deliver their second child on Monday. However, tragedy struck when she died during childbirth at a hospital in Bahraich. Upon receiving the heartbreaking news, Sanjay became restless and was eager to reach home quickly. The bereaved family has decided to conduct the last rites of both Sanjay and his wife together.

Meanwhile, Mirganj Police has registered a case against the unidentified vehicle and launched an investigation. "We are scanning CCTV footage from the area to trace the vehicle involved in the hit-and-run," Mishra said.

RLD leader vows to strengthen party base

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Rashtriya Lok Dal's newly appointed national general secretary, Anil Dubey, outlined the party's efforts to reconnect with the followers and supporters of Chaudhary Charan Singh and Chaudhary Ajit Singh in a bid to expand its influence in central, Purvanchal, and Bundelkhand regions.

Speaking in his home district of Gonda, Dubey emphasised the need to restore the party's mass base, which had been lost over time.

Addressing a gathering where he was warmly welcomed by party officials, workers, and well-wishers, Dubey discussed the importance of building on the legacy of RLD's founders and strengthening the party ahead of the 2027 assembly elections. He also stated that RLD would be contesting the upcoming district panchayat elections as part of its strategy to regain political ground.

Dubey took the opportunity to criticise Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, urging them to clarify their stance on the anti-Hindi remarks made by the Tamil Nadu chief

minister.

He questioned whether they supported Hindi in Tamil Nadu or not, seeking clarity on their position. Dubey also praised the Yogi government, highlighting its focus on all-round development in Uttar Pradesh. He claimed that the state's growth had been hindered during previous Congress and Samajwadi Party regimes, contrasting it with the current administration's efforts for progress. "Our organisation will be strengthened ahead of the 2027 elections. RLD will contest the district panchayat elections. We will not compromise on the honour and interests of farmers," Dubey asserted.

Earlier, Dubey received a warm welcome as he toured several locations, including Jarwal Road, Karnailganj, Balpur, Gonda Sadar, Ambedkar Chauraha, and Chaupal Sagar. Party flags, banners, and hoardings were displayed along the route. Upon reaching the Irrigation department's field hostel, Dubey paid tribute to Chaudhary Charan Singh by garlanding his statue, before engaging with party officials, workers, and supporters present there.

Guv distributes pre-school, health kits in Kushinagar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Gorakhpur

Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel on Tuesday distributed pre-school and health kits in the Kushinagar district, officials said here.

The programme was held at the Kushinagar Collectorate premises, aiming to strengthen Anganwadi centres and promote early childhood education. Two-hundred-fifty Anganwadi centres in the district will receive these kits in the days to come. Inspecting various stalls at the event, Patel emphasised self-reliance and skill development.

"Children must be nurtured from an early age to become mentally, physically and intellectually strong. Just as we prepare the land before sowing seeds, we must prepare children with the right education and values," she said. Children from Anganwadi centres showcased cultural performances, including cleanliness-themed songs and plays. Impressed by their efforts, Patel remarked, "Cleanliness should be ingrained in every child. The message of hygiene they

conveyed today must reach every household." Essay winners of the National Women's Day, Jhanvi and Shreya Dwivedi, spoke about the role of women in a developed India. Patel underscored gender equality and said, "Whether a son or daughter, every child deserves equal education and opportunities. Women's empowerment is key to a developed India." She also distributed benefits, including residential lease certificates to Musahar community members, 'One district, one product' (ODOP) toolkits and Ayushman Bharat cards. Stressing the importance of healthcare, she said, "Every girl aged nine to 14 should receive a cancer vaccine. No family should be deprived of essential medical facilities." Patel instructed officials to ensure proper healthcare for senior citizens, monitor medicines and tighten border surveillance.

She called for strict action against dowry, child marriage and drug abuse, stating, "Social evils must be eradicated for a progressive society." The event saw the participation of local legislators, district officials and Anganwadi workers.

Strong ICU network in dist hospitals ensures timely care

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh government's efforts to strengthen intensive care units (ICUs) in district hospitals are yielding results. In seven district hospitals, where ICU specialists have been trained, 1,498 critically ill patients received timely treatment and recovered, a senior official said.

With ICUs in 10 district hospitals now fully operational and specialist training ongoing for 19 more hospitals, the state's healthcare infrastructure is rapidly improving, ensuring advanced medical care closer to home, he added. Principal Secretary (Health and Medical Education) Parth Sarathi Sen Sharma shared that CM Yogi Adityanath's vision to strengthen ICUs across all district hospitals started taking shape

in February 2024. Under the CARE-UP (Critical Care Advancement and Readiness Enhancement for Upcoming ICU Professionals) programme, selected doctors and paramedical staff were trained to operate ICUs and ventilators. He mentioned that the government assigned this responsibility to Prof Anshul Jain, head of the anaesthesia department at Maharani Laxmi Bai (MLB) Medical College, Jhansi, who is also the Director of MLB Paramedical College. Sharma further stated that so far, two batches in Jhansi and one batch in KGMU (Lucknow) have completed their training. The trainees include doctors, nurses, lab technicians, and pharmacists. ICU units are now fully operational in district hospitals of Lucknow (Civil Hospital & Lokbandhu Hospital),

Barabanki, Gorakhpur, Banda, Jhansi, and Prayagraj. Additionally, doctors from Agra District Hospital, Meerut Women's Hospital, and Kannauj District Hospital have also been trained, with instructions from the director general of training to activate their ICU units soon. Dr Anshul Jain stated that training is ongoing for doctors and paramedical staff from Kanpur Nagar, Rae Bareilly, Unnao, Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Moradabad, Varanasi, Chandauli, Azamgarh, Mau, Ballia, Mathura, Firozabad, Meerut, Bulandshahr, Chitrakoot, Etawah, Shamli, and Muzaffarnagar. Once training is complete, ICUs in 29 district hospitals will be fully operational, reducing the need to refer critical patients to Lucknow. The principal secretary further shared that while district hospitals

already have ventilators and oxygen facilities, the lack of trained staff led to frequent patient referrals. The Yogi government took serious action to address this issue by training doctors and paramedics. Once all staff members are trained, district hospitals will be fully equipped to provide advanced critical care, transforming the state's healthcare system.

"Eleven ICU beds are now fully operational here. Following the training, critical patients are being admitted without hesitation. Over the past months, hundreds of patients have received treatment here. The trained staff is now efficiently handling ventilators and other ICU equipment, ensuring smooth and effective patient care," Dr Deepak Kumar Maurya, ICU incharge, Lokbandhu Hospital, said.

इंडियन बैंक
(भारत सरकार का उपक्रम)

इलाहाबाद

Indian Bank
(A Govt. of India Undertaking)

ALLAHABAD

POSSESSION NOTICE (for Immovable Property)
(Under Rule-8 (1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002)

Whereas, the undersigned being the authorised officer of the Indian Bank under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, (Act 54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3, 8 and 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice as detailed here in below calling upon the borrower to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The Borrowers/Guarantors having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrowers/ Guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of the powers conferred on him/her under section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 and 9 of the said Rules.

The Borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the properties will be subject to the charges of the Indian Bank.

The Borrower's / Guarantor's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

This Possession Notice is being served to the Borrower (s), Guarantor (s) & Mortgagor (s) to deposit the said dues. Details as under:

| S. N. | Name & Address of the Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s)/ Proprietor / Mortgagors | Description of the Immovable Property | Dt. of Demand Notice Dt. of Possession Outstanding Amount |
|---|---|--|--|
| Branch : Rajkamal Road Barabanki | | | |
| 1. | Mr Kamla Prasad S/O Late Abhiraj (Borrower-Mortgagor), Add- Vill Badatal, Post- Tindola, Nawabganj, Distt- Barabanki 225001 | All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Kharsa No 867 min, Vill Palia Masoodpur, Pargana Dewa, Tehsil Nawabganj Distt Barabanki within the registration Sub-district Nawabganj and District Barabanki, Area: 185.80 sq mtr belongs to Shri Kamla Prasad (CERSAI Asset ID 200015693629 & Security ID: 400015728206) Bounded by:- North: Kaccha Rasta 25 Ft, South: Bhooni Deegar, East: Plot no 39, West: Plot no 41 | 11.12.2024 12.03.2025 Rs. 24,14,632.94 and interest thereon from 11.12.2024 |

Date : 19.03.2025 Place: Barabanki Authorised Officer Indian Bank

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)

CIN : L65110TN2414PLC09792

Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chelpet, Chennai- 600031.

Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

IDFC FIRST Bank

**APPENDIX IV [Rule 8(1)]
POSSESSION NOTICE
(For immovable property)**

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 16.10.2024 calling upon the borrower, co-borrowers and guarantors 1. MADHURI DEVI (IN THE CAPACITY OF AVAILABLE LEGAL HEIR OF LATE SHIVA RASTOGI), 2. MADHURI DEVI, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being RS. 5,50,899.15/- (Rupees Five Lac Fifty Thousand Eight Hundred Ninety Nine and Fifteen Paise Only) as on 16.10.2024 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Demand notice.

The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic Possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this 12th day of MAR 2025.

The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of THE IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) for an amount of RS. 5,50,899.15/- (Rupees Five Lac Fifty Thousand Eight Hundred Ninety Nine and Fifteen Paise Only) and interest thereon.

The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

| DESCRIPTION OF MORTGAGE PROPERTY | |
|--|---|
| ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF PLOT NO. 42, AREA 1500 SQ. FT. I.E., 139.405 SQ. METER, PART OF LAND GATA NO.1045, SITUATED AT MOHALLA - SATISH NAGAR COLONY, NEAR VILLAGE-MEERPUR TEHSIL LAKHIMPUR PARGANA & DISTRICT-KHERI, UTTAR PRADESH 262701 AND, BOUNDED AS: EAST: RASTA 6 MTR., WEST: PLOT OF SELLER, NORTH: PLOT NO. 41 SHOBHA DEVI, SOUTH: PLOT NO. 43 SELLER | |
| Date: 12-03-2025 | Authorised Officer |
| Place: UTTAR PRADESH | IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) |
| Loan Account No: 138197682 | |

Chandigarh DGP stresses on involvement of local communities for sustainable dev

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Chandigarh Director General of Police (DGP) Dr Surendra Singh Yadav said for sustainable development and continuous search for peace, we will have to take the local communities into confidence and establish the concept of justice and dignity inherent in those traditions at the global level. Speaking as the chief guest in the inaugural ceremony of the three-day international seminar organised by Malaviya Peace Research Centre in Banaras Hindu University (BHU) here on Tuesday, he said there are progressive concepts of peace philosophy in the southern hemisphere of the world which we should make a part of the knowledge tradition of developed countries.

"A comprehensive system of thinking about peace exists in the local communities of the north-eastern states of India, which should be used for conflict resolution", Dr Yadav suggested.

Vice-Chancellor of Nalanda University and special guest Prof Abhay Kumar Singh described peace as a concept like health, whose value is understood only after it ends. He described the expansion of knowledge and compassion inherent in



Chandigarh DGP Dr SS Yadav addressing an international seminar at BHU in Varanasi on Tuesday

the Sanatan tradition as the inevitable starting point of peace.

Delivering the keynote address, Prof Jyoti M Pathania of Jindal School of International Relations (Haryana) described Varanasi as a beacon of multi-religious and multi-cultural peace building.

Prof Pathania underlined with statistics that only 0.03 per cent of the global military budget is spent on peace building. He underlined the need to read the concept of peace in the plural form and highlighted the

importance of the concept of Shanti Sena and Jai Jagat contained in the thinking of Mahatma Gandhi.

Special guest Prof Anju Sharan Upadhyaya highlighted the ill-effects of globalisation and commercialism on local communities. She described cultural diversity and sensitivity as essential elements for peace building. While presiding over the programme, Dean of Social Sciences Faculty (BHU) Prof Binda D Paranjape advocated for linking the Indian concept of environmental thinking with the global discourse on peace building.

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This three-day programme held at the Sambodhi auditorium was attended by representatives from countries like Ireland, Sweden, Iceland etc along with many renowned teachers and activists of peace studies at the national level. The welcome address was given by the coordinator of Peace Centre Prof Manoj Kumar Mishra and the vote of thanks was proposed by Dr Sunita Singh. The programme was conducted by Prof SP Singh, Chief Proctor, BHU, Prof Ghanshyam, Dr Sanjay Kumar, Prof Sushmita Singh, Dr Priyanka Jha, Prof Ravi Dutt Bajpai, Dr Vaishali Raghuvanshi, Prof Rajiv Singh and researchers.

Emphasis on skill dev for achieving Viksit Bharat goal



IITDM Director Prof BK Singh at inaugural function of a seminar at IUCTE in Varanasi on Tuesday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Director of Indian Institute of Information Technology, Design and Manufacturing (IIITDM), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) Prof BK Singh said to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat @ 2047, it is necessary to focus on skill development in every sector as the number of skilled workforce in the country is limited. He was speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural function of a two-day national seminar on the topic 'Transforming Assessment Approaches in Higher Education for Vision- 2047' which was organised in hybrid mode at the IUCTE campus under the joint aegis of Inter-University Centre of Teacher Education (IUCTE), BHU (Varanasi) and Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, on IUCTE campus on Tuesday.

Prof Singh said there is a need to improve assessment methods in this task. He also underlined that skill development in students is essential and highlighted the important role of assessment in all educational institutions.

Chairing the session, IUCTE Director Prof Prem Narayan Singh said in accordance with Vision 2047, do the country, society and people need 'Achhe Aadmi' or 'skilled barbarian'? He said the kind of development, country and society we want, the same kind of education system is needed. "We also need to think deeply on the education of humanity. We need to re-examine the assessment methods", he added. As the keynote speaker, Prof Arvind Kumar Jha of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, while delivering his lecture on the topic 'Challenges in Current Assessment Practices', said that education is a discourse so we should constantly think about pedagogy, assessment etc for education and one thing in the country's education system, which needs to be changed, is assessment.

tem, which needs to be changed, is assessment. "The changes in assessment methods have also been mentioned in the recommendations of various education commissions of India", he said.

Prof Pradeep Kumar Mishra of National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi, in his speech on 'Global Assessment Trends' said that there is no fixed method of assessment, there are constant changes in this field, so it is necessary for us teachers to keep ourselves updated by not adopting any particular assessment strategy. "Only then can we assess the students correctly", Prof Mishra said.

Earlier, the programme was inaugurated with Mangalacharan and floral tribute and lighting of lamps at the statue of Maa Saraswati and Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. This seminar is providing an important platform for the teachers of Indian universities to deliberate in depth on the transformative areas of educational assessment. It is providing an opportunity to brainstorm on the need to re-evaluate assessment strategies in view of the dynamism in the educational scenario of the 21st century and with the innovative and comprehensive goals set in Vision 2047.

Researchers and teachers from 10 states, including Assam, Delhi, Bihar, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Punjab are participating in this two-day seminar. Seminar coordinator Dr Gyanendra Singh presented its outline. Dr Gyanendra Singh conducted and coordinated the seminar and welcomed the guests. It was co-ordinated by Dr Raj Singh. In this workshop, the centre's Prof Ashish Srivastava (Dean, Academic and Research), Prof Ajay Kumar Singh, Dr Vinod Kumar Singh, Dr Deepthi Gupta, Dr Kushagri Singh, Dr Raja Pathak, Dr Sunil Kumar Tripathi, Dr Anil Kumar along with academic and non-academic staff were present.

Cleanliness fortnight launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The activists of Namami Gange launched Swachhata Pakhwada (cleanliness fortnight) on Tuesday under the aegis of National Clean Ganga Mission of Union Jal Shakti Ministry.

The cleanliness campaign will run till March 31. People were also called upon to join it by cleaning the banks of Ganga at Assi Ghat.

A magazine showing complete details of Namami Gange project published by Jal Shakti Ministry was also distributed to the guests present on the stage of 'Subah e Banaras' at the ghat.

The volunteers, in coordination with Namami Gange (Kashi) coordinator and Municipal Corporation's Swachhata brand ambassador Rajesh Shukla, offered 'shramdaan' and removed clothes, polythene and religious items from Ganga water. The volunteers, with the help of Municipal Corporation employees, collected large amount of garbage from the banks of Ganga and sent it for disposal.

Rajesh Shukla said during the fortnight,



the people will also be made aware of cleaning the Ganga through awareness and public participation. People of urban areas, towns, ghats and rural areas situated on the banks of the river will be made aware about making the national river clean and preserving aquatic animals in it. Under this Swachhata Pakhwada, the people will be made aware to stop the flow of domestic waste in Ganga, reduce pollution and not to drain sewage into Ganga.

During the fortnight Ganga Sandesh

the Sanatan tradition as the inevitable starting point of peace.

Delivering the opening address of the seminar, UNESCO Chair Professor Priyanka Upadhyaya spoke about the need to include other local traditions in the Indian knowledge tradition. He underlined the need to read the concept of peace in the plural form and highlighted the

Medical officers told about hepatitis B, C

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The three-day training of medical officers was started in the Department of Gastroenterology in Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) on Tuesday by lighting a lamp and singing the Kulgeet. Inaugurated by the IMS-BHU Director Prof SN Sankhwar, the function was also attended by Dean of Modern Medicine Faculty Prof Shampa Anupurba, Medical Superintendent of Sir Sundarlal Hospital (SSH) Prof KK Gupta, Head of Department and Nodal Officer of the Programme Dr Devesh Prakash Yadav, Dr SK Shukla, Dr Anurag Tiwari, Dr Vinod Kumar and others.

Along with this, medical officers from 12 districts were present on the occasion. In this training, information was given about hepatitis B and C, its management and prevention. This programme was also addressed by Dr Juhi Singh and Dr Brajesh Pandey.

55-yr-old woman found dead

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

A 55-year-old woman was found dead in her room under mysterious circumstances in Phulpur Kotwali area. The body of Durgavati Devi, wife of Rajkumar Kanaujia of Saripur village, was found hanging in the room on Tuesday. She had returned to her in-laws' house from her maternal home just 12 hours ago. On Tuesday morning, when the door of the room did not open for a long

time, the family informed the police. The Phulpur police reached the spot and found the woman hanging from the ceiling. The police have sent the body for post-mortem examination after the 'panchnama' proceedings. According to Phulpur Station House Officer (SHO) Deen Dayal Singh the case is being investigated. The reasons for the woman hanging herself are not yet known. Police said the real situation will become clear on getting the post-mortem examination report.

Course on structural biology begins

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) course on 'structural biology techniques and its role in drug discovery' is being organised by the School of Biotechnology, Institute of Science, Banaras Hindu University (ISCBHU) till March 21 from under Ministry of Education initiative of GIAN. The GIAN is a programme of the Ministry of Education, Government of India. It is designed to tap the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs

internationally to encourage their engagement with the institutes of higher education in India so as to augment the country's existing academic resources, accelerate the pace of quality reform, and elevate India's scientific and technological capacity to global excellence. The programme is being attended by various participants of India. The inaugural function held on Monday was chaired by Prof SK Upadhyay, Dean, Faculty of Science in presence of local coordinator of GIAN Prof Madhu Tapadia and course coordinator Prof P Shukla.

NCL organises seminar on new Income Tax Bill

CORRESPONDENT ■ Sonbhadra

The Northern Coalfields Limited (NCL) organised a seminar on the "New Income Tax Bill and Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR)" aimed at enhancing financial awareness and compliance within the coal sector on Tuesday.

The NCL on the occasion launched three significant books to support financial and regulatory understanding. 'Ready Reckoner for Closing of Accounts - A guide to ensuring compliance and accuracy in financial reporting', 'Navigating SAP for Accounting - A Step-by-Step Handbook - A practical manual for accounting professionals' and 'Understanding GST on the Coal Industry - A comprehensive analysis of GST regulations impacting the coal sector'.

The meeting was chaired by Director (Finance), CIL, Mukesh Agrawal. The event also witnessed the presence of Directors (Finance) from all CIL subsidiaries, Jitendra Mallik, Director



(Technical), NCL and senior finance officials from various CIL subsidiaries.

The establishment of the new NCL Singrauli CPE Study Circle was announced, further strengthening professional learning and development initiatives.

Addressing the gathering, Mukesh Agrawal commended NCL for organising such a significant seminar, emphasising its role in fostering financial excellence and regulatory compliance across the coal industry.

Director (Finance), NCL, Rajneesh Narain, expressed gratitude to all participants for their valuable presence and extended his congratulations to the NCL finance team for their dedicated efforts in successfully organising the seminar.

Another milestone in fertility treatments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

Regency Health highlights an extraordinary success story from its IVF centre, emphasising the power of modern reproductive medicine. A patient struggling with primary subfertility due to tubal blockage underwent a successful IVF treatment in September 2020, leading to the birth of a healthy baby girl in June 2021. Three and a half years later, the couple returned to Regency Health to use their frozen embryos and in 2024, they welcomed twins, completing their family.

Senior consultant, Infertility and IVF specialist, Laparoscopic and Robotic surgeon at Regency Health, Dr Yuthika Bajpai, led the treatment with a meticulous approach. The patient first underwent laparoscopic bilateral salpingectomy for tubercular pyosalpinx, followed by IVF treatment. Eight embryos were formed, with three transferred in the first cycle and five cryopreserved for future use. The couple's decision to return for a second cycle in 2024 resulted in the successful birth of twins at 32 weeks, marking another milestone in Regency Health's commitment to excellence in fertility treatments.

"This case is a testament to the miracles of modern fertility treatments," said Dr Bajpai. "Many couples hesitate to return for a second IVF cycle after a successful pregnancy, but this family's journey shows how frozen embryos can provide hope and continuity. It is incredibly fulfilling to see how science and perseverance can turn dreams of parenthood into reality," she said.

Knp Metro: Preparations for expansion of passenger services in final stages

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

Preparations for the expansion of passenger services from Motijheel to Kanpur Central Station under Corridor-1 (IIT - Naubasta) of the Kanpur Metro Rail Project are in their final stages. As part of this, five new underground stations—Chunniganj, Naveen Market, Bada Chauraha, Nayaganj, and Kanpur Central—are being equipped with advanced facilities to enhance passenger convenience and safety. To ensure seamless navigation, LED-based signages have been installed at all these stations. Alongside the signages, a public information display system has been installed to provide real-time information about arriving and departing trains. This system, positioned at the concourse and platform levels, will help passengers stay informed about train schedules and estimated arrival times. It is particularly beneficial for hearing-impaired and specially-abled passengers, offering vital information at a glance.



Each station features over 275 LED-based signages spread across all three levels—ground, concourse and platform. These signages assist passengers in locating key areas such as entry and exit gates, ticket counters, platforms, station control rooms, drinking water facilities, toilets, lifts, fireman staircase, emergency gates, technical rooms (restricted to Metro staff) etc. Additionally, statutory signages such as fire safety instructions, emergency exits, and danger warnings have

been strategically placed across the stations. The extension of metro passenger services to Kanpur Central is contingent upon an inspection by the Commissioner of Metro Rail Safety (CMRS). In preparation for this, all necessary arrangements related to passenger convenience are being finalised. A recent inspection by the CMRS team has already taken place and a final inspection by the CMRS itself is expected soon. MD of Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Limited (UPMRC), Sushil Kumar, said, "Safety and convenience of passengers have been given top priority in the construction of metro stations. The installation of necessary signages and public information display systems for guiding passengers has been completed. Obtaining a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Commissioner of Metro Rail Safety (CMRS) is a crucial step before commencing passenger services. After receiving the NOC, the extension of metro services from Motijheel to Kanpur Central will be inaugurated shortly."

Take concrete steps to prevent cruelty towards animals: DM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

A meeting of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was held in the Collectorate auditorium under the chairmanship of District Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh on Tuesday. The DM directed the committee members to take concrete steps to prevent cruelty towards animals. He said the SPCA should ensure better treatment for injured animals and birds and provide them shelter at the facility established by the organisation. The district magistrate appealed to the public to bring any injured animal or bird to the hospital run by SPCA,

where they will receive proper treatment. The DM said interested individuals can adopt animals and birds that have been treated and rehabilitated by the organisation from the SPCA building located next to Raipurwa police station. For further information, people can contact the chief veterinary officer. The DM directed the removal of inactive committee members who were absent from the meeting and instructed that dedicated and hardworking individuals be inducted in the committee. He also instructed the Animal Husbandry department to construct multiple indoor hospitals for the treatment of injured animals and birds. The organisa-

tion's hospital is located in Lal Bangla. It was registered in 2015. The organisation's managing committee includes the DM as chairman and senior superintendent of police, municipal commissioner, district forest officer, chief veterinary officer, additional chief officer and district panchayat members as vice-chairpersons.

Bithoor Festival

Preparations have been completed for the upcoming Bithoor Festival, which will showcase a blend of culture of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The festival is scheduled to be held from March 21 to 23, for which the district administration had

been preparing for several days. The event will commence on March 21 at 11:00 am. On March 21, school students will present various cultural programmes, including dance, rangoli, slogan and art competitions. The festival will be inaugurated by the chief guest, UP Minister of Tourism and Culture, Jaiveer Singh, at 4 pm. Following the inauguration, Kanpur Kathak Kala Kendra will present Ganesh Vandana and a performance depicting the descent of the Ganga. The Prince Dance Group will showcase performances related to Lord Krishna and the Indian tricolour, while Ramakrish Sagar from Pune will present folk songs based on the

theme "From Godavari to Ganga-Jamuna." From 7 pm, Vinod Kumar Dwivedi and Ayush Dwivedi will perform Dhruwad singing, followed by the most exciting event of the evening—a 'Bhajan Sandhya' presented by Padma Shri Bhajan Samrat Anup Jalota. On March 22 school students will perform dance, singing and short plays, followed by a quiz competition by Kushan Patel Group. There will also be presentations by local artistes, a Ramayana-based theatrical performance by Shri Ram Kala Kendra and the much-awaited grand All India Kavi Sammelan. On March 23 the Maratha Group will demonstrate the use of historical weapons and give a lecture on the

life of Nana Rao Peshwa. Abhay Ji Mandke from Indore will present Geet Ramayana, followed by patriotic songs by Jeevan Dharmadhikari Maratha Group. Video clips will provide glimpses of Bithoor's culture and the festival. Jeevan Dharmadhikari Maratha Group will also release patriotic songs and showcase a documentary on Nana Rao Peshwa's life. Students and Maratha warriors will exhibit weapons used by freedom fighters of 1857. The Maratha Regiment will present Mallakhamba demonstrations, while Mohan Mishra from Hariharpur Gharana in Azamgarh will present an account of Rani Lakshmi Bai's personality and the history of Bithoor and Kanpur.

Rail fares lowest in region: Vaishnaw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

The minister said the prices in European countries are more than five times. He asserted that railway accidents have come down by 90 per cent from the time when RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav was at the ministry's helm.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sonia Gandhi seeks ₹400 minimum wage under MGNREGA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ED conducts searches against OSF beneficiaries in Bengaluru

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

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

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

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

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

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

Its total expenditure for India during 2021 was USD 4,06,000, as per official data. The OSF began working in India in 1999, offering scholarships and fellowships to students to pursue studies and research at Indian institutes.

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Editor's TAKE

New vistas with New Zealand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nepal's monarchy debate reignites

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



ASHOK K MEHTA

He has also accused Gyanendra of murdering his brother Birendra and a statue smuggler. NC General Secretary Gagan Thapa has asked the government to withdraw Gyanendra's privileges. Gyanendra's alleged role in the 2001 Palace massacre has resurfaced. There are calls for a fresh enquiry into the royal tragedy; the initial enquiry was done hastily. Conspicuously Gyanendra and his notorious son Paras were among the few survivors of the tragedy. On March 16, a royalist rally on the Durbar Marg between the main gate of the

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

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

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

Gathered by love, glued by familial bonds

SECOND Opinion



ASHA IYER KUMAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

still held me fast.

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

In those two days, I found myself moving through a reel of faces and voices, yet each encounter felt personal and profound as if no time had lapsed at all. It was not just a family gathering, it was a homecoming for the heart, a reminder that love, in its purest form, doesn't need constant tending to thrive. It waits patiently, ready to embrace us the moment we return.

All we need to nurture is a willingness to cruise into embraces and a bonding that are not encumbered by status, health conditions, time lapse, achievements or other highs and lows of a world that has no time to stand and share.

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

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

Leaderspeak

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

CHRISTOPHER LUXON, PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND



Letters to the Editor

INDIA TAKES CENTER STAGE

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

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

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

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

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

TRUMP AND PUTIN EYE 30-DAY CEASEFIRE

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

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

P VICTOR SELVARAJ | TAMIL NADU

SOUTH INDIA'S TRIPLE WHAMMY

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

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KOZHIKODE

HIMACHAL PRADESH APPLE GROWERS FEAR US TARIFF THREAT

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

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

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

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

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

Transforming education in a globalised era

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

FIRST
Column

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

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

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

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



SUDHIR HINDWAN

nurture a spirit of selfless service and brotherhood.

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

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

Another welcome regulation is the introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The peril of few holding the future

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

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

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

Lessons from nuclear non-proliferation

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

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

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

A climate governance

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

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

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

The need for equitable participation

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

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

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

Towards a global architecture

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

Purity and well-being: The true foundations of health

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI



ISHOO RATNA SRIVASTAV

SC seeks roadmap to fix builder-banks nexus

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the CBI to submit a roadmap on how it plans to unravel the "builder-banks nexus" which has duped thousands of homebuyers in the NCR as it proposed to go into the root of the matter.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh said thousands of homebuyers were affected by the subvention scheme, where banks paid 60 to 70 per cent of the home loan amount to the builders without projects being completed within the stipulated time.

Under the subvention scheme, banks disburse the sanctioned amount directly to the accounts of builders, who are then required to pay EMIs on the sanctioned loan amount until flats are handed over to homebuyers. After builders started defaulting on EMIs to banks, as per the tripartite agreement, the banks sought EMIs from the homebuyers. "We hope that there is no mafia involved," the bench said.

The court directed CBI counsel additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati to submit a proposal outlining the investigation and resources, manpower including financial experts it required. The bench also appointed advocate Rajiv Jain, as amicus curiae in the matter, saying he was a former Intelligence Bureau officer, and possessed the knowledge in dealing with such kinds of economic offences. "We don't want any reluctance on the part of the CBI. We want to go to the depth of it, to the ultimate extent. They will have a free hand," it added.

The top court was hearing a batch of petition filed by several homebuyers, who booked flats under subvention plans in various housing projects in NCR region especially Noida, Greater Noida and Gurugram, alleging that they were being forced by banks to pay EMIs despite no possession of flats. Bhati offered to start with Greater Noida area of Uttar Pradesh in the NCR region, where most housing projects have mushroomed, given the enormous size of the investigation.

Security grid for Katra-Srinagar Vande Bharat Express train

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Ahead of launching the Vande Bharat Express train from Katra to Srinagar in the coming weeks, a dedicated security grid comprising the Railway Protection Force (RPF), Government Railway Police (GRP), CRPF, and the Indian Army has been established to ensure fool-proof security arrangements along the track and the newly opened railway stations.

High-value targets such as the world's highest arch bridge over the River Chenab and cable-stayed bridge over Anji Khad have been kept on the high priority list. Dedicated teams of security personnel have been deployed at these locations to ensure round-the-clock surveillance. State-of-the-art electronic surveillance has also been installed to assist the human eye in preventing terrorist strikes.

PM Modi pens note for Sunita Williams

Continued from >> P1 The prime minister said he enquired about Williams' wellbeing while meeting President Donald Trump and his predecessor Joe Biden during his visits to the US.

He said 1.4 billion Indians had always taken great pride in Williams' achievements. "Recent developments have yet again showcased your inspirational fortitude and perseverance." Modi said Williams' mother Bonnie Pandya must be keenly awaiting her return and he was sure that "Deepakbhai's" blessings were with her as well. The prime minister also sent his warm regards to Williams' husband Michael Williams.

Williams and her fellow astronaut Butch Wilmore undocked from the ISS on Tuesday initiating a 17-hour journey back to earth aboard SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft.

Their return marks a significant milestone, as their mission was originally intended to last only eight days.

However, technical issues with the Boeing Starliner spacecraft necessitated a prolonged stay in orbit.

As the Crew Dragon spacecraft prepares for splashdown in the Atlantic Ocean, expected around 3:27 AM IST on Wednesday, NASA has coordinated closely with meteorologists to ensure favorable conditions for landing.

The spacecraft will undergo a series of critical maneuvers during its descent, including jettisoning its trunk and deploying parachutes to facilitate a safe landing.

Williams' return is not just a personal achievement but also a display of resilience in overcoming unexpected challenges in space travel.

As she and Wilmore prepare to splash down, their journey home symbolises hope and inspiration for future generations of astronauts. Following their splashdown, recovery teams will be ready to retrieve them and bring them back safely to solid ground.

Pollution worsening in Indian metros

Continued from >> P1 Delhi recorded its highest daily PM2.5 level in four years, with pollution spiking to 602 µg/m³ on November 18, 2024. This marks a 65 per cent increase from last winter's peak and is 42 per cent higher than the city's three-year average, highlighting a worsening pollution trend in the capital. CRRI Mathura Road saw a 20 per cent increase in winter pollution concentration, while Ashok Vihar, Vivek Vihar and Gwal Pahari recorded 11-13 per cent rises in PM2.5 levels. Anand Vihar remained the most polluted location in Delhi, recording a winter PM2.5 average of 227 µg/m³. In the NCR region, Loni in Ghaziabad emerged as the worst affected area, with a PM2.5 average of 153 µg/m³, followed by Gwal Pahari in Gurugram at 149 µg/m³. NOx concentrations spiked sharply, especially in November-December, with Anand Vihar recording a 71 per cent increase from October to December. ITO registered the highest NO2 levels at 167 µg/m³ in December.

EPIC link to Aadhaar soon

Continued from >> P1 During the hearing, advocate Prashant Bhusan, appearing for the NGO, said there were huge discrepancies on the EVM count and the number of persons coming to cast vote at the polling stations. "How did it at the end of the day polling of 10 become 50 next morning needs to be explained. There is a discrepancy in the final list published and the ones who visit the polling station," argued senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Moitra. The court adjourned the hearing in the July 28 week. The PILs sought a direction to the poll panel to upload polling station-wise voter turnout data on its website within 48 hours of conclusion of polling in the Lok Sabha and assembly elections.

For the "first time in decades", the EC also sought suggestions from all national and state parties on a variety of issues including purification of electoral rolls by April 30. Amid attacks from opposition

parties on the sanctity of electoral rolls, the EC has also resolved to settle within the next three months the issue of duplicate voter card number pending for nearly 25 years.

The EC has also for the first time convinced some political parties to train their field level workers including booth level agents, polling agents, counting agents and election agents regarding their important role in the electoral process.

Flagging cases of duplicate voter card numbers allocated to electors in different states, Opposition party TMC has alleged that the poll authority was fudging voters' list to help the BJP. Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi echoed similar sentiments in Lok Sabha recently. Describing duplicate card numbers as a "legacy issue", the election commission has assured to settle the matter in the next three months. It has maintained that duplicate numbers not necessarily mean fake voters.

Trump, Putin talk Ukraine ceasefire, Zelenskyy unsure

Continued from >> P1 The plant has been caught in the crossfire since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in 2022 and seized the facility shortly after. The UN's International Atomic Energy Agency has repeatedly expressed alarm about it, fuelling fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe. The plant is a significant asset, producing nearly a quarter of Ukraine's electricity in the year before the war.

"I can say we are on the 10th yard line of peace," Leavitt said. "And we've never been closer to a peace deal than we are in this moment. And the president, as you know, is determined to get one done."

But Bradley Bowman, senior director of the Center on Military and Political Power at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, questioned whether Putin is ready to end the war or will hold out for potential further concessions as Trump grows impatient.

After a disastrous February 28 White House meeting with Zelenskyy, Trump

temporarily cut off some military intelligence-sharing and aid to Ukraine. It was restored after the Ukrainians last week signed off on the Trump administration's 30-day ceasefire proposal.

"The US has been consistently offering in some form preemptive concessions that have been weakening the American and Ukrainian negotiating position," Bowman said. "I think there's a real danger here that the administration's approach is boiling down to sticks for Ukraine and carrots for Putin."

Zelenskyy in his nightly video address on Monday made clear he remains doubtful that Putin is ready for peace.

"Now, almost a week later, it's clear to everyone in the world - even to those who refused to acknowledge the truth for the past three years - that it is Putin who continues to drag out this war," Zelenskyy said.

In his dealings with Zelenskyy and Putin, Trump has frequently focused on who has the leverage. Putin has "the cards"

and Zelenskyy does not, Trump has said repeatedly.

Trump, who has long shown admiration for Putin, has also made clear he'd like to see the US-Russia relationship return to a more normal footing.

The president during his recent contentious meeting with Zelenskyy grumbled that "Putin went through a hell of a lot with me," a reference to the federal investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election in which he beat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Trump on Monday again underscored his view that Ukraine is not in a strong negotiating position. He said Russian forces have "surrounded" Ukrainian troops in Russia's Kursk region - amplifying an assertion made by Russian officials that's been disputed by Zelenskyy.

Ukraine's army stunned Russia in August last year by attacking across the border and taking control of an estimated 1,300 square kilometres of land. But

Ukraine's forces are now in retreat and it has all but lost a valuable bargaining chip, as momentum builds for a ceasefire with Russia.

Zelenskyy has acknowledged that the Ukrainians are on their back foot while disputing Russian claims that his troops are encircled in Kursk.

Trump suggested that he's taken unspecified action that has kept Russia from slaughtering Ukrainian troops in Kursk. "They're surrounded by Russian soldiers, and I believe if it wasn't for me they wouldn't be here any longer," Trump said.

Leavitt is one of three Trump administration officials who face a lawsuit from The Associated Press on First- and Fifth-Amendment grounds. The AP says the three are punishing the news agency for editorial decisions they oppose. The White House says the AP is not following an executive order to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America.

Riot sets Nagpur ablaze

Continued from >> P1 "The BJP is indulging dirty politics over Aurangzeb... We have seen people like Rahul Solapurkar, Prashant Koratkar and former Governor Koshiyari heap insults on Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji, but the BJP did not do anything then. Now, the BJP is trying to divide and trigger riots over Aurangzeb," Uddhav said, while condemning a statement by BJP MP Pradeep Purohit that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was Chhatrapati Shivaji in his previous birth.

Meanwhile, the other leaders from the Opposition MVA also slammed the ruling BJP for the riots in Nagpur. "There is no reason for violence to occur in Nagpur. It is where RSS is headquartered. It is also Devendra ji's constituency. Who can have the courage to spread violence here?" Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut said.

"This is a new pattern to scare Hindus, make their own people attack them, and then incite and involve them in riots. The things which are happening regarding Aurangzeb are planting fear into the minds of people, they are trying to finish Maharashtra and the country," Raut said.

Congress Legislature Party leader Vijay Wadetiwar said: "Nagpur is a very peaceful city. But we are today witnessing communal violence all because of pro-ruling organizations. All this is because of ministers in the cabinet have been making absurd statements"

NCP (SP) Working President and MP Supriya Sule said: "The violence between

two groups in Nagpur city has caused great damage. This incident is very sad and unfortunate. We appeal to the citizens to please not believe in any rumours. Let us all work together to maintain an atmosphere of mutual harmony and harmony. This is Maharashtra of progressive ideas. Let us all work together to maintain this identity of our state."

In a related development, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen chief and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi said that the communal violence in Nagpur should be seen in the context of the recent statements made by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and his ministers of the MahaYuti-NDA government.

"In the past few weeks, the chief minister and other ministers of the Maharashtra government have been making provocative statements. They don't even realise their responsibility that they are ministers and he is the chief minister," Owaisi said.

"They (VHP and Bajrang Dal) burnt effigies of a certain emperor in the entire Maharashtra; there was no reaction and they did not like this. So they wrote verses of the Quran on a piece of cloth and burnt it" Owaisi said.

"You have taken oath in the name of Constitution... follow the rule law... this is the failure of the government and the intelligence....The incident happened in Nagpur, which is the hometown of CM (Fadnavis) and Union Minister (Nitin Gadkari)," Owaisi said.

Hitting out at the BJP-led MahaYuti-NDA dispensation, Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi founder-President Prakash Ambedkar said that the Nagpur violence was a "pre-planned" conspiracy.

"A poisonous minister of Maharashtra is openly spreading hatred in the society. Not only this, people are being brought from outside to spread hatred in Maharashtra. This is part of a big well-planned conspiracy! An appeal to all the people including Nagpur to not pay attention to rumours and maintain peace," said Ambedkar, who is the grandson of late Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, said.

Meanwhile, the situation in the communal violence-hit Nagpur was returning to normal on Tuesday, with no fresh untoward incidents reported from any part of the orange city.

In all, the Nagpur police has registered three cases at the Ganeshpath Police Station, and two at the Tehsil Police Station in connection with the communal violence witnessed on Monday night. More than 50 persons have been rounded up during the overnight combing operations. The police are monitoring several social media accounts - which triggered violence in Nagpur on Monday.

Curfew was clamped in several parts of Nagpur - under the jurisdiction of Kotwali, Ganeshpet, Tehsil, Lakadganji, Pachpavli, Shantinagar, Sakardara, Nandanvan, Imamwada, Yashodharanagar, and Kaplinagar police stations - after the riots on Monday night.

PM speaks Maha Kumbh, Opposition cries stampedes

Continued from >> P1 While the Opposition protests going on, Prime Minister Modi said the huge display of unity at the Maha Kumbh was India's strength, particularly at a time when the world was in disarray. "People put aside their egos and gathered in Prayagraj with the feeling of 'we' and not 'I'. The Maha Kumbh demonstrated that there was no distinction between big and small - it reflected India's immense strength. It reaffirmed that the profound element of unity is deeply ingrained within us," he added.

A section of the Opposition also sought to know under what rule the Prime Minister was allowed to speak. Speaker Birla cited Rule 372 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business that allows the Prime Minister and Ministers to make a statement in the House but no questions are permitted after the statement.

Prime Minister Modi said the grand Maha Kumbh witnessed the awakening of national consciousness on a magnificent scale. "The power of our unity is so great that it can shatter any attempt to divide us. This unwavering spirit of oneness is a blessing for every Indian," he said. Throughout history, there have been defining moments that become examples for generations to come, he added.

"Our nation, too, has witnessed such moments that have given it a new direction and awakened its people... Similarly,

our freedom struggle was marked by several such turning points - the revolt of 1857, the martyrdom of Veer Bhagat Singh, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's clarion call of 'Delhi Chalo', and Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March," Modi said.

"These events inspired the nation and paved the way for independence. I see the Prayagraj Maha Kumbh as another such defining moment, where we can see the reflection of an awakened nation," he added. Recalling his recent visit to Mauritius, the prime minister said the atmosphere of devotion, faith and celebration was truly remarkable the moment holy water from the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj was offered at the Ganga Talab.

"This moment reaffirmed how our traditions, culture and values are being embraced and celebrated with great intensity," Modi said. The Prime Minister said India's cultural values were seamlessly being passed down from generation to generation. "Look at our modern youth today - how deeply they connect with the Maha Kumbh and other traditional festivals. The young generation of India is proudly embracing its heritage, faith, and traditions with immense pride and devotion," Modi said.

The proceedings were earlier adjourned till 1 pm, shortly after Modi made his statement and the opposition members rose in their seats in protest, with Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi apparently

urging Speaker Om Birla to allow the opposition members to speak. Amid noisy protests by opposition members demanded asking questions on the statement of Prime Minister on the Maha Kumbh. They also demanded the inclusion of the stampede deaths in the statement.

Members of the Congress, TMC and other opposition parties then stormed the Well, raising slogans, while Samajwadi Party members staged a walkout in protest. Rahul Gandhi told reporters outside Parliament that he also wanted to speak in the House on the issue and pointed out that PM Modi should have paid homage to those who lost their lives in the January 29 stampede at the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj.

"I wanted to support what he was saying. Kumbh is our tradition, history and culture. There was also a complaint that he did not pay homage to those who lost their lives (in the stampede in the Mahakumbh)," Gandhi said. "The other thing I wanted to say is that the youth that went to the Kumbh need another thing from the PM, they need employment. The prime minister should speak on employment," the Congress leader said.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said the opposition should have been allowed to speak in the House. "Opposition also has its sentiments on it and they should not have had any objection to them airing their views," she said.

Israel pummels Gaza, killing more than 400 Palestinians

Continued from >> P1 A senior Hamas official said Netanyahu's decision to return to war amounts to a "death sentence" for the remaining hostages. Izzat al-Risheq accused Netanyahu of launching the strikes to try and save his far-right governing coalition and called on mediators to "reveal facts" on who broke the truce. Hamas said at least four senior officials were killed in Tuesday's strikes.

There were no reports of any attacks by Hamas several hours after the bombardment, indicating it still hoped to restore the truce.

The strikes came as Netanyahu comes under mounting domestic pressure, with mass protests planned over his handling of the hostage crisis and his decision to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency. His latest testimony in a long-running corruption trial was cancelled after the strikes.

The strikes appeared to give Netanyahu a political boost, and a far-right party that had bolted the government over the ceasefire announced Tuesday it was rejoining.

The main group representing families of the captives accused the government of backing out of the ceasefire, saying it "chose to give up on the hostages."

"We are shocked, angry and terrified by the deliberate dismantling of the process

to return our loved ones from the terrible captivity of Hamas," the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement.

Wounded stream into Gaza hospitals

A strike on a home in the southern city of Rafah killed 17 members of one family, including at least 12 women and children, according to the European Hospital, which received the bodies. The dead included five children, their parents, and another father and his three children.

In the southern city of Khan Younis, Associated Press reporters saw explosions and plumes of smoke. Ambulances brought wounded people to Nasser Hospital, where patients lay on the floor, some screaming. A young girl cried as her bloody arm was bandaged.

Many Palestinians said they had expected a return to war when talks over the second phase of the ceasefire did not begin as scheduled in early February. Israel instead embraced an alternative proposal and cut off all shipments of food, fuel and other aid to the territory's 2 million Palestinians to try to pressure Hamas to accept it.

"Nobody wants to fight," Palestinian resident Nidal Alzaanin told the AP by

phone from Gaza City. "Everyone is still suffering from the previous months," he said.

Gaza's Health Ministry said at least 404 people were killed in the strikes and more than 560 had been wounded. It revised its confirmed count after saying earlier Tuesday that 413 were dead and 660 wounded. Rescuers were still searching the rubble for dead and wounded as the strikes continued. It was among the deadliest days of the war.

US backs Israel and blames Hamas

The White House sought to blame Hamas for the renewed fighting. National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said the militant group "could have released hostages to extend the ceasefire but instead chose refusal and war."

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the unfolding operation, said Israel was striking Hamas' military, leaders and infrastructure and planned to expand the operation beyond air attacks.

The official accused Hamas of attempting to rebuild and plan new attacks. Hamas militants and security forces quickly returned to the streets in recent weeks after the ceasefire went into effect.

Netanyahu's office said the Israeli leader

held security consultations with senior officials. It did not provide further details.

Talks on a second phase of the ceasefire had stalled

The strikes came two months after a ceasefire was reached to pause the war. Over six weeks, Hamas released 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight more in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners in a first phase of the ceasefire.

But since that ceasefire ended two weeks ago, the sides have not been able to agree on a way forward with a second phase aimed at releasing the 59 remaining hostages, 35 of whom are believed to be dead, and ending the war altogether.

Hamas has demanded an end to the war and full withdrawal of Israeli troops in exchange for the release of the remaining hostages. Israel says it will not end the war until it destroys Hamas' governing and military capabilities and frees all hostages - two goals that could be incompatible.

Netanyahu's office on Tuesday said Hamas had "repeatedly refused to release our hostages and rejected all offers it received from the US presidential envoy, Steve Witkoff, and from the mediators."

Israel wants Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas instead

wants to follow the ceasefire deal reached by the two sides, which calls for negotiations to begin on the ceasefire's more difficult second phase, in which the remaining hostages would be released and Israeli forces would withdraw from Gaza.

A return to war would allow Netanyahu to avoid the tough trade-offs called for in the second phase of the agreement and the thorny question of who would govern Gaza. It would also shore up his coalition, which depends on far-right lawmakers who want to depopulate Gaza and re-build Jewish settlements there.

Gaza already was in a humanitarian crisis

The war erupted when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking 251 hostages. Most have been released in ceasefires or other deals, with Israeli forces rescuing only eight and recovering dozens of bodies.

Israel responded with a military offensive that killed over 48,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and displaced an estimated 90 per cent of Gaza's population. The territory's Health Ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and militants, but says over half of the dead have been women and children.

The ceasefire had brought some relief to Gaza and allowed hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to resume to what remained of their homes.

Netanyahu faces mounting criticism

The released hostages, some of whom were emaciated, have repeatedly implored the government to press ahead with the ceasefire to return all remaining captives. Tens of thousands of Israelis have taken part in mass demonstrations calling for a ceasefire and return of all hostages.

Mass demonstrations are planned later Tuesday and Wednesday following Netanyahu's announcement this week that he wants to fire the head of Israel's Shin Bet internal security agency. Critics have lambasted the move as an attempt by Netanyahu to divert blame for his government's failures in the October 7 attack and handling of the war.

Since the ceasefire in Gaza began in mid-January, Israeli forces have killed dozens of Palestinians who the military says approached its troops or entered unauthorised areas.

Still, the deal has tenuously held without an outbreak of wide violence. Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been trying to mediate the next steps in the ceasefire.

Bangladesh slams Tulsi Gabbard's remarks on minority persecution

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

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

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

It said Gabbard's statement in an Indian TV channel was "misleading and damaging to the image and reputation of Bangladesh, a nation whose traditional practice of Islam has been famously inclusive and peaceful and that has made remarkable strides in its fight against extremism and terrorism".

The US spy chief, now in India, earlier on Monday said the "longtime unfortunate persecution, killing, and

abuse of religious minorities like Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and others has been a major area of concern for the US government and President Trump and his administration."

In an interview with the TV channel, Gabbard alleged "persecution and killing" of religious minorities in Bangladesh and that "the threat of Islamic terrorists" in the country was "rooted" in the "ideology and objective" to "rule and govern with an Islamist caliphate". She said, "The talks are just beginning between President Trump's new cabinet coming in and the Government of Bangladesh, but this continues to remain a central focus area of concern".

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

It said Bangladesh "strongly



condemns any efforts to link the country to any form of "Islamist caliphate".

"Political leaders and public figures should base their statements, especially about the most sensitive issues, on

actual knowledge and take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes, to fan fears and potentially even stoke sectarian tensions," Yunus's office said.

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

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

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

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Hong Kong

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

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

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

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

His comments followed a somewhat veiled backlash from Beijing.

Since last Thursday, Beijing's offices handling Hong Kong affairs have posted two commentaries by a Beijing-backed local newspaper that blasted the deal. That has raised questions over the sale.

One of the newspaper commentaries suggested the deal is a betrayal to all Chinese and disregards national interests. The other described great entrepreneurs as patriots, but suggested that businesspeople who "dance with" predatory American politicians to reap quick profits were doomed to infamy.

The articles signalled Beijing's disapproval of the deal, though its actual impact remains unclear.

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

Lee said any business transaction must comply with Hong Kong's laws. The city

will handle it according to the law, he said without elaborating.

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

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

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



including USD 5 billion in debt.

Hutchison said the transaction was purely commercial and unrelated to other developments surrounding the Panama Ports.

The deal, if approved, will give the BlackRock consortium control over 43 ports in 23 countries, including the ports of Balboa and Cristobal, located at either end of the Panama Canal. Other ports are in Mexico, the Netherlands, Egypt, Australia, Pakistan and elsewhere.

The transaction requires approval by Panama's government. It does not affect a trust that operates ports in Hong Kong or any other ports in mainland China.

Panama says it has full control over the shipping lane and Hutchison's operation of the ports does not amount to Chinese control over the canal. Selling it to a US-based company does not represent any US "reclaiming" of the canal, it says.

The United States built the canal in the early 1900s, seeking a faster way for commercial and military vessels to travel between its coasts.

Washington relinquished control of the waterway to Panama on December 31, 1999, under a treaty signed in 1977 by then-President Jimmy Carter. Trump has claimed that Carter "foolishly" gave the canal away.

Some 70 per cent of the sea traffic that crosses the Panama Canal leaves or goes to US ports.

Lebanon, Syria agree to truce after 2 days of border clashes

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Beirut

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

The agreement also stipulates "enhanced coordination and cooperation between the two sides," the statement from the Syrian Ministry of Defense said.

Lebanon's president earlier Monday ordered troops to retaliate against the source of gunfire from the Syrian side of the border after more deadly fighting erupted overnight along the frontier. Lebanon's Health Ministry reported that seven Lebanese citizens were killed and another 52 injured in the clashes, including a 4-year-old girl.

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

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

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



Syrian troops gather in the village of Hawsh al-Sayyid Ali, located 2 km (1.24 miles) from the Lebanon border, Syria. Lebanon's president ordered troops to retaliate for gunfire from the Syrian side of the border after renewed fighting broke out overnight along the frontier.

a statement on Sunday.

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

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

Lebanon's state news agency reported

that fighting intensified Monday evening near Hermel.

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

Aoun added that he asked Lebanon's foreign minister, who was in Brussels for a donors conference on Syria, to contact Syrian officials to resolve the problem "and prevent further escalation."

Violence recently spiked in the area between the Syrian military and armed Lebanese Shiite clans closely allied with the former government of Assad, based in Lebanon's Al-Qasr border village.

Lebanese media and the observatory say clans were involved in the abductions that sparked the latest clashes.

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

Lebanese media reported low-level fighting at dawn after an attack on a Syrian military vehicle. The number of casualties was unclear.

Early on Monday, four Syrian journalists embedded with the Syrian army were lightly wounded after an artillery shell fired from the Lebanese side of the border hit their position. They accused Hezbollah of the attack.

Meanwhile, senior Hezbollah legislator Hussein Haj Hassan in an interview with Lebanon's Al Jadeed television accused fighters from the Syrian side of crossing into Lebanese territory and attacking border villages. His constituency is the northeastern Baalbek-Hermel province, which has borne the brunt of the clashes.

Lebanon has been seeking international support to boost funding for its military as it gradually deploys troops along its porous northern and eastern borders with Syria as well as its southern border with Israel.

Trump hangs copy of Declaration of Independence in Oval Office

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

President Donald Trump has hung a copy of the Declaration of Independence in the Oval Office, according to images he shared on social media.

The Republican president's official account on X showed two images Monday of a framed copy of the historical document hanging on the wall not far from the Resolute desk.

In one image, Trump is moving aside heavy dark blue curtains hung around the document to look underneath.

It was not immediately clear where the copy came from and when it was installed. "The Nationals Archives delivered the Declaration of Independence to the White House at the President's request. It is displayed in the Oval Office where it will be carefully protected and preserved," press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement.

The original version of the Declaration of Independence is very faded and displayed in the Archives' building,

China conducts drills near Taiwan, blaming recent statements by US, Taiwanese leaders

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Taipei (Taiwan)

An unusually large number of Chinese military ships, planes and drones entered airspace and waters surrounding Taiwan between Sunday and Monday, the self-governing island republic's Defence Ministry said.

China said the drills were a response to recent statements and actions by the US and Taiwan.

The ministry on Tuesday published on its social media several images of Chinese drones and ships and said 43 out of 59 of them entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone but that no confrontations were reported.

Taiwan monitored the situation and deployed aircraft, navy ships and coastal anti-ship missile defences in response, the ministry said. China launches such missions on a daily basis in hopes of wearing down Taiwanese defences and morale, although the vast majority of the island's 23 million people reject Beijing's claim of sovereignty over Taiwan and its threat to use force to assert its control.

It's unclear what prompted the large Chinese deployment. Daily figures often vary widely based on statements by the

Taiwanese authorities or their US partners.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said Monday the drills were "a resolute response to foreign connivance and support to Taiwan independence, and a serious warning to Taiwan separatist forces."

China's military actions are "necessary, legal and justified measures to defend national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity", Mao said.

"In particular, the United States deleted the literal expression that reflected the one-China principle and that did not support Taiwan independence on the website of the US Department of State, which indicates wrong signals to Taiwan separatist forces," Mao was quoted as saying.

Taiwanese President William Lai Ching-te also raised Beijing's hackles last week when he said that Taiwan law designates mainland China as a "foreign hostile force" and said tougher measures were being taken to prevent Chinese subversion through the media and civic exchanges. Lai also warned of the danger of influential figures and current and retired military members selling secrets

to China. The Taiwan Strait is an international body of water and one of the most important channels for global trade. While China does not interfere with civilian shipping in the Strait — or in the South China Sea to the south that it claims almost in its entirety — it routinely objects to actions by the US and other foreign navies in the area.

China on Saturday lashed out at accusations by top diplomats from the Group of 7 industrialised democracies who said Beijing is endangering maritime safety.

The G7 had said in a joint statement: "We condemn China's illicit, provocative, coercive and dangerous actions that seek unilaterally to alter the status quo in such a way as to risk undermining the stability of regions, including through land reclamations, and building of outposts, as well as their use for military purpose."

China called the G7 statement "filled with arrogance, prejudice and malicious intentions". Faced with the rising threat from China, Taiwan has ordered new missiles, aircraft and other armaments from the US, while revitalising its own defence industry with submarines and other key items.

King Charles III plans to meet Pope during Vatican state visit

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ London

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

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

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

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

Church of England, made building bridges between people of all faiths a priority since he ascended the throne 2 1/2 years ago.

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

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

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

"The visit to Italy will underscore the depth and breadth of the bilateral relationship," the palace said in a statement.

No peace till ban on women and girls reversed, UN tells Afghan rulers

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ United Nations

The UN Security Council told Afghanistan's Taliban rulers Monday that peace and prosperity are "unattainable" until they reverse their bans on women and girls getting an education, being employed and speaking in public. The UN's most powerful body also condemned ongoing terrorist activity in Afghanistan "in the strongest terms" and called for strengthened efforts to address the country's dire economic and humanitarian situation.

The council resolution, adopted unanimously by its 15 members, extended the UN's political mission in Afghanistan, known as UNAMA, until March 17, 2026.

The Taliban seized power in 2021 as US and NATO forces withdrew following two decades of war. No country officially recognizes them as Afghanistan's

government because of their crackdown on women. Not only are women barred from working, from many public spaces, and being educated beyond the sixth grade, but they must be fully veiled and their voices cannot be heard in public.

The Security Council called for the Taliban "to swiftly reverse these policies and practices."

UN special envoy Roza Otunbayeva, the head of UNAMA, told the Security Council last week that it's up to the Taliban to indicate whether they want Afghanistan to be reintegrated into the international system — "and, if so, whether they are willing to take the necessary steps."

The Taliban's chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, posted a statement on his official X account this month saying the dignity, honor and legal rights of women were a priority for the country, in accordance with Islamic law and



Afghan culture and traditions. Islamic countries and religious scholars have said that denying women education and work is not part of Islamic law.

Otunbayeva said Afghans "increasingly resent the intrusions on their private lives" by Taliban officials and fear the country's further isolation from the rest of the world.

"They have indeed welcomed an absence of conflict, and greater stability and freedom of movement, at least for the male population," she said. "But this is not a peace in which they can live in dignity with their human rights respected and with confidence in a stable future."

More than half of Afghanistan's population — some 23 million people — need humanitarian assistance, a humanitarian crisis caused by decades of conflict, entrenched poverty, climate shocks and large population growth. Otunbayeva said. She said a downturn in funding is

having a significant impact.

In the past month, the UN envoy said, more than 200 health facilities have been forced to close, affecting some 1.8 million people, including malnourished children. On another major issue, the Security Council called on the Taliban to strengthen efforts to combat terrorism, condemning all terrorist activity in Afghanistan and demanding that the country not be used to threaten or attack any other country.

Relations between Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan have become strained since the Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP, which is allied with the Afghan Taliban, have increased attacks on security forces in Pakistan. At the same time, militants from the Afghan chapter of the Islamic State group, which opposes the Taliban, have carried out bombings across Afghanistan.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of life insurance, particularly in terms of penetration lately.

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

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

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

Majority of Indians are long-term investors: NSE CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India partners with Meta on digital consumer protection initiative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

LG Electronics India, Innovision get SEBI nod for IPOs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RBI, Bank of Mauritius sign pact for bilateral transactions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

Bajaj Finserv shares dip over one per cent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

On the NSE, shares of the firm slipped 1.43 per cent to ₹1,844.65. The stock emerged as the biggest laggard among the Sensex and Nifty firms.

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

Gold continues record run

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

metal, Gandhi added.

However, silver prices traded flat at ₹1,02,500 per kg, also a historic high. Meanwhile, gold futures jumped by ₹649 or 0.73 per cent to establish a fresh peak of ₹88,672 in the afternoon trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

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

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

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

Rupee settles 25 paise higher against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

In contrast, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel,

Tech Mahindra and Reliance Industries were the laggards.

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

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

2.10 per cent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

INBRIEF

IP UNIVERSITY SIGNS MOU WITH ST PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS

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



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



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

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

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



PGTI introduces Kapil Dev Grant Thornton Invitational

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

"It is something new that is happening. We want to do something like T20. More thrills in a short time," Kapil, who is the PGTI president, told reporters on Tuesday.

"We can bring more people to the golf course and more sponsors. The golfers need more opportunities. Today cricket reached at this stage because cricket board has given them the opportunity to play at the highest level.

"I think it is very important for the



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

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

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

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

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

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

off at Prestige Golfshire next month.

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

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

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

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

"I had a good start last season, I had a low patch before that, so it was a good feeling that I still have it. I learnt so much and the game is good but I feel I am learning every week. I am really excited this season."

The event was also attended by Vishesh C. Chandok, CEO, Grant Thornton Bharat, and Amandeep Johl, CEO, PGTI.

Coco Gauff heads home to Miami Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

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

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

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

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

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

— COCO GAUFF, TENNIS PLAYER

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

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

nents tend to go after.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— HARVINDER SINGH, ARCHER

schedule and the arrangements were of the highest quality.

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

aiming to end the long ICC trophy wait at home.

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

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

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

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

Lionel Messi out of World Cup qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Buenos Aires

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

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

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

"The examination's findings confirmed the presence of a low-grade injury in the adductor muscle," Inter Miami said.

"His clinical progress and response to treatment will determine his availability for competition."

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



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

Scaloni also dropped Alejandro

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ponte Vedra Beach

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

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

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

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

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



quietly. "I never thought it was long."

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

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

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

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

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

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

And then it effectively ended on the 17th. "When my ball was in the air, I was telling it to get down," McIlroy said.

Spaun hit his 8-iron with a higher trajectory into a hurting wind off the right, and his first instinct was to yell, "Get up."

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

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

ing and get this thing done."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I always knew my strengths, abilities: Shreyas Iyer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

His was a classic case of performance

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

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

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

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

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

Number 4 is where I belong

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And to ensure that his obsessive desire to perform does not become an all-consuming routine, Iyer likes to tune out every once in a while. "...I feel it's needed, to not over-think and burn yourself out. There is life beyond cricket with family and friends, hobbies and magic tricks, and I enjoy these breaks in between," he revealed. A limited-overs giant in the making he might be but Iyer has a decent Test record too. In 14 Tests that he has played, Iyer averages around 37 which includes a hundred and five half-centuries.

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

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

India face Maldives in Asian Cup qualifier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Shillong

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

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

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

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

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

— MANOLO MARQUEZ, HEAD COACH

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

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

Indian football."

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

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

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

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

He has scored 12 goals from 24 match-

Runner Archana Jadhav gets four-year ban

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

— WORLD ATHLETICS' ATHLETES INTEGRITY UNIT

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

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

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

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

medals, points, prizes and appearance money for the period.

The AIU said Jadhav did not exercise her right to a 'B' sample test despite expressing a desire to do so in early communication.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pakistan origin cricketer dies after collapsing on field

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Adelaide

Junail Zafar Khan, a club-level Pakistan-origin cricketer, has died after collapsing on the ground during a local match played in extreme heat at the Concordia College here.

In his 40s, Khan was representing Old Concordians Cricket Club in a match against Prince Alfred Old Collegians last Saturday, news.Com.Au reported.

After fielding for 40 overs and batting for seven, Khan collapsed around 4pm Australian Central Daylight Time (ACDT). South Australia has been in the grip of extreme heat over and according to data from the Bureau of Meteorology, temperatures here were still above 40 degrees Celsius at the time.

Adelaide Turf Cricket Association rules state that games are cancelled if the temperature climbs above 42 degrees Celsius.

Samson joins team practice session

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

Rajasthan Royals skipper Sanju Samson has joined his IPL team after completing his recovery from a finger surgery he underwent last month.

The 30-year-old cricketer, who finished his rehabilitation at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, attended the Royals' first practice session on Monday ahead of the upcoming season.

Samson had suffered the injury after being struck by a bouncer from Jofra Archer during India's five-match T20I series against England. Following the injury, he underwent surgery to treat the damaged finger. "Straight from the airport to our first practice match to making everyone smile like he does!," RR said

in a post on 'X'. The RR skipper was seen interacting with his teammates, including India batter Yashasvi Jaiswal, and head coach Rahul Dravid, among others.

Rajasthan Royals, the inaugural champions, will kick off their campaign against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Hyderabad on March 23. Although Samson has regained full fitness, it remains uncertain whether he will take the wicketkeeping gloves straight away. If he isn't deemed fit, Dhruv Juraj is likely to step in behind the stumps. In another boost for RR, all-rounder Rryan Parag has fully recovered from a shoulder injury that had kept him out of the T20Is against South Africa and England. Parag made his comeback in the second phase of the Ranji Trophy, scoring a half-century and bowling 26 overs against Saurashtra.



New Zealand beat Pakistan by five wicket in T20 match

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dunedin

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

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

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

New Zealand began its innings needing 136 runs from 90 balls. By the end of the five-over power play that target had been reduced to 70 runs from 60 balls. New Zealand was 87-2 when Allen followed Seifert to the pavilion in the seventh over.

"There's not too much conversation out there to be fair," Seifert said.

"It's just about backing our skills and putting pressure on the bowlers when we can." Mitchell Hay made an unbeaten 21 to steer New Zealand home and Bracewell hit a four off Jahandad Khan for the winning runs. New Zealand won the toss and was eager to bowl first on a pitch at the University Oval which had been covered and looked fresh with patches of grass.

Jacob Duffy, who took 4-14 in the series-opener which New Zealand won by nine wickets on Sunday, removed Hasan Nawaz with the fourth ball of the match.

The New Zealand bowlers were too full at first and Pakistan reached 19-1 before Ben Sears came on in the fourth over and dismissed Mohammad Haris with his first delivery. Sears, who missed the Champions Trophy with injury, used bounce effectively and Haris sliced his first delivery to Duffy at third man.

Pakistan was 36-2 after the five-over power play. Salman took 12 runs including a 75-meter (yard) six from the sixth over bowled by Jimmy Neesham, lifting Pakistan to 48-2. But spinner Ish Sodhi dismissed Irfan Khan (11) and Khushdil Shar (2) with the fourth and sixth balls of the seventh over as Pakistan slipped to 52-4.

Kohli to focus on playing smart cricket: AB De Villiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

South African batting great AB de Villiers believes Virat Kohli should focus on playing smart cricket and continue controlling the game this season as RCB possess immense firepower with Phil Salt expected to ease the pressure on the Indian superstar.

Despite being one of RCB's most consistent performers, Kohli's strike rate was a topic of discussion past two seasons. However, with the Bengaluru franchise acquiring the English duo of Salt and Liam Livingstone, along with Australian Tim David and West Indian Romario Shepherd all fearless strikers of the ball de Villiers feels Kohli can play with more freedom.

"Virat seems to be enjoying his cricket. I don't think he's going to have to up his strike rate batting with Phil Salt," de Villiers said on JioStar Press Room on Tuesday. "Salt is one of the most attacking players we've ever seen. I think he's going to take a lot of pressure off Virat. Virat needs to continue what he's been doing for so many years...Control the game, play smart cricket. He's got the best instinct of any player out there. He knows when to up the ante a bit and when



to lower it."

The South African, who played for RCB for 11 seasons, said Kohli needs to ensure there are no batting collapses.

"Virat needs to be the captain of the batting department in this tournament and really just keep things together, play smart cricket to make sure they don't find those collapses in the batting order."

The former Proteas skipper feels that Kohli has been subjected to "unnecessary criticism over the last few seasons".

"There's no doubt some of the outside noise has maybe influenced him a bit. He's

only human, he's definitely got those doubts in his head.

"But the one thing about Virat is that he's always had the ability to, when it matters most, when he crosses that line for his team, block everything out and it's business time." With Faf du Plessis' departure, RCB enters the season with a new captain in Rajat Patidar.

De Villiers opined that Patidar's biggest challenge would be dealing with self-doubt while stepping into the shoes of past captains like du Plessis and Kohli.

"His biggest challenge will be insecu-

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