

## CAPITAL GAINS ₹ONE LAKH CRORE

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

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

The Budget also unveiled plans for the branding of Delhi as a tourism and cultural hub. This is first budget presented by a BJP-led government in Delhi after 27 years, following the party's victory over the AAP in last month's Assembly elections.

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

"The Budget Estimates in 2025-26 of ₹One Lakh Crore is 31.5 per cent more than the Budget estimates 2024-25 of ₹76,000 Crore and 44 per cent higher than the revised estimates 2024-25 of ₹69,500 Crore. The proposed Budget of ₹ One Lakh Crore for the year 2025-26 is to be financed from the Tax Revenue of ₹68,700 Crore, Non-Tax Revenue of ₹750 Crore, Small Savings Loan of ₹15,000 Crore from, Central Road Funds of ₹1,000 Crore from, Centrally Sponsored Schemes of ₹4,128 Crore, Grant in Aid from Government of India of ₹7,348 Crore and



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

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

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

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

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

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

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## Yeh Hai Mumbai Meri Jaan!

### New complaint in Disha Salian case

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

Within days after he moved the Bombay High Court seeking a fresh probe in the Disha Salian death case, former celebrity manager Disha Salian's father Satish Salian on Tuesday submitted a complaint to the Mumbai police, seeking registration of an FIR against Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Aadiya Thackeray and others in the much-discussed case.

In his complaint submitted to Mumbai's Joint Commissioner of Police, Satish Salian named Aadiya Thackeray his bodyguards, actors Dino Morea and Suraj Pancholi, ex-police commissioner Parambir Singh, dismissed Mumbai police officer Sachin Vaze and actor Rhea Chakraborty.

Talking to media persons after submitting a complaint to them Mumbai police, Salian's lawyer Nilesh Ojha said, "Today, we have filed a written complaint with the Commissioner of Police, and the Joint Commissioner of Police Crime has accepted it" "The accused in this are Aadiya Thackeray, Dino Morea, Suraj Pancholi and his bodyguard, Parambir Singh, Sachin Vaze and Rhea Chakraborty."

Accusing the Parambir Singh, who was the Mumbai Police Commissioner at the time of the deaths of Disha Salian and Sushant Singh Rajput, of "masterminding" a cover-up in the celebrity-manager's death, Ojha alleged: "Parambir Singh was the mastermind behind the cover-up in this case. He held a press conference and fabricated lies to protect Aadiya Thackeray. The NCB's investigation papers

prove that Aadiya was involved in the drug business, and this detail has also been mentioned". Satish Salian, who was present along with his lawyer, said, "I am expecting justice for my daughter.....I won't speak much now. I am feeling dizzy."

Disha Salian (28), it may be recalled, had reportedly committed by falling from the 14th floor of Galaxy Regent building at Malad in north Mumbai on the intervening night of June 8-9, 2020. She had allegedly ended her life five days before actor Sushant Singh Rajput committed suicide at his rented duplex flat in Bandra in north-west Mumbai on June 14, 2020.

Earlier, in a petition filed in the Bombay HC last week, Satish had sought a fresh probe, an FIR against Aadiya and transfer of the case to the CBI.

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### Eknath Shinde calls for a limit to satire

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

Undeterred by the protests by the ruling Shiv Sena over his 'gaddar' jibe against Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, a defiant stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra on Tuesday came out with another parody song — "hum honge kangaal ek din..." — this time targeting the BJP, even as Shinde said that "every action has a reaction" while reacting to Shiv Sainiks' act of vandalism at a Mumbai studio.

Using the clips of the manner in which the Shinde-led Shiv Sena workers on Sunday night vandalised a studio where he had recorded a parody song against Shinde, Kamra uploaded one more song on "X" which has bars against the ruling BJP at the Centre and the State.

Recorded by him in the same Habitat in The UniContinental hotel at Khar in south-central Mumbai, the song rendered by Kamra had the following lines: "Mann me andhvishwass, Desh ka satyanash; 'Honge nange charo aur', 'Karenghe dange charo or', 'Police ke pange charo aur'; 'Man me Nathuram, Harkate Asaram'; 'Hoga gai ka prachar', 'Leke haathon me hathiyar'; 'Hoga Sangh ka shishtachar', 'Janata berozgar', 'Garibi ki kagaar'. The song ends with 'Hum honge kangaal ek din...'

Thirty-six-year-old Kamra — who had earlier refused to tender apology for his jibe against Shinde as demanded by chief minister Devendra Fadnis — did not appear before the Mumbai police in response to the summons issued to him to present himself before them at 11 am

on Tuesday for questioning in connection with the First Information Report (FIR) registered against in the "gaddar" controversy. He has reportedly sought a week's time to appear before the Mumbai police.

In a related development, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde came out with his first reaction over the Kamra-triggered controversy.

Speaking at a Marathi television event, Shinde said that there should be a limit to everything and that every action has a reaction. He said that he would refrain from responding to allegations.

"Freedom of speech is there. We understand satire. But there should be a limit. This is like taking 'supari' (contract) to speak against someone....," Shinde said.

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## Dhankhar holds meet over cash controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday held a meeting with leaders of various parties to decide the course of action the House should take on pleas by some MPs seeking discussion on the alleged discovery of cash from the official residence of a Delhi High Court Judge.

He announced about the meeting after rejecting a Rule 267 notice of Haris Beeran of Kerala-based IUML who wanted a discussion on the matter by setting aside the business of the day.

Dhankhar said he had on Monday met Leader of the House JP Nadda and Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge on the "very critical issue that is agitating the minds in branches of governance". "The issue is undoubtedly serious enough," he said.

According to him, Kharge had suggested calling a meeting of floor leaders and Nadda agreed. "The three of us took note of the developments and also took note that for the first time, in an unprecedented manner, the Chief Justice of India took the initiative to put everything in the public domain," he said.

Dhankhar was referring to the apex court uploading on its website an in-house inquiry report, including photos and a video, into the alleged discovery of a huge stash of cash at high court Yashwant Varma's official residence.

Meanwhile, the three members of Supreme Court-appointed in-house committee on Tuesday commenced its inquiry into the cash discovery row involving Delhi High Court Judge Justice Yashwant Varma. The three members — Justice Sheel Nagu, Chief Justice of the High



Court staff that accompanied the three-member committee during its visit to the residence of senior Delhi High Court Judge Justice Yashwant Varma in New Delhi PTI

Court of Punjab and Haryana, Justice G S Sandhawalia, Chief Justice of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh, and Anu Sivaraman, Judge of the High Court of Karnataka — reached Justice Varma's official residence at 30, Tughlak Crescent here.

The judges were inside the official residence of Justice Varma for around 30-35 minutes and apparently inspected the site. The cash discovery took place following a fire at Justice Varma's official residence at around 11.35 pm on March 14, prompting the fire officials to rush to the spot and douse it. On March 22, Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna constituted a three-member committee to conduct an in-house inquiry into allegations against

Justice Varma. A fire at the storeroom of the official residence of Justice Varma on March 14 in posh Lutyens' Delhi locality purportedly led to the discovery of the cash by fire fighters and police personnel. Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna has constituted a three-member panel to probe the discovery of "four to five semi-burnt sacks" of Indian currency notes after the fire incident.

Stating that legislature and judiciary function optimally when they perform best in their respective realm, he said, adding the Supreme Court putting the entire material available with it in the public domain has found wide acceptability in the country.

Pramod Tiwari of the Congress said

justice should not just be done but also seen to be done and so steps need to be taken to ensure such incidents are not repeated.

On cue, Dhankhar referred to the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act passed by Parliament, saying if the mechanism for judicial appointments had not been struck down by the Supreme Court, things would have been different.

The law was passed by Rajya Sabha with near unanimity, with no dissension, only one abstention and was later endorsed by the requisite 16 state assemblies and signed by the President under article 111 of the Constitution, he said.

"Now, it is befitting the occasion to reiterate (that it) was a visionary step. And imagine if that had taken place, things would have been different."

"What emanated from the Indian Parliament as a historic development with rare convergence of unanimity since independence, found acceptance by needed state legislatures. We need to reflect on what happened to that," he said.

Dhankhar said under the Constitution, there is no provision that allows anyone to tinker with a Constitutional Amendment.

"There is no constitutional provision of review or appeal of a constitutional amendment. If there is a legislation (passed) by parliament or state legislatures, judicial review can take place on whether it is in conformity with the Constitutional provisions," he said.

The Rajya Sabha chairman went on to state that one is considered innocent until proven guilty, but MPs should think about the "judicial mess".

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## India, China hold talks in Beijing on bilateral ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India and China on Tuesday agreed to work together to make "substantial preparation" for the next meeting of their Special Representatives (SR) on the boundary question that is set to be held in the national capital later this year.

The decision was taken at a fresh edition of talks held in Beijing under the framework of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC).

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the WMCC meeting was held in a "positive and constructive atmosphere" and both sides "comprehensively" reviewed the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

"The two sides agreed to work together to make substantial preparation for the next meeting of the Special Representatives (SR), which will be held in India later this year," it said in a statement. The MEA said peace and tranquillity on the border are critical for the smooth development of overall bilateral relations.

"The two sides explored various measures and proposals to give effect to the decisions taken during the 23rd meeting of the Special Representatives on the India-China boundary question in Beijing in December 2024 and to advance effective border management," it said.

The Indian readout said the two sides agreed to maintain and strengthen relevant diplomatic and military mechanisms towards this end. "They also exchanged views on early resumption of cross-border cooperation and exchanges, including on trans-border rivers and Kailash-

Mansarovar Yatra," the MEA said. The Indian delegation at the talks was led by Gourangalal Das, Joint Secretary (East Asia) in the MEA.

The Chinese delegation was led by Hong Liang, Director General of the Boundary and Oceanic Affairs Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Earlier, on March 16, Prime Minister Narendra Modi conveyed optimism about India's ties with China, emphasising the value of learning from and understanding one another.

**The MEA said the meeting was held in a "positive and constructive atmosphere" and both sides "comprehensively" reviewed the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)**

"Look, the relationship between India and China isn't something new. Both nations have ancient cultures and civilisations. Even in the modern world, they play a significant role. If you look at historical records, for centuries, India and China have learned from each other. Together, they have always contributed to the global good in some way," he said in a podcast with AI researcher Lex Fridman.

The Prime Minister said, "It is true that there have been ongoing border disputes between us. We are now working to restore conditions to how they were before 2020. Slowly but surely, trust, enthusiasm, and energy will return. But of course, it will take some time since there's been a five-year gap."

## No lesson learnt: Is DGP violating standard operating procedures in J and K?

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Despite sacrificing senior police officers, including the Chief of the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism squad (ATS) Hemant Karkare, during the Mumbai terror attack on November 26, 2008, very few lessons have been learned by the in-service fellow officers of the Indian Police Service in recent years.

On Monday, the Director General of Jammu and Kashmir Police (DGP), Nalin Prabhat, was seen leading the combing and search operations (CASO) in the border area of Hiranagar, Kathua. The IPS officer of the 1992 batch, who also served as the Director General of the National Security Guard (NSG), was armed with an AK series rifle as he led the anti-terrorist operations from the front.

Senior officers of the Jammu range, including the Inspector General of Police,

DIG, SSP Kathua and SP operations, Kathua, accompanied him in the thickly forested area. Despite taking all necessary precautions, the DGP was not seen wearing a bulletproof vest and protective headgear (patka) to ensure his safety.

As his images were published on various social media platforms, questions were raised about whether DGP was violating the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) while leading the anti-terrorist operations.

The Police Chief earlier rushed to the active area on Sunday and supervised the ongoing operations to neutralise the terrorists trapped in the thickly forested area of Sanyal.

According to preliminary reports, an alarm was raised by a couple who claimed to have spotted a group of five terrorists in the nearby forests while they were out there to collect firewood. DGP also inter-



Despite taking all necessary precautions, the DGP was not seen wearing a bulletproof vest and protective headgear (patka) to ensure his safety

acted with the couple and gathered vital inputs based on their assessment of the group of terrorists hiding in the area.

In the past, senior army and police officers sacrificed their lives in the line of duty during anti-terrorist operations, and sev-

eral others received injuries when they were present on ground zero.

On September 14, 2023, Col Manpreet Singh and Major Ashish Dhonchak of 19 Rashtriya Rifles, and DSP Humayun Bhat of J&K Police sacrificed their lives during a fierce gunfight with terrorists in the forests surrounding Gadool village of Kokernag in Anantnag district.

On Feb 18, 2019 a deputy inspector general of police, a Rashtriya Rifles commander of the rank of brigadier and a lieutenant colonel were among the top police and Army officers injured in an encounter in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district. The encounter took place in Pulwama's Pingleena area.

On September 13, 2018, two para-commandos received gunshot injuries while neutralising the third terrorist in the last leg of the counter. Emerging out of his safe hideout, the

lone terrorist opened fire on these commandos when he came face to face with them during the combing and search operations in the thickly vegetated fields of Kakriyal.

Media teams led by a senior police officer had a narrow escape as the lone terrorist opened a barrage of fire using his AK rifle. In the fierce gun fight the commandos eliminated him, successfully ending the 33-hour-long chase in search of these terrorists.

Meanwhile, in the absence of any success, a joint team of security forces continued to search the general area of Hiranagar for the third day in succession to eliminate terrorists hiding in the area. On the other hand, local police authorities have so far detained three suspects, and the army found two China-made hand-grenades since Monday evening in the area.





# Projects worth ₹40K cr completed in Kashi: Maurya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath Uttar Pradesh has seen four-pronged development in the last eight years and development projects worth ₹40,000 crore have been completed in Kashi, while projects worth ₹15,000 crore are in progress. Talking to reporters at Circuit House here on Tuesday on the occasion of completion of eight years of Yogi government, he said the biggest achievement is our good governance when the state was made crime-free. "During the previous rule of Samajwadi Party (SP), UP was not only a state of goons and rioters, but was also a sick state", he said. However, Maurya said in the last eight years, eight lakh government jobs were given on the basis of merit. "Successful work was done in the direction of women empowerment and resolution taken by our government was achieved in these eight years", he said, adding that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, 25 crore people have come out of poverty line in the country, out of which six crore people are from UP.

He said that 1.56 crore women of UP were benefited under the Ujjwala scheme. In 2016, the unemployment rate of the state was 18 per cent, which has now come down to 2.5 per cent. He described the 'Har Ghar Nal Yojana' as the world's largest scheme in which 2.37 houses only in UP have been given their water connections. Maurya said in Kashi during the last eight years, 458 projects related to roads, bridges, drinking water, sewerage, STP, education, health, energy, tourism, urban development and police welfare etc costing more than ₹40,536 crore have been



DyCM KP Maurya addressing a press conference in Varanasi on Tuesday.

completed and dedicated to public. "Apart from this, the construction work of various projects costing more than ₹15,000 crore are in progress. In the district, 102 projects related to ring road, national highway, state highway, district road and bridge construction have been completed at a cost of more than ₹22,408 crore while construction of roads and bridges costing more than ₹4,955 crore is in progress. Construction of railway, airport and waterway has been completed at a cost of more than ₹1,529 crore while construction work of railway and airport etc projects costing more than ₹3,809 crore is in progress", he said.

The DyCM said under the Smart City Project, 34 projects have been completed in the district at a cost of ₹877.65 crore, which mainly include Kashi Integrated Command Control Centre, advanced surveillance cameras at 720 places in the city, Varanasi Sports Complex Sagra, construc-

tion of Town Hall shopping complex, 3D urban digital map and construction of multilevel two wheeler parking at Godowlia Chowk etc. Besides, 60 sewerage and drinking water related projects costing more than ₹1,000 crore have been completed, he said. Drinking water and sewerage related projects costing more than ₹2,100 crore are currently in progress, he added.

He said that 32 education-related projects costing more than ₹512 crore have been completed while construction of 11 projects costing more than ₹666 crore is in progress. The urban electricity improvement work, electrification in 3,722 hamlets, construction of 220 KV electricity substation and bio CNG plant etc have been constructed at a cost of ₹1,100 crore. Besides, 43 health-related projects have been completed at a cost of ₹1,870.36 crore, which mainly include Mahamana Pandit Madan Migan Malviya Cancer Centre,

## Exhibition highlights govt's achievements

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya formally inaugurated the development exhibition based on the achievements of the last eight years of the Uttar Pradesh government organised by the Information department at Chota Cutting Memorial Ground here on Tuesday by cutting the ribbon.

In it was highlighted that in Kashi 3,01,207 farmers have been benefitted from the Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi; 16,026 farmers from the Kisan Loan Redemption Scheme; 32,708 persons from the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin and 4,930 from the Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojana. Besides, 2,80,132 individual toilets and 694 community toilets have been constructed in the district. Pension is being given to 63,229 destitute women, old age pension to 1,19,205 elderly people and pension is being given to 23,343 disabled people. In the last eight years, 5,942 couples have been married by organising mass marriages. 57,777 girls have been benefited

Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital, construction of 430-bedded super specialty hospital in Banaras Hindu University, construction of 100-bedded maternity wing in District Women Hospital, Kabirchaura and Bone Marrow Transplant and Stem Cell Research Centre while projects worth ₹512 crore related to health infrastructure are

under the Chief Minister Kanya Sumangala Yojana and 38,848 women under the Prime Minister Matru Vandana Yojana.

Besides, 11,02,734 Prime Minister Jan Dhan accounts have been opened in the district and Atal pension is being given to 1,95,551 persons. Ayushman Bharat Golden Cards for 11,27,646 persons have been made and ration cards have been provided to 6,05,436 eligible persons in the district. Besides, 78,15,373 quintals of free ration has been distributed in the district and 55,673 persons have been benefited under the PM Swanidhi Yojana and 1,89,308 persons under the PM Ujjwala Yojana. Tablets and smart phones have been distributed to 1,58,736 students in the district and 6,000 people have been benefited under Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana. On the occasion Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya, Mayor Ashok Tiwari, MLA T Ram, MLA Dr Awadhesh Singh, regional BJP president Dilip Patel, city BJP chief Pradeep Agrahari along with party office-bearers etc were present.

currently under construction. Six sports-related projects have been completed at a cost of ₹128.07 crore, which include 100-bed capacity boys and girls hostel and public pavilion in Sagra Sports Stadium, District Shooting Range Sports Stadium, Lalpur etc. Maurya informed that 30 projects related to tourism development cost-

ing more than ₹721 crore have been completed, which mainly include Namoo Ghat, Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham (Corridor), tourism redevelopment in Sarnath, tourism redevelopment of five stops of Panchkosi Parikrama Yatra, road along the Ganga river from Markandeya Mahadev Ghat to Sangam Ghat in Kaithi, Sarnath Laser and Sound Show, Markandey Mahadev Temple, Kaithi and Ganga Ghat, development of Kaithi, Swarved Meditation Centre, tourism development work in Rameshwar, Virtual Experience Museum, Maan Mahal, construction of Anna Kshetra in Kashi Vishwanath Temple (KVT) and tourism development from Godowlia to Dashashwamedh Ghat and Ganga Darshan Guest House at KVT etc. "Apart from this, projects costing more than ₹900 crore are currently under construction. Besides, 17 projects related to police welfare have been completed at a cost of ₹87 crore while four projects are in progress at a cost of ₹44.39 crore", he said.

Maurya said Rudraksh Convention Centre was constructed and eight new transmission lines of 156.33 km have been prepared in the district. He said 34 new panchayat ghar have been constructed and 439 Anganwadi centres have been constructed. Besides, 114 tourist centres have been developed. Notable works have been done under innovative initiatives like Sabal Kashi, 10 point Kashi strategy against malnourishment, Kashi Prerna Cafe, Project Vidya Shakti and Swasth Drishti Samridhdh Kashi", he said, adding that the consolidated result of all these works done has been that while the GDP of the district was ₹22586.91 crore in the year 2017, it has now become ₹ 43899.75 crore, which is almost double. Apart from this, the per capita income of Kashi has also increased to ₹90,028 at present.

## Immense potential of maize cultivation emphasised



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

A one-day seminar on the topic "Revolutionary changes in maize cultivation: Innovations for a sustainable future" was organised at the farmers auditorium of the Directorate of Extension, Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology

(CSAUA&T). The event was jointly conducted by the Directorate of Extension and Dhanuka Agritech Limited.

Former director of the Maize Research Institute, Dr Sai Das, who was the chief guest, emphasised the immense potential of maize cultivation in the state and its importance. He said maize cultivation could significantly increase the income of

farmers and reshape state's agricultural economy.

Vice-Chancellor Dr Anand Kumar Singh said that maize can be cultivated three times a year, providing multi-purpose benefits to farmers. He also mentioned that maize is being cultivated in 23 districts of the state, which is contributing to the improvement of the economic condition of farmers. Director of Extension Dr RK Yadav and Director of Research Dr PK Singh also addressed the farmers. Dr VK Kanojia provided insights into maize production techniques and water management, while Dr. Bhupendra Kumar Singh shared information on pest and disease management. Dr Vinod Prakash also guided the farmers during the event. Along with Senior General Manager of Dhanuka Agritech Limited Atul Kumar, the seminar witnessed the participation of more than 200 farmers from nearby districts.

## Body of one of 3 kids feared drowned in canal recovered

CORRESPONDENT ■ SHAHJAHANPUR

The body of one of the three children feared drowned while bathing in Garra river was recovered on Tuesday. Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Arvind Kumar said four children of Mamudi Mohalla under Sadar Bazar police station had gone to the bank of the river to graze goats on Monday afternoon. Shahrulkh (12), Shoaib (14) and Akhlaq (11) decided to bathe in the river but got stuck in the deep water and started drowning. Zeeshan, brother of Shahrulkh, rushed home and alerted the family. Police reached the spot along with a flood unit and divers. The body of the child recovered on Tuesday has been sent for post-mortem examination, the ADM said and added that the search operation is going on for the last 24 hours.

## Row over car parking claims lawyer's life

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

A lawyer lost his life in a dispute over parking a car in Kalyanpur police station area. A tenant living in the neighbourhood seriously injured the advocate by hitting him with crutches in a dispute over car parking in Kalyanpur late on Monday night. The victim was admitted to a nearby hospital where he died during treatment on Tuesday morning.

Rajesh Singh alias Chhotu (40), a lawyer from Kalyanpur Khurd, was also involved in property dealing. He is survived by his wife Kshama Singh and two daughters. Kshama said Dheeraj Tiwari, a tenant living in the neighbourhood, often parked his two cars in the way. She said she was returning home in the car with her husband late on Monday night. Due to many cars parked on both sides of the road, there was difficulty in reaching home. Rajesh

knocked on the door of neighbour Dheeraj and called him. He allegedly abused Rajesh and hit him on his head with crutches, due to which he fell down bleeding. He was admitted to a nearby hospital. Kshama said on receiving information about the dispute, the police reached the spot, caught the accused and took him to the police station. She alleged that the police released him without taking any action. Rajesh died due to serious head injuries during treatment on Tuesday. His family and locals staged a massive agitation.

On getting information about the ruckus, ADCP (West) Vijender Dwivedi, ACP (Kalyanpur) Abhishek Kumar Pandey along with the circle force reached the spot. In view of the ruckus, PAC has been deployed there. It is alleged that Dheeraj Kumar along with family fled by car after the incident.

## KnP Metro expansion to improve transport system, connect commuters with heritage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The expansion of Kanpur Metro from Motihel to Kanpur Central will not only enhance the city's public transport system but also offers commuters a unique opportunity to connect with Kanpur's rich cultural heritage. From the 1857 freedom struggle to the architectural landmarks that define this industrial hub, and from promotion of One District, One Product to the city's dialect and the life-giving Ganges—every aspect of Kanpur's heritage has been thoughtfully integrated into the new metro stations.

Each station along this route showcases an artistic tribute to Kanpur's legacy. Near Chunniganj station, the historic Lal Imli building is prominently featured in the station's artwork. At Naveen Market station, locally crafted products, including leather bags, bangles and jewellery, are beautifully displayed. Bada Chauraha station features captivating visuals of Ganga Ghat and Ganga Aarti, along with a display of a traditional clay pot on a chalk base. The Nayaganj station, located near



Phoolbagh Park, embraces the colors of nature in its artistic design. The vibrancy of Kanpur's markets is brought to life with depictions of Ganga Mela, rangoli, laddoo, and samosa. At Kanpur Central station, the city's linguistic charm and history take center stage, with artwork showcasing words in the Kanpur dialect alongside images of the 1857 revolt led by Rani Lakshmi Bai.

Managing Director (MD) of Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Limited (UPMRC), Sushil Kumar, said, "Each station from Chunniganj to Kanpur Central

has been adorned with artwork based on a unique theme. Additionally, local products such as leather bags, carpets, wooden artifacts, brass utensils and jewellery have been prominently displayed under the One District, One Product concept. We hope the people of Kanpur appreciate these efforts.

The captivating artwork will not only serve as selfie points for the younger generation but will also strengthen the connection between residents, visitors and city's cultural heritage. Kanpur's past is glorious and its future is bright. We are deeply grateful for the unwavering support of this great city during the metro's construction."

### World TB Day celebrated

World TB Day 2025 was celebrated with great enthusiasm at CSJM University under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Prof. Vinay Kumar Pathak. The event was graced by the chief guest, Dr Vandana Pathak, and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Sudhir Kumar Awasthi. Registrar, Dr Anil Kumar Yadav also played a key role in the success of the event.

## Contribution of Indian Railways in sports promotion appreciated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The 68th All India Railway Golf Championship was inaugurated at the lush green golf course of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) here on Tuesday. This prestigious competition, being organised under the aegis of Railway Sports Promotion Board and BLW Sports Association, was inaugurated by General Manager (GM) Naresh Pal Singh by releasing balloons.

A total of 66 golfers from 21 zones and production units of Indian Railways are participating in this championship. The GM gave an exciting start to the competition by playing a golf shot. In his inaugural address, he appreciated the contribution of Indian Railways in sports promotion and the enthusiasm of the employees towards sports. He said, "Competitions like golf not only promote physical and mental fitness but also strengthen discipline, solidarity and sportsmanship among railway employees". President of BLW Sports Association and Principal Chief



Electrical Engineer (PCEE) Sushil Kumar Shrivastava, BLW Sports Association honorary general secretary and Chief Mechanical Engineer (Production & Marketing) Suneel Kumar, Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer Vivek Sheel, Principal Chief Materials Manager Sanjay Kumar Mishra, Deputy Chief Electrical Engineer Shishir Tyagi, Deputy General Manager Anuj Katiyar, Arjun Awardee and Senior Sports Officer Bahadur Prasad, Principal Chief Personnel Officer of North Western Railway (NWR) Pradeep Kumar Singh, Inspector General-cum-rincipal Chief Security Commissioner of Chittaranjan Locomotive Works (CLW) Satya Prakash, Principal Chief Materials

Manager of North Central Railway (NCR) SP Dwivedi, Finance Adviser and Chief Accounts Officer of NER RR Gupta, Principal Chief Personnel Officer of NER Manoj Kumar, Principal Finance Advisor of Patiala Locomotive Works (PLW) Bikram Singh Gill, Chief Materials Manager of South East Central Railway (SECR) SS Lakra, CWE Planning of South Eastern Railway (SER) BK Rath, CMS from NER SP Sharma etc were present.

### TB-Free India campaign ends

The '100-Day TB-Free India Public Participation Campaign' concluded on Monday at Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW). Various health experts, officers, employees and their families participated in this programme organised in the auditorium of BLW Hospital.

This campaign was started on December 7 last year by General Manager Naresh Pal Singh. In the last 100 days, BLW has promoted widespread public awareness and community participation with the goal of TB elimination.

## Safety awards given to 23 rly employees



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

General Manager of North Central Railway (NCR) Upendra Chandra Joshi presented safety awards to 23

Railway employees for their excellent work towards safety on Tuesday.

Besides, Senior Train Manager Rajendra Kumar Gautam was declared the best railway employee for December 2024 while

pointsman Ranno Devi became the best railway employee for January 2025.

The GM gave the safety awards to 23 Railway employees selected from Jhansi, Agra and Prayagraj divisions for December 2024 and January 2025 in presence of Principal Chief Safety Officer, JCS Bora and department heads of NCR.

### Prayagraj division excels

Continuous efforts are being made to provide excellent services to the passengers in Prayagraj division. The division has performed brilliantly in passenger services and freight loading in the current financial year. Divisional Railway Manager of Prayagraj division, Himanshu Badoni, congratulated all the officers and employees for this achievement.

Public Relations Officer Amit Singh said that Prayagraj division has earned an income of Rs 2552.87 crore till now in the current financial year 2024-25. This income earning is 4.31 per cent more than the target set at Rs 2447.43 crore and 10.72

per cent more than the income earning of Rs 2305.64 crore of the last financial year.

Prayagraj division transported 7.01 crore passengers in the current financial year. This achievement is 16.03 per cent more than the target set at 6.04 crore passengers and 20.97 per cent more than the passenger transport of 5.80 crore passengers of the last financial year.

Prayagraj division performed brilliantly in the current financial year 2024-25 and earned Rs 122.27 crore from other coaching income, Rs 773.74 crore from freight income, Rs 31.70 crore from miscellaneous income. Miscellaneous income registered an increase of 68.16 per cent from the last financial year.

Prayagraj division earned Rs 3.12 crore from parking income and Rs 13.77 crore from catering income in the current financial year 2024-25. Parking income has registered an increase of 240 per cent more than the target and catering income has registered an increase of 170 per cent than the target.

## Need for early diagnosis, community support stressed for TB elimination

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The Department of Community Medicine, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU), organised a World TB Day awareness event at RHTC Chiragaon. The event aimed to raise awareness through ralley and nukkad natak, bust myths and empower the community in the fight against tuberculosis (TB) — a disease still burdening India. The event was graced by IMS-BHU Director Prof SN Sankhwar. On the occasion Prof Hari Shankar (Head of the Department, Community Medicine), and other faculty members including Prof Sangeeta Kansal, Prof Ravi Shankar, Dr Arun Dubey, Dr Abhishek Jaiswal (In-Charge RHTC), Dr Zari Anjum, Dr Vineet Pathak, and Dr Vibha Swaroop were present. Prof Sankhwar emphasised the need for early diagnosis, treatment adherence, and communi-

ty support to eliminate TB. A rally was green flagged by the IMS-BHU Director at RHTC Chiragaon. The rally included director, faculties, residents, interns, health workers, field staffs and villagers, chanting slogans like 'TB hareega, desh jeetega'. This was followed by an interactive myth-busting session featuring roleplays, addressing common misconceptions — from TB spreading by touch to patients needing isolation. The event ended with a resounding commitment to fight TB together, echoing: 'TB se darna nahi -jeetna hai!'

Meanwhile the Wellbeing Services Cell (WBSC) at BHU under the aegis of the Dean of Students, organised the clue chase race on Monday to promote gender equality. This engaging race aimed to foster teamwork and problem-solving skills among students through a fun, intellectually stimulating activity.

# TN gets more MGNREGS funds than Uttar Pradesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Earlier also, with a population of seven

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

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

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

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

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

# Avalanches recurring phenomenon in high-altitude areas: Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# UP reports highest number of ragging complaints in medical colleges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Finance Bill 2025 offers unprecedented tax relief



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The Committee recommends the implementation of a comprehensive

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

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

# XR Creator Hackathon revolutionises India's immersive technology

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

experience to the next level.

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

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

Editor's TAKE

## Turkey in turmoil

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# A historic return from space

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



over 20 years.

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

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

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

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

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

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

will take time.

Former US President Donald Trump has turned the issue of the stranded astronauts into a political matter. He blamed former President Joe Biden for not helping them.

The White House's official X account stated, "PROMISE MADE, PROMISE KEPT: President Trump promised to rescue the stranded astronauts while criticising Joe Biden."

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

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

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

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

### Conclusion

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

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



KALYANI SHANKAR

## Green infrastructure for sustainable cities

### SECOND Opinion



HARI SOMALRAJU

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Leaderspeak



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

SUNIL GAVASKAR, INDIAN CRICKETER



## Letters to the Editor

### Trump's Greenland gambit

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

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

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

ANUSHKA BOHRA | UJJAIN

### Clamour for Justice Varma's impeachment

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

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

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

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

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

SACHIN TRIPATHI | SATNA

### RESERVATION HAS BECOME A SLOGAN FOR HARNESSING VOTES

It has become a routine process to raise the issue of reservations whenever an election is near as now Bihar elections will be held after six months and political parties know that the issue will be challenged in the court and will be rejected by the judiciary and till then keep this alive for vote bank. In the Parliament elections, Opposition parties were to flare up the issue of reservations and due to this reason BJP could not get the absolute majority in the Lok Sabha, and it is a great weapon in the hands of Opposition.

Now the Karnataka government has declared four per cent reservation for Muslims in allotment of contracts, and it is also true that the state has already provided similar reservation for SCs and STs and OBC contractors.

Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution of India mandate that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth but authorises governments to "make special provisions for the

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

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

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

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

## The ailing discoms need structural changes

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

FIRST  
Column

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

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

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

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

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

### Can the scheme deliver?

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

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



UTTAM GUPTA

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

FY 2023-24. The RLRBSD launched in FY 2021-22 talks of lowering AT&C losses to 12-15 per cent by the end of FY 2025-26, a level that should have been reached in FY 2018-19. As for the ACS-ARR gap, it merely talks of 'gradually narrowing' the gap forgetting the 'zero' target that UDAY sought to achieve by FY 2018-19. Now, the MoP has shifted the goalpost to the end of FY 2027-28.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



HIMANSHU UPADHYAYA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The art of stress-free management

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

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

But still, no company has found that magical technique. Why? After a lot of mind churning and keeping a pragmatic approach, it can be said that the art of tension-free management is mainly about using the 8 M's, 7 P's, 6 S's and lastly 5 T's in an organised way and useful, profitable and peaceful manner and to the maximum possible satisfaction of and justice to all concerned. The 8 M's are: men, money, materials, machines, marketing, mutual connections, mutual relations and means. The seven P's. These are: productivity and performance, price and profitability, planning ahead of time, pecuniary discipline, publicity, public relations and politeness, punctuality and personal commitments. The six S's are: skills, standards, strategies and speed, salesmanship, systems and structures social good and finally the 5 T's are: time and time sense, technology or techniques, teamwork, treatment of each other, thanks giving habits.

Now, to be a good manager, one has to have a good judgement of men, materials, movements and moments and one has to have the abilities of innovation, intuition, entrepreneurship and enthusiastic efforts. One has also to have the qualities of farsightedness, global thinking, humility, integrity and lastly humour. Since this is the era of increasing competition, rapid changes in technology and trends and doing things in ever new ways and at a great speed, one must have the abilities of resilience and feel relaxed in the face of all these and many more pressures, else one would lose one's health and happiness and temper and tranquillity.

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

Now, to attain success in achieving the goal of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





# Palestinian director attacked by Israeli settlers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jerusalem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# US President hits Venezuela oil buyers



President Donald Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

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

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

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

But even the United States, despite its

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Denver

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

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

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

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

Initially, people objected to artist

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Wildfires force evacuation in Andong

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

The national government designated

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

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

He also urged public vigilance as dry spring weather persists.

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Moscow

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# India losing three per cent of GDP annually: Gadkari

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

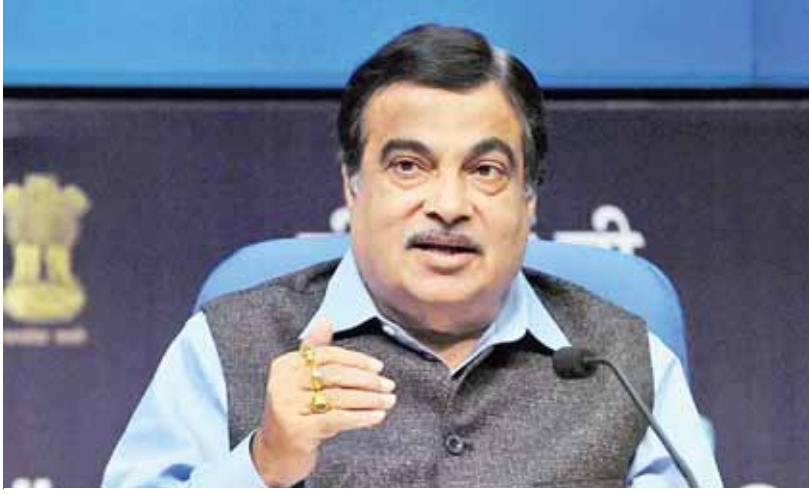
The most important problem for the country is road accidents, Gadkari said, noting that every year India sees 4,80,000 accidents, which lead to 1,88,000 deaths of people aged between 18 and 45 years.

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

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

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

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



Union Minister Nitin Gadkari

PIONEER PHOTO

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

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

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

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

# Government recovers ₹416 crore under PM-KISAN scheme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

Initially, Aadhaar seeding was also relaxed for some of the states, he said. Later on, to address this, several technological interventions were introduced, including integration with PFMS, UIDAI, and the Income Tax Department.

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A total of 12,957 new multi-purpose primary agricultural credit societies, dairy and fishery cooperative societies have been established across the country in past two years, Cooperation Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday in Parliament. Shah, in his written reply to the Lok Sabha, said the government had in February 2023 approved the plan for strengthening cooperative movement in the country and deepening its reach up to the grassroots.

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

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

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

# REC transfers four transmission SPVs to Power Grid, IndiGrid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Government rolls out fix quality norms for hinges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

The Chief Minister, during the press conference, said that the education sector has got a major boost as the government has increased allocation of ₹19,291 Crore, a 17% rise from the previous year's Budget of ₹16,396 Crore.

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

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

Additionally, several startup support centres will be set up across Delhi to help young entrepreneurs with financial assistance and guidance.

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

memorandum of understanding on a Singapore-India GDSC.

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

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

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

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



VINOD GIRI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# NorthEast Frontier Railway achieves 100 per cent electrification of Alipurduar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

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

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

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

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

## IN BRIEF

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

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



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



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

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

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





