



Riot sets Nagpur ablaze

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

ter said that the film had brought to the people the "real history" of Sambhaji Maharaj to the people.

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

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

Israel pummels Gaza, killing more than 400 Palestinians

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

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

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

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

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



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

the territory, indicating that Israel could soon launch renewed ground operations.

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

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

PM Modi pens note for Sunita Williams

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

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

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

He said he had met Massimino at a programme in New Delhi and Williams' name came up during the conversation. "During the course of our conversation, your name came up and we discussed how proud we are of you and your work. Following this interaction, I could not stop myself from writing to you," he said.

Trump, Putin talk Ukraine ceasefire, Zelenskyy unsure

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

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

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

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

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

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

ceasefire framework.

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

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

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

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

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



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

PM speaks Maha Kumbh, Opposition cries stampedes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

Chhattisgarh CM unveils Bastar development dream before PM



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR/NEW DELHI

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Tuesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi and discussed the development roadmap of the tribal heartland Bastar, a state government statement informed.

During the meeting, Sai presented the Bastar Development Master Plan, outlining the transformation of Naxal-affected areas into hubs of infrastructure, industry, and tourism.

The Prime Minister responded positively and assured full support from the central government.

Sai informed Modi that Naxalism in Chhattisgarh is near to elimination, and with the coordinated efforts of security forces and local public, rapid changes were evident in the Naxal-affected regions.

"The state's primary focus is now on developing Bastar into a new industrial and economic centre, creating employment

opportunities for youth and improving the living standards of tribal communities," Sai told the Prime Minister.

Sai also elaborated on Chhattisgarh's new industrial policy and the rising interest of investors. He spoke about single-window clearance, tax incentives, and investor-friendly policies, attracting major companies to invest in Chhattisgarh.

Sai also informed about ongoing initiatives to make rural women in Bastar self-reliant. Through women's self-help groups, thousands of women are gaining economic independence and employment opportunities.

Promotion of minor forest produce, organic farming, handloom, bamboo industries, and handicrafts is enabling women to secure livelihoods while strengthening the local economy, he said.

Sai added that startups and small-scale industries are linking Bastar's women to production and marketing networks, ensuring their financial independence and contribution to the state's economic progress.

Pollution worsening in Indian metros

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Justice after a 44-year-old massacre

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Firozabad

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Develop Vidhan Sabha as 'model' Assembly: Om Birla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday gave a call to develop the Delhi Vidhan Sabha as a "model" Assembly and urged the newly elected MLAs to upskill themselves with modern technology such as Artificial Intelligence.

Inaugurating a two-day orientation programme for Delhi MLAs at the Assembly, he said people have high expectations from the legislators and the new government.

"Delhi as the national capital is like a 'Mini India', representing the diversity among people from different states living here... It is a big responsibility to meet their expectations and solve their problems by ensuring infrastructure development and social welfare," Birla said.

The orientation programme will be helpful in learning ways to fulfil the high expectations of people from their MLAs and the new government, he said.

The inaugural session of the event was also attended by Delhi Assembly Speaker

Vijender Gupta, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Leader of Opposition in Assembly Atishi, Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht, Lok Sabha Secretary General Utkal Kumar Singh and the MPs from Delhi.

Stating that a good orator is also the best listener, Birla urged the MLAs to spend time participating in the legislative business of the Assembly.

"Artificial Intelligence should be used for capacity building and efficiency. One can ensure better dialogue and communication with more use of technology," he said.

The Delhi Assembly should be developed as a "model" with respect to maximum use of technology and skills of its members, Birla said. The Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies is conducting the orientation programme, offering insights into parliamentary rules and legislative practices.

Birla also said the new members should learn legislative drafting, employ the available legislative sources, and become aware of the rules and regulations to be able to work for the people.

The Lok Sabha speaker asked them to



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla being welcomed by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta upon his arrival for the inauguration of a two-day orientation programme for the newly-elected Delhi MLAs in New Delhi on Tuesday

be innovative in solving problems in their constituencies and said that "transparen-

cy, honesty and accountability" are necessary for Delhi's development.

Solutions that emerge from Delhi will not only serve the city and its people but also set an example for other states and legislative bodies in the country, he said.

Birla also said the Assembly should be a platform for debate, discussion and consensus building, and there should be no impasse even as disagreements may appear.

Artificial Intelligence should be used for capacity building and efficiency. One can ensure better dialogue and communication with more use of technology

— OM BIRLA, LOK SABHA SPEAKER

"In a democracy, both the ruling party and the opposition have important roles to play and their positive contributions strengthen the democratic process. There should not be any impasse within the House and dissent must be expressed through a dignified meaningful discourse," he said.

The Delhi Assembly Speaker in his address emphasised the importance of

understanding legislative procedures and rules and urged the new MLAs to thoroughly read the rule book, especially the Code of Conduct, and adhere to these guidelines during House proceedings.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta reaffirmed her commitment to the progress and prosperity of Delhi, highlighting the need for a harmonious political environment to ensure the sustained development of the city. "The people of Delhi have entrusted us with great faith. Every moment is precious and it must be utilised and respected properly. Our sole objective is the progress of Delhi and the cordial atmosphere we have today should be maintained for the next five years as well," she stated.

Both the ruling party and the opposition play a crucial role in the path of development, she noted. Leader of Opposition Atishi said every MLA is expected to uphold the hopes of Delhi's people and fulfil their responsibilities in the Assembly. "With decision-making power granted by Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution, we represent millions of Delhiites who look to us with great expectations," she said.

Christian Michel James not convicted, can't get remission: Tihar jail authorities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Tihar jail authorities on Tuesday informed a Delhi court that Christian Michel James, an alleged middleman in the AgustaWestland case, was not entitled for any remission as he was not convicted yet.

The jail superintendent also informed special judge Sanjeev Aggarwal that no punishment was recorded during the custody of James, saying his conduct during the incarceration was "satisfactory". The judge also sought a report in response to James' plea seeking six months of remission. James, a British national, was extradited from Dubai, where he had spent four months in custody, on December 4, 2018.

Probe agencies reported irregularities in the purchase of 12 VVIP helicopters from Italian manufacturing company AgustaWestland.

James, on March 7, offered to "finish his sentence" and leave India instead of walking out on bail owing to "security risks".

Following the reprieve in the CBI and ED cases against him, the special court imposed the necessary bail conditions for releasing him on bail.

While the Delhi High Court on March 4 granted him bail in the ED case and directed for saddling Michel with the necessary bail riders, the Supreme Court on February 18 granted the relief in the CBI case subject to the trial court's conditions.

A trial court judge on March 7 asked

James, "How are you now? God has been kind to you in the last two months. You have got bail in both cases."

James said, "Delhi is just a larger prison. My family cannot come to me... My security is at risk. I would rather complete my sentence and leave the country."

The judge asked Michel how could he continue to be incarcerated when bail had been granted to him. "I cannot accept the

James was extradited from Dubai, where he had spent four months in custody. Probe agencies reported irregularities in the purchase of 12 VVIP helicopters from Italian manufacturing company AgustaWestland

bail. It's unsafe. Every time I step out of Tihar (prison), something happens," Michel said. On the aspect of furnishing a surety bond, he said, "How can a person who has been in jail for six years produce local sureties?"

After Michel stressed he did not want to be released on bail because of security reasons, the judge asked, "Can't you find a safehouse in Delhi?" Michel then offered to "narrate in private the incident" he faced when he was admitted to AIIMS.

"The problem I have is with the police. I would rather talk to you in private," he said. The judge then asked the media per-

sons and the police personnel to wait outside for some time. The court later passed its order, laying down the conditions for bail. The conditions included James marking his attendance physically before the investigating officers once every 15 days, providing his cellphone number, email and residential address to the probe agencies aside from not leaving the country without the court's permission and not tampering with the evidence or attempting to influence the witnesses.

"The accused shall not interact with respect to the present case with the media nor shall communicate regarding this case at any forum, during the trial of this case, the court's order said.

The court also directed James to furnish a personal bond and surety of Rs 10 Lakh in both cases and surrender his passport. James was extradited from Dubai in December 2018 and was arrested by the CBI and the ED later.

He is among the three alleged middlemen being probed in the case and the other two are Guido Haschke and Carlo Gerosa. The CBI, in its chargesheet, claimed an estimated loss of 398.21 million euros (about Rs 2,666 Crore) to the exchequer due to the deal that was signed on February 8, 2010, for the supply of VVIP choppers worth 556.262 Million Euros.

The ED chargesheet filed against James in June 2016 alleged he received 30 Million Euros (about Rs 225 Crore) from AgustaWestland.

9,000 MW: Power demand!

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi is likely to have peak power demand for the first time of nearly 9,000 Mega Watt (MW) this summer and the power discoms are taking steps to ensure smooth electricity supply. The national capital peak power demand last year was 8,656 MW.

Peak power demand in BRPL area of South and West Delhi, which had clocked 3,809 MW during the summers of 2024, is expected to reach around 4,050 MW during the summers of 2025. On the other hand, in BYPL area of East and Central Delhi, the peak power demand, which had reached 1,882 MW during the summers of 2024, is expected to touch around 1,900 MW this year, according to BSES.

It said discoms are geared-up to ensure reliable power supply to meet the power demand of more than 50 Lakh consumers and two Crore residents in South, West, East and Central Delhi. These arrangements include long term PPAs and banking arrangements with other states and deployment of latest technologies like AI and ML for predicting power demand accurately, critical for ensuring reliable power supply.

Moreover, BSES has made power banking arrangements with many states, from where the discoms will get upto 500 MW of power during the summer months. "To meet today's power challenges and to get a grip on so many varied and dynamic variables, BSES uses a mix of advanced statistical forecasting models, combined with state-of-the-art

weather forecasting solutions, including Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning and rich domain expertise provided by IMD-POSCO. These analytics help us build models, which lead to high accuracy planning and huge saving of man-hours," it said. During the year, BSES discoms have strengthened the network and undertook several unique measures to ensure reliable power supply during the summer months.



Apart from preventive maintenance, BSES has also done extensive predictive checks to identify hot-spots or to pre-determine potential faults and to take remedial measures. This is done through thermal scanning, partial discharge measurement, and health assessment of power and distribution transformers. Online load monitoring system is also in place for tracking the power transformers and 11kV feeder load especially during the summers.

City court dismisses plea of activist Medha Patkar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A city court on Tuesday dismissed a plea of activist Medha Patkar to examine a new witness in her 2000 defamation case against Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and said the judicial process couldn't be "held hostage to such tactics". The Narmada Bachao Andolan leader filed the case against Saxena when he headed an NGO in Gujarat for allegedly publishing a defamatory advertisement. Judicial magistrate Raghav Sharma noted that present case was pending for 24 years and the complainant had already examined all the witnesses listed at the time of filing of the complaint. "The judicial process cannot be held hostage to such tactics, especially in a case that has already been pending for over two decades," the judge said. Patkar, he observed, previously filed a plea to summon additional witnesses, yet she did not mention the present witness in that application.

"If this witness was truly material to her case, she would have either included them in the original list of witnesses or, at the very least, mentioned them in the earlier application for additional witness. The fact that this witness has surfaced only now, after all of the complainant's witnesses have been examined, raises serious doubts about the genuineness of this request," the judge said. The court said neither the complainant nor any of her witnesses referred to the witness sought to be summoned at any stage of the trial. "If this witness was genuinely relevant, his/her name or role in the case would have been mentioned at some point during the last 24 years of proceedings. The complete absence of any reference to this witness further suggests that it is an afterthought, possibly introduced to bolster the complainant's case artificially," the judge said.

Patkar, said the court, further did not provide any explanation as to when, how, or under what circumstances she learnt about the witness.

Elderly couple found dead in Kohat Enclave, night attendant missing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A 70-year-old man was strangled and his wife badgered to death in the Kohat Enclave area of northwest Delhi, with their night attendant, who joined three days ago, missing, police said on Tuesday.

The victims were identified as Mohinder Singh, a readymade garment shop owner, and his wife Diljeet Kaur, an officer said. The bodies of the couple, who lived alone, were found in a decomposing state.

The couple has two sons, who live near their house, and a daughter. They hadn't

been to their parents for the last three days and did not know about their deaths incident, till they were told by a driver.

Police sources said that Mohinder Singh had not been keeping well for the last few months and was being taken care of by an attendant, Ravi. Three days ago, Ravi, a resident of Uttam Nagar, proposed his replacement as he was taking leave. The man, who the family had never met, was hired as a fill-in. "Singh was first strangled with an oxygen pipe and his wife was hit with an iron rod," a police source said.

Another officer said that a PCR call was received on Tuesday at Subhash Place

police station regarding a foul smell emanating from a house. "Upon reaching House No 317 in Kohat Enclave, police found the bodies of the elderly couple lying in separate rooms on the third floor of the building," the officer said.

The state of decomposition suggested they had been dead for about two or three days, he said. Mohinder Singh was last seen alive around 8 pm on Sunday.

Police also discovered that an attempt had been made to break open a locker inside the house. A hunt has been launched for the missing attendant and a case filed. Police are also trying to nab Ravi, who

hired the replacement, he said.

While talking to media, Charanpreet Singh, a son of the couple, said that on Tuesday, their driver rang the bell of his parent's house, but no one responded.

"We live nearby. The driver informed us that my parents were not opening the door. My wife went there and saw my father's body lying on the bed. My mother's body was found in another room," Charanpreet Singh said. He said the latest attendant had been hired only three days ago.

"We have provided all the details of the accused to the police. We have also checked CCTV footage and got to know

that he left the house early in the morning two days ago with a backpack," Mohinder said, adding, he was yet to know what had been taken from the house.

The incident comes a day after a Delhi University professor, his wife, and their house help were tied up by robbers in a daylight heist at their northwest Delhi residence. Police said three to four men forced themselves inside the house Aggarwal in Ashok Vihar and tied up the occupants.

The matter was reported to police at 11.45 am, with the caller alleging the robbers took off with gold ornaments and other valuables in Aggarwal's car.

DMRC completes Phase-IV tunnelling for underground tunnel on Golden Line

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has successfully completed tunnelling at the deepest underground section of Phase-IV with a tunnel breakthrough at the IGNOU Station site (from Chhatarpur Mandir) on the Aerocity-Tughlakabad Corridor (Golden Line). This significant achievement took place in the presence of Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Tuesday. The new tunnel has been built at an average depth of around 27 metres, one of Delhi Metro's deepest. The Delhi Metro noted that work on a parallel tunnel between Chhatarpur Mandir (Aerocity) and IGNOU (Tughlakabad) was completed in February. With the latest breakthrough, tunnelling for both up and down lines has now been finished.

Addressing the media, the chief minister stated that this is a proud moment not only for Delhi Metro but for all residents of Delhi. She expressed happiness in announcing that with the tunnel breakthrough at IGNOU Station, the deepest underground passage of Delhi Metro Phase-4 has been successfully completed.

This marks a crucial step toward making public transport in Delhi more efficient, accessible and environmentally sustainable. The tunnel will not only make commuting easier for citizens of Delhi but will also help in reducing traffic congestion and pollution. She further emphasised that this breakthrough is not just an engineering achievement but a testament to collective efforts. The government extends



Rekha Gupta with Manjinder Singh Sirsa at the IGNOU station site in New Delhi

its gratitude to the engineers, workers, metro officials, and technical experts who have worked tirelessly to bring this project to completion.

The CM highlighted that Delhi Metro has now become the lifeline of the Delhi-NCR region. She also acknowledged the contributions of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Madan Lal Khurana in the development of Delhi Metro. She noted that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country's infrastructure be it expressways, metro, or rapid transport-is expanding rapidly, bringing pride to all citizens. As India progresses, Delhi is advancing at the same pace. She also said such break-

throughs are crucial for underground tunnel construction in crowded urban areas. The newly constructed tunnel, one of Delhi Metro's deepest, is built at an average depth of 27 metres. Despite geological challenges such as presence of hard rocks, state-of-the-art tunnel boring machines were used to ensure smooth construction in densely populated areas.

40.10 km of underground track is being built under Phase-4 of Delhi Metro, including a 19.34 km underground stretch on the Aerocity-Tughlakabad corridor. This expansion will provide a safer, faster, and more convenient travel option for millions of passengers while reducing road congestion and air pollution.

Government to sign MoU with Centre to implement AB-PMJAY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Singh on Tuesday said the government will sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Centre on April 10 to implement the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) in the national capital with an aim to enrol one Lakh people for the health cover scheme within a month.

Implementation of the scheme was one of the major promises of the BJP for the Delhi Assembly elections held in February. The previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government had devised its own scheme after refusing to implement the AB-PMJAY.

"Each assembly constituency currently has about seven Mohalla clinics running from rented premises. Since we have our own land, why not build them (Mohalla clinics) there instead? Around 160 such clinics on rent that aren't functioning properly will be shut down," Singh said.

The AB-PMJAY provides health cover of ₹5 Lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to 55 Crore beneficiaries corresponding to 12.37 Crore families constituting the economically bottom 40 per cent of India's population.

Need to improve South Delhi roads: Bidhuri to Gadkari

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a move to improve connectivity and reduce congestion, South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri on Tuesday met Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari and urged him for improvement of Mandi-Jaunapur Road, Chhatarpur 100 Foota Road and construction of Master Plan Road behind Sangam Vihar and Sainik Farm, besides improving the drainage system of Badarpur Mathura Road. The MP said the Minister assured to get all the schemes implemented soon.

Bidhuri said that there is a need to improve the roads to get relief from jam in South Delhi and the government is continuously working on it. That is why he suggested these projects to Gadkari. He was requested that Mandi-Jaunapur road needs to be widened to 100 feet. Due to the high number of traffic on this road, there is often congestion and jams. Widening the road will provide relief to the people.

Similarly, Chhatarpur 100 feet road needs to be elevated from Fatehpur Beri near Qutub Minar Metro Station to Dera Mor and then from Dera Mor to Faridabad-Gurgaon Road. By doing this, there will be success in reducing the congestion on this road as well.

South Delhi BJP MP Bidhuri said that the construction of the proposed master plan road to be built behind Sangam Vihar and Sainik Farm on priority basis will provide relief from jams to the entire area. Bidhuri said that the drainage system of Mathura Road till Badarpur

border also needs to be fixed. The drainage system of this road has become very old and there is a problem of water-logging there during the rainy season. A new drainage system should be built to get relief from it. Bidhuri said that the completion of these projects will help a lot in making South Delhi jam-free.

Chandni Chowk BJP MP Praveen Khandelwal also expressed gratitude to Gadkari for approval of a new link connecting Azad Market to Urban Extension Road-II. The project will significantly improve transportation networks in Chandni Chowk and surrounding areas.

South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that there is a need to improve the roads to get relief from jam in South Delhi and the government is continuously working on it

easing congestion and facilitating smoother trade and travel. By linking Azad Market, Shastri Nagar, Outer Ring Road, and Rohini to the Delhi-Katra Expressway via the KMP Expressway, the development will provide better access for businesses, daily commuters, and the logistics sector.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has initiated Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for this 20-km road link, with an estimated Budget of ₹2,500 Crore. Following the finalisation of DPRs within the next 6-7 months, construction will begin promptly.

Police files charge sheet in journalist murder case

STAFF REPORTER ■ BIJAPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Tuesday filed a charge sheet against four persons in connection with the killing of journalist Mukesh Chandrakar in Bijapur district in January this year.

The 1,241-page-long charge sheet and a case diary were filed before a local court, Bijapur. Additional Superintendent of Police Mayank Gurjar said.

The body of freelance journalist Mukesh Chandrakar (33), who had gone missing since January 1, 2025, was recovered on January 3 inside a septic tank on the property of the murder kingpin Suresh Chandrakar in the Chattanpara locality in the



Bijapur town. Chandrakar was arrested from Hyderabad on January 5, while his brothers Ritesh and Dinesh, along with a supervisor, Mahendra Rameke, were apprehended on January 4. They were held under sec-

tions 103 (1), 238 (A), 61 (2) (B), 239, 249 and 3 (5) of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita.

The victim and accused were relatives.

Chandrakar was furious with the journo after a news report highlighting corruption in a road construction work by the latter linked to the former in Bijapur district was telecast on national news on December 25 last year. The state government then ordered a probe the very next day.

After Chandrakar's arrest, the state government suspended his registration with the state's Public Works Department as an 'A' category contractor and cancelled all works allotted to him earlier.

The four are in jail on judicial remand.

Oppn stages walkout over 'anomaly' in engineers' recruitment in PHE

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Opposition Congress MLAs on Tuesday staged a walkout from the Chhattisgarh Assembly charging anomalies in engineers' recruitment in the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department.

Even after holding a higher qualification of Bachelor of Engineering (BE), they are labelled ineligible for the post of Sub Engineer, the Congress legislators alleged.

BJP legislator Rajesh Munat and Leader of Opposition Charandas Mahant had raised the issue by moving a call attention motion.



Munat, raising the issue, questioned how a person having a higher qualification is ineligible while a diploma holder is preferred for

the post of sub-engineer.

Earlier in 2017 the state government had recruited BE holders for the post of sub-engineer, but why is it restricting them today, he said.

Congress legislator Umesh Patel pointed out that 75 percent of the post of Assistant Engineer in the PHE department is reserved for promotion, and how will these sub-engineers be promoted without having a BE degree.

Dissatisfied with the answer of Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for PHE, Arun Sao, the opposition members later staged a walkout from the House.

C'garh earns 11.5K Cr mineral revenue



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh has earned Rs 11,581 crore in mineral revenue from April 2024 to February 2025, an official communique said on Tuesday.

The state's mineral revenue has multiplied about 30 times since formation. This is the result of a transparent mining policy and effective administration, the communique said.

So far, 44 mineral blocks have been e-auctioned, which include 14 limestone blocks, nine iron ore, 11 bauxite, three gold, two nickel, two chromium, two graphite, two glauconite and one lithium.

A large part of the revenue is being invested for the social development of the state. Under the District Mineral Institute Trust, a total of 9,362 development works, including education, health, roads, drinking water projects and skill development, have been approved.

Exploration works are also underway under the National

So far, 44 mineral blocks have been e-auctioned, which include 14 limestone blocks, nine iron ore, 11 bauxite, three gold, two nickel, two chromium, two graphite, two glauconite and one lithium.

Critical Mineral Mission. This has enabled auction of 10 critical and deep-seated mineral blocks in Chhattisgarh.

Govt officer gets 5 yr imprisonment for corruption

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A special Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) court on Tuesday sentenced a government officer to five years of rigorous imprisonment in a disproportionate assets case.

ACB special judge Madhusudan Chandrakar passed the order against Manoj Singh Thakur, ACB Deputy Director (Prosecution) Mithlesh Verma told The Pioneer.

"Presently, corruption is deeply rooted in the society, which hollows out its roots. Corruption is a serious offence



Thakur. Failing to pay this will add another year to his sentence.

Thakur was posted as Executive Engineer, Urban Administration and Development Department in Raipur.

In 2015, the ACB sleuths had raided Thakur's place in DD Nagar locality and seized gold and silver ornaments, cash, vehicles, valuable documents, bank passbooks and insurance papers.

The ACB investigation revealed that Thakur had disproportionate assets worth Rs 71.22 lakh apart from his known source of income.

Raigarh achieves highest farmer registrations

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIGARH

Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district has achieved the highest number of farmer registrations in the state under Agristack, achieving 88.34 percent of the target, an official communique said on Tuesday.

They have registered a total of 82,307 farmers in the Farmer Registry Portal.

Through digital records, the government aims to ensure that the farmers receive the benefits of agriculture-related welfare programmes.

Collector Kartikeya Goyal said that the Revenue Department, Agriculture



Department and Public Service Centre were organising camps, door-to-door campaigns and awareness drives for this.

Bilaspur to get critical care hospital

STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

A 75-bed critical care hospital will come up in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district as part of the Pradhan Mantri Bharat Ayushman Health Infrastructure Mission, an offi-



cial communique said on Tuesday.

The hospital will be equipped with all modern medical facilities and high-level technical equipment and is going to be built near the district hospital in two years. It will cost about Rs 36.35 crore. The Chhattisgarh

Medical Services Corporation Ltd (CGMSC) has been appointed as the construction agency.

This facility will prove to be a boon for the patients of the poor section. Patients of the entire Bilaspur division will benefit, the communique said.

Study shows low doses of antibiotics can help treat a rare hair loss problem

AGENCIES ■

Small amounts of a common antibiotic and anti-inflammatory drug can help treat a rare hair loss problem caused by a misplaced immune reaction, according to a study on Tuesday.

Low doses of antibiotics may also present fewer side effects than higher doses of the medication, said researchers at the New York University Langone Health.

The study explored lymphocytic scarring alopecia, a rare skin condition in which the body's immune cells damage hair follicles, leading to hair loss and scarring.

Physicians typically treat this chronic disorder with relatively high doses of the antibiotic doxycycline often for prolonged periods.

However, the drug can trig-

ger nausea, vomiting, and rashes and may discourage patients from continuing to take it, said the team, in the paper, published in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology.

To determine whether lower doses could work instead, the team involved 241 men and women. The participants, who were treated for several forms of lymphocytic scarring alopecia, revealed that lower doses (usually 20 milligrams taken twice daily) and higher doses (as much as 100 milligrams taken twice daily) of doxycycline were equally effective.

Specifically, no significant difference was seen between the two groups on evaluations of scalp inflammation, patients' perception of the severity of their hair loss, and clinical measurements of hair

density, hair-shaft diameter, and hairline recession.

In addition, while 23% of those on the high-dose regimen experienced common negative side effects of doxycycline, only 12% of those taking smaller doses of the drug did so.

Further, while 25% of the high-dose group stopped taking doxycycline altogether due to gastrointestinal issues, only 16% of the low-dose group stopped treatment due to this side effect.

"Our findings suggest that physicians can prescribe lower doses of doxycycline to patients struggling with lymphocytic scarring alopecia without compromising the efficacy and anti-inflammatory benefit of the therapy," said Carli Needle, a medical student at NYU Grossman School of Medicine.

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,
WATER RESOURCES DIVISION No.-2 RAMANUJGANJ,
DISTT BALRAMPUR-RAMANUJGANJ (C.G.)

e-Procurement Tender Notice (FIRST-CALL)

eProcurement Portal: <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>

NIT NO. 04/SAC/2024-25 DATED 10.03.2025 Online Tenders are invited for the following works up to 01.04.2025 (17:30 hours IST). The details can be viewed & downloaded online directly from the

G. No.	System Tender No.	Name of Work	Probable amount of contract
1	185780	RENOVATION ON BUND MAIN CANAL R.B.C. RD 0 M TO 1000M LINING WORK, MAIN CANAL OF R.B.C. RD 100M TO RD 2KM CANAL LINING WORK R.D. 0.0M TO 400M RCC CHANNEL WORK, NON CD AT 410M & FIXING OF OUTLETS WORK OF SONHARA TANK SCHEME	Rs. 291.59 Lakhs
2	186781	RENOVATION OF EAV OF DUND, MAIN CANAL RD 0M TO R.D. 600M R.C.C. CHANNEL WORK, RD 680M TO R.D. 1100M CANAL LINING WORK, R.D 0M TO R.D. 960M CANAL LINING WORK, 2 NOS. CDI NOS. (2M) FALL & IN 5 NOS FIXING OUTLETS WORK OF SARNA TANK SCHEME.	Rs. 294.57 Lakhs
3	186782	RENOVATION 01 E/W OF BUND, BOULDER TOE, FILTER DRAIN, 22CM THICK PITCHING STONE WALLS CHIPS & FAW OF MAIN CANAL R.D.0M TO 2000M I/C LINIC WORK 1 NOS. C.D. 810M & I/C FIXING OF OUTLA ES WORK OF LOPINDAN TANK SCHEME.	Rs. 306.21 Lakhs
4	165783	RENOVATION OF H/E, LAW OF BUND & LINING WORK OF MAIN CANAL BETWEEN R.D. 0M TO 1080M CONCRETE CHANNEL OF MAIN CANAL R.D. 1180M TO 2700M & CONSTRUCTION OF NEW 03 NO C.D. 1 NOR SYPHON IN MAIN CANAL OF HARGIWAN TANK SCHEME.	Rs. 245.51 Lakhs
5	155784	RENOVATION OF H/W, EAV EXCAVATION NEAR SLUICE, REPAIR OF SLUICE, E/W ON BUND, 22 CM THICK DRY STONE PITCHING I/C STONE CHIPS & C.C. OF MAIN CANAL BETWEEN RD 60 M TO 200M CONCRETE CHANNEL OF MINOR CANAL OF RD 0M TO 400M AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW 1 NO. V.R.D. IN MAIN CANAL OF SARUWATI TANK SCHEME.	Rs. 172.36 Lakhs

Govt. of Chhattisgarh integrated e-Procurement portal (<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>) from dated 17.03.2025. at 17.31 hours (IST) onwards.

Note: All eligible/interested contractors/bidders are mandated to get enrolled on the integrated e-Procurement portal (<https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>) and get approval on specific vendor class from PWD under centralized contractor/ supplier registration in order to download the tender documents and participate in the subsequent bidding process.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
WATER RESOURCES DIVISION No.-2
RAMANUJGANJ,
DISTT. BALRAMPUR RAMANUJGANJ (CG.)
For, Chief Engineer
Hasdeo Ganga Basin, W.R. Deptt.
Ambikapur, Sarguja (C.G.)

G- 242505986/5

Elephant calf found dead in Raigarh

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIGARH

An elephant calf was found dead of suspected drowning in a pond in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district on Tuesday.

The carcass of the one-year-old jumbo was found floating in a water body in Jampali village under the Chhal forest range, Dharamajgarh Divisional Forest Officer Abhishek Jogawat said.

Prima facie, the calf drowned after it entered deep water while bathing.

The calf was part of a herd of 32 elephants that visited the pond owned by a local villager.



Further investigation into the matter was underway.

In the last six years, nearly 90 elephants have died due to ailments, old age and electrocution in Chhattisgarh.

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792
Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai- 600031.
Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

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

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 11.12.2024 calling upon the borrower, co-borrowers and guarantors 1.ANAND KUMAR GADEHWAL, 2. DASHVANTI GOYL, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 9,73,182.37/- (Rupees Nine Lac Seventy Three Thousand One Hundred Eighty Two And Thirty Seven Paise Only) as on 10.12.2024 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Demand notice.

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

The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of THE IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) for an amount of Rs. 9,73,182.37/- (Rupees Nine Lac Seventy Three Thousand One Hundred Eighty Two And Thirty Seven Paise Only) and interest thereon.

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

DESCRIPTION OF MORTGAGE PROPERTY

ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF LAND AREA 1088 SQ. FT. PART OF KHASRA NO 6/3, SITUATED AT GRAM: BIREJHAR, P.H. NO. 33, NEW P.H. NO. 61, R.I.C.-RAJNANDGAON - 2, TAHASIL & DISTRICT: RAJNANDGAON, CHHATTISGARH - 491441, AND BOUNDED AS: EAST: LAND OF OTHER, WEST: LAND OF KALU, NORTH: LAND OF LALU, SOUTH: ROAD

Date: 12-03-2025
Place: CHHATTISGARH
Loan Account No: 58114993 & 32829835

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

OFFICE OF THE ENGINEER IN CHIEF
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT, NAVA RAIPUR, ATAL NAGAR
(CENTRAL TENDER CELL) E-Procurement Tender Notice
Main Portal: <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>

Tenders are invited for the Following works:-

S. No.	System Tender No./Date	Name of Work	PAC Amount (Rupees in laes)
1	165851 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF GARM PANCHAYAT UDUMKELA MECHHARONA BLOCK MAINPATH ROAD LENGTH 5.50 K.M.) DISTT SURGUJA (C.G.) (Work code - W28959).	592.44
2	165858 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH LEVEL BRIDGE I/C APPROACH ACROSS SEMARIYA NALA ON BORI BHENGARI ROAD LENGTH = 75.00 M.	286.10
3	165856 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH LEVEL BRIDGE I/C APPROACHES ACROSS KARRA NALA ON BORTARA - MASULGONDI ROAD.	359.89
4	165857 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH LEVEL BRIDGE I/C APPROACHES ACROSS DOTU NALA ON TENDUA NAYAPAR ROAD.	645.95
5	165859 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH LEVEL BRIDGE I/C APPROACHES ACROSS KARUA NALA ON PADMI - PADUMSARA ROAD.	496.12
6	165860 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH LEVEL BRIDGE ACROSS SONBARSA RIVER ON NAWAGAON - PARSADAPAR ROAD.	400.12
7	165864 First Call 11.03.2025	Construction of High Level Bridge & Approach Road across Arpa River on Shanichari Chantidih Road.	1110.56
8	165866 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF NAVIN CIVIL COURT BUILDING(6 NOS COURT ROOM) I/C. WATER SUPPLY, SANITERY FITTINGS & RAIN WATER HARVESTING & ELECTRIFICATION WORK AT SARAIPALI, MAHASAMUND (DIVISION), DISTT. MAHASAMUND.	862.36
9	165865 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH LEVEL BRIDGE I/C APPROACH ACROSS KULCHHURI NALA ON GHOTWANI - MUDPAR ROAD.	224.18
10	165869 First Call 11.03.2025	CONSTRUCTION OF HIGH LEVEL BRIDGE I/C APPROACH ACROSS POTIYA NALA ON POTIYA -BADETEMARI ROAD.	247.49
11	165930 First Call 12.03.2025	Construction of High level bridge i/c approach road across Indrawati river in k.m. 2/2 to 2/10 on Bedrelanka-Nugur road. (balance work)	2841.86
12	165915 First Call 12.03.2025	Construction of Malakat Badepara to Village Kibaibalanga Road Length 5.05 Km i/c Bridgr & Culvert. Work Code W25286.	650.92
13	165916 First Call 12.03.2025	Construction of Chaunda to Village Chalka Road Length 6.00 Km i/c Bridge & Culvert Work Code W25291.	697.21

Last Date of Tender Downloading S.No. 11 To S.No. 13 date 03.04.2025, Other Tenders Date are Schedule as date 02.04.2025. For more details on the tender and bidding process please visit the above mentioned portal.

Chief Engineer
(Central Tender Cell)
Office Of Engineer In Chief
P.W.D. Nava Raipur Atal Nagar
G-242506000/8

Rail fares lowest in region: Vaishnav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

The minister said the prices in European countries are more than five times.

He asserted that railway accidents have come down by 90 per cent from the time when RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav was at the ministry's helm.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Delving into geopolitical turmoils, Gabbard said President Trump is unwavering in securing peace with strength. The top American official extensively focused on explaining Washington's policy towards the Indo-Pacific.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sonia Gandhi seeks ₹400 minimum wage under MGNREGA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ED conducts searches against OSF beneficiaries in Bengaluru

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

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

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

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

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

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

Its total expenditure for India during 2021 was USD 4,06,000, as per official data.

The OSF began working in India in 1999, offering scholarships and fellowships to students to pursue studies and research at Indian institutes.

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Centre committed to Manipur's growth: FM Nirmala Sitharaman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the Central government is committed to bringing normalcy to Manipur and assured all support for the economic growth of the state.

Replying to a discussion on the passage of the Manipur Budget for the current fiscal and vote of account for the six months of 2025-26 in the Rajya Sabha, the minister also sought the support of the Opposition parties for peace in Manipur instead of engaging in the blame game.

The senior minister also hit back at the Opposition for its criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi not visiting the violence-affected state, saying none of the prime ministers in the past visited Manipur when the violence took place there. She cited the names of former prime ministers PV Narasimha Rao and IK Gujral.

She said violence in Manipur has adversely impacted economic activities in the state but expressed confidence that it will recover swiftly. Responding to the Opposition criticism of not paying the required focus to Manipur, she said the



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

Union Home Minister and Minister of State for Home visited the state as part of the Centre's efforts to bring normalcy.

"We extend the fullest support to the state. So that the recovery of Manipur will be sooner than later. We are, all of us here, committed to getting that state back to some normalcy and we want that state to grow and prosper as much as any other state," Sitharaman asserted.

Centre and the state). "Double engine, of course, double engine. That is why the Home Minister was there (for four days), and that is why MoS Home was there for more than 23 days.

"So, please do not compare how you (Congress) handled Manipur and how this government is handling Manipur. We have greater sensitivity, we care for Manipur and every state of this country," the minister said. Sitharaman informed the House that ₹913 Crore have been given under Special Assistance for State Capital Investment for 2024-25. "We have also created a Contingency Fund for Manipur with ₹500 Crore allocated to them," she said. The state is currently under the President's rule. Consequent to the Proclamation issued under Article 356 of the Constitution on February 13, 2025, the powers of the Legislature of the State of Manipur are exercisable by or under the authority of Parliament. The total receipts have been pegged at ₹35,368.19 Crore, up from ₹32,471.90 Crore in 2024-25. According to documents, the capital outlay has been increased by 19 per cent to ₹7,773 Crore over the current financial year ending March 2025.

Observing that the unrest in Manipur led to a reduction in economic activities, she said, "With improvement in law and order and consequent improvement in economic activity, I expect GSDP to show some recovery this year onwards."

The Opposition has been repeatedly questioning the Centre's stance on Manipur, and taunting BJP's slogan of 'double engine government' (government at the

Sambhal's Neja Mela denied permission

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

The annual Neja Mela, a long-standing religious event in Sambhal, will not be held this year after authorities declined permission, citing concerns over public sentiment and security risks. The fair, traditionally observed on the second Tuesday after Holi, is dedicated to Syed Salar Masood, a historical figure whose legacy has been a subject of debate due to his role in medieval invasions.

Officials said the decision to deny permission was influenced by objections from sections of the local community and the potential for unrest. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Shrish Chandra emphasised that no event commemorating individuals linked to historical invasions would be allowed.

"Public safety is our priority. Celebrations that evoke historical conflicts or communal sensitivities cannot be permitted," he stated. The controversy surrounding the event stems from Masood's association with Mahmud of Ghazni, who led multiple invasions into India. Historical accounts suggest Masood played a role in campaigns that included temple raids and territorial conquests. While some communities regard him as a revered figure, others oppose the

mela, arguing that it glorifies an era of destruction. Authorities noted that last year, efforts were made to rebrand the event as 'Sadhvna Mela' to promote harmony while maintaining religious observances. However, organisers continued to insist on using its traditional name, leading to a complete prohibition this year. "The decision is final, and any attempt to hold the event under its original identity will not be tolerated," said Sub-Divisional Magistrate Dr Vandana Mishra.

The ban has drawn criticism from the Neja Mela Committee, which argues that the gathering is a religious tradition rather than a political statement.

"For generations, we have observed this mela as part of our faith. We will seek legal recourse if necessary," said Shahid Hussain Masudi, the committee's president. The debate surrounding Syed Salar Masood continues to have political ramifications in Uttar Pradesh. His legacy remains a polarising issue, with political leaders referencing his historical role to shape narratives about regional history and identity. While his tomb in Bahraich remains a pilgrimage site, political discourse often portrays him in contrasting lights, with some emphasising his military campaigns while others highlight his cultural significance.

GMDA cracks down on encroachments in Sikanderpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

The Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) enforcement wing geared into action again after the Holi festival. After taking strict action against RMC plants on Monday, the team cracked down on the area under the metro pillars of Sikanderpur area on MG road on Tuesday.

DTP RS Bath and his team has visited the location twice and had asked the violators to vacate the area but few local people were still found to have occupied the Government land by way of renting the area or fixing their own businesses.

On Tuesday, the GMDA officers conducted the demolition drive at the furniture market near the Sikanderpur metro station where the team demolished three numbers of building material shops and even removed a lot of the material.

Further, the team also took help of towing machines and towed about five vehicles which were parked illegally under metro line.

The said area was highly encroached and the residents had complained about traffic jams.

It was also found that material loaded

vehicles were entering and exiting on the main road disturbing the traffic movement. Almost 20 such vehicles were also removed. Apart from this, the GMDA enforcement team had also warned the violators to prior to the drive to remove their material within a week but they did not pay heed to the same.

Gurugram citizens also sent multiple emails for removing encroachment because MG road is a major road connected to Delhi.

Bath was assisted by ATP Satinder Arya, JE Ashish tayagi, JE Sumit Boora, Pankaj and Pawan Kumar. The Mobility towing team from GMDA was also present in the drives.

About 15 policemen were also present on spot. The team also visited surroundings of road and made shopkeepers and others aware on abstaining from encroaching public spaces.

"We won't allow this encroachment and that will first also make them aware of the issue. Still if encroachment is done we will take them to task. We are working on zero tolerance policy towards anyone illegally occupying Government land or public spaces that cause disturbance to the public at large," said DTP GMDA.

Practice of Nokku Kooli prevailing in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

The ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI (M)) in Kerala faced a major embarrassment in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attributed the industrial stagnation in the State to rampant militant trade unionism.

"It is the Communist Party of India (Marxist) tradition of Nokku Kooli that led the State backwards while other States made progress in industrialisation. Nokku Kooli is the practice of holding the entrepreneur to ransom demanding wages for no work which have been done by the party affiliated workers," said Nirmala Sitharaman, while replying to a calling attention motion by a Communist Party of India (Marxist) member representing the State.

Nirmala Sitharaman pointed out the recent statement made by Kerala Industries Minister P Rajeev that there was no Nokku Kooli in the State as on date.

"That itself proves that there was the practice of Nokku Kooli prevailing in Kerala," said the Finance Minister.

By evening the Kerala Government was on a firefighting mode, denying reports about Nokku Kooli in the State.

But the fact is that black mailing by head load workers (porters) continue unhindered in the State.

According to political commentators and former top bureaucrats trade union workers and bosses have become a law unto themselves.

"Kerala is the only State in India which has seen entrepreneurs committing suicide thanks to the high handed attitude of the head load workers and their bosses," said Rajmohan Pillai, chairman, Beta Group, who once owned many cashew nut processing units in the State.

Last week saw a popular Malayalam TV

It is the CPI(M) tradition of Nokku Kooli that led the State backwards while other States made progress in industrialisation.

— NIRMALA SITHARAMAN, FINANCE MINISTER

programme Marimayam (Malayalam for Deceit) featuring the threats and black mailing employed by militant workers and their trade union bosses. The programme was based on real life incidents that shocked the State.

Even small time traders in towns are not free from the shackles of party leaders who approach them for 'hafta'.

A shop owner was forced to cough down the airlines ticket for the local political leader for his West Asian trip to attend a seminar on the global issues haunting

working community across the world. The political leaders and head load workers who shout from rooftops for bonus and gratuity have not done any physical work throughout their life.

"There is no exaggeration or fiction in these episodes. These incidents are culled out from real life stories faced by our friends and well wishers who put their hard earned money in business enterprises," said Mani Shornur, veteran actor who is one of the central characters in the sitcom.

The Kerala Government in a release had said that the recent summit of investors held in the State saw signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to the tune of ₹1.5 Lakh Crore worth investments.

The only question being asked is whether a small state like Kerala has the potential to accommodate this much investments. One more question remains unanswered.

What happened to the Memorandum of Understandings (MoU) signed by Kerala Government in the last 20 years?" said a corporate honcho.

Nokku Kooli flourishes in the State irrespective of the claims by the Government and this keeps the investors away from Kerala.

"The message from Kerala to prospective investors is Invest at your own risk," said P Sujathan, political critic and author.

College professor flees amid sexual abuse allegations

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a shocking case from Uttar Pradesh's Hathras, police are on the lookout for Rajnish Kumar, the suspended Chief Proctor of Seth Phool Chand Bagla PG College, commonly known as 'Old Degree College'.

Kumar is accused of sexually exploiting students and recording the acts to blackmail them. The college administration suspended him following the emergence of these serious allegations.

The case came to light after an anonymous letter, received by the police nearly ten months ago, accused Kumar of coercing students into sexual acts in exchange for passing marks and job opportunities. The letter accused Dr Rajneesh, of sexually harassing female students. Following this, CO City initiated an inquiry, during which multiple individuals were questioned.

"I fear for my life, which is why I have concealed my identity. But aren't the pictures I provided enough to prove his crime?" the letter read.

The complaint letter was accompanied by around twelve photographs, some of which were taken inside the college premises. These images reportedly depicted the professor engaging in inappropriate behaviour with students.

Along with the complaint, a pen drive containing 59 explicit videos of Kumar engaging in sexual acts with students was also submitted.

The faces of the victims have been blurred to protect their identities. Reports suggest Kumar used hidden cameras to record these acts and later blackmailed the victims into submission. The complainant also accused other members of the college administration of shielding Kumar.

Following the registration of a case under sections related to rape, sexual harassment, and abuse of authority, Kumar was suspended from his position.

However, he remains absconding. The police admitted that the absence of a statement from the victim has posed a challenge in their investigation. The videos, reportedly dating back to 2023, serve as crucial evidence, but the victims fear coming forward due to social stigma and potential harassment.

Authorities are also examining whether Dr Rajneesh had accomplices or if similar incidents have taken place previously.

Meanwhile, efforts are being made to remove the explicit videos from online platforms and prevent their further circulation.

In response to the allegations, the college administration has taken disciplinary action against Dr Rajneesh.

Suwendu Adhikari plays Hindu card in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Bengal Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari on Tuesday played the Hindu card more intensely towards consolidating the Hindu votes ahead of the next year's Assembly elections, saying those who would serve the cause of the Hindus would rule Bengal because only the Hindus and none else were destined to rule Hindustan. Announcing the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) programmes to take out grand rallies of Hindus on the Ram Navami day Adhikari said there were plans being hatched by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, her police and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) to create communal disturbance during Ram Navami and said the State Government would be held liable if any untoward incident would happen as a consequence of the TMC leadership's "nefarious designs." "Hindus will rule Hindustan and none else," Adhikari said adding, "those who are trying to disturb peace of the State should appreciate the fact that only those who would serve the cause of the Hindus would finally rule Bengal."

Launching a scathing attack on Banerjee for provoking the minority community he said, "the Chief Minister and her Police are spreading the poison of communalism and hatred in the State ahead of Ram Navami, the police have been directed to take pre-

ventive steps to thwart the celebrations of the festival of the Hindus."

Alleging that the State police and the TMC men were inciting communal hatred in the society he said, how "the Chief Minister told the public from a Muslim religious congregation that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal are hatching plans to disturb the State."

This was the second year of Ram Navami celebrations after the inauguration

Those who are trying to disturb peace of the State should appreciate the fact that only those who would serve the cause of the Hindus would finally rule Bengal

— SUWENDU ADHIKARI, OPPOSITION LEADER

of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and this year has seen 66 Crore of Santani people taking holi dip in Maha Kumbha, he said asking the people to come out in lakhs to celebrate Ram Navami. Bengal would witness so many rallies this year that "it would be difficult for the Chief Minister's mischievous police force and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) goons to measure of the crowds," he said.

"The Police are trying to thwart the cel-

ebrations by imposing conditions, but I ask you not to abide by those conditions and only follow the protocols that we followed the last year before taking out the processions," he said. Attacking the Chief Minister for allowing the "jihadi forces" to spike Durga Puja and Ram Navami celebrations in various parts of the State last year the BJP leader said, "the jihadis prevented celebrations of Durga Pujas at Falakata. There were jihadi attacks on the Ram Navami processions at Rishra in Hooghly district, Shibpur in Howrah district, and Dalkhola in North Bengal but the government kept silent, and the state government spent lakhs of rupees to prevent National Investigation Agency (NIA) investigation into such attacks but failed and today 85 such jihadis are in jail. This year also they will try to do the same thing but the Hindus will have to unite and keep a strong vigil." Adhikari's statement comes a day after processions were taken out in Hooghly district with huge banners and posters reading "Hindus, Hindus Bhai Bhai, Ei baar BJP ke chai (All Hindus are brothers, so this year BJP should come to power)." Meanwhile, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) hit back at the Opposition leader wondering how the Bengal leadership was contracting Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was asking for peace and unity.

Debendra Pradhan's last rites held with state honours

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Puri

The last rites of veteran BJP leader and former union minister Debendra Pradhan were performed with full state honours at Swargadwar in Odisha's Puri on Tuesday, officials said.

On the occasion, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and other dignitaries were present there and paid their tribute to Pradhan who died on Monday morning due to age-related ailments. He was 84. "The mortal remains of Pradhan were consigned to flames at Swargadwar here with full state honours," an official said.

Amid chanting of Sanskrit slokas, Pradhan's elder son Soumendra lit the funeral pyre after the Odisha Police accorded the guard of honour to the departed leader. His younger son and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan was also present there.

"Dr Debendra Pradhan amar rahe" slogan reverberated through the air at the Swargadwar. Puri MP Sambit Patra, Yoga Guru Baba Ram Dev, several Odisha ministers and BJP leaders from the Centre and the state attended the

funeral. Debendra Pradhan was a union minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and was a three-time president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Odisha. He was also the national vice-president of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2001-2002.

Debendra Pradhan breathed his last at his son's official residence in Teen Murti Lane in New Delhi. He is survived by his wife Basanta Manjari Pradhan and two sons. Leaders of various political parties visited Pradhan's residence and paid floral tribute to the departed soul.

Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly and former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, ex-minister Bijay Mohapatra and ex-MLA Soumya Ranjan Patnaik visited Pradhan's house at Chandrasekharpur in Odisha and paid their last respects.

"Thousands of people have gathered here to pay their last respects. Dr Debendra Pradhan has done a lot for the BJP in the state. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) formed government today in Odisha and Pradhan ji had laid the foundation of it in the early days. I pray that his family has the strength to bear this loss," Majhi said.

Holi clash rocks Jharkhand Assembly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ranchi

The Jharkhand Assembly on Tuesday witnessed an uproarious scene over the clash during a Holi procession in Giridih district with BJP legislators trooping into the well of the House and demanding a special debate over the state's law and order situation.

Despite repeated requests by Speaker Rabintra Nath Mahato to let the question hour function, the BJP MLAs continued to raise slogans against the JMM-led coalition government.

Unable to run the House, the Speaker adjourned proceedings till noon.

As the House assembled around 11 am after the Holi break, Leader of Opposition Babul Marandi raised the issue of the Giridih clash on March 14, in which several people were injured and many shops and vehicles were torched.

"This is appeasement politics by the government. The administration was a mute spectator when the incident happened. Now, the police have lodged an FIR against 80 people and arrested 22. A particular community has been targeted in the police action. The case should have been registered against those who created the nuisance," he alleged.

He also claimed that the state's law and order situation is in "shambles".

"Many festivals such as Ram Navami and Eid will be celebrated soon. We want a special debate on the state's law and order situation in the House. It is a serious issue," Marandi said.

Congress MLA Pradip Yadav alleged that BJP creates division in the society on religious lines.

JMM legislator Sudivya Kumar claimed that Marandi presented a one-sided story in the House.

Pakistan's Seema Haider welcomes baby girl in India

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Seema Haider, a mother of four from Pakistan who risked everything to be with her Indian lover, has now stepped into a new chapter of her life-motherhood once again. She gave birth to a baby girl at 4 am on Tuesday at Krishna Hospital in Greater Noida. Both mother and child are in good health, her lawyer AP Singh confirmed. "For those who have followed Seema and Sachin's journey, this is a moment of celebration," said Singh.

"A daughter has been born, and both mother and child are perfectly fine."

In a rare move, Seema and her husband Sachin Meena have decided to involve the public in naming their newborn.

"We invite people from across the country and beyond to suggest a name for our daughter. Social media users can send



Sachin Meena (left) along with his wife Seema Haider

FILE PHOTO

in their choices based on Indian traditions, and the name with the most votes will be chosen," Singh added. Seema Haider, originally from Sindh, Pakistan, first met Sachin Meena through the online game

PUBG. Their virtual friendship soon turned into love, leading her to take a drastic step. In 2023, she illegally entered India via Nepal, bringing along her four children from her previous marriage to Ghulam

Haider, a Pakistani national. Their love story soon came under legal scrutiny. July 2023, Seema and Sachin were arrested for her illegal entry into India but were later released on bail. Seema converted to Hinduism and married Sachin, vowing never to return to Pakistan. Back in Pakistan, her first husband, Ghulam Haider, continues to fight for her return, insisting that she was misled and that their children should be raised in Pakistan. Seema, however, remains firm in her choice. "I would rather die than return or leave Sachin. I request the Indian government to grant me citizenship," she has declared. As Seema and Sachin embrace their new journey as parents, the legal uncertainties around their case remain. But for now, the couple is focused on their newborn daughter-whose name, fittingly, will be chosen by the people.

Editor's TAKE

New vistas with New Zealand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nepal's monarchy debate reignites

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



ASHOK K MEHTA

House has been civilised. Outside it, former prime minister and leader of the opposition, Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda the pathfinder of the republic, has said that the former King has found voice at this time due to the mis-governance of the ruling CPN UML and Nepali Congress. He has also accused Gyanendra of murdering his brother Birendra and a statue smuggler. NC General Secretary Gagan Thapa has asked the government to withdraw Gyanendra's privileges. Gyanendra's alleged role in the 2001 Palace massacre has resurfaced. There are calls for a fresh enquiry into the royal tragedy; the initial enquiry was done hastily. Conspicuously Gyanendra and his notorious son Paras were among the few survivors of the tragedy.

On March 16, a royalist rally on the Durbar Marg between the main gate of the palace and

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

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

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

Leaderspeak

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

CHRISTOPHER LUXON, PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND



Gathered by love, glued by familial bonds

Opinion



ASHA IYER KUMAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In those two days, I found myself moving through a reel of faces and voices, yet each encounter felt personal and profound as if no time had lapsed at all. It was not just a family gathering, it was a homecoming for the heart, a reminder that love, in its purest form, doesn't need constant tending to thrive. It waits patiently, ready to embrace us the moment we return. All we need to nurture is a willingness to cruise into embraces and a bonding that are not encumbered by status, health conditions, time lapse, achievements or other highs and lows of a world that has no time to stand and share.

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

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

Letters to the Editor

INDIA TAKES CENTER STAGE

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

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

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

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

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

TRUMP AND PUTIN EYE 30-DAY CEASEFIRE

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

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

P VICTOR SELVARAJ | TAMIL NADU

SOUTH INDIA'S TRIPLE WHAMMY

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

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KOZHIKODE

HIMACHAL PRADESH APPLE GROWERS FEAR US TARIFF THREAT

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

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

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

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

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

Transforming education in a globalised era

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

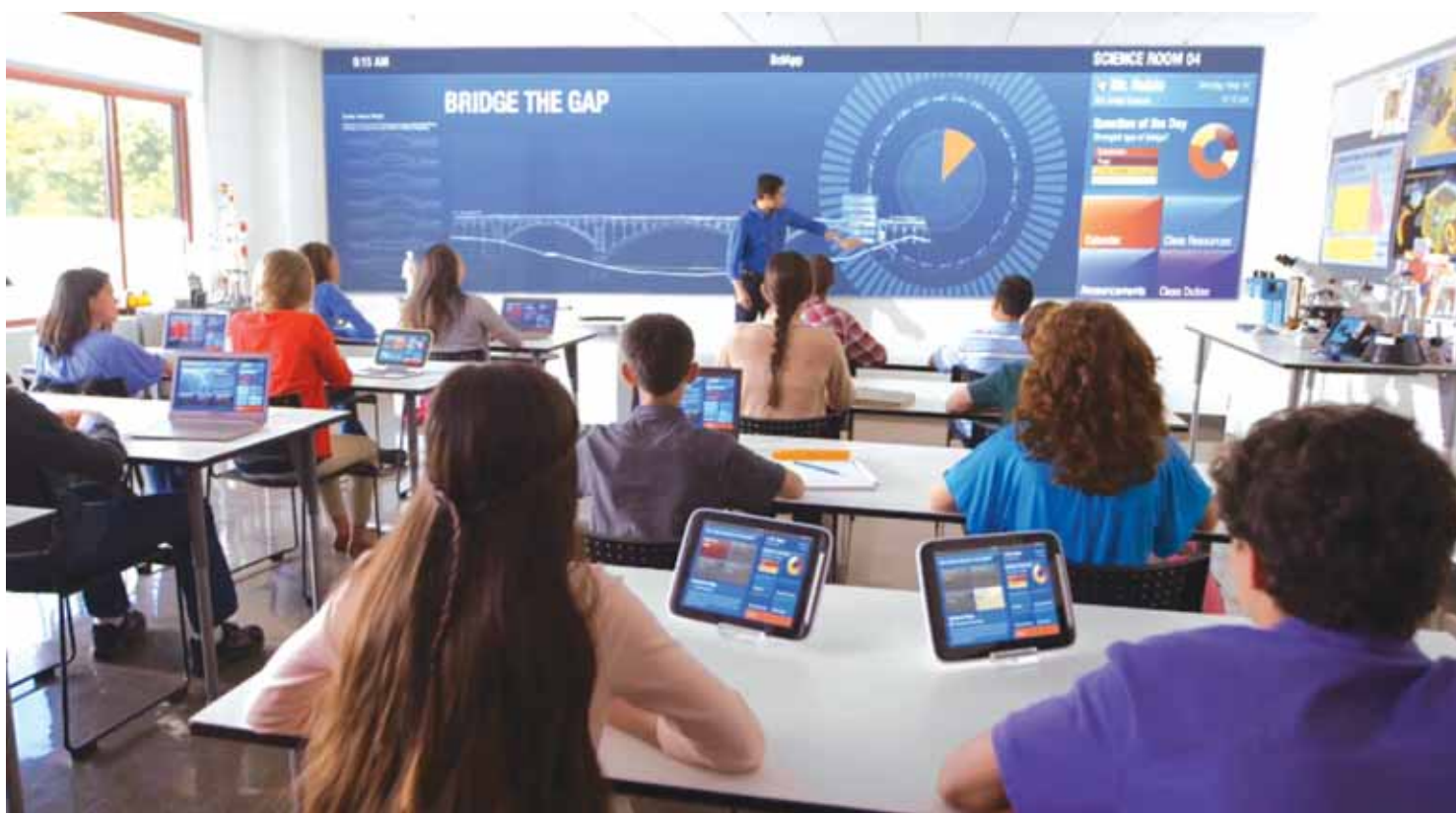
FIRST
Column

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

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

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

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



SUDHIR HINDWAN

nurture a spirit of selfless service and brotherhood.

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

enhance the overall educational landscape.

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

Another welcome regulation is the introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The peril of few holding the future

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

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

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

Lessons from nuclear non-proliferation

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

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

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

A climate governance

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

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

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

The need for equitable participation

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

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

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

Towards a global architecture

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

Purity and well-being: The true foundations of health

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



ISHOO RATNA SRIVASTAV



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Gabbard's remarks damaging, says Bangladesh govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

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

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

It said Gabbard's statement in an Indian TV channel was "misleading and damaging to the image and

reputation of Bangladesh, a nation whose traditional practice of Islam has been famously inclusive and peaceful and that has made remarkable strides in its fight against extremism and terrorism".

The US spy chief, now in India, earlier on Monday said the "longtime unfortunate persecution, killing, and abuse of religious minorities like Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and others has been a major area of concern for the US government and President Trump and his administration".

In an interview with the TV channel, Gabbard alleged "persecution and killing" of religious minorities in

Bangladesh and that "the threat of Islamic terrorists" in the country was "rooted" in the "ideology and objective" to "rule and govern with an Islamist caliphate".

She said, "The talks are just beginning between President Trump's new cabinet coming in and the Government of Bangladesh, but this continues to remain a central focus area of concern".

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

stability, and progress.

It said Bangladesh "strongly condemns any efforts to link the country to any form of 'Islamist caliphate'".

"Political leaders and public figures should base their statements, especially about the most sensitive issues, on actual knowledge and take care not to reinforce harmful stereotypes, to fan fears and potentially even stoke sectarian tensions," Yunus's office said.

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



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

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

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

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

SPECIAL TRAINS RUNNING ON 19.03.2025 (WEDNESDAY) FROM DELHI AREA TERMINALS

Spl. Train No.	Station From	Dept. Time	Station To	Arr. Time	Stoppages
03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpur, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
03414	Delhi Jn.	13:35	Malda Town	17:30	Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Patna Jn., Patna Saheb, Fatuha, Khusrapur, Bakhtiyarpur Jn., Barh, Mokama, Hathidah Jn., Barhiya, Luckeesarai Jn., Kiul Jn., Kajra, Abhaipur, Dharhara, Jamalpur Jn., Bariarpur, Sultanganj, Bhagalpur, Kahaigaon, Sahibganj Jn., Barharwa Jn. & New Farakka Jn. Stations
09004	Delhi Jn.	13:05	Mumbai Central	13:30	Delhi Cantt., Gurgaon, Rewari Jn., Alwar, Bandikui Jn., Gandhinagar Jaipur, Jaipur Jn., Kishanganj, Ajmer Jn., Beawar, Marwar Jn., Falna, Pindwara, Abu Road, Palanpur Jn., Mahesana Jn., Sabarmati BG, Vadodara Jn., Udhna Jn., Valsad, Vapi & Borivali Stations
02436	New Delhi	08:30	Patna Jn.	20:10	Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar & Ara Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpur, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
04068	New Delhi	14:00	Bhagalpur	13:30	Govindpur, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur, Patna Jn., Bakhtiyarpur Jn., Mokama, Hathidah Jn., Luckeesarai Jn., Kiul Jn., Abhaipur, Jamalpur Jn. & Sultanganj Stations
05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05306	Anand Vihar (T)	00:20	Chhapra	22:50	Etawah, Kanpur Central, Aishbagh, Badshahnagar, Barabanki Jn., Gonda Jn., Mankapur Jn., Babhnan, Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur, Kaptanganj Jn., Padrauna, Tamkuhi Road, Thawe Jn. & Siwan Jn. Stations

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

04026	Delhi Jn.	23:05	Raxaul Jn.	19:00	Ghaziabad, Hapur, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Gonda Jn., Gorakhpur & Narkatiaganj Jn. Stations
03698	Delhi Jn.	08:55	Gaya Jn.	00:30	Govindpur, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Bhabua Road, Sasaram, Dehri On Sone & Anugrah Narayan Road Stations
02436	New Delhi	08:30	Patna Jn.	20:10	Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Kanpur Central, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar & Ara Stations
02394	New Delhi	13:20	Rajendra Nagar	07:45	Govindpur, Prayagraj Jn., Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn., Buxar, Ara, Danapur & Patna Jn. Stations
04028	Anand Vihar (T)	23:55	Jogbani	03:00	Ghaziabad, Moradabad Jn., Bareilly Jn., Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur, Deoria Sadar, Siwan Jn., Chhapra, Sonpur Jn., Hajipur Jn., Shahpur Patoree, Barauni Jn., Begusarai, Khagaria Jn., Naugachia, Katihar Jn., Purnea Jn., Arariya & Forbesganj Jn. Stations
05578	Anand Vihar (T)	05:15	Saharsa Jn.	10:30	Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Basti, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Bagaha, Narkatiaganj Jn., Raxaul Jn., Bairagnia, Sitamarhi, Janakpur Road, Darbhanga Jn., Sakri Jn., Jhanjharpur, Ghogardiha, Nirmali, Saraygarh, Supaul & Garh Baruari Stations
05114	Anand Vihar (T)	16:00	Chhapra	14:00	Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur, Burhwal, Gonda Jn., Basti, Khalilabad, Gorakhpur Jn., Kaptanganj Jn., Padrauna, Tamkuhi Road, Thawe Jn., Dighwa Dubauli, Mashrakh & Chhapra Kacheri Stations
04018	Anand Vihar (T)	09:00	Muzaffarpur Jn.	06:00	Moradabad, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Sitapur Jn., Gonda Jn., Gorakhpur, Kaptanganj Jn., Narkatiaganj Jn., Sagauli Jn. & Bapudham Motihari Stations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hong Kong

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

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

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

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

His comments followed a somewhat veiled backlash from Beijing. Since last Thursday, Beijing's offices handling Hong Kong affairs have reposted two commentaries by a Beijing-backed local newspaper that blasted the deal. That has raised questions over the sale.

One of the newspaper commentaries suggested the deal is a betrayal to all Chinese and disregards national interests. The other described great entrepreneurs as patriots, but suggested that businesspeople who "dance

with" predatory American politicians to reap quick profits were doomed to infamy.

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

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

Lee said any business transaction must comply with Hong Kong's laws. The city will handle it according to the law, he said without



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

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

The company surprised market watchers when it announced March 4 that it would sell all shares in Hutchison Port Holdings and in Hutchison Port Group Holdings to the consortium in a deal valued at nearly USD 23 billion, including USD 5 billion in debt.

Lebanon, Syria agree to truce

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beirut

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

The agreement also stipulates "enhanced coordination and cooperation between the two sides," the statement from the Syrian Ministry of Defense said. Lebanon's president earlier Monday ordered troops to retaliate against the source of gunfire from the Syrian side of the border after more deadly fighting erupted overnight along the frontier. Lebanon's Health Ministry reported that seven Lebanese citizens were killed and another 52 injured in the clashes, including a 4-year-old girl.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aoun added that he asked Lebanon's foreign minister, who was in Brussels for a donors conference on Syria, to contact Syrian officials to resolve the problem "and prevent further escalation." Violence recently spiked in the area between the Syrian military and armed Lebanese Shiite clans closely allied with the former government of Assad, based in Lebanon's Al-Qasr border village. Lebanese media and the observatory say clans were involved in the abductions that sparked the latest clashes.

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

King Charles III plans to meet Pope

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

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

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

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

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

King Henry VIII. Charles, who is head of the Church of England, made building bridges between people of all faiths a priority since he ascended the throne 2 1/2 years ago.

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

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

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

3 terrorists neutralised by Pakistan's security forces

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Peshawar

Security forces killed three terrorists during an intelligence-based operation in Pakistan's northwestern Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa...

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said security forces conducted the IBO in the general area of Tor Darra of Khyber district...

"During the conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarji [terrorists] location, as a result of which, three khwarji were sent to hell," it added.

Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from killed terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area, the ISPR added.

A sanitization operation was launched to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area as the "security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country".

Last week, the Pakistan Army thwarted a terrorist attack on a check post and killed 10 militants following a suicide attack in the Jandola area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's South Waziristan district.

The military's media wing had said that the

attempt to enter the post was effectively thwarted by the troops, forcing the terrorists to "ram an explosive-laden vehicle into the perimeter wall".

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

The data revealed that at least 74 militant attacks were recorded nationwide, resulting in 91 fatalities, including 35 security personnel, 20 civilians, and 36 militants.

Another 117 individuals sustained injuries, including 53 security forces personnel, 54 civilians, and 10 militants.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remained the worst-affected province, followed by Balochistan. In KP's settled districts, militants carried out 27 attacks, resulting in 19 fatalities, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and two militants.

The tribal districts of KP (erstwhile Fata) witnessed 19 attacks, leading to 46 deaths, including 13 security personnel, eight civilians, and 25 militants.

Balochistan also experienced a surge in militant activity, with at least 24 attacks, which claimed 26 lives, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and nine militants.

Last surviving pilot from Battle of Britain dies at 105

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The last surviving pilot of the Battle of Britain has died, severing the last living link to the few thousand young men who fought the Nazi air force to a standstill amid fears that Britain might be forced to capitulate during the early months of World War II.

John "Paddy" Hemingway, an Irish national who enlisted in the Royal Air Force before the war began, died Monday at his home in Dublin, the RAF said.

Hemingway was just 20 years old when he and his comrades in the Royal Air Force took to the skies to fight off wave after wave of Nazi aircraft that sought to pound Britain into submission during the summer and autumn of 1940.

In August of that year, when German bombers were relentlessly targeting airfields in southern England and the outcome of the battle was still in doubt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously stood before the House of Commons to pay tribute to the young pilots who were defending Britain. "The gratitude of every home in our island, in our empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the enemy, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal dan-

ger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion," Churchill said. "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Britain has ever since revered "the few" for saving the country during its moment of peril. The Battle of Britain Memorial on the English Channel coast lists the names of 2,941 Allied airmen who took part in the battle.

Public Notice regarding Hemant Saini's property and mortgage details. Includes contact information for legal services.

Public Notice regarding the sale of property in Khasra No. 6222m, situated in the abadi of Gali No. 5, Ram Colony, S.S. Block, Bhoi Nath Nagar, Ilaqa Shahdara.

Public Notice regarding the sale of property in Khasra No. 42914, Old Property No. 194-N/A, area measuring 100 Sq. Yds.

Public Notice regarding the sale of property in Khasra No. 6222m, situated in the abadi of Gali No. 5, Ram Colony, S.S. Block, Bhoi Nath Nagar, Ilaqa Shahdara.

Public Notice regarding the sale of property in Khasra No. 42914, Old Property No. 194-N/A, area measuring 100 Sq. Yds.

NORTHERN RAILWAY (E-AUCTION NOTICE) - Details regarding the auction of railway stations and locations.

Canada's Carney meets with European allies as Trump targets his country's sovereignty, economy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney met with leaders of Britain and France on Monday during his first official overseas trip, seeking support from two of Ottawa's oldest allies as US President Donald Trump targets Canada's sovereignty and economy.

Canadians have criticized the leaders of the two countries that founded Canada for their muted response to Trump's attacks. The president has imposed tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum and repeatedly commented on turning Canada into the 51st state.

Carney and French President Emmanuel Macron did not take journalists' questions, and a joint news conference was not scheduled with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, either. An official familiar with the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly, said the Canadians proposed a press conference in Paris but the French declined.

Starmer has called Canada a friend and ally of the UK but has declined to directly call out Trump's talk of annexation — though he went further than he has before by stressing Canada's sovereignty.

"The relationship between our two countries has always been strong," Starmer told Carney inside the British leader's 10 Downing St. residence. "Two sov-

ereign allies, so much in common — a shared history, shared values, shared king."

Carney dismissed the notion that he is seeking the support of other countries to affirm Canada as a nation. "We don't need another country to validate our sovereignty, we are sovereign," he said. "We can stand up for ourselves. The disrespect is not helpful and needs to stop before we sit down about a broader partnership." Macron did not address Trump's attacks on Canada ahead of their talks but noted that tariffs only bring inflation and damage to supply chains.

"In the current international context, we want to be able to develop our most strategic projects with our closest, more loyal partners," Macron said.

In London, Carney was received at Buckingham Palace by King Charles III, Canada's head of state, before his talks with Starmer. The monarch, wearing a red tie and an Order of Canada lapel pin, congratulated Carney on his recent victory. He was sworn in on Friday.

"Canada is fortunate to have a steadfast defender in our sovereign," Carney posted on X.

On Tuesday, Carney will travel to the edge of Canada's Arctic to reaffirm the country's security and sovereignty.

Why Paris and London?: Carney has chosen the two European capitals that shaped Canada's early existence. During his swearing-in, he noted the country was built on the bedrock of three peoples, French,

English and Indigenous.

He added that Canada is fundamentally different from America and will "never, ever, in any way shape or form, be part of the United States."

"I want to ensure that France, and the whole of Europe, works enthusiastically with Canada, the most European of non-European countries," Carney said, but vowed to "maintain the most positive relations possible with the United States."

Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal, said other leaders are "playing it safe" and making sure to avoid gaffes at a time of international tension around Trump's actions and rhetoric.

Carney's choice of itinerary emphasizes Canada's strong connection with the two former colonial powers, Béland said, and noted that "the fact that Canada never broke away from the UK in a violent fashion is a key historical and institutional difference between the United States and Canada."

The trip to London was a kind of homecoming. Carney became the first non-British governor in the Bank of England's 319-year history when he took the job in July 2013. He served until March 2020.

No Washington trip planned: Carney said he won't sit down with Trump until the U.S. is ready to have a more comprehensive discussion on trade and security. "When the US is ready to have that conversation we're ready to sit down," he said.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding Hemant Saini's property and mortgage details.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding the sale of property in Khasra No. 6222m, situated in the abadi of Gali No. 5, Ram Colony, S.S. Block, Bhoi Nath Nagar, Ilaqa Shahdara.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding the sale of property in Khasra No. 42914, Old Property No. 194-N/A, area measuring 100 Sq. Yds.

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GOVERNMENT OF HARYANA TENDER NOTICE - Details regarding the tender for the centrally stored items for the financial year 2025-26.

INDIRA GANDHI UNIVERSITY, MEERPUR - REWARI - Details regarding the university's establishment and regulations.

NIQ (NOTICE INVITING QUOTATIONS) - Details regarding the invitation for quotations for the purchase of centrally stored items.

Office of the Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh - Details regarding the tender for road work.

National Competitive E-Tender Notice - Details regarding the tender for road work in Raigarh Division.

Table with 7 columns: Sl. No., Name of Work, Earnest Money (in Lac), Cost of Tender (in Rs.), Validity of Tender (day), Period of Completion (months), Contractor's Category of Registration.

CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED - Details regarding the company's services and contact information.

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Table with 4 columns: Name of Borrower, Co-Borrower/ Guarantor(s) with address/es, Description & Owner(s) of Properties, Reserve Price (RP) & EMD Amount 10% of the Reserve Price & Incremental Amount.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

of life insurance, particularly in terms of penetration lately.

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

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

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

Majority of Indians are long-term investors: NSE CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India partners with Meta on digital consumer protection initiative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

LG Electronics India, Innovision get SEBI nod for IPOs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RBI, Bank of Mauritius sign pact for bilateral transactions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

Bajaj Finserv shares dip over one per cent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

On the NSE, shares of the firm slipped 1.43 per cent to ₹1,844.65.

The stock emerged as the biggest laggard among the Sensex and Nifty firms.

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

Gold continues record run

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

metal, Gandhi added. However, silver prices traded flat at ₹1,02,500 per kg, also a historic high.

Meanwhile, gold futures jumped by ₹649 or 0.73 per cent to establish a fresh peak of ₹88,672 in the afternoon trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

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

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

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

Rupee settles 25 paise higher against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

In contrast, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel,

Tech Mahindra and Reliance Industries were the laggards.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IN BRIEF

IP UNIVERSITY SIGNS MOU WITH ST PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS

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



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



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

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

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



PGTI introduces Kapil Dev Grant Thornton Invitational

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

"It is something new that is happening. We want to do something like T20. More thrills in a short time," Kapil, who is the PGTI president, told reporters on Tuesday. "We can bring more people to the golf course and more sponsors. The golfers need more opportunities. Today cricket reached at this stage because cricket board has given them the opportunity to play at the highest level."

"I think it is very important for the



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

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

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

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

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

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

off at Prestige Golfshire next month.

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

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

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

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

"I had a good start last season, I had a low patch before that, so it was a good feeling that I still have it. I learnt so much and the game is good but I feel I am learning every week. I am really excited this season." The event was also attended by Vishesh C. Chandio, CEO, Grant Thornton Bharat, and Amandeep Johl, CEO, PGTI.

Coco Gauff heads home to Miami Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

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

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

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

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

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

— COCO GAUFF, TENNIS PLAYER

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

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

nents tend to go after.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

their abilities. This is the second edition of KIPG 2025, so it feels good to see para sports growing in India."

Harvinder finished first in the rankings stage and went on to win the gold medal in the inaugural edition of the Khelo India Para Games, which took place in December 2023.

After his remarkable performance, he went on to become a double Olympic medalist in Paris last year, adding a gold medal in individual recurve open, the same event in which he had won the bronze medal at the Tokyo Paralympics.

"I was very happy that a tournament of this level is organised. Last time when I competed in KIPG, it felt like we were in an international level event. The set-up,

I was very happy that a tournament of this level is organised. Last time when I competed in KIPG, it felt like we were in an international level event

— HARVINDER SINGH, ARCHER

schedule and the arrangements were of the highest quality.

"Since then, I knew that India is capable of hosting any international tournament. This time around, I am expecting a similar scale and I am eager to return to the field," Harvinder said.

The World Para Athletics Grand Prix 2025 concluded recently in New Delhi, which will also host the World Para Athletics 2025 in August.

Reflecting on the surge of domestic tournaments and the government's support for para sports, Harvinder said: "The top schemes of the government are putting focus on para sports. There is also growing interest in para athletes among private organisations. They are supporting para athletes and society is becoming more inclusive."

"India is now adopting and recognising para sports and our performances. In tournaments such as KIPG 2025, the participation of athletes is constantly increasing, which is a sign that India is developing overall in the sports sector," he said.

BCCI set to form organising committee for Women's ODI World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

BCCI will form the organising committee of the Women's ODI World Cup besides taking a call on the venues for the ICC event it will be hosting later this year at its Apex Council emergent meeting in Kolkata on March 22. The meeting will take place ahead of the IPL opener between defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the Eden Gardens.

The BCCI last hosted a Women's ODI World Cup back in 2013. The exact schedule of the tournament slotted in October is yet to be worked out.

According to the agenda accessed by PTI, there will be a "discussion on formation of LOC for Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 and discussion regarding venues for Women's Cricket World Cup 2025".

India have made two finals of the 50-over event but fell short at the final hurdle. Harmanpreet Kaur's team will be

aiming to end the long ICC trophy wait at home.

The Apex Council will also finalise the structure for the 2025-26 domestic season. As part of the home season, India are scheduled to host West Indies and South Africa and therefore, the members are likely to decide on the venues for the Test series. With a new set of office-bearers in place, an approval for change in signatories to the bank accounts operated by BCCI will also be taken.

Following government's directive, BCCI set to ban tobacco sponsorship

Earlier this month, the health ministry instructed the BCCI to ban all forms of tobacco and alcohol promotions, including surrogate advertisements, during the IPL beginning March 22.

The Apex Council will take up that matter in the meeting, including sponsorships related to tobacco as well as crypto currency. "Discussion regarding sponsorship from tobacco and crypto brands," read item No.9 on the agenda.

Lionel Messi out of World Cup qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi will miss Argentina's World Cup qualifiers against Uruguay and Brazil over the next eight days because of an injury to his adductor.

The 37-year-old Messi was not included in the 25-man squad announced on Monday by coach Lionel Scaloni.

Later Monday, Inter Miami said Messi the reigning Major League Soccer MVP underwent an MRI "to assess the extent of the discomfort in his adductor region," an injury that the team said occurred in Sunday's win over Atlanta United.

"The examination's findings confirmed the presence of a low-grade injury in the adductor muscle," Inter Miami said. "His clinical progress and response to treatment will determine his availability for competition."

Argentine media initially reported Messi suffered a sore left thigh on Sunday during Inter Miami's 2-1 victory. Argentina, which leads South America, will visit second-placed Uruguay on Friday and host fifth-placed Brazil four



days later at Monumental Stadium in Buenos Aires. Messi was not the only absentee for the two matches that could seal Argentina's qualification. Also ruled out were Paulo Dybala, Gonzalo Montiel and Giovanni Lo Celso.

Scaloni also dropped Alejandro

Garnacho and Claudio Echeverri from the larger squad announced on March 2.

Messi, the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner who captained and led Argentina to the 2022 World Cup title, has been sidelined several times by Inter Miami this season because of injury concerns.

Time for India to win hockey World Cup gold again, says Ashok Kumar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

World Cup-winning striker Ashok Kumar, son of the legendary Major Dhyani Chand, on Tuesday said it is high time India reclaimed hockey's top prize to commemorate the golden jubilee of its historic 1975 World Cup victory.

Fifty years ago, on March 15, India won their first and only hockey World Cup in Kuala Lumpur under the captaincy of Ajitpal Singh with Kumar scoring the winning goal.

Kumar, 75, feels Indian hockey is back to its best after two back-to-back bronze medal wins in the Olympics (Tokyo and Paris). "It was different when we used to play hockey. We played on natural grass but now the game is played on astro-turf. So the dynamics have changed but the skill set remains the same," Kumar said during a book launch function to celebrate 50 years of India's World Cup-winning feat.

"After 1980, our last and eighth gold medal in the Olympics, the game changed drastically when astro-turf was introduced." Titled 'March to Glory: The Story of India's 1975 World Cup Triumph', the book was co-authored by hockey historian K Arumugam and veteran journalist Errol D'Cruz.

"In 1990s and 2000s we had some very good players who kept the game alive although we continued to adjust to astro-turf. But now we have back-to-back Olympic bronze medals, we are also dominating Asian hockey," Kumar said.

"So it would be fitting if we can celebrate the 50 years of the only world title by winning the crown again next year."

The next men's World Cup will be jointly held in Wavre, Belgium and Amstelveen, Netherlands from August 14 to 30, 2026.

Besides the only gold, Kumar was also part of India's bronze and silver medal winning teams in 1971 and 1973 World Cups. He had also won a bronze medal in the 1972 Munich Olympics.

But Kumar still recalls he was never satisfied with second and third place finishes and had never had the courage to show that medals to his illustrious father and uncle Roop Singh, who had won two Olympic gold medals.

"I still remember I never had the courage to show my Olympic bronze or World Cup silver and bronze medals to my family especially my father," Kumar recollected. "In my heart, I was thinking 'I can't show these medals to my family. I was not satisfied till I won a gold.'"

Rory McIlroy takes drama out of playoff to win The Players Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ponte Vedra Beach

The playoff was only three holes. Rory McIlroy needed only three swings. And yet his victory over JJ Spaun in The Players Championship revealed so much about the state of his game and the cruel nature of the notorious TPC Sawgrass.

McIlroy delivered an early knockout against JJ Spaun with his best drive of the week that set up a simple birdie, followed by a three-quarter 9-iron into a cold, cackling wind that found land on the island green at the par-3 17th.

"By no means did I have my best stuff this week," McIlroy said after becoming the eighth multiple winner of The Players. "But I was still able to win one of the biggest tournaments in the world. That's a huge thing." It's the first time in his career he has won twice going into the Masters, the major that for more than a decade has kept him from joining golf's most elite group with the career Grand Slam.

Spaun thought he had the perfect answer until he saw his 8-iron sail over the island on the second playoff hole, ending his hopes of the biggest win of his career.

"Can I watch this?" Spaun said as he sat at a table, his eyes trained on a television in the back of the media center showing a replay of his tee shot on the 17th. It was his first time seeing where the ball landed just beyond the wooden frame and into the water. He had heard only groans from the gallery. And he still couldn't believe it. "I never thought it was long," he said



quietly. "I never thought it was long."

So ended a memorable week at golf's richest tournament, where thousands of spectators showed up in the cold and wind for 47 minutes of golf between McIlroy among the most celebrated players who now has 39 worldwide wins and Spaun,

a 34-year-old with one PGA Tour title who until this week had never broken 70 on the TPC Sawgrass.

McIlroy said he woke up at 3 a.m. And couldn't get back to sleep. Whether this was about trying to win or trying not to lose he had a three-shot lead with five

holes to play in the final round Sunday did not matter. He worked on his tee shot with the same helping wind off the right. To practice in the right wind for the 17th, McIlroy turned and hit balls from the range toward the third green.

McIlroy had been spotty off the tee all week, missing nearly half of his fairways. He set the tone with his best of the week, a 336-yard blast right down the middle that set up a pitching wedge from 176 yards into the par-5 16th for a two-putt birdie from 35 feet.

"I thought if I could get the ball in the fairway there, it sort of puts a little bit of pressure on JJ," he said. "To step up and make that swing was awesome."

And then it effectively ended on the 17th. "When my ball was in the air, I was telling it to get down," McIlroy said. Spaun hit his 8-iron with a higher trajectory into a hurting wind off the right, and his first instinct was to yell, "Get up."

"It just looked like it was going to be short," Spaun said. "I was stunned. I couldn't believe it was long. I'm happy with the swing I put on it I am. The wind must have just laid down just a little too much, and it just went through the wind. Wasn't my time." The first three-hole playoff in 10 years at The Players was caused by a four-hour rain delay on Sunday. McIlroy had to make a 4-foot par putt on the 72nd hole. Spaun had a 30-foot birdie putt for the win that stopped inches short.

McIlroy, disappointed and having lost a three-shot lead on the back nine, looked ahead to the playoff by saying, "Make five good swings tomorrow morn-

ing and get this thing done."

Turns out he only needed three the driver and wedge on No. 16, the 9-iron on No. 17 to beat Spaun and claim the \$4.5 million prize from the \$25 million purse.

It was reminiscent of a 2008 playoff between Sergio Garcia and Paul Goydos, back when the 17th was used in sudden death. Garcia hit the green. Goydos came up short and into the water, and there is no lonelier walk than to the drop zone knowing it's over.

Spaun wound up three-putting from 45 feet for triple bogey. McIlroy ran his 30-footer well past the hole for a bogey, giving him a three-shot lead. Both hit drives well right on the 18th. McIlroy took a safe bogey and Spaun didn't bother putting the 10-footer he had left for bogey.

Any mention of The Players being the fifth major or even resembling one is not where McIlroy wants to go right now because he knows the real one the big one is a month away at Augusta National. The trick now is to keep his game in good stead. He also won the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am last month. He plans to add one more start in Houston or San Antonio before the Masters.

"Everything feels like it's in good working order at the minute," he said. "Just keep practicing and doing the right things and practicing the right habits, and day after day, week after week, they all add up to days like today."

Spaun won \$2,725,000 for his runner-up finish and moved to No. 25 in the world ranking, high enough that he is assured a spot in the Masters.

I always knew my strengths, abilities: Shreyas Iyer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

He fought perceptions about a so-called technical shortcoming, was "typecast", and had his contract torn up within months of being a World Cup hero but Shreyas Iyer was indefatigable through it all, trusting his sincerity and uncomplicated mind to steer him through.

The result of the perseverance has been pleasing, to put it mildly. The 30-year-old has built himself into one of India's most consistent number four batters in recent times and was declared a "silent hero" by his captain Rohit Sharma after the team's Champions Trophy triumph a few days ago. "Maybe, the perception was created or maybe I was typecast. But I always knew my strengths, my abilities and (there was also) the belief (that) I had in myself," Iyer said in an interview when asked about his perceived lack of ability to play the short ball that became a talking point in the last couple of years.

The numbers back him. In the last eight ODIs, including the home games against England and the subsequent Champions Trophy, Iyer has averaged 53 batting at number four and had only one low-scoring outing in eight knocks.

"An athlete needs to constantly evolve as the sport keeps changing its dynamics. I am glad I kept a positive frame of mind, and trusted my process," he said.

Last year, he sustained a back injury during the home Tests against England and



then lost his central contract after showing up for his then IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders' training instead of Ranji Trophy duties after his recovery.

He was stripped of his central contract as BCCI set out to assert the importance

of domestic cricket by seemingly punishing him. Iyer kept his head down and led Kolkata Knight Riders to the IPL trophy weeks later before forcing his way back into India's 50-over set-up.

His was a classic case of performance

doing all the talking for him.

"I kept my process simple. Tried not to over-think the situation and to continue doing my work honestly. I always had the belief that my performance and my sincerity will bring back the opportunity," said

the prolific batter, who will be captaining Punjab Kings this IPL season.

The difficult time also made him a better learner. "It allowed me to learn a lot, reassess the situation and prepare a routine to add additional skills in my armoury."

"Looking back, I am happy with the outcome, the way I managed the situation and importantly, belief in my abilities. Lots and lots of hard work went behind it.

"From my coach Pravin Amre sir to my trainer Sagar, everyone worked around my needs. The two of them really helped me create power and the force which you see in my batting now," he recalled.

Number 4 is where I belong

The right-hander, who averages close to 50 (48.22) after 70 ODIs, said ever since his impressive run in the 2023 World Cup, in which he scored 530 runs, he has felt comfortable batting at number four.

He was also India's top-scorer in the Champions Trophy, finishing with 243 runs in five games.

"I feel I belong to the No.4 position. Whether it was in the 2023 World Cup or now in the Champions Trophy, I enjoyed the most coming as Number 4. It gives me a sense of belonging and that's where I am able to flourish."

Iyer had one of the most tricky jobs during the Champions Trophy and that was to manoeuvre the strike against spinners in the middle overs. And he did it quite well, proving himself to be as good a play-

er of spin as his stroke-making skipper on the slightly slow surfaces of Dubai.

"Well, basically the foundation needs to be stronger and thankfully in my case, having played in Mumbai where wickets are grassless, it helps. Besides, I think early in the career, I learned that the footwork has to be strong to play on such tracks," he explained.

Iyer said he was quite pleased with how he executed his plans during the marquee event and "provided a sense of consistency in the middle order throughout the campaign." "I will tirelessly repeat it to provide that balance in the middle order, whenever I represent India," he promised.

And to ensure that his obsessive desire to perform does not become an all-consuming routine, Iyer likes to tune out every once in a while. "...I feel it's needed, to not over-think and burn yourself out. There is life beyond cricket with family and friends, hobbies and magic tricks, and I enjoy these breaks in between," he revealed.

A limited-overs giant in the making he might be but Iyer has a decent Test record too. In 14 Tests that he has played, Iyer averages around 37 which includes a hundred and five half-centuries.

Does he think that he has a chance of making it to the squad that will tour England in June-July for a five-Test series?

"I prefer not to over-think and complicate my current process. For now, I am living in the moment to fulfil my roles and responsibilities with Punjab Kings," he concluded.

India face Maldives in Asian Cup qualifier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Shillong

The returning Sunil Chhetri will be the cynosure of all eyes as India face Maldives in an international friendly here on Wednesday, the match serving as a dress rehearsal for the all-important AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Bangladesh at the same venue in less than a week's time.

The 40-year-old Chhetri came out of his international retirement earlier this month to help the team successfully navigate the qualifiers for the continent's top football tournament, starting with the March 25 clash.

The preparatory match for Manolo Marquez's side marks a historic moment as the Blue Tigers will play in the football-crazy hill town for the first time.

It will also be India's all-time top scorer Chhetri's first match since announcing his return to international football.

The main team needs to win games. And if we need to win games, we need to call players who are in better shape

— MANOLO MARQUEZ, HEAD COACH

In the pre-match press conference on Tuesday, Marquez said, "It is the first time we are playing here, but I have worked with a lot of coaches and players from here. I knew it's a very nice place. "I remember when I watched the Durand Cup in Shillong last year, I said, 'Wow, the ground, crowd, atmosphere, everything is nice.' I'm not joking, I said it'd be great if one day, the national team could play here."

Defender Mehtab Singh concurred with the Spaniard. Mehtab said, "We feel great to be in Shillong. It's the first time our national team will be playing here. The north-east is known for its football fan following. Football is the biggest sport here. Taking football

to diverse regions is a great thing for Indian football."

For Marquez, his first competitive match since becoming India's head coach in July 2024 is a week away, and the friendly presents a great opportunity to fine-tune his team before the crucial fixture. The Indian team, though, remains winless under Marquez with the side ending the year with a 1-1 stalemate against Malaysia in November in Hyderabad. "It's a friendly game to prepare for the Asian Cup qualifier. Obviously, we want to win. We knew that the target during the previous FIFA windows was to arrive in the best possible condition for the first competitive match against Bangladesh next Tuesday. "I don't think we will play with the same team against Bangladesh that will play tomorrow. Obviously, you can't change all 11. Some will repeat on Tuesday. I'm confident in all my players. It has to be a good game and a good preparation for Bangladesh."

Marquez also confirmed Chhetri's involvement in the friendly match that will mark his 152nd cap for India. "For sure, Sunil will play some minutes. I don't know whether as a starter or from the bench. We can use six substitutions, so 17 players can play, and I think Sunil will be one of them."

"He is the Indian player with the most goals this season. It doesn't matter if a player is 20, 40, or my grandfather at 87. If they are in better shape, they will be here. The national team is not about developing players. "Developed players have to arrive here. The main team needs to win games. And if we need to win games, we need to call players who are in better shape," said Marquez.

Chhetri had earlier hung his boots in June 2024 after a glorious international career after making his India debut in 2005. But he showed he remains a force to reckon with, in the 2024-25 ISL which has turned out to be Chhetri's most prolific season.

Runner Archana Jadhav gets four-year ban

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's long-distance runner Archana Jadhav was on Tuesday banned for four years owing to a failed dope test in January, the findings of which she did not contest despite repeated reminders, prompting World Athletics to deem her actions as acceptance of guilt.

According to World Athletics' Athletes Integrity Unit (AIU), Jadhav's sample, which was collected at the Pune Half-Marathon in December last year, contained prohibited substance Oxandrolone. This synthetic anabolic steroid promotes protein production and muscle building in the body.

The ban came into effect from January 7. Jadhav has been under provisional suspension for the duration. On February 25, she had replied to the violation charge in an e-mail to the AIU stating "I am extremely sorry sir...I welcome your decision." The AIU said its understanding of this communication was that Jadhav did not require a hearing and was "content" to get a decision from the body.

The AIU said Jadhav was nonetheless informed that she had time till March 3 to admit that she had committed the Anti-Doping Rule Violations, and was reminded of the same by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) on February 28. The AIU, however, did not get any response from Jadhav.

Jadhav's sample, which was collected at the Pune Half-Marathon in December last year, contained prohibited substance Oxandrolone

— WORLD ATHLETICS' ATHLETES INTEGRITY UNIT

The AIU said Jadhav has also not demonstrated that the Anti-Doping Rule Violations were "not intentional".

"...The Athlete is deemed to have committed the Anti-Doping Rule Violations..." the AIU stated.

As a result, "a period of ineligibility of four years" commences on January 7.

In addition, her results on and since December 15, 2024 stand disqualified. She will have to forfeit all awards,

medals, points, prizes and appearance money for the period.

The AIU said Jadhav did not exercise her right to a 'B' sample test despite expressing a desire to do so in early communication.

She responded well past the stipulated date of January 17 to state that she was hospitalised owing to illness.

This was after she was told about the procedure and the cost involved in getting a test. The AIU said it had provided an extended deadline to the athlete.

"...On 22 January 2025, the AIU wrote to the Athlete and provided her with an extended deadline by which to make the full payment of the costs of the B Sample analysis to World Athletics..."

Jadhav was required to confirm her availability by no later than January 24.

The AIU said Jadhav once again failed to respond or make the full payment.

She had last competed in the Delhi half marathon in October 2024 in the elite Indian women's race, finishing fourth with a time of 1:20.21 behind winner Lili Das, Kavita Yadav and Priti Lamba.

Pakistan origin cricketer dies after collapsing on field

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Adelaide

Junaid Zafar Khan, a club-level Pakistan-origin cricketer, has died after collapsing on the ground during a local match played in extreme heat at the Concordia College here.

In his 40s, Khan was representing Old Concordians Cricket Club in a match against Prince Alfred Old Collegians last Saturday, news.Com.Au reported.

After fielding for 40 overs and batting for seven, Khan collapsed around 4pm Australian Central Daylight Time (ACDT). South Australia has been in the grip of extreme heat over and according to data from the Bureau of Meteorology, temperatures here were still above 40 degrees Celsius at the time.

Adelaide Turf Cricket Association rules state that games are cancelled if the temperature climbs above 42 degrees Celsius.

Samson joins team practice session

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

Rajasthan Royals skipper Sanju Samson has joined his IPL team after completing his recovery from a finger surgery he underwent last month. The 30-year-old cricketer, who finished his rehabilitation at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, attended the Royals' first practice session on Monday ahead of the upcoming season.

Samson had suffered the injury after being struck by a bouncer from Jofra Archer during India's five-match T20I series against England. Following the injury, he underwent surgery to treat the damaged finger. "Straight from the airport to our first practice match to making everyone smile like he does!" RR said in a post on 'X'. The RR skipper was seen

interacting with his teammates, including India batter Yashasvi Jaiswal, and head coach Rahul Dravid, among others.

Rajasthan Royals, the inaugural champions, will kick off their campaign against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Hyderabad on March 23. Although Samson has regained full fitness, it remains uncertain whether he will take the wicketkeeping gloves straight away. If he isn't deemed fit, Dhruv Jurel is likely to step in behind the stumps. In another boost for RR, all-rounder Riyan Parag has fully recovered from a shoulder injury that had kept him out of the T20Is against South Africa and England. Parag made his comeback in the second phase of the Ranji Trophy, scoring a half-century and bowling 26 overs against Saurashtra.

New Zealand beat Pakistan by five wicket in T20 match

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dunedin

Tim Seifert blasted 45 from 22 balls and Finn Allen hit 38 from 16 as New Zealand cruised to a five-wicket win over Pakistan on Tuesday in a rain-shortened second Twenty20 (T20) cricket international.

Captain Salman Ali Agha made 46 as Pakistan reached 135-9 in a match reduced to 15 overs per innings after a delay for wet outfield. Shaheen Shah Afridi then bowled a maiden to start New Zealand's innings. But Seifert and Allen hit seven of the next 12 balls for sixes as New Zealand launched

an assault which helped them clinch the match and a 2-0 series lead with 11 balls remaining.

Seifert and Allen hit five sixes apiece as New Zealand sped towards its target. After the scoreless opening over Allen cleared the boundary on the first, third and sixth balls of the second over, then Seifert struck sixes from the first two and the last two deliveries of the next over as New Zealand raced to 44-0.

New Zealand began its innings needing 136 runs from 90 balls. By the end of the five-over power play that target had been reduced to 70 runs from 60 balls.

Kohli to focus on playing smart cricket: AB De Villiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

South African batting great AB de Villiers believes Virat Kohli should focus on playing smart cricket and continue controlling the game this season as RCB possess immense firepower with Phil Salt expected to ease the pressure on the Indian superstar.

Despite being one of RCB's most consistent performers, Kohli's strike rate was a topic of discussion past two seasons.

However, with the Bengaluru franchise acquiring the English duo of Salt and Liam Livingstone, along with Australian Tim David and West Indian Romario Shephard all fearless strikers of the ball de Villiers feels Kohli can play with more freedom.

"Virat seems to be enjoying his cricket. I don't think he's going to have to up his strike rate batting with Phil Salt," de Villiers said on JioStar Press Room on Tuesday.

"Salt is one of the most attacking players we've ever seen. I think he's going to take a lot of pressure off Virat. Virat needs to continue what he's been doing for so many years...Control the game, play smart cricket. He's got the best instinct of any player out there. He knows when to up the ante a bit and when to lower it."



"Virat needs to be the captain of the batting department in this tournament and really just keep things together, play smart cricket to make sure they don't find those collapses in the batting order."

The former Proteas skipper feels that Kohli has been subjected to "unnecessary criticism over the last few seasons." "There's no doubt some of the out-

side noise has maybe influenced him a bit. He's only human, he's definitely got those doubts in his head.

"But the one thing about Virat is that he's always had the ability to, when it matters most, when he crosses that line for his team, block everything out and it's business time." With Faf du Plessis' departure, RCB enters the season with a new captain in Rajat Patidar.

De Villiers opined that Patidar's biggest challenge would be dealing with self-doubt while stepping into the shoes of past captains like du Plessis and Kohli.

"His biggest challenge will be insecurity, stepping into the big boots of the past captains like Faf and Virat... Having Virat around and constantly almost doubting yourself.

"He needs to stay true to who he is and not try to captain like Virat or like Faf. And use the experience of Virat, use the experience of Andy Flower and some of the other players."

RCB will be on the road consistently throughout the season, frequently alternating between home and away fixtures.

"Their scheduling is going to be a big obstacle. The team is balanced and that bodes well for them, especially with their scheduling, where they hop around to different venues all the time, right throughout the tournament. They've got the trickiest schedule of them all."

Despite this challenge, de Villiers believes RCB has a strong and balanced squad.

"They're only lacking an X-factor spinner, right? Krunal Pandya is a wonderful spinner. We've seen him over the years perform very consistently and he can chip in with the bat as well. They have some other options as well.

"But I mean, look at that batting lineup. It is pure power. There's a mix between power and also control."

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