

CHAMPIONS BRING THE TROPHY HOME! JAI HO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai
 India sealed an unprecedented third Champions Trophy triumph with an unblemished record as Rohit Sharma combined his inherent freedom with steely resolve to inspire his side to a four-wicket win in a closely-fought final against New Zealand, here on Sunday.
 India won the trophy without losing a match, reflecting their dominance in the tournament which they won back in 2002 and 2013.
 No other team has won the event thrice. Well-timed fifties by Daryl Mitchell (63) and Michael Bracewell (53) steered the Kiwis to 251 for seven after Indian spinners led by Kuldeep Yadav applied the squeeze for a large part of their innings.
 Indian batters needed to capitalise on that fine effort of the bowlers, and Rohit, who many believe was featuring in his last ODI match for India, led from the front, slipping into his tur-



bocharged version almost immediately. The chase of 252 grew tight in the business end while the Blackcaps spinners were operating on a sluggish pitch, but skipper Rohit's ebullient 83-ball 76 had already given them the cushion to overhaul the target in 49 overs.
 KL Rahul with his 34 not out, there was no dramatic twist to the tale, leading the side past the finish line after India lost well-settled batters.
 Pacer Nathan Smith, who replaced injured Matt Henry in the line-up, felt the heat as the 37-year-old Rohit hammered him for two sixes and as many fours in the beginning of the chase.
 At the other end Shubman Gill (31), who helped Rohit to raise 105 runs for the opening wicket, was more subdued and the lone spark in his innings was a maximum off spinner Rachin Ravindra.



WINS THROUGH DECADES		
Year	Winner	Margin of wins
1998	South Africa	South Africa won by 4 wickets
2000	New Zealand	New Zealand won by 4 wickets
2002	Sri Lanka and India	India and Sri Lanka declared co-champions
2004	West Indies	West Indies won by 2 wickets
2006	Australia	Australia won by 8 wickets
2009	Australia	Australia won by 6 wickets
2013	India	India won by 5 runs
2017	Pakistan	Pakistan won by 180 runs
2025	India	India won by 4 wickets

India, what is wrong with these men?

Macabre carnality in Hampi

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Bengaluru
 Hampi, a UNESCO world heritage site in Karnataka, is in the news for wrong reasons as two women including an Israeli tourist, were raped at knifepoint by a group of local persons who robbed their mobile phones and Rs 9,500 cash late Thursday night.
 An Orissa youth Bipash, who was with the victims at the time of attack, was bashed up by the group and thrown into Thungabhadra Canal. His body was recovered on Friday morning while two friends of the victims jumped into the canal and swam to safety. One of the victim was a US citizen while the other person was from Nashik in Maharashtra.
 The Israeli lady and her female companion, who was the former's host, went to the scenic Koppal for stargazing around Thursday midnight, when the attack happened. The police, according to Ram Arasiddi, the Superintendent of Police, Koppal told media persons that two of the attackers have been arrested and a search was

on to trace the third person. The arrested duo has been identified by the victims and their associates. Both the women are undergoing treatment at a government run hospital in Koppal.
 Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar took to social media and condemned the incident. Siddaramaiah described the attack on women as a most heinous act. The police are yet to catch hold of the third attacker even at the time of going to Press on Sunday evening. Police said the names of arrested persons were Handi Malla (22) and Chetan Sai (21).
 What has upset the local population is the timing of the incident as this is considered as a tourist season in Hampi which draws a lot of tourists from India and abroad. "This is likely to cause a rethinking on the part of travelers who had selected Hampi, which is hardly 25 km away from the spot," said M R Hari, CEO, Invis Muti Media, tourism management and consultancy services.

Perverse depravity in Pune

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Pune
 A man arrested for alighting from a BMW and urinating at a traffic junction in Pune was on Sunday remanded in police custody till March 10 along with his co-passenger. A video of the act, which took place on Saturday morning in Shastrinagar in Yerawada area, had gone viral on social media, prompting police to book Gaurav Ahuja (25) and Bhagyesh Oswal (22) for public nuisance, rash and negligent driving, causing danger on public roads and other offences under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Motor Vehicles Act.
 While Oswal was arrested from his residence on Saturday, Ahuja, who was driving the car, was detained hours later from Karad in neighbouring Satara district and was placed under arrest in the early hours of Sunday, a

police official said.
 In the clip that went viral on social media platforms, Oswal can be seen occupying the front seat of the luxury car, while Ahuja is urinating at a traffic junction before taking to the wheel and speeding off after making an obscene gesture at a person videoling the incident.
 Ahuja and Oswal were produced in the sessions court here, with the public prosecutor seeking seven-day police remand to allow a probe into whether the two had consumed any narcotic substance. The duo's lawyer opposed the remand plea claiming police was working under political and media pressure and had invoked BNS sections that did not apply to the case. After hearings arguments from both sides, the court remanded Ahuja and Oswal in police remand till March 10.

Sick obscenity booked in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna
 Bihar Police has ordered a statewide crackdown on the public playing of double-meaning Bhojpuri songs, calling it a "burning social problem" that endangers women's security and has a "perverse effect" on children's minds. The move comes as authorities aim to curb the growing influence of vulgar songs in public spaces, warning of strict action against violators.
 A circular issued by the state Police Headquarters directs all Inspector Generals (IGs), Deputy Inspector Generals (DIGs), and railway police to take action against those playing such songs in public spaces. "A special drive must be carried out across the state to identify those who indulge in such activities and promote vulgar and double-meaning Bhojpuri songs," the circular stated. The move comes swiftly after renowned actress Neetu Chandra took a strong stance against vulgarity in music by filing a PIL in the Patna High Court. Her petition specifically targets singer Yo Yo Honey Singh's latest song, Maniac, citing its objectionable content. Neetu who authored an article for The Pioneer on the

issue on occasion of Women's Day, also urged the court to impose a ban on Bhojpuri songs that promote misogyny, arguing that their lyrics often objectify and demean women. In this regards she also met top Bihar police officials including DGP Vinay Kumar on Sunday.
 The letter highlights concerns about the impact of these songs on society. "It becomes embarrassing for women when they hear such vulgar and double-meaning Bhojpuri songs at public places, functions, buses, trucks, and auto-rickshaws," it read.
 The directive also stressed that such songs create an unsafe atmosphere. "Sometimes they feel insecure also when such songs are played. Strict action should be taken against those who are caught violating the directive in this regard," the circular added.
 People caught playing such songs in public spaces will face legal action under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The issue has been a subject of concern in the Bihar Assembly as well. Responding to the demand, the state government had assured that "strict action would be taken against those who promote obscene and double-meaning Bhojpuri songs."

Terror continues unabated in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu
 Amid large scale protests against the 'targeted killing' of three members of a Hindu family in the remote Billawar area of Kathua, the Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan Sunday chaired a high level security review meeting with different heads of the paramilitary forces, senior army and intelligence agency officers in Jammu to chalk out a 'comprehensive strategy' to tackle the threat on ground zero.
 According to highly placed official sources, the Union Home Secretary was briefed in detail about the dynamic deployment pattern of additional troops inducted in the region to further beef up security ahead of the summer season.
 Senior BSF and CRPF officers who attended the meeting were directed to enhance vigil and surveillance along the border villages to prevent any fresh infiltration.
 The intelligence agencies also briefed the Union Home Secretary about the efforts being made to generate pin pointed human intelligence to flush out the Pakistani terrorists hiding in the region with the help of their sympathizers and over ground workers.
 The J and K police Chief and army commanders briefed the Union Home Secretary about the ongoing anti-terrorist operations launched across the Jammu region to neutralise these foreign terrorists. Recent assessment of various intelligence agencies suggested presence of several groups of Pakistani terrorists across several districts of Jammu region. During the meeting a thorough review of security arrangements for the proposed start of railway services connecting Kashmir Valley with the rest of country was also reviewed.
 Ahead of the crucial security review meeting the entire Billawar belt and other adjoining areas witnessed complete shutdown against the rising

incidents of civilian killings.
 Local BJP MLA Satish Sharma and leader of the opposition in the J & K Assembly Sunil Sharma visited Billawar to pacify the agitated residents and delivered a strong message on behalf of the Union Home Minister Amit Shah to stay united in the decisive fight against the 'faceless' enemy.
 As situation remained volatile in the absence of a postmortem report of the deceased civilians including a teenager, the Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday ordered a thorough and transparent investigation into the killing of three relatives of a family in Kathua. The doctors panel handed over the dead bodies of the deceased to their relatives late Dunday afternoon. The last rites will be performed on Monday.
This is a clear case of target killings by terrorists...we want the government to intensify the anti-terrorist operations in the forests to neutralise them.
 — Gopal Krishan, BJP leader
 The probe was ordered after Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh directly pointed to the involvement of terrorists in the killing of three civilians.
 According to police, the bodies of Varun Singh (15), his paternal uncle Yogesh Singh (32) and maternal uncle Darshan Singh (40) were found from the Ishu nullah in the remote Malhar area in the higher reaches of the district on Saturday. The trio had gone missing on March 5.
 "I have ordered a thorough and transparent investigation, and all the necessary support to the families will be provided," the LG said in a post on X.
 He said he was shocked and saddened beyond words at the brutal killing of the three.

"I assure the people that the perpetrators will be brought to book at the earliest. Justice will be ensured and accountability will be fixed," Sinha said.
 He offered his condolences to the families and friends of the deceased.
 However, the Union Minister said the killings were a matter of great concern.
 "The brutal killing of 3 youth by terrorists in Bani area of district Kathua is extremely sad as well as a matter of great concern. There appears to be a deep conspiracy behind spoiling the atmosphere in this peaceful area," the minister, who represents Udhampur Parliamentary constituency that covers Kathua, said on X.
 "We have discussed this matter with the officials concerned. The Union Home Secretary himself is reaching Jammu so that the situation can be assessed on the spot. I am confident that it will be ensured that such incidents do not happen again and the confidence of the people remains strong," he said.
 Addressing a gathering of protestors in Billawar local BJP leader Gopal Krishan said, "This is a clear case of target killings by terrorists, engulfing the peaceful area in fear and anger...we want the government to intensify the anti-terrorist operations in the forests to neutralise the terrorists hiding in the forests for the last one year".
 He said the people will not allow the terrorists to succeed in their designs and harm the communal harmony by carrying out selective killings.
 Senior BJP leader and Billawar MLA Satish Sharma, who visited the deceased family, said it is premature to say who killed the three civilians. "It is a matter of investigation as nobody has seen how they were killed. Police are looking in all aspects, including the terror angle, in the case," he said.

Opposition plots an EPIC session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi
 The second leg of the Parliament Budget session will resume on Monday amid indications of an 'EPIC' showdown between the Centre and the Opposition, which is planning to raise issues such as the alleged manipulation of electoral rolls, the fresh bout of violence in Manipur and India's handling of the Trump administration.
 The focus of the government will be on getting Parliament nod for the demands for grants, completion of the budgetary process, seeking approval for the Manipur budget and passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill.
 Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to move a statutory resolution seeking Parliament approval for the proclamation of President's Rule in Manipur. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is also scheduled to table the budget for Manipur on Monday. Manipur has been under President's Rule since February 13 after the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh.
 The Opposition said it is set to corner the government over the issue of duplicate Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers. The Trinamool Congress has taken the lead in flagging the issue, following which the Election Commission declared that it would take corrective measures within the next three months.
 The Election Commission had rejected the Trinamool Congress

claim that the voter lists were manipulated to allow voters from other states to exercise their franchise in West Bengal.
 The poll body also made it clear that while the EPIC numbers of some voters "may be identical", other details such as demographic information, Assembly constituency and polling booth are different.
 Trinamool Congress leaders are meeting the Election Commission on Monday and have also rallied other opposition parties, including
 A Joint Committee of Parliament submitted its report on the bill in the Lok Sabha amid vociferous protests by the opposition.
 Issues such as the fresh violence in Manipur, the threat of reciprocal tariffs by US President Donald Trump, the political furor over the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies are also expected to find an echo in Parliament.
 Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has said the opposition INDIA bloc leaders will hold "extensive consul-



the Congress, DMK, Shiv Sena-UBT, to raise the issue in both Houses of Parliament during the second part of the Budget session. For the government, the early passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill is a priority.
 Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said at the India Today Conclave last week that the government is keen on the early passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill as it will solve many issues of the Muslim community.
 He said the Congress will raise the issue of Trump's reciprocal-tariff threats during the second half of the Budget session and called for a bipartisan collective resolve to deal with the threats.

Manipur far cry from normal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Imphal
 Normal life was affected in Kuki-dominated areas of Manipur on Sunday as agitators enforced an indefinite shutdown called by Kuki-Zo groups against a "crackdown by security forces".
 The situation in Kangpokpi district, where at least one person was killed and 40 others were injured in clashes between Kuki demonstrators and security forces on the previous day, remained tense but calm on Sunday.
 In other Kuki-dominated areas in Churachandpur and Tengnoupal districts as well, protesters burnt tyres and blocked roads with boulders, which the security forces were seen clearing. However, no fresh violence has been reported so far.
 Business establishments remained closed and few vehicles were seen plying the roads in Kuki-dominated areas in the state. Agitators were seen asking people to remain indoors.
 Additional security forces have been deployed in Gangphiphal and other parts of the district along the NH-2 (Imphal-Dimapur Road) and

vehicular patrolling was being conducted to ensure law and order, a district official said.
 A protester was killed while over 40 others, including women and policemen, were injured in clashes between Kuki demonstrators and security forces in different parts of Kangpokpi district on Saturday, officials said.
 Clashes erupted between demonstrators and security forces in the Kuki-dominated district after police fired tear gas shells to disperse them, as they opposed Union Home Minister Amit Shah's directive allowing free movement across the state. Protesters clashed with security forces till late on Saturday night as the agitators used catapults against the law enforcers, he said, adding windshields of at least five vehicles of the security forces were damaged.
 The Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF), a Kuki-Zo body, extended support to the indefinite shutdown called by Kuki Zo Council (KZC) in all areas inhabited by the community in Manipur to protest the crackdown of security forces on demonstrators protesting free movement along all roads in the ethnic strife-torn state.

Rahul Gandhi's mochi steps into global shoes

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Sultanpur
 A year ago, Ramchet, a 60-year-old cobbler from Sultanpur, spent his days stitching and repairing footwear in a small roadside shop, barely making ends meet. Today, he is gearing up to launch his own footwear brand, 'Ramchet Mochi', thanks to the support and mentorship of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.
 Ramchet's journey took a turn when Rahul Gandhi, during his outreach programs, noticed his craftsmanship and decided to help. The Congress MP from Rae Bareilly gifted him a machine to improve his work and later invited him to Delhi, where he had the opportunity to present his handmade slippers to Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra at 10, Janpath.
 In a further push to his entrepreneurial dream, Rahul Gandhi arranged for Ramchet to visit Mumbai, where he met Sudheer Rajbhar, a well-known leather entrepreneur and founder of the design brand Chamar Studio. For Ramchet, who had never boarded a flight before, the experience was



Rahul Gandhi arranged for Ramchet to visit Mumbai, where he met Sudheer Rajbhar, a well-known leather entrepreneur PIONEER PHOTO

and Sudheer Rajbhar encouraged me to take my skills to the next level," Ramchet told local reporters in Sultanpur.
 Since then, Ramchet has expanded his work. He has set up a small workshop with a few artisans and invested in better tools. His son, who once had no interest in the trade, now spends hours each day learning the craft. The cobbler who once earned Rs 100-150 per day now earns in thousands and dreams of building his own brand.
 Rahul Gandhi, who shared their meeting on social media on March 6, praised Rajbhar's success story as an example of Dalit entrepreneurship and the potential of traditional artisans when given access to opportunities.
 For Ramchet, the dream is no longer just about survival. With his new brand taking shape, he hopes to inspire other local artisans to believe in their craft and strive for something bigger.
 Congress leaders have praised Rahul's initiative, calling it a model for grassroots entrepreneurship.



GUEST COLUMN

*Uttarakhand as a year-round tourist destination: PM Modi's vision for sustainable growth



KAMAL K PANDEY

Nestled in the lap of the Himalaya, Uttarakhand has long been revered as the Devbhoomi—the land of the gods. However, beyond its spiritual significance, the State holds immense potential for tourism and economic growth. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his visit to Harshil on March 6, laid out an ambitious roadmap to transform Uttarakhand into a 365-day tourist destination, emphasising its year-round appeal. This vision, if realised effectively, could mark a paradigm shift in the State's tourism sector.

For years, the prevailing perception has been that Uttarakhand primarily attracts visitors during the summer. PM Modi challenged this notion, asserting that the State has something unique to offer in every season. The lush valleys provide respite from the scorching summer

heat of the plains, while the monsoons enhance the beauty of its waterfalls and rivers. Autumn paints the landscape in breathtaking hues and winter, with its snowfall-laden terrain, makes for an ideal adventure tourism hub. By leveraging these natural advantages, Uttarakhand can dismantle the outdated concept of "off-season" and reposition itself as a destination that remains vibrant throughout the year. This shift, however, requires strategic investments in infrastructure, marketing and policy incentives to ensure that the State's tourism industry thrives in all seasons.

PM Modi also highlighted the Vibrant Villages programme, an initiative designed to rejuvenate and develop villages along India's borders. Historically, settlements such as Jadung and Mana were viewed as India's "last villages". However, under this new vision, they are being rebranded as the "first villages"—a transformation that seeks to redefine not just geographical boundaries but also socio-economic opportunities. Promoting border tourism can serve multiple purposes: strengthening national security by fostering economic activity in these remote areas, enhancing local livelihoods and creating new tourist circuits that

By positioning itself as a comprehensive tourism destination, the State can attract spiritual seekers, adventure enthusiasts, cultural explorers and eco-conscious travellers alike. However, realising this vision requires a multi-stakeholder approach—the State government, local entrepreneurs, tourism boards and communities must collectively work towards improving infrastructure, digital promotion and service quality. Incentives for sustainable practices, environmental conservation and skill development in the hospitality sector will be crucial in ensuring that tourism growth is inclusive and long-term.

integrate cultural heritage with adventure experiences.

A key highlight of PM Modi's address was his emphasis on winter tourism. Traditionally, visitor footfall drops significantly in the colder months. However, the Prime Minister introduced a novel idea—"Gham Tapo Tourism" or sunbathing tourism—where tourists can experience the serene warmth of Uttarakhand's winter sun. This concept aligns well with global trends in experiential tourism. European countries have long capitalised on winter travel through seasonal sports, cozy retreats and wellness tourism. If implemented effectively, Uttarakhand can attract tourists seeking winter escapades, homestay experiences and local organic cuisine, thereby boosting the rural economy.

To sustain year-round tourism, seamless connectivity is essential. Modi underscored the importance of ropeway projects in Kedarnath and Hemkund, which aim to revolutionise pilgrimage and adventure tourism. Once completed, the Kedarnath trek, which currently takes hours, will be reduced to a mere 30-minute journey. Such infrastructure developments not only make

pilgrimage sites more accessible to elderly and differently-abled visitors but also provide opportunities for eco-tourism, reducing vehicular congestion and minimising environmental impact.

Tourism is more than just scenic landscapes—it is a lifeline for local economies.

commodities. Promoting these local products on a national and global scale aligns with India's broader vision of self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat). By integrating agri-tourism, handicraft markets and eco-tourism initiatives, Uttarakhand can create sustainable livelihood opportunities that prevent large-scale mi-

gration from villages to urban centers—a challenge the State has grappled with for years.

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PM Modi's Uttarakhand visit underscored a transformative vision—one that has the potential to reshape the State's tourism industry and redefine its economic trajectory. By capitalising on its natural beauty, cultural richness and strategic location, Uttarakhand can evolve into one of India's most dynamic and resilient tourism destinations. The challenge now lies in execution—how effectively can the policies be translated into action? How swiftly can infrastructure be upgraded? And most importantly, how can tourism be harnessed as a tool for sustainable development? Only time will tell, but one thing is certain: Uttarakhand is on the cusp of a new era—one that extends far beyond pilgrimage tourism and embraces a truly global vision.

(The author is a content strategist, technology and media analyst; views expressed are personal)



The PM highlighted Uttarakhand's diverse agricultural produce, praising Harshil's Rajma (kidney beans) and Mandua (finger millet) as valuable local

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DVMUVM favours separate vendors' zone to overcome crowding in Paltan Bazaar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

The Doon Valley Mahanagar Udyog Vyapar Mandal (DVMUVM) will submit a letter to Dehradun mayor Saurabh Thapliyal within a week. The traders' body will request the establishment of a separate vendors' zone in the outer areas of the city, away from Paltan Bazaar. This is aimed at reducing the increased crowding during weekends and to protect the business profit of local shopkeepers in the Paltan Bazaar area. It will be recalled that recently, The Pioneer had highlighted concerns of the shopkeepers and customers about increased footfalls in this area in the heart of the city, particularly on Sundays. They believe that if crowd management is not prioritised soon, there may be a higher risk of theft in Paltan Bazaar during weekends, especially on Sundays.

Considering this earlier, DVMUVM president Pankaj Masson had said that many shoppers have difficulty navigating the market due to street vendors, where individuals tend to gather to purchase items at lower prices. To effectively manage the crowd at Paltan Bazaar, he believes the best solution would be to relocate street vendors to designated areas. This would allow those who prefer buying from such vendors to visit other lo-



FILE PIC

cations, thus alleviating congestion in the market.

Informing about the current status of this initiative, Masson informed that he has not yet contacted the mayor due to a busy schedule, but he considers the issue of increased crowds during weekends and its impact on shopkeepers' businesses a priority that needs to be resolved promptly. He plans to approach the mayor within a week, advocating for the creation of a separate vendors' zone far from Paltan Bazaar. This initiative aims to not only reduce crowding in the market during weekends but also protect shopkeepers' businesses from decline.

He further added that the Sunday market, which held at

Rangers Ground, is negatively affecting local shopkeepers. Therefore, he intends to request the mayor to relocate the Sunday market to a different location, away from city markets, to resolve the sales issues faced by shopkeepers. Many shopkeepers have expressed concern about the Sunday market at Rangers Ground affecting their businesses. One shopkeeper, Prince, stated that customers prefer shopping at the Sunday market because items are cheaper, which adversely impacts their livelihoods. In addition to this, shopkeepers like him are unable to cover workers' salaries and other expenses because of this situation. He emphasised that the authorities must take action to address this situation.

Rain forecast in mountains today, Doon to remain dry

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Even as dry weather continues in the State with days getting warmer and nights remaining cool, some mountainous regions of the State are likely to witness rain today. Dehradun may witness some cloud movement though rain is not forecast here. The State Meteorological Centre has forecast that very light to light rainfall is likely to occur at isolated places in Uttarakhand, Chamoli and

Rudraprayag districts on Monday. Apart from this, dry weather is likely to prevail in the remaining districts today.

The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a mainly clear to partly cloudy sky with the maximum and minimum temperatures likely to be about 29 degrees Celsius and 13 degrees Celsius respectively.

Meanwhile, temperatures remained above normal or normal in various parts of the State on Sunday. The maximum and minimum temperatures were 28.1 degrees Celsius and 12 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 28.6 degrees Celsius and 11 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 18.5 degrees Celsius and five degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 18.4 degrees Celsius and 7.4 degrees Celsius in Tehri.

Shri Venkateshwara University felicitates Dhami for UCC implementation in U'khand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami was felicitated at a function held by the Shri Venkateshwara University for Uttarakhand being the first Indian State to implement the Uniform Civil Code. At the function held at the university's campus in Gajraula in Uttar Pradesh on Sunday, Dhami said the honour accorded to him is to the entire population of Uttarakhand as it is the people who made him capable of taking the historic decision. The CM said that the credit for the implementation of the UCC should go to the makers of the Indian Constitution who had accorded place to the idea of UCC in the constitution as part of their vision for a society where all are equal. Dhami further said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, Uttarakhand is moving ahead towards becoming a developed nation by 2047. "All the citizens of the nation will also enjoy equality in rights when India is established as a



developed nation and this has started with Uttarakhand. It was under PM Modi guidance that the UCC could be implemented in Uttarakhand. The UCC also fulfills the dreams of Bhim Rao Ambedkar," the CM said. Dhami said that the UCC is the constitutional solution to any legal bias that might take place on the basis of caste, religion and gender. All the people in Uttarakhand have equal rights now with the implementation of the UCC. A new chapter of woman empowerment has started in the State and the Muslim will not have to suffer from practices

like triple talaq, child marriage and halala. The women in Uttarakhand will not have to face bias when it comes to the right to inheritance or property. The UCC will make the legal process simpler and swifter, he said, while adding that many Muslim women had thanked him after the implementation of UCC in the State. Founder-chairman of the Venkateshwara group of institutes Sudhir Giri, former UP cabinet minister Ashok Katariya, the university's pro-chancellor Rajeev Tyagi and others were also present on the occasion.

Trekkers allege departmental negligence in U'kashi trek

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ UTTARKASHI

Some members of a group of youths which had gone on a seven-day trek to the Dayara Bugyal-Goi trek in Uttarkashi district have alleged negligence by the Tourism department official concerned. They have alleged that while some of them were injured and some fell sick, the staff did not provide them proper assistance. On the other hand, the official concerned has rejected the allegations, claiming that some persons with ill-intentions are levelling such allegations. Meanwhile, the issue has reached the district magistrate with action being sought against officials for negligence. The trek was held from March 1 to 7. One of the trekkers, Bhankoli resident Kalpana Rawat sustained an injury but it is alleged that the district adventure sports offi-

cer Mohammed Ali Khan, who was leading the trek, did not have even a first-aid kit. After she sprained her leg, Rawat was reportedly brought down with the help of four other trekkers. The members of the trainee skiing foundation course have written to the Uttarkashi district magistrate levelling allegations against the department officials. They have alleged that the department staff left the injured trekkers on their own without providing any medical assistance. With even a stretcher being unavailable, they questioned what would have happened in case of a serious injury or mishap. Rawat said that her condition could have worsened had the other trekkers not helped her. The complainants have appealed to the DM to take strict action and to ensure basic safety and medical

measures to prevent such incidents in the trekking course in the future. Other members of the trekking group have also raised questions, alleging that safety standards are being ignored in the course being organised by the department. They were not provided proper guidelines and no medical facility was provided either when required. They said that some of the members fell ill during the trek but were not provided even first-aid. A properly trained guide was not available to lead the trek, which enhanced the risk, they alleged.

Meanwhile, Khan has refuted the allegations and told The Pioneer that some ill-intentioned persons are escalating the issue.

District hospital to buy new sets of coloured bed sheets for patients ward

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

The administration of Deen Dayal Upadhyay district hospital is planning to acquire new sets of coloured bed sheets for the patient wards in the facility. Notably, Health minister Dhan Singh Rawat had recently instructed all government hospitals in the State to regularly change bed sheets in the inpatient areas. Additionally, he recommended that the hospital management use different coloured bed linens each day. In line with the Health minister's directives and following guidance from the Health department, the administration has purchased 2,000 bed sheets in various colours for the patient wards.

The hospital administration has received these coloured bed sheets for routine use and has started to implement new protocols for bed linens. Regarding the new plans for bed sheets, the medical superintendent at the hospital Dr VS Chauhan said that the use of 2,000 coloured bed sheets has recently begun. Additionally, the adminis-

tration intends to purchase another 2,000 new similar sets of coloured bed sheets for the hospital. He said that there may be times in the future when bed sheets from the laundry do not arrive on schedule, or the existing bed sheets become damaged.

To address these issues, the administration is planning to acquire more coloured bed sheet sets to ensure alternatives are available if problems occur. It is anticipated that the administration will finalise the arrangement for the bed sheets by the end of March after discussions with officials. The new sets of 2,000 coloured bed sheets are expected to be sourced from the same manufacturing company as the previous one, he said.

It will be recalled that according to the directions, a white bedsheet will be placed in the ward on Monday, pink on Tuesday, green on Wednesday, yellow on Thursday, light blue on Friday, dark blue on Saturday and light grey on Sunday.

ESAF
ESAF SMALL FINANCE BANK

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DATE OF AUCTION: 21-03-2025 **TIME: 2 PM TO 5 PM**

AUCTION VENUE: THROUGH E-AUCTION

AUCTION ADDRESS: <https://gold.matextnet.org/>
Contact Number: 9500173386/9962979770

To register as bidder for the e-Auction with terms and conditions, and full details of e-Auction please visit the above site.

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Mother kills 6-month twins for repeatedly crying, not letting her rest

Accused went to buy milk as usual after strangling daughters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HARIDWAR

A 20-year old woman has been arrested for allegedly murdering her six-month twin daughters reportedly because their repeated crying left her disturbed and tired. The Haridwar police arrested the resident of Jwalapur area a few days after the twins were brought to a hospital where they were declared brought dead. According to the police, the district control room received information on March 6 that the twins had been brought dead to the district hospital. Tehri native Mahesh Saklani, currently living in Jwalapur area lodged a police case on March 7, suspecting that his daughters had been murdered.



said that questioning the locals along with checking footage from nearby CCTV cameras revealed various aspects including that on the day of the incident, nobody had visited or left the Saklani residence between the times when the complainant's wife Shivangi Saklani went out in the morning to get milk and when she returned home. The com-

plaintant said that he was at work on March 6 when he received a phone call informing him that his twin daughters were unwell.

He rushed home to learn that his wife had taken the twins to a hospital where they were declared dead. Shivangi told him that she had put the twins to sleep and gone to get milk as usual.

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Three-day Vasantotsav-2025 concludes at Raj Bhawan

IIT Roorkee lifts running trophy with awards in 10 categories

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

The three-day Vasantotsav-2025 concluded at the Raj Bhawan here on Sunday. The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee lifted the running trophy this year. IIT Roorkee won awards in 10 categories while the Uttarakhand Sainik Punarvas Sansthan and Pattharchatta won in three categories each. There were 15 categories and 55 sub-categories with a total of 165 awards being presented by

the State. He said that there are major possibilities in the sphere of honey, aromatic plants and flowers in Uttarakhand, which can bring about revolutionary changes in the State's economic prosperity and rural development. The participation of cultivators, women and youths had made this event more special. He congratulated all the winners, participants and the main organiser- Horticulture department, Culture depart-

Police term Vasantotsav shuttle service a great success

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

Dehradun Police has claimed that their initiative of using shuttle service during Vasantotsav-2025 at Raj Bhawan to ensure a smooth transportation for visitors was a great success. The event, held from March 7 to 9, saw a large number of attendees, with more than one lakh people visiting the flower exhibition, as per Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh. He stated that three parking locations, RT Ground Parking, 8 GR Parking and Mahindra Ground were designated for visitors' vehicles in coordination with the Indian Army in Garhi cantonment area. A shuttle service was introduced for the first time, operating between these parking areas and the event venue to facilitate the movement of visitors. The service was managed by the police and ensured that visitors could commute without inconvenience. The SSP said that traffic management was planned in advance, with parking and information boards placed at various locations. Parking restrictions were imposed along routes from Shaurya Sthal to the chief minister's residence and CSD

Tiraha to prevent congestion. The arrangements helped maintain smooth traffic flow even when two processions passed through the Pathibadkala route on March 8, he claimed. He informed that a total of 89 police officers and personnel were deployed in and around Raj Bhawan for traffic regulation. He stated that about 30,000 to 35,000 people attended the event each day. The police followed a structured plan to manage the large number of visitors and their vehicles, ensuring that everyone reached the venue without disruption. He said that for senior citizens, the police had made additional arrangements like, along with the shuttle service, e-rickshaws were deployed to transport them from the parking areas to Raj Bhawan. Those who could not access e-rickshaws due to crowding were transported by police vehicles. Singh claimed that the traffic and transport arrangements were appreciated by visitors and the police will continue to implement measures to manage public gatherings efficiently in Dehradun.



the governor lieutenant general (ret'd) Gurmit Singh at the conclusion of the event.

ment and other departments for the successful event.

Speaking on the occasion, the governor said that a large number of people had visited and participated in the Vasantotsav this year, making it a festival of the people. About 2.7 lakh people attended the three-day event, he said, while adding that technology and innovations had also been utilised in the event this year to make it more effective and attractive.

Speaking on the occasion, Agriculture and Horticulture minister Ganesh Joshi said that the Vasantotsav this year had seen unprecedented participation of the public. Stating that this event is being held in better ways every year due to motivation from the governor, the minister said that it will be given a grander form in the future.

Singh said that a rise in the flower-based economy will definitely enhance prosperity in

The first lady Gurmit Kaur, chief minister's wife Geeta Dhama and various officials were also present on the occasion.

CM launches development works worth Rs 110 crore in Kashipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama said that the State government is consistently working for all-round development of Uttarakhand according to the aspirations of the people. He said this after launching development works worth Rs 110.56 crore at Kashipur on Sunday.

Kashipur for electing a 'triple-engine' government to office. "The State government will make all effort to fulfill the trust placed by the people of Kashipur in it. We will work with dedication to execution development works at a threefold pace. In this direction, various development works costing about Rs 111 crore have been launched for Kashipur today. I am confident that all these projects will not only enhance the basic facilities in the region but will also enable the provision of better services to the citizens and boost economic development in the region," the CM said. Dhama also talked about the various development works and public welfare schemes being executed across the State including in Kashipur, along with the impact they are having on improving the life of the people. He said that the State is achieving new dimensions in development and prosperity under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and guidance. Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar MP Ajay Bhatt and others were also present on the occasion.



ed to reduce traffic pressure at the junction point. The ISBT area, despite having two gates for entry and exit, had been operating mainly through one gate. Now, a new system has been introduced where buses traveling to Rishikesh, Haridwar, Kotdwar and other Garhwal and Kumaon regions will use Exit Gate 2, while those heading towards Saharanpur and Delhi will exit through Gate 1 and enter through Gate 2, he said. He informed that to regulate passenger pick-up and drop-off, authorities have des-

vehicles such as e-rickshaws, small transport vehicles, and passenger carriers were being parked on the main road, leading to traffic disruptions. To resolve this, separate parking zones under the flyover have been designated for different types of vehicles, marked with four different colours. Bansal further informed that the tender process for drainage improvement at ISBT has been completed and the construction work is expected to be completed before the monsoon season.

Union budget to strengthen and develop tribal regions in Uttarakhand: Oram

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

The Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Jai Oram stated that the Union budget will play a key role in making Uttarakhand stronger and more developed. He described it as a significant step towards empowering tribal regions, including those in Uttarakhand, by ensuring their active participation in the country's progress.

Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan with an allocation of Rs 80,000 crore.

He expressed confidence that the increased budget allocation will not only benefit tribal communities but also contribute to building a developed India. Addressing a Press conference at the party's State headquarters on Sunday, Oram called the bud-

He informed that this scheme is expected to bring significant changes. A budget of Rs 79,156 crore has been allocated for the next five years to develop 63,843 villages, including those in Uttarakhand, with Rs 56,333 crore provided by the central government and Rs 22,823 crore by the states. Seventeen ministries will work together to focus on key areas such as healthcare, education, livelihood and skill development in tribal regions. The budget for PMAAGY has been increased by 163 per cent to Rs 336 crore, aiming



get a blueprint for a self-reliant India.

He said the budget focuses on the welfare of the poor, farmers, youth and women, with special attention to tribal welfare through improvements in education, livelihood and infrastructure. Referring to his department, he stated that the budget allocation has increased from approximately Rs 4,497 crore in 2014 to Rs 14,925 crore, marking a 45.79 per cent rise compared to the previous year. He said that the Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY) has been extended for five years under the Dharti Abha

to address gaps in education, healthcare and employment infrastructure in tribal areas, including those in Uttarakhand. Under the Prime Minister's Tribal Development Mission, Rs 380 crore has been allocated to enhance the annual income of tribal communities. He said that the budget includes specific provisions for tribal development with a clear objective. He stated that tribal regions will not only be beneficiaries but also active contributors to India's development. He claimed that suggestions from the Uttarakhand government will be given priority too.

Man arrested for duping Doonite of Rs 32 lakh after digital arrest for over 24 hours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

The cyber police unit of Uttarakhand Special Task Force (STF) arrested an accused from Jharkhand on charges of keeping a Dehradun man under digital arrest for over 24 hours and duping him of Rs 32.21 lakh. The accused, identified as Deepak Kumar Verma (39), was apprehended in Palamu district of Jharkhand.

the victim's daily activities and instructed him not to travel anywhere. Fearing arrest, the victim did not share the information with anyone. From 2 PM on October 30, 2024, he remained under digital surveillance through continuous audio and video calls for over 24 hours. During this period, the fraudsters coerced him into transferring Rs 32.21 lakh to designated bank accounts, claiming the funds were for verification by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and will be refunded within 24 to 48 hours. After making the payment, the victim was further threatened that senior officials wanted to conduct a deeper investigation and that his assets would be frozen.

The investigation revealed that the accused was involved in similar fraud cases in Telangana and Karnataka. According to the deputy superintendent of police of cyber crime police station of STF Ankush Mishra, the victim, a resident of GMS Road, Dehradun, received a phone call on October 30, 2024, from an unknown number. The caller introduced himself as a representative of DHL courier service and informed the victim that a parcel in his name had been seized by Mumbai customs due to the presence of a passport, credit card and methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA). The call was then transferred to another person claiming to be from Mumbai Crime Branch, who later connected the victim to an alleged police officer.

He was asked to transfer an additional Rs 10.5 lakh within two days. Realising that he had been deceived, the victim reported the matter to the cyber crime police station in Dehradun, Mishra said. He stated that considering the seriousness of the case, a special team was formed that analysed the bank accounts and mobile numbers used in the fraud. The team finally identified the main accused through digital evidence.

The victim was then contacted via WhatsApp video call and was shown an arrest warrant and a notice from the Supreme Court. The caller threatened him with arrest within 24 hours and gave him the option to either visit the Mumbai police station in person or present his case over a video call, as per DSP. He informed that the fraudsters obtained details of

The accused kept changing locations to evade arrest but the police tracked him down and arrested him in Jharkhand. Two mobile phones, an SMS alert-linked bank account, a cheque book and an Aadhaar card were recovered from his possession, he said. The investigation is ongoing, he said.

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Mamata created Frankenstein's monster at JU: Adhikari

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Frankenstein's monster at the Jadavpur University (JU) is a creation of Mamata Banerjee, State Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari on Sunday said adding the former had manufactured the entanglement inside the JU campus in order to afford a lease of life to the Marxists and make them relevant in the State politics once again. This, in order to divide the anti-Trinamool Congress votes and impede BJP's ascendancy. Adhikari who led an impressive rally of saffron workers skirting the Jadavpur University campus said, "The Frankenstein's monster at Jadavpur has been manufactured by Mamata Banerjee. The entire drama is being directed by her to give the CPI(M) a fresh lease of life in Bengal Trinamool Congress has teamed up with the Left to make them relevant again in the State," in order to divide the Hindu votes and hinder BJP's emergence to power.

Adhikari organised the rally more than a week after a commotion broke out inside the JU campus where the Left wing students including the CPI(M) affiliated Students' Federation of India gheraoed State Education Minister Bratya Basu whose vehicle then allegedly forced its exit out of the campus grievously injuring a couple of students. Basu visited the University to attend a meeting of the Trinamool Congress-backed West Bengal College and University Professors' Association (WBCUPA). The students were demanding from the Minister a deadline for staging of students' body elections in the State. The elections to the students' unions have not been held for the past eight years. Adhikari who also demanded the arrest of Basu for the JU incident said, "This is a drama that has been jointly enacted by Salim and Hakim — (read CPI(M) State secretary Md Salim and senior TMC leader and Minister Firhad Hakim) — in order to divert the attention of the people from other more important issues and



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee

once again divide the Opposition vote, but we will expose them soon. Jadavpur has become a hub of anti-national elements who thrive by drugs and impose their hegemony inside the campus. We will organise a mass convention after March 15 and go out on an awareness campaign throughout the State where we will tell the people about this TMC-Left camaraderie. We will not leave them." Adhikari's colleague in the State Assembly Amarnath Shakha too attacked the Left from "perpetrating a goonda raj inside the Jadavpur campus. Mamata Banerjee's Government cannot take care of them. They are hand in gloves with them, leave them up to the BJP. It will take half-an-hour to restore order in JU. The CPI(M) and TMC are destroying the campus which was once a seat of nationalist learning." Curiously the TMC leadership too had issued similar threats against the JU students. While Bengal Minister Arup Biswas said that it would take one minute for his party

men to enter and subjugate JU, his party colleague and MP Sayani Ghosh said that it was because of the restraint being exercised by Mamata Banerjee that JU were perpetrating their illegal acts. "Mamata Banerjee is showing remarkable patience despite provocations by the Left-wing students. Due to the patience shown by the CM, police are not entering the campus despite the attack on the Minister." The Left however "invited" the TMC and BJP to enter JU forcibly and "see the consequence." CPI(M) leader Srijan Bhattacharya said that "repeatedly these leaders of BJP and TMC are issuing threats this means the students are on the democratic track let them enter the campus and then face the consequence in the people." Meanwhile much like what happened in the aftermath of the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital rape and murder case a section of the civil society on Sunday took out a long procession demanding justice for the students of JU.

Worker dies in factory collapse, rescues ongoing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ludhiana

One more worker died in the factory building collapse here, while the rescue operation was still on, as another worker was stated to be trapped under the debris, officials said on Sunday. The worker's body was brought out from under the debris on Sunday, taking the death toll in the incident to two, they said. On Saturday evening, a worker was killed after the building of a textile factory collapsed in the focal point area here. Two teams of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), along with police, fire brigade and the municipal corporation, were undertaking the rescue operation, the officials said. Sources said repair work was being taken up in the factory when a pillar gave way. An eyewitness on Saturday said a loud sound was heard before the building caved in. On Sunday, Deputy Commissioner Jitendra Jorwal said that two workers have died in the incident. The rescue operations are still going on to locate one worker who is stated to be



Rescue work underway after a multi-storey building of a textile factory collapsed in Ludhiana

trapped beneath the debris after the incident that occurred around 5 pm Saturday, the officials said. Due to the substantial amount of debris, rescue teams are removing it carefully using manual equipment, they said. Deputy Commissioner Jorwal said a magisterial probe has been ordered to

investigate the exact cause of the incident. An FIR has also been registered in connection with the incident. Compensation will be provided to the families of the deceased while the government will cover the medical expenses for the workers who were injured in the incident, the officials said.

Mumbai's electric bus drivers trained at Dindoshi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

More than seven years after inducting its first electric bus, the civic-run Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking has started training drivers at Dindoshi centre in north Mumbai for the changes in technology the vehicles come with, an official said on Sunday. The trigger apparently is the accident of a 12-metre electric bus on the congested SG Barve Marg in Kurla West on December 9 in which nine persons died, several others were injured and more than 20 vehicles suffered damage. The driver of the vehicle had been deployed on the bus since December 1 after just three days of training, which some experts claimed may have been the cause of the accident. They had flagged "human error". A panel of experts appointed by BEST after the

accident had recommended that private bus operators deploy a couple of e-buses to facilitate the training of drivers. The first e-bus was inducted into the BEST fleet in November 2017. Most e-buses have automatic transmission and do not have clutch like conventional manual transmission buses, the official said. "The Dindoshi facility used to train drivers for diesel buses. Now, an old 12-metre e-bus from Olectra has been deployed for training purposes. It has been made into a dual-control bus fitted with a secondary brake system on the left side for effective control and has been approved by the RTO for exclusive drive training," the official said. The bus has been provided by EveyTrans Private Limited, which has bagged two separate contracts for supplying 2100 and 2400 buses, respectively, to BEST, the official said.

J and K achieves single digit neonatal mortality rate

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jammu

The neonatal mortality rate (NMR) has reached single digit at 9.8 per 1,000 live births in Jammu and Kashmir, recording a 13.3-point decrease, while the sex ratio at birth has recorded significant improvement from 923 to 976, official data showed. The infant mortality rate (IMR) also dipped to 16.3, marking a drop of 16.1 points, according to the Economic Survey Report for 2024-25 tabled by the Jammu and Kashmir government in the Assembly on March 6. The report said the government is continuing its efforts to enhance basic health infrastructure at all levels, including technical manpower and medical equipment to provide improved healthcare delivery with special focus on maternal and child health, communicable and non-communicable diseases, and to face the upcoming challenging ailments. Jammu and Kashmir has moved forward from the category of 'performers' to 'front-runners', as per the SDG India Index 2023-24 released by the NITI Aayog, with the score of the health sector increasing from 70 to 78. "The NMR has reached a single digit of 9.8 per 1,000 live births, a 13.3-point decrease, while the IMR has dipped to 16.3 with a decrease of 16.1 points. Sex ratio at birth also recorded a significant improvement, from 923 to 976," the report said. The percentage of fully-immunised children against preventable diseases has increased to 96.5 per cent, it said. Institutional births have increased from 85.6 per cent to 92.40 per cent, while life expectancy at birth in J-K has reached 74.3 years — the highest in the country after Kerala and Delhi — against a national average of 70 years, the report said. Since its inception, 100 per cent families have registered and 86.12 Lakh Ayushman Golden cards have been issued under the AB-PMJAY — SEHAT scheme, it said, adding that this initiative has facilitated treatments worth ₹2,800 Crore, benefiting 15 Lakh individuals. As many as 489 ambulances have been geo-tagged and integrated with online 108 or 102 ambulatory services. These efforts have enabled quick response times (average response time less than half-an-hour) and served more than 4.50 lakh beneficiaries since August 2020. Over the past four years, J and K has significantly expanded its healthcare workforce, including hiring of 10,919 doctors and paramedical staff under the National Health Mission (NHM), alongside filling up of 36,274 regular positions in health and medical education, besides supporting 13,965 ASHA workers, the report said. Infrastructural upgradation and consolidation of health institutions include two AIIMS, two state cancer institutes and two bone and joint hospitals, the report said.



Rescue operation underway to trace workers trapped inside SLBC tunnel in Nagarkurnool

Cadaver dogs deployed in SLBC tunnel rescue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nagarkurnool

Cadaver dogs will be deployed inside the partially collapsed Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel here on Sunday to search for human presence, as the rescue operation to save eight trapped persons entered its 16th day. The dogs joined the rescue efforts on March 7, when they were taken inside the tunnel. The canines, specially trained to detect human remains, would be taken into the tunnel on Sunday, a police official said. Rescue teams will dig beyond five feet at two points identified by Human Remains Detection Dogs (HRDDs), as workers may be trapped in the second layer of the dismantled tunnel boring machine (TBM), according to a senior official on Saturday. The Kerala police's Belgian Malinois breed dogs are capable of detecting

scent from a depth of up to 15 feet. The Telangana government has decided to deploy robots for the rescue operation from March 11 to ensure the safety of rescue personnel, as the challenging conditions inside the tunnel, including water and slush, pose significant risks. The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has submitted an initial report in which, among other things, it has cautioned that rescue operations should be carried out with extreme caution and care in the last 70 metres (at the accident site), the official said. As the fragments of the huge TBM got submerged under water, soil and stones inside the tunnel, they caused a hazard to the rescue team. The rescue operation has been going on amid challenging conditions, including muck and seepage of water. Eight persons — engineers and labourers — have been trapped in the SLBC project tunnel since February 22

Nitish Kumar issues appointment letters to new teachers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar handed over appointment letters to 51,389 newly recruited teachers on Sunday. These teachers were recruited by the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) through the third phase of the Teachers' Recruitment Examination (TRE-3). Speaking at the function, the CM said that apart from 2,68,548 teachers recruited in the three phases, 42,918 candidates have cleared the exam for headmasters

and they will get the appointment letters next month. "Further, 2,53,961 teachers, who were earlier appointed by Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies, also cleared competency test to get the government employee status," he said. "Now, the total number of government teachers in the state will be 5,65,427," he added. Kumar said his government is taking all measures to ensure the overall development of the education sector in the state. "The share of the state budget ear-

marked for education has reached 22 per cent, and it will be further increased. Right from the beginning, education, especially that for girls, has remained the top priority of the state government," he said. Leader of the opposition in the assembly Tejashwi Yadav said the process for the recruitment of these teachers started during the previous Mahagathabandhan government. Yadav was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an RJD protest to press for the implementation of 65 per cent reservation for backward communities in state government jobs.

Three injured in Mumbai gas pipeline fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Three persons suffered burn injuries after a leaking gas pipeline caught fire on a road in Mumbai's Andheri area early on Sunday, an official said. Two vehicles were also damaged in the incident, he said. The Mahanagar Gas Limited (MGL) in a statement later said the pipeline was damaged due to the "JCB impact during unauthorised, uncontrolled digging". The blaze erupted at 12.35 am in a heavily leaking supply pipeline of the MGL, passing through the middle of a road at Sher-E-Punjab society near a gurdwara at Takshila in Andheri (East) area, a fire official said earlier in the day. It was a "level-one" fire which was confined to two moving vehicles, he said. A two-wheeler rider, Arvindkumar Kaithal (21), suffered 30 to 40 per cent burns, another biker, Aman Harishankar Saroj (22), sustained 40 to 50 per cent burn injuries, and auto-rickshaw driver



Repair work underway after leaking of a gas pipeline in Mumbai

Suresh Kailas Gupta (52) suffered 20 per cent burns, he said. A water tanker, a fire engine and other assistance were rushed to the spot and the blaze was extinguished by 1.34 am, the official said. The three injured persons were taken to the Balasaheb Thackeray Trauma Care Centre in Jogeshwari for treatment. Kaithal and Saroj, however, took discharge against

medical advice, the official said. The MGL in its statement said the gas pipeline was damaged due to the JCB (earth-excavating machine) impact during unauthorised and uncontrolled digging last night, leading to the fire. The fire brigade and the MGL emergency team extinguished the blaze. The gas supply was stopped for repair work of the pipeline, it said.

ASHA workers combat TB stigma in UP with nationwide screening initiative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Ranjana Chaudhary, a 28-year-old ASHA worker in Uttar Pradesh's Siddharthnagar visits six to seven houses in Madhubeniya village every day with an aim to eradicate the stigma behind Tuberculosis and encourage villagers to get screened for the disease. "Social stigma is still a major impediment due to which people do not readily come forward for testing for the deadly contagious air-borne disease. "No no, why should I have TB?" she said irritatingly. Chaudhary and lakhs of ASHA workers in remote areas of the country face the daunting challenge of convincing people to attend tuberculosis screening camps and

are mobilising vulnerable people to such camps under the ongoing pan India 100-Day Intensified Campaign to Eliminate TB. Aimed at accelerating efforts towards eliminating Tuberculosis from the country, the government has been proactively screening and testing vulnerable populations such as diabetics, smokers, alcoholics, those who are malnourished, people living with HIV, individuals with a history of TB or COVID, the elderly and household contacts of TB patients. Since the launch of the 100-day campaign in December last year, the TB programme has notified over 6.1 Lakh TB patients across the country of which 4.3 Lakh patients were diagnosed from the 455 intervention districts. "Often we don't tell people that it is a TB screening camp and tell them to attend it saying a free health check-up camp is being held nearby. Even if detected for tuberculosis people generally prefer to keep it under wraps for fear of isolation and social stigma," Chaudhary said.

"By virtue of the fact that TB is a communicable disease, stigma is manifold. Especially if a woman is diagnosed with the disease, the family considers it as a curse and tries to hide it for fear of the girl remaining unmarried. Lots of families also try to keep it confidential thinking they would be ostracised from the community," said another ASHA worker Sunita. Dr Shailendra Bhatnagar said TB is a very peculiar disease. If you do not get the right treatment at the right time you may infect other family members of the family and neighbours. "If a TB-positive patient is not treated he or she can create 15 new patients in one year. Similarly further if this new lot of 15 new patients are not treated in the second year the figure becomes 225 and similarly the chain can go on and on," he explained. Dr Bhatnagar stressed that as soon as one gets any of the symptoms, he or she should get tested. If found positive, the entire family is examined.

Contact tracing, which became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, is a terminology that has been used in TB programmes for several years now, Dr Bhatnagar informed. It is being done with the intention that if one index patient gets Tuberculosis, his or her household members and the people they interact with on a routine basis in work areas or elsewhere are examined for signs of TB. The household contacts are 10-60 times more at risk of getting the disease. "Even if their close contacts test negative at that moment, they are put on preventive TB treatment," he said. "However, before initiating TB preventive treatment to contacts, it is mandatory to rule out active TB disease by a qualified doctor," Dr Bhatnagar said. The identity of TB patients is not revealed to the public, and in several cases, the Ni-kshay Poshan kit is being delivered to their doorstep, he added. To mitigate stigma, the national TB elim-

ination programme has adopted a multi-pronged approach. TB champions/TB Vijaetas - persons who have overcome the deadly disease are being engaged and made ambassadors of awareness, counselling, and patient support. They routinely support patients and their families by paying them house visits, guiding them through their treatment and nutrition requirements and helping them mitigate any stigma or misinformation about the disease. Along with them, Gram Pradhans are also being sensitised under the TB-Mukt Panchayat Abhiyaan, where they are briefed about the TB disease, how it is diagnosed, and patient entitlements. They are also encouraged to talk about TB during their Panchayat meetings, monitor progress indicators of the program and support TB patients as Ni-kshay Mitras. Since the launch of the campaign, around 12 Lakh Ni-kshay Shivirs (TB screening camps) have been held across the country and 11 Crore persons who are vul-

nerable to being affected by TB have been screened across the country. Such mass mobilisation has been possible through different levers the National TB Elimination Programme has tapped into to combat stigma around TB and encourage early testing and screening. Through the course of the campaign, over 27,000 elected representatives across different levels (union and state ministers, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, and Gram Pradhans), have been engaged to increase awareness, participate in Ni-kshay Shivirs and provide nutrition support to TB patients and their families through the Ni-kshay Mitra programme. As part of the campaign, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare sensitised over 250 parliamentarians during the winter session of parliament, and the Union Health Minister JP Nadda, chaired meetings with Chief Ministers or LGs and Health Ministers of implementation states, encouraging them to actively monitor and participate in campaign activities.

Editor's TAKE

A promise is a promise!

Delhi Government approves financial aid for women, seeking to set it apart from what has now come to be widely perceived as political freebies

The Delhi Government, powered by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, has approved the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, a scheme aimed at providing financial assistance of ₹2,500 per month to women from economically weaker sections. The initiative, a key promise made during the BJP's election campaign in Delhi, is expected to cost the exchequer ₹5,100 crore. The eligibility criteria for the scheme include an annual income cap of ₹2.5 lakh and an age range of 18 to 60 years.

The Delhi Chief Secretary, along with other officials, has finalised these conditions, ensuring that the financial aid reaches the most deserving beneficiaries. However, the announcement understandably will concretise over a period of time as no date for disbursement has been declared yet, despite earlier promises of payments beginning on March 8. Besides, it has also been pointed out that the eligibility criteria were not communicated to voters during the election campaign. In its layout, the Mahila Samridhi Yojana seeks to ward off any criticism of the so-called "freebie culture," which political parties across the spectrum accuse each other of.

Indeed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has often warned of excessive populist schemes could that burden State finances and harm long-term economic stability. He has advocated for welfare measures that promote self-reliance rather than direct cash benefits. It is hoped that the Delhi Government would acknowledge the Prime Minister's warning and ensure that welfare measures are not just a tool to secure electoral victories.

BJP national president JP Nadda himself launched the scheme, congratulating the Chief Minister for allocating the funds for its execution. Ms Rekha Gupta has a tight financial rope to walk on, considering she bemoaned the appalling fact of Delhi's empty coffers when she assumed office. Admittedly, Delhi has already allocated itself subsidies which are worth thousands of crores, a probe into which the Government must initiate post haste. The subsidies given by the Kejriwal Government in the past decade have increased manifold, inquiries into which ought to be the present Government's utmost priority. The highest subsidies have been allocated to the power, water and transport sectors. Delhi's power subsidies rose from ₹292 crore in 2014-15 to a shocking ₹3,600 crore by 2024-25. The free water provided by the Kejriwal Government was another big drain on the exchequer. The past decade has spawned an invincible Water Mafia culture in Kejriwal's erstwhile strongholds which merits an independent action. Water subsidies rose from ₹21 crore in 2014-15 to ₹500 crore projected for 2024-25. Free bus travel for women cost a whopping ₹115 crore in 2019-20. In 2014-15, the total subsidy doled out was ₹1,555 crore. This figure nearly doubled in 2015-16, soaring to ₹3,018 crore. While it remains to be seen how Ms Gupta delivers on her promise to fellow women citizens, what needs to be clearly factored in is the figure of ₹5100 crore and how best to manage the resources for it.

The approval of the Mahila Samridhi Yojana initiative is expected to strengthen the BJP's party's appeal among women voters, a crucial demographic in electoral politics. Therefore, the real success of the scheme will depend on its swift and transparent implementation. With opposition parties already raising concerns over delays and additional conditions, the Delhi Government must ensure that the scheme does not remain a mere electoral promise and delivers tangible benefits to the intended beneficiaries.

As the political landscape of Delhi continues to evolve, the implementation of welfare schemes such as this will play a pivotal role in shaping the public's perception of the ruling party. The question remains whether the BJP can balance its ideological opposition to freebies with the electoral necessity of welfare measures. Indeed, the politics is the art of possible.

Leaderspeak



I urge the CM of Tamil Nadu to draw inspiration from other states that have taken steps to offer medical and engineering education in their native languages. It is my sincere wish that Tamil Nadu also introduce such courses in Tamil.

AMIT SHAH, MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



Judiciary under malicious attack by influential groups

In a democracy, some criticism of the judiciary is inevitable. However, unless there is a measure of restraint, judicial institutions will be damaged and judicial integrity stand debilitated

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked, "Events crowd in upon us in such quick succession that we are apt to miss their true significance." This is particularly true of the unhealthy drift of recent events in the Supreme Court of India. The customary reverence formerly paid to judges of the Supreme Court is being systematically deflated. Pernicious attacks on the judiciary have become commonplace. Many are made by political parties and politicians. Some politicians who are distinguished members of the Supreme Court Bar, see enormous mileage in pursuing that course. But even beyond politicians, the attacks have been made with impunity by the media, academicians and limbs of the law. The recent spate of malicious attacks on our former most respected Harvard educated Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, particularly after he hung up his gloves on November 10, 2024, has shocked the conscience of all right thinking people who cherish and value democracy, the rule of law and the independence of the Judiciary. All I can say is that the vicious attack of calumny and vilification set in motion against Chief Justice Chandrachud in the print, visual, broadcast and internet media, and that too without any cogent basis or tangible evidence, by vested political interests and ventilated by unscrupulous lawyer politicians (who ostensibly owe their allegiance to the Supreme Court) is a most ignominious development that deserves to be condemned by one and all in the strongest possible language. It is indeed lamentable that such personal and political attacks, led by politicians, politician lawyers and lawyers, have gone too far, nay crossed the 'Lakshman Rekha'.

They have sometimes been devised to undermine the fundamental independence of judges of the highest judiciary, even to attempt to daunt judges or to sway the outcome of cases and to depreciate their irrepressible impartiality and integrity. The unconquerable power of democracy and the Rule of Law are being sought to be subverted and subjugated in a most sinister and malicious manner.

Behind the façade of the attacks on the judiciary, I see the evil hand of certain political parties (even invisibly supported by foreign forces inimical to India's interests) to dislodge the smooth functioning of the highest court of the land by means foul rather than fair. In a democratic society, some criticism of the judiciary is inevitable. This is especially so at a time when there is a grow-



ANOOP BOSE

ing understanding of the inescapable choices which are open to judges. Just as decisions of the other branches of the government attract criticism, important and controversial decisions of the courts will inescapably do the same.

Into this ambience has been impregnated the technology of the modern media of communications. Unless there is a measure of restraint, the judicial institutions will be damaged and judicial integrity debilitated. The following features of the recent attacks on the judiciary have been distinctly intemperate. The personal targeting of identified judges. The attempt to intimidate them or to deflect them from fidelity to their oath of office to decide each case strictly on its merits. The unrelenting character and partisan political aspect of the attacks. A censurable feature of the barrage which cannot pass unnoticed is how a woman judge, who was the first lady judge to have been honoured with a well-deserved elevation straight from the Bar to the Bench, was singled out for a studied attack by a senior lady member of the Bar in April, 2018 before her swearing in. In April, 2018, there was also an unholy attempt to impeach another former Chief Justice of India supported by seven disgruntled opposition parties. Targeting judges, identifiable because of their sex, race or other minority considerations, attacking them by over-simplified and inaccurate generalisations, caters to public prejudice.

Such conduct is unworthy of our country that indefatigably claims to uphold fundamental rights and the rule of law. In the face of the onslaught, and under fire, there are a few strategies available to the judiciary. It would be a reprehensible judicial response

to cave in to the pressure and to do exactly what the politicians, editorialists or other powerful interests desire. This would be a complete abdication of the judicial system. It, therefore, rests increasingly on the organised legal profession to defend the judiciary, to correct blatant misinformation and to remind politicians, the media and others of the precious heritage of judicial neutrality and independence which we have enjoyed so proudly. In India, independence and conscientiousness are cherished features of the judiciary. Institutional protection for those features must be sustained.

Political attempts to undermine them should be spurned. Leaders of the legal profession, irrespective of their personal political leanings, should speak up where judges are unjustly assailed by politicians and others for carrying out their independent role. The increasingly adversarial and belligerent nature of our public discourse should not become contagious to the erosion of the balanced relationship of the judiciary with other branches of the government.

Legislators, members of the Executive Government and the judiciary should realise that each branch has its distinct part to play, without which constitutional government would falter and fail. But a genuine desire to protect and preserve the rule of law and the dignity and majesty of the highest court of the world's largest working democracy. In this context, it would not be out of place to men-

tion that our first President Dr Rajendra Prasad, himself an outstanding lawyer, described this "noble edifice" as the 'Temple of Justice' on the occasion of the inauguration of the new Supreme Court building on August 4, 1958 in the august presence of Prime Minister Nehru, Vice President Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Chief Justice Sudhi Ranjan Das, his son-in-law Asoke Kumar Sen, the Union Law Minister and my senior and guru, Lok Sabha Speaker Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, and Attorney General Motilal Chimanlal Setalvad.

In conclusion, I am highly emboldened to commend to readers the stern message delivered by Justice Jashmed Burjor Pardiwala of the Supreme Court at the Second Justice HR Khanna Memorial Symposium on July 3, 2022, "Personal attack on judges for their judgements lead to a dangerous scenario where the judges have to think about what the media thinks, rather than what the law says.

This puts the rule of law on the burner, social and digital media are primarily resorted to expressing personalised opinions more against the judges, rather than a constructive critical appraisal of their judgments. This is what is harming the judicial institution and lowering its dignity. This is where digital and social media need to be regulated throughout the country to preserve the rule of law under our Constitution in India, which cannot be defined as a completely mature or defined democracy, social media is employed frequently to politicise purely legal and constitutional issues."

(The author is an internationally reputed senior lawyer practising in the Supreme Court of India and various High Courts and Tribunals in India. Views expressed are personal)

Whither the women of this country?

SECOND Opinion



PAYAL AGARWAL

Accelerate Accelerate action is a call for urgency, inclusion, and transformative change. It underscores that equality cannot wait and that all sectors of society must work together to hasten progress toward women's rights and empowerment. The responsibility for accelerating this change primarily lies with institutions, particularly the government. Effective policy changes and awareness campaigns that challenge deeply ingrained societal norms are crucial.

While the Government of India has placed women's education and empowerment at the forefront of its agenda — an effort worthy of commendation — the critical question remains: What about their security? According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a total of 4,32,256 cases of crimes against women were registered across India in 2022 — an alarming statistic that translates to nearly 51 FIRs being filed every hour. These cases include rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and dowry-related violence, marking a four per cent increase from the previous year. However, the NCRB also clarified that the rise in registered cases does not necessarily indicate an increase in crime but rather a greater willingness among victims to report incidents.

While urban areas have witnessed increased awareness

and reporting, rural regions still struggle with underreporting due to social stigma and a lack of support systems. A report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) revealed that 151 sitting MPs and MLAs have declared cases related to crimes against women in their election affidavits.

West Bengal has the highest number of lawmakers (25) facing such cases, with 16 sitting MPs and MLAs accused of rape. While the BJP leads in such cases, Congress and other parties are not far behind. These numbers are not just statistics—they represent silent battles fought daily by women at home, on the streets, in workplaces, and even within political corridors.

Protecting the dignity of women is the Government's duty, yet it is deeply ironic that political parties, both at the State and Central levels, sometimes shelter individuals accused of crimes against women for electoral gains. Whether it is Sheikh Shahjahan of TMC or Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of BJP, such instances raise serious concerns about political accountability.

The BJP Government claims significant progress in empowering women, yet the party itself has 134 sitting MPs and MLAs facing charges of crimes against women. Congress follows with 25, with AAP close behind. India ranked 128th out of 177 countries in the 2023 Women, Peace, and Security Index, which assesses women's status based on three dimensions: Inclusion (economic, social, and politi-

cal), Justice (formal and informal discrimination), and Security (individual, community and societal levels). This ranking reinforces the urgent need to accelerate action. In response to growing concerns, the Central Government has extended its flagship

women's security scheme until 2025-26 to curb crimes against women. However, ensuring women's safety requires a multi-pronged approach, including stringent laws, robust security measures, swift justice, timely redressal of complaints, and accessible institutional support for victims.

At its core, the persistence of gender-based violence is deeply rooted in India's complex social fabric, where patriarchal norms, economic disparities and cultural traditions intersect to perpetuate inequality. This systemic injustice not only denies women their right to live with freedom and dignity but also hinders societal progress. Meaningful change requires a shift in mindset-starting at home. As the saying goes, "Gender equality begins at home," and by fostering a culture of respect and equality, we can empower the next generation to build a fairer world. According to the World Economic Forum, at the current pace of progress, achieving full gender parity will take until 2158 — approximately five generations from now. The question we must ask ourselves is: Can we afford to wait that long, or will we take action now to accelerate change?

(The writer is a lecturer in Political science, Jawaharlal Nehru College, Kuanpal, Cuttack; views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

TRUMP IMPOSES RECIPROCAL TARIFF

The United States of America is all set for rolling out the reciprocal taxation policy for the world. And his particular taxing targets are China, Brazil and India, all the major BRICS countries, along with Canada, the EU and Mexico. Donald Trump claims their tariff rates are unfair for US products. Trump claims that India charges more than 100 per cent tariff rates, whereas South Korea charges four times higher tariffs on the USA. This is a clear indication of the fact that this time Trump 2.0 is actually trying to establish fair trade conditions, at least from the American domestic perspective. His wish to play fair on the tariff ground against those nations that have charged tremendously higher amounts of tariffs on America will become a costly affair for the respective targeted countries. Although Trump achieving this trade fairness is definitely a challenging task. As the nation will feel, it is challenging to adjust themselves to the new reciprocal tariff system. The opinion of Trump to achieve this trade fairness is welcoming, as every country has the right to bargain, compete and charge

the tariff for protecting their local businesses. But at the same time, the US must not forget that the world is still on the juggernaut of unfair competition, resource and income divide. Still, the developing countries stand nowhere in comparison to the trade figures of the developed nations. In such a trade paradox milieu, the idea of tariff fairness and equity seems a little vague. Trump must pave the way for fair trade opportunities before initiating the idea of tariff fairness and reciprocity. Trump must understand that no nation can grow unilaterally; we all need each other for our holistic development altogether. Trump must understand that America is a hegemonic state, and it holds its accountability for setting a balanced world order. It just can't do tit for tat with the world, calling it fairness. At the same time, Trump must stop taking help from Elon Musk, a smart capitalist. Since the administration of America is not like the running of a company, where risk-bearing is conditioned for profit only. Sometimes, our loss is the genuine profit of others, and we have to do so to pave the way for an equivalent and just society.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Unique ID for voters

Madam — India's democracy is set to create a new milestone in its journey toward becoming more robust and transparent. Under the initiative of the Election Commission, nearly one billion voters in the country will now be assigned a unique identity, making the electoral process more transparent, secure and error-free. This step will not only simplify voting but also eliminate issues like fraudulent voting and duplicate voter names. In today's digital era, it was essential to make voter identification more effective. By adopting a digital system, the Election Commission is ensuring that duplicate names are removed from voter lists and each voter is assigned a distinct identity, thereby strengthening the democratic framework. This initiative will enhance voter credibility, ensuring fair and impartial elections.

Eliminating the problem of duplicate EPIC numbers will provide every voter with a unique identity, preventing any misuse of voting rights. Moreover, this initiative will pave the way for future advancements such as e-registration and digital voting, making the electoral process more transparent and convenient. This historic step will further deepen public trust in democracy. Now, every citizen will be able to exercise their voting rights without any doubts or obstacles. This initiative will serve as a milestone in steering Indian democracy towards the digital era.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

Russian strikes on Ukraine

Madam — US President Donald Trump on Friday, March 7, 2025, threatened serious sanctions against Russia for attacking Ukraine. Russia launched a wave of aerial bombings early Friday, hitting Ukraine with 67 missiles and 194 drones, according to Kyiv. Most of them were intercepted, but some did make it through, hitting gas and power facilities. These threats were the first strong warnings for Russia from Trump, who had, during the election campaign 2024, claimed the war would be over on the day he took office and even before.

He had then, as now, also claimed Russia would have never invaded Ukraine if he was still president. The second claim cannot be tested, but the first, his confidence in finishing the war, is being tested, as the war has been on for two months now after the start of his second term. Trump has managed to strong-arm Ukraine into getting ready for a ceasefire and a final settlement. After a heated exchange with President Volodymyr Zelensky at an Oval Office meeting, he announced a pause in all US aid to Ukraine, stopping even the exchange of intelligence. Mollified by a "regret" letter from Ukraine, Trump has said he is ready to work with Zelensky towards peace. Officials of the two sides are to meet next week for talks, including on a US-Ukraine agreement that will grant Washington rights in Ukraine's rich reserves of rare earth minerals.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Unfair criticism of Shami

Madam — The statement from the All India Muslim Jamaat President Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Bareilly's criticism against the Indian cricketer Mohammed Shami is quite shocking. The cleric stated that fasting during Ramadan is an obligatory duty in Islam, and anyone who deliberately avoids it is committing a sin. The Indian cricketers have been held in high esteem worldwide not just for their passion towards the game but also for their patriotism towards the nation when it comes to delivering their best on the field. I can bring up the incident of the past when Mohammed Siraj lost his father in November 2020 while he was with the team on his tour of Australia. Though he was given the option of returning home, the pacer chose to stay back with the team for the series.

It was such an emotional moment even for the fans when he shared later that he went to his father's graveyard straight after landing in Hyderabad. The traumatic state was fought out by Siraj then because of his commitment towards national duty. The same is the case here with Mohammed Shami, whose commitment towards the game is well known and who is delivering his might in the absence of Jasprit Bumrah in the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy. When the game of cricket unites all religions, it is unfortunate that the cleric, by his remark, has brought out unreasonable division among religions and is unpardonable as per Islam.

AP THIRUWADI | CHENNAI

Bangladesh's National Citizen Party: A new dawn or fleeting revolution?

Breaking Free from Cloth Clutter

On February 28, 2025, Bangladesh witnessed the birth of the National Citizens Party (NCP), or Jatiya Nagorik Party (NJP) in Bengali. Emerging from the embers of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM)—the very force that toppled former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, the NCP represents both hope and uncertainty

In today's fast-paced and consumer-driven society, the accumulation of clothing has become a significant issue, leading to what is commonly referred to as cloth clutter. The ease of online shopping, the rise of fast fashion, and the influence of social media have all contributed to an excessive and often unnecessary collection of garments.

The National Citizens Party (NCP) or Jatiya Nagorik Party (NJP) in Bengali, was born in Bangladesh on February 28, 2025. It is a progeny of the student leaders who spearheaded the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) that ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina from power on August 5, 2024, and the National Citizens Committee (NCP) or the Jatiya Nagorik Committee (JNC), that emerged from the same political cradle on September 8, 2024.



The country was pregnant with it for almost seven months. A report by Reuters, datelined August 16, 2024, and issued under the heading 'Student protesters plan new party to cement their revolution,' quoted Mahfuz Alam, who then chaired a committee charged with liaising between the interim government, which had assumed office on August 8, and groups like teachers and activists, that the decision to form such a party would be known in about a month. It further quoted Alam, who had been a key leader of the ADSM and is now an adviser to the interim government, as saying, "People are tired of the two political parties (obviously the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party). They trust in (sic) us."

According to the report, Nahid Islam, another of ADSM's important leaders, who resigned as an adviser on February 25 and is now the convener and leader of the NCP, said that the spirit of the students' movement was to build a new Bangladesh where no fascist or autocrat could return. He had added, "To achieve that, we need structural reforms, which will undoubtedly require some time." Nahid further stated that the government was not heeding calls by the Awami League and BNP to hold new elections as early as the fall (of 2024). Another Reuters' report by Ruma Paul, Krishn Kaushik, Devjyot Ghoshal and Krishna N Das, carried under the headline "Insight: Bangladesh student protesters eye new party to cement their revolution" and datelined August 16, 2024, however, cited Alam as having said on Facebook that his statement to Reuters "had come out wrong" and that "We are not thinking about political organisations right now."

The main focus was to maintain the spirit of the mass uprising and to consolidate the government. Others also expressed the same view. Statements, denials and volte faces—nothing new in politics—often reflect tensions and conflicts kept under wraps. Was Alam under pressure to retract or deny his statement? One does not know. There, however, have been indications of differences among both leaders—called coordinators—and rank-and-file of the Students Against Discrimination (SAD), the moniker given to the organisation emerging out of the ADSM, even in the heady immediate aftermath of the formation of the interim government led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

Thus, a report in *The Daily Star*, datelined August 16, 2024, stated that a coordinator and four assistant coordinators of Chittagong University's ADSM had resigned from their posts, alleging that the central coordinators took unilateral decisions and ignored their demands. According to another report in the *Daily Star* datelined January 3, 2025, eight persons were injured in Khulna town in a clash among ADSM supporters.

There have been several reports of internal conflicts and tensions. According to a report in Prothom Alo English, adherents of the ADSM blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway for an hour on February 24, 2025, demanding the dissolution of the organisation's new district committee announced earlier in the month. Not surprisingly, though a consensus was subsequently achieved, there have been reports of arguments and tensions over the naming of the NCP's office-bearers and members of the central convening

committee. Wrangling and power struggles seem programmed into the genes of all political parties. In the case of the NCP, however, factional fissures are accompanied by the presence of incompatible ideologies.

The NJP includes alumni of the Shibir, Jatiotabadi Chhatradal (Bangladesh Nationalist Students Party) affiliated with the BNP, several students' organisations of both leftist and fundamentalist Islamist outfits and those without any political involvement prior to joining the ADSM. They seem to be sticking together because they feel that the future belongs to the new party. What would happen when the latter loses its sheen with time? Signs of trouble are already manifest.

Questions have been asked as to how the enormous amounts of funds needed to mobilise for the gargantuan rally that marked the NCP's formation were found. According to a report in *The Daily Star* datelined March 2, 2025, the Pirojpur district administration had requisitioned several privately owned buses to facilitate local students joining the NJP's inaugural rally on February 28.

It was a partisan act and a grim pointer of this becoming a regular factor if the NJP comes to power. Besides, the declaration of the party's vision for Bangladesh raises questions. It talks of a "cruel fascist" regime—obviously referring to Sheikh Hasina's—ruling for 15 years, destroying state institutions and democracy, and making all-encompassing corruption and money laundering a part of state culture.

A lot of what it says—relief to marginalised and disadvantaged communities, the protection of fundamental rights, preserving ethnic, social, gender, and cultural diversity, and ensuring strong safeguards against poverty, inequality, and abuse of power—is unexceptionable.

One, however, wishes that it said more about the 'Second Republic', which, and the enactment of a new constitution, are the party's overarching goals. Also, one wonders as to how seriously are pronouncements to



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

be taken, particularly because it says that the party is committed to a culture where justice replaces vengeance. It is liable to make the dead rise up laughing given the interim government's relentless and savage persecution of Awami League leaders and supporters, conducted in blatant disregard of all juridical fairness.

Will the NCP come to power following the next parliamentary elections? It might have enjoyed a sweeping victory if an election had been held immediately after Sheikh Hasina's ouster, when its popularity was at its peak. Since then, issues like a steep decline in the law-and-order situation, runaway inflation and economic instability have been eroding the public's confidence in the interim government. Given the latter's links with the founders of the new party, they too have started attracting a measure of cynicism, which is bound to be transferred to the NCP.

The latter will also meet growing challenges from parties like the BNP, which had their backs to the wall during Sheikh Hasina's second innings as prime minister but are now flexing their political muscles.

Further, the NCP lacks a nationwide, grassroots-level political infrastructure and a leader with charisma and gravitas. Its leaders' demands for not holding parliamentary elections until the reforms are completed and Sheikh Hasina is on the gallows are obviously ploys to gain time to build up its organisation. Time, however, takes its own toll even on the most resplendent of shrines. It cannot be otherwise with the NCP. Its leaders will do well to remember the saying, "Sic transit gloria mundi," which literally translates as "thus passes the glory of the world" but is generally meant to convey that earthly glory is fleeting.

Bangladesh: A backgrounder

A 17-member interim government, led by Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus as its chief advisor, took charge in Bangladesh on August 8, following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina. Hasina resigned as prime minister on August 5, following weeks of deadly student-led protests. Her ouster was followed by a chaos in Muslim-majority country of over 170 million people and it reverberated in neighbouring India.

Sheikh Hasina's departure from Dhaka to neighbouring India resulted from months of growing anger in Bangladesh. After the January 2024 general election, perceived as flawed, critics accused Hasina's government of becoming increasingly arrogant and serving its minions.

The turning point came in June 2024, when Bangladesh's High Court re-instated a quota reserving 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans from Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. With government jobs in high demand due to elevated graduate unemployment, students protested the quota, which they also viewed as favouring supporters of Hasina's Awami League party.

The Supreme Court eventually reduced the quota in late July to 5 per cent. The reversal was too little, too late. Violence between the protesters and the police increased, further fuelled by Hasina's refusal to release detained student leaders.

The protesters, viewing Hasina as responsible for the deaths of some 600 people killed in the clashes with the police, began seeking her overthrow.

To control the protests, Hasina announced a curfew, repeatedly shut down internet and jailed over 11,000 protesters. The army eventually withdrew its support after refusing Hasina's order to open fire on civilians to enforce the curfew. On August 5, 2024, with a large number of angry protesters heading to her official residence, Hasina resigned and fled to India.

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

Unlike previous generations who have always valued durability and longevity in clothing, today's generation – the Gen Alpha born between 2010 and 2025, is caught in a cycle of overconsumption, leading to cluttered wardrobes, financial waste and severe environmental consequences.

Cloth clutter or fashion hoarding refers to the excessive accumulation of clothing, often resulting in disorganised spaces filled with unused or rarely worn garments. With trends changing rapidly, many individuals feel pressured to keep up with fashion, leading to impulsive purchases contributing to a growing pile of clothes.

Unlike past generations who owned fewer but high-quality garments, today's generation is surrounded by cheap, trendy options that encourage frequent buying. Moreover, the convenience of online shopping, where clothes are just a click away, has made it even easier to accumulate unnecessary clothing. The result is overcrowded closets, confusion in outfit choices, and a constant feeling of having nothing to wear despite an overflowing wardrobe. There is no denying that the fast fashion industry thrives on quick production cycles, offering new styles almost every week at an affordable price.

This rapid turnover has created a sense of urgency among consumers to buy more before trends change, leading to excessive clothing accumulation. Above all, online shopping platforms such as Amazon, Myntra, Meesho and many more offer constant discounts such as buy-one-get-one deals, and fast delivery, making it incredibly tempting to buy clothes even when they are not needed. Subscription-based shopping models and exclusive online sales have also encouraged unnecessary purchases, filling wardrobes with items that may never be worn.

Today, with the increased stress, boredom or emotions imbibed among many individuals, the concept of mindless shopping is being used, leading to impulsive buying decisions. This has resulted in wardrobes filled with clothes that were purchased out of momentary excitement but have no long-term use.

Various studies and research have shown that a cluttered environment negatively affects mental wellbeing, making it harder to focus and feel at ease. Today, the textile industry is one of the largest contributors to pollution. Overproduction of clothing has led to increased carbon emissions, water consumption and waste. Many discarded clothes end up in landfills, as most fast fashion items are made from synthetic fabrics that take decades to decompose. Constantly buying new clothes without fully utilising existing ones results in unnecessary expenses.

As a result, many individuals end up spending large amounts on fashion while struggling to save money for essential needs. Adopting a minimalist approach to fashion will encourage owning fewer but high-quality, versatile pieces that can be mixed and matched.

This will not only reduce the clutter but also promote mindful consumption. Choosing sustainable brands, buying second-hand clothes, and donating unused garments can significantly reduce the impact of fashion waste.

Supporting ethical fashion brands that prioritise durability over trends can help break the cycle of overconsumption. Donating, selling, or repurposing clothes instead of hoarding them can also free up space and prevent unnecessary purchases.

Asking questions like "Do I need this?" or "Will I wear this at least 20 times?" before making a purchase can help in avoiding impulsive buying. Cloth clutter is a growing problem among today's generation, fuelled by fast fashion, digital influence, social media influencers and impulsive shopping habits.

While the allure of trendy and affordable fashion is strong, it comes at a high cost—both personally and environmentally. By embracing mindful consumption, adopting sustainable fashion choices, and prioritising quality over quantity, individuals can break free from the cycle of cloth clutter, leading to a more organised, stress-free, and eco-conscious lifestyle. There are various reasons for it.

Cloth clutter can arise from various factors, such as: Buying more clothes than needed, holding onto clothes that no longer fit or are out of style and above all reluctance to ward off the old clothes.

It may look innocuous but cluttering can have a negative impact on your well being and mental state. It also has practical issues arising from the problem of plenty.

One can have reduced storage space and difficulty accessing clothing and one can experience the a sense of being overwhelmed and disorganised. It often leads to stress and anxiety which can impact your overall wellbeing. But there is solution to it. To combat cloth clutter, you may start declutter your wardrobe regularly and get rid of the items you no longer wear or need.

Besides, organising your clothing storage, using bins, shelves, and drawers effectively declutters your storage space.

One of the easiest way to declutter is to avoid mindless purchasing and buying only what you need and love. Indeed it is not a big problem or something which cannot be dealt with but it must be acknowledged and taken into stride.

It is a lifestyle problem arising from our inability to be mindful of our actions. And don't forget there are people who need your clothes so why not give it to people who need them and experience the feeling of gratitude

Let your wardrobe smile!

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)



SHAINY SHARMA

A trade deal between India and the US remains a strong possibility

The strategic partnership and geopolitical compulsions of both India and the United States could significantly contribute to clinching a long-awaited trade deal, laying the foundation for future cooperation. While President Donald Trump has positioned himself ideologically closer to Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un—thus isolating European nations—his administration saw the need to counter China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific, making India a crucial ally.

US Demands and India's Position

US Commerce Secretary, Howard Lutnick has stressed the necessity of India opening its agriculture market, asserting that this sector could not be "off the table" in trade negotiations. He advocates a broad, macro-level trade pact rather than product-specific agreements, arguing that aligning India's tariff policies with the US would be more beneficial for both nations.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently concluded productive trade discussions in Washington with US counterparts, including Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Secretary Lutnick. The talks hold significance as both nations move towards negotiating a bilateral trade deal. During Prime Minister Modi's recent US visit, India and America committed to doubling bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030, targeting the completion of the first phase of a trade pact by fall 2025.

In 2023, US-India trade in goods and services reached \$190.08 billion, with India enjoying a \$43.65 billion trade surplus. Trump, echoing Lutnick's optimism, emphasised that a trade deal is within reach, underlining its strategic importance.

The Indian Diaspora's Growing Influence

Reports suggest that the Indian diaspora in the US has emerged as a significant economic and political force, subtly shaping US-India trade policies. Indian-Americans, one of the most prosperous and educated ethnic groups in the US, have wielded considerable influence in strengthening bilateral ties. In a shift, a notable portion of the Indian diaspora supported Trump in the November elections, affecting the political calculus. As of 2021, the average household income for Indian-Americans was \$123,700—surpassing all other ethnic groups.

Between 1995 and 2005, they founded more technology and engineering companies than immigrants from the UK, China, Taiwan, and Japan combined, contributing significantly to innovation and job creation.

The Indian-American population has grown from 2.3 million in 2005 to approximately 4.4 million by 2023, making them the second-largest immigrant group in the US. Their increasing economic and political clout has played a pivotal role in strengthening US-India relations, including current on-going

trade deal dialogue.

Trump's Foreign Policy and Its Impact on India Trump's foreign policy has been defined by an "America First" approach, often at the cost of traditional alliances. His controversial actions—isolating European allies, supporting Russia in the UN by refusing to name it as an aggressor, and potentially attempting to pull Russia away from China—signal a major shift in global geopolitics. These moves could have far-reaching consequences, impacting not just Europe and Asia but also India's strategic positioning.

If Trump successfully distances Russia from China, India stands to benefit. Moscow has historically been a key defense and energy partner for New Delhi.

Europe's Strategic Shift under Trump

Trump's presidency has been marked by tensions with European allies over defense spending, trade policies, and multilateral agreements like the Paris Climate Accord. His criticism of NATO and demands for Europe to shoulder more security costs have strained US-Europe ties. Trump's questioning of NATO's Article 5 (the

mutual defense clause) could leave Eastern European nations vulnerable. Europe might be forced to increase defense spending and coordination, but a lack of American support would weaken the alliance's deterrence against Moscow.

Indo-Pacific Security Dynamics

In the Indo-Pacific, key US allies like Japan, South Korea, and Australia rely on Washington to counterbalance China. If Trump reduces support for alliances like AUKUS and Quad, these nations may strengthen security ties with India and European powers like France and the UK. Trump's retreat from alliances could create a vacuum that China might exploit. Beijing has been expanding its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), offering economic and military incentives to countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. If US allies feel abandoned, China might step in, further eroding American influence.

Trump's Alignment with Russia

On the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, US support for Moscow at the UN exposed a growing rift with European allies. Washington sided with Russia, North Korea, and Belarus in opposing a Europe-backed resolution condemning Moscow. The motion still passed 93-8, with 73 abstentions, including China. Furthering this shift, the US pushed a UN Security Council resolution calling for an end to the war—conspicuously avoid-

ing any reference to Russia's invasion.

Trump's alignment with Moscow signals a potential unravelling of America's transatlantic security commitments. His pivot to Russia, ostensibly to end the war, side-lines Kyiv and Brussels, making lasting peace unlikely, though pressure tactics may yield results. Meanwhile, China sees a strategic advantage in this shift, hoping to mend its strained ties with Europe and Washington as the global order tilts towards an authoritarian axis.

The Future of India-US Trade Relations

While Trump may attempt to realign US-Russia relations, Russia's deep economic and strategic ties with China make a complete pivot unlikely. However, his policies could still reshape global trade and security dynamics in ways that affect India. A trade deal between India and the US remains a strong possibility, driven by economic and geopolitical imperatives.

The Indian government will need to carefully navigate these complexities to safeguard its trade interests while ensuring strategic autonomy. As the global power balance shifts, India's ability to leverage its relationships with the US, Russia and China will determine its long-term geopolitical and economic standing.

(The writer is a political analyst; views are personal)



KS TOMAR

Russian forces walk inside gas pipeline to strike Ukrainian troops from rear

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv

Russian special forces walked inside a gas pipeline to strike Ukrainian units from the rear in the Kursk region, Ukraine's military and Russian war bloggers reported, as Moscow moves to recapture parts of its border province that Kyiv seized in a shock offensive.

Ukraine launched in August a daring cross-border incursion into Kursk, in what marked the largest attack on Russian territory since World War II. Within days, Ukrainian units had captured 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of territory, including the strategic border town of Sudzha, and taken hundreds of Russian prisoners of war.

According to Kyiv, the operation aimed to gain a bargaining chip in future peace talks, and force Russia to divert troops

away from its grinding offensive in eastern Ukraine.

But months after Ukraine's thunder run, its soldiers in Kursk are weary and bloodied by relentless assaults of more than 50,000 troops, including some from Russia's ally North Korea. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers run the risk of being encircled, open source maps of the battlefield show.

According to Telegram posts by a Ukrainian-born, pro-Kremlin blogger, Russian operatives walked about 15 kilometers (9 miles) inside the pipeline, which Moscow had until recently used to send gas to Europe.

Some Russian troops had spent several days in the pipe before striking Ukrainian units from the rear near the town of Sudzha, blogger Yuri Podolyaka claimed. The town had some 5,000 resi-

dents before the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, and houses major gas transfer and measuring stations along the pipeline, once a major outlet for Russian natural gas exports through Ukrainian territory. Another war blogger, who uses the alias Two Majors, said fierce fighting was underway for Sudzha, and that Russian forces managed to enter the town through a gas pipeline.

Russian Telegram channels showed photos of what they said were special forces operatives, wearing gas masks and moving along what looked like the inside of a large pipe. Ukraine's General Staff confirmed on Saturday evening that Russian "sabotage and assault groups" used the pipeline in a bid to gain a foothold outside Sudzha. In a Telegram post, it said Russian troops were "detected in a timely manner" and that Ukraine responded with rockets

and artillery.

"At present, Russian special forces are being detected, blocked and destroyed. The enemy's losses in Sudzha are very high," the General Staff reported. The Associated Press could not independently verify these accounts, and there was no immediate comment from Russian officials.

Meanwhile, French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said Sunday that France will use profits from frozen Russian assets to finance an additional 195 million euros package (USD 211 million) in arms for Ukraine, the latest in a series of military aid deliveries funded through the mechanism. In an interview with the La Tribune Dimanche newspaper, Lecornu said that Paris will send new 155-mm artillery shells and glide bombs for Mirage 2000 fighter jets it previously gave to Ukraine.

2 days of clashes in Syria leave over 1,000 dead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beirut

The death toll from two days of clashes between Syrian security forces and loyalists of ousted President Bashar Assad and revenge killings that followed has risen to more than 1,000, a war monitoring group said on Saturday, making it one of the deadliest acts of violence since Syria's conflict began 14 years ago.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in addition to 745 civilians killed, mostly in shootings from close distance, 125 government security force members and 148 militants with armed groups affiliated with Assad were killed. It added that electricity and drinking water were cut off in large areas around the city of Latakia.

The clashes, which erupted Thursday, marked a major escalation in the challenge to the new government in Damascus, three months after insurgents took authority after removing Assad from power.

The government has said that they were responding to attacks from remnants of Assad's forces and blamed "individual actions" for the rampant violence.

Retribution killings between Sunnis and Alawites: The revenge killings that started Friday by Sunni Muslim gunmen loyal to the government against members of Assad's minority Alawite sect are a major blow to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the faction that led the overthrow of the former government. Alawites made up a large part of Assad's support base for decades.

Residents of Alawite villages and towns spoke to The Associated Press about killings during which gunmen shot Alawites, the majority of them men, in the streets or at the gates of their homes. Many homes of Alawites were looted and then set on fire in different areas, two residents of Syria's coastal region told the AP from their hideouts. They asked that their names not be made public out of fear of being killed by gunmen, adding that thousands of people have fled to nearby mountains for safety.

Residents speak of atrocities in one town: Residents of Baniyas, one of the towns worst hit by the violence, said bodies were strewn on the streets or left unburied in homes and on the roofs of buildings, and nobody was able to collect them. One resident said that the gunmen prevented residents for hours from removing the bodies of five of their neighbours killed Friday at close range.

Ali Sheha, a 57-year-old resident of Baniyas who fled with his family and neighbors hours after the violence broke out Friday, said that at least 20 of his neighbors and colleagues in one neighbourhood of Baniyas where Alawites lived, were

killed, some of them in their shops, or in their homes. Sheha called the attacks "revenge killings" of the Alawite minority for the crimes committed by Assad's government. Other residents said the gunmen included foreign fighters, and militants from neighbouring villages and towns.

"It was very very bad. Bodies were on the streets," as he was fleeing, Sheha said, speaking by phone from nearly 20 kilometers (12 miles) away from the city. He said the gunmen were gathering less than 100 meters from his apartment building, firing randomly at homes and residents and in at least one incident he knows of, asked residents for their IDs to check their religion and their sect before killing them. He said the gunmen also burned some homes and stole cars and robbed homes.

Death toll has multiplied: The Observatory's chief Rami Abdurrahman said that revenge killings stopped early Saturday. "This was one of the biggest massacres during the Syrian conflict," Abdurrahman said about the killings of Alawite civilians.

The previous figure given by the group was more than 600 dead. No official figures have been released. A funeral was held Saturday afternoon for four Syrian security force members in the northwestern village of Al-Janoudiya after they were killed in the clashes along Syria's coast. Scores of people attended the funeral.

Official reports say Syrian forces regaining control: Syria's state news agency quoted an unnamed Defense Ministry official as saying that government forces have regained control of much of the areas from Assad loyalists. It added that authorities have closed all roads leading to the coastal region "to prevent violations and gradually restore stability."

On Saturday morning, the bodies of 31 people killed in revenge attacks the day before in the central village of Tuwaym were laid to rest in a mass grave, residents said. Those killed included nine children and four women, the residents said, sending the AP photos of the bodies draped in white cloth as they were lined in the mass grave. Lebanese legislator Haidar Nasser, who holds one of the two seats allocated to the Alawite sect in parliament, said that people were fleeing from Syria for safety in Lebanon. He said he didn't have exact numbers. Nasser said that many people were sheltering at the Russian air base in Hmeimim, Syria, adding that the international community should protect Alawites who are Syrian citizens loyal to their country. He said that since Assad's fall, many Alawites were fired from their jobs and some former soldiers who reconciled with the new authorities were killed.

Israel will send delegation to Qatar to try to 'advance' ceasefire negotiations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Deir Al-Balah

Israel said that it would send a delegation to Qatar on Monday "in an effort to advance the negotiations" around the ceasefire in Gaza, while Hamas reported "positive signals" in talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators on starting negotiations on the truce's delayed second phase.

The statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office gave no details except to say it had "accepted the invitation of US-backed mediators." Hamas spokesman Abdel-Latif al-Qanoua also gave no details. Talks on the second phase should have started a month ago.

There was no immediate comment from the White House, which on Wednesday made the surprise confirmation of direct US talks with Hamas.

Over the past week, Israel has pressed Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for an extension of the first phase, which ended last weekend, and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas is believed to have 24 living hostages and the bodies of 35 others.

Israel last weekend cut off all supplies to Gaza and its more than 2 million people as it pressed Hamas to agree. The militant group has said that the move would affect the remaining hostages as well.

The ceasefire has paused the deadliest and most destructive fighting ever between Israel and Hamas, sparked by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The first phase allowed the return of 25 living hostages and the remains of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli forces have withdrawn to buffer zones inside Gaza, hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have returned to northern Gaza for the first time since early in the war and hundreds of trucks of aid entered per day until Israel suspended supplies. Before their weekly rally in Tel Aviv, relatives of hostages appealed to U.S. President Donald Trump, who met with eight former hostages on Wednesday.

"Mr. President, a return to war means a death sentence for the living hostages left behind. Please, sir, do not allow Netanyahu to sacrifice them."

Muslim countries reject moving Palestinians from Gaza: Also on Saturday, foreign ministers from Muslim nations rejected Trump's calls to empty the Gaza Strip of its Palestinian population and

backed a plan for an administrative committee to govern the territory to allow reconstruction to proceed.

The foreign ministers gathered in Saudi Arabia for a special session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to address the situation in Gaza. The OIC has 57 nations with largely Muslim populations. They supported a plan to rebuild Gaza put forward by Egypt and backed by Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Without mentioning Trump, the ministers' statement said that they rejected "plans aimed at displacing the Palestinian people individually or collectively ... as ethnic cleansing, a grave violation of international law and a crime against humanity."

They also condemned "policies of starvation" they said aim to push Palestinians to leave, a reference to Israel's cutting off all supplies to Gaza. Trump has called for Gaza's population to be resettled elsewhere permanently, so that the United States can take over the territory and develop it for others. Palestinians have rejected calls to leave. The ministers at the OIC gathering supported a proposal that an administrative committee replace Hamas in governing Gaza. The committee would work "under the umbrella" of the Palestinian Authority, based in the occupied West Bank. Israel has rejected the PA having any role in Gaza, but hasn't put forward an alternative for postwar rule.

The foreign ministers of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom said in a joint statement that they welcome the Arab initiative for a Gaza reconstruction plan, calling it "a realistic path." They added that "Hamas must neither govern Gaza nor be a threat to Israel anymore," and they support the central role for the PA. Early Saturday, an Israeli strike killed two Palestinians in the southernmost city of Rafah, the Health Ministry there said. The Israeli military said that it struck several men who appeared to be flying a drone that entered Israel. Israel's military offensive has killed more than 48,000 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't say how many of the dead were militants. Hamas' attack in October 2023 killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, inside Israel and took 251 people hostage. Most have been released in ceasefire agreements or other arrangements. The militants also hold the remains of a soldier killed in the 2014 war.



People take part in a protest in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Saturday, demanding the immediate release of hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip

Pope thanks volunteers for 'miracle of tenderness'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rome

Pope Francis issued a message Sunday thanking volunteers for the "miracle of tenderness" they offer the sick, as he continued his recovery from double pneumonia and doctors reported positive news. After more than three weeks in the hospital, the 88-year-old pope is responding well to treatment and has shown a "gradual, slight improvement" in recent days.

For the fourth Sunday in a row, the 88-year-old Francis didn't appear for his weekly noon blessing, but he met with his top deputies and the Holy See distributed the text he would have delivered if he were well enough. In it, the Argentine pope thanked all those who were caring for him and others who are sick and experiencing a "night of pain."

"Brothers and sisters, during my prolonged hospitalisation here, I too experience the thoughtfulness of service and the tenderness of care, in particular from the

doctors and health care workers, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart," read the message from Gemelli hospital.

"And while I am here, I think of the many people who in various ways are close to the sick, and who are for them a sign of the Lord's presence. We need this, the miracle of tenderness' which accompanies those who are in adversity, bringing a little light into the night of pain," he wrote.

Francis, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, has remained in stable condition at Gemelli, with no fever and good oxygen levels in his blood for several days, doctors reported in a Vatican statement Saturday. The doctors said that such stability "as a consequence testifies to a good response to therapy." It was the first time the doctors had reported that Francis was responding positively to the treatment for the complex lung infection that was diagnosed after he was hospitalised on February 14.

But they kept his prognosis as "guard-

ed", meaning he's not out of danger. On Sunday morning, the Vatican reported he was resting after a quiet night.

In his absence, the Vatican's day-to-day operations continued alongside celebrations of its Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century Jubilee that brings millions of pilgrims to Rome.

On Sunday, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, who is close to Francis, celebrated the Holy Year Mass for volunteers that Francis was supposed to have celebrated.

During the Mass in St. Peter's Square, the giant banner bearing Francis' papal coat of arms fluttered from the loggia of



the basilica above. Even while in the hospital, Francis is very much still the pope and in charge of the Catholic Church.

That was evident too by the fact that the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, visited the pope on Sunday for the third time since he has been in the hospital.

The Vatican has noted that such meetings are the routine way the pope governs while at the Vatican, making clear that he was getting essential work done from Gemelli. Francis has been using high flows of supplemental oxygen to help him breathe during the day and a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask at night.

Francis was hospitalised February 14 for what was then just a bad case of bronchitis. The infection progressed into a complex respiratory tract infection and double pneumonia that has sidelined Francis for the longest period of his 12-year papacy and raised questions about the future.

Man with Palestinian flag who climbed London's Big Ben tower arrested

London (PTI): A man was arrested early Sunday after he climbed the Big Ben tower at the Palace of Westminster in central London while barefoot and holding a Palestinian flag. The man, who appeared to be staging a protest on a ledge several metres (yards) up Elizabeth Tower, which houses Big Ben, stepped off the building after midnight and onto a cherry picker following a long conversation with negotiators. He got into a waiting ambulance.

Traffic around the Palace of Westminster in London had come to a standstill for much of Saturday as emergency crews tried to reach the man. Negotiators were lifted up on a fire brigade ladder platform several times before eventually talking him down. Westminster Bridge and a nearby street were closed for much of the day and several emergency services vehicles were at the scene as crowds looked on. Police also blocked off all pedestrian access to Parliament Square. A small group of supporters shouted "Free Palestine" from behind a police cordon nearby. Officials said tours of the Houses of Parliament were cancelled because of the incident. The Metropolitan Police confirmed that the man has now been arrested. "This has been a protracted incident due to the specifics of where the man was located and the need to ensure the safety of our officers the individual and the wider public," it said in a statement.

Wu says Chinese military faces tough challenges in safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beijing

China on Sunday defended its USD 249 billion defence budget, which is next only to the US, saying it faces tough challenges in safeguarding sovereignty and the increased amount will be used to develop new-domain forces with the latest combat capabilities and joint strikes by its armed forces. Chinese Premier Li Qiang announced on Wednesday in the parliament that the planned defence expenditure for the country this year is 1.784665 trillion yuan (about USD 249 billion).

"The Chinese military faces tough challenges in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Defence Spokesperson Sr. Co. Wu Qian said during the ongoing annual parliament session.

Last year, China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 232 billion (1.67 trillion yuan).

China has the world's second-largest military budget after the US, whose latest defence spending amounted to over USD 890 billion as proposed by President Donald Trump. While China cites the heavy US budget, its increasing defence spending is putting pressure on neighbours, especially India. The Chinese defence spending

amounted to three times that of India's Rs 6,81, 210 crore (about USD 78.8 billion).

China's defence budget figures are viewed by critics with scepticism in light of massive military modernisation, including building aircraft carriers, rapid construction of advanced naval ships and modern stealth aircraft being carried out at a feverish pitch by the Chinese military.

Wu said the increased expenditure will be mainly used to develop new-domain forces with new combat capabilities and to enhance systems and capacity for reconnaissance and early warning, joint strikes, battlefield support and integrated logistics support. The spending will also be put into improving military training under combat conditions and deepening national defence and military reform, Wu said. Compared to major military powers like the US, China's defence spending remains relatively low in terms of the spending's share in GDP, its share in national fiscal expenditures, the country's per capita defence spending, and expenditure per service member, he added. On Tuesday, Lou Qinjian, spokesperson for the National People's Congress, also defended China's increasing defence expenditure, saying that "peace needs to be safeguarded with strength".

China learned from Trump's first trade war, changed tactics when tariffs came again

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

The leaders of both Canada and Mexico got on the phone with President Donald Trump this past week to seek solutions after he slapped tariffs on their countries, but China's president appears unlikely to make a similar call soon. Beijing, which unlike America's close partners and neighbours has been locked in a trade and tech war with the US for years, is taking a different approach to Trump in his second term, making it clear that any negotiations should be conducted on equal footing.

China's leaders say they are open to talks, but they also made preparations for the higher US tariffs, which have risen 20 per cent since Trump took office seven weeks ago. Intent on not being caught off guard as they were during Trump's first term, the Chinese were ready with retaliatory measures — imposing their own taxes this past week on key US farm imports and more.

"As Washington escalates the tariff, Beijing doesn't see other options but to retaliate," said Sun Yun, director of the China programme at the Stimson Centre, a Washington-based think tank. "It doesn't mean Beijing doesn't want to negotiate, but it cannot be seen as begging for talks or mercy."

As the world's second-largest economy,

China aspires to be a great power on both the regional and global stage, commanding respect from all countries, especially the United States, as proof that the Communist Party has made China prosperous and strong.

After the US this past week imposed another 10 per cent tariff, on top of the 10 per cent imposed on February 4, the Chinese foreign ministry uttered its sharpest retort yet: "If war is what the US wants, be it a tariff war, a trade war or any other type of war, we're ready to fight till the end."

The harsh rhetoric echoed similar comments in 2018, when Trump launched his first trade war with China and it scrambled to line up tit-for-tat actions. Beijing's leaders have since developed a toolkit of tariffs, import curbs, export controls, sanctions, regulatory reviews and measures to limit companies from doing business in China. All are designed to inflict pain on the US economy and businesses in response to the American measures.

That allowed the Chinese government to react swiftly to Trump's recent across-the-board doubling of new tariffs on Chinese goods by rolling out a basket of retaliatory measures, including taxing many American farm goods at up to 15 per cent, suspending US lumber imports and blacklisting 15 US companies.

Beijing showed restraint in its response to leave room for negotiation, analysts say. Xi Jinping's leadership of the ruling Communist Party spans both of Trump's terms, giving Beijing more continuity in its planning. He is the one who decided it's not yet time to speak with Trump, said Daniel Russel, vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

"That's not a scheduling issue, it's leverage for China," said Russel, who previously served as the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. "Xi won't walk into a call if there's a chance he'll be harassed or humiliated and for both political and strategic reasons, Xi won't play the role of a supplicant."

"Instead, China is hitting back promptly — but judiciously — to each set of tariffs," Russel said. At his annual press conference Friday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that "no country should fantasize that it can suppress, contain China while developing good relations with China."

"Such two-faced acts not only are bad for the stability of bilateral relations but also will not build mutual trust," Wang said. He added that China welcomes cooperation with the US, but noted that "if you keep pressuring, China will firmly retaliate."

Trump's transactional approach driving force on world stage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

Donald Trump, the real estate developer turned commander in chief, is laying bare his style of diplomacy in the early weeks of his new term: It's a whole lot like a high-stakes business deal, and his No. 1 goal is to come out of the transaction on top. The tactics are clear in his brewing trade war with Canada and Mexico, in his approach to Russia's war on Ukraine and in his selection of the first country he will visit in his second term.

"President Trump approaches diplomacy and engages in a very transactional manner, with economics as the foundation and driving force behind international affairs," retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, the president's special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, explained at an event in Washington this past week.

For Trump, it's about leverage, not friendship; dollars as much as values; and hard power versus soft. It's not just a matter of negotiating style. At stake is the post-World War II international order as Trump's actions raise doubts about American leadership around the globe.

He's shaping a foreign policy that's more inward looking and conscious of the bottom line, dismissing American soft-power levers such as the US Agency for International Development as dubious and riddled by waste and suggesting that the United States might not defend fellow NATO members that aren't meeting defence spending benchmarks set by the alliance. Politics and presidents to a certain degree are all transactional.

Trump, who helped make himself a household name by burnishing an image as an intrepid real estate dealmaker, is taking it to another level as he navigates an increasingly complicated world.

The Republican president, in his previ-

ous life as a real estate titan, saw every deal as one in which there were clear winners and losers. In his return to the White House, he is more demonstrably injecting a what's-in-it-for-me approach to his dealings with both friend and foe.

Money talks: Edward Frantz, a University of Indianapolis historian who has studied the American presidency, said Trump's "ledger" approach might not be the most practical way to conduct diplomacy. Frantz observed that Trump, 78, a baby boomer and football fan, seems inspired in his foreign policymaking by the ethos of legendary pro football coach Vince Lombardi, who famously said, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing."

"But diplomacy, especially in a more complicated world, might be more like soccer," Frantz said. "Sometimes you just need a tie. Sometimes you need to just survive and move on."

Trump on Thursday told reporters that he has decided to make Saudi Arabia the first overseas visit of his new term because the oil-rich kingdom has agreed to make a huge investment in the United States over the next four years. "They've gotten richer, we've all gotten older. So I said, 'I'll go if you pay a trillion dollars, USD 1 trillion to American companies,'" Trump said. He also made the kingdom his first overseas stop during his first White House term after the Saudis promised USD 450 billion in US investment. Trump acknowledged that the United Kingdom, one of America's oldest allies, has traditionally been the first stop for US presidents. But money talks.

Who has the cards' matters to Trump: In his dealings with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump has highly focused on who has the leverage. Putin has "the cards" and Zelenskyy does not, Trump has said repeatedly.

Zelenskyy appeared to be making some strides in assuaging Trump after their recent rocky meeting in the Oval Office ended with Trump and Vice President JD Vance criticising the Ukrainian leader for what they said was insufficient gratitude for the tens of billions of dollars in US assistance provided in the three years since Russia invaded. Zelenskyy said later that how that meeting went down was "regrettable".

He also made clear he was ready to sign off on a minerals deal with the US — even without the explicit American security guarantees sought by the Ukrainians — that Trump wants.

In his Tuesday address before a joint session of Congress, Trump acknowledged Zelenskyy's fence-mending efforts. Trump also announced plans to send top advisers to Saudi Arabia this week for talks with Ukrainian officials. But soon Trump was back to criticizing Zelenskyy, saying he does not have the leverage to keep fighting the war with Russia.

"I'm finding it more difficult, frankly, to deal with Ukraine, and they don't have the cards," Trump said. "In terms of getting a final settlement, it may be easier dealing with Russia, which is surprising, because they have all the cards."

Trump departs from years of US scepticism toward Russia: Trump's push on Zelenskyy — and pivot toward Moscow — marks a significant departure from traditional US foreign policy toward Russia since the Cold War. Others before Trump, including Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, have tried resets with Russia, but perhaps never at a time as fraught. Deep scepticism toward Moscow, even in the best moments in the relationship, has been the standard operating posture in both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Houston teen indicted for terrorism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Houston

A 17-year-old has become the first person in Harris County to be indicted for terrorism under a new state law, officials say. Laith Adil Shehzad appeared in the court on Friday, wearing an orange jumpsuit and showing no apparent nervousness, even smiling at the cameras.

Prosecutors say the FBI was alerted by Meta in August 2024 about messages between Shehzad and an alleged ISIS militant jailed in the Philippines. Court documents state Shehzad sent photos of himself holding a Glock with extended magazines via Facebook messenger on August 17. The next day, as the FBI agents arrived at his home, he allegedly dumped the gun and ammunition in a detention pond before speaking with investigators.

The prosecutors also claim that Shehzad sought guidance on martyrdom and was previously under juvenile supervision for possessing homemade explosives. The investigators believe that he was radicalized as early as 2021, at the age of 13.

Defense Attorney John Stevenson described Shehzad as young and scared, arguing that many Texas teenagers post with firearms. "This case involves a lot of words and no one was actually harmed," he said. Prosecutors allege that Shehzad planned an attack but was unable to carry it out because his Uber account was suspended. A grand jury indicted Shehzad under a law targeting those who conspire to commit crimes "to intimidate or coerce the public".

"I'm incredibly grateful to law enforcement for preventing what could have been a tragic act," said Harris County DA Sean Teare. Shehzad remains jailed without bond and faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

Panama releases dozens of detained deportees from US into limbo

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Panama City

After weeks of lawsuits and human rights criticism, Panama on Saturday released dozens of migrants who were held for weeks in a remote camp after being deported from the United States, telling them they have 30 days to leave the Central American nation.

It thrust many like Hayatullah Omagh, a 29-year-old who fled Afghanistan in 2022 after the Taliban took control, into a legal limbo, scrambling to find a path forward.

"We are refugees. We do not have money. We cannot pay for a hotel in Panama City, we do not have relatives," Omagh told the Associated Press in an interview. "I can't go back to Afghanistan under any circumstances... It is under the control of the Taliban, and they want to kill me. How can I go back?"

Authorities have said deportees will have the option of extending their stay by 60 days if they need it, but after that many like Omagh don't know what they will do.

Omagh climbed off a bus in Panama City alongside 65 migrants from China, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Nepal and other nations after spending weeks detained in poor conditions by the Panamanian government, which has said it wants to work with the Trump administration "to send a signal of deterrence" to people hoping to migrate.

Human rights groups and lawyers advocating for the migrants were waiting at the bus terminal, and scrambled to find the released migrants shelter and other resources. Dozens of other people remained in the camp. Among those getting off buses were migrants fleeing violence and repression in Pakistan and Iran, and 27-year-old Nikita Gaponov, who fled Russia due to repression for being part of the LGBTQ+ community and who said he was detained at the US border, but not allowed to make an asylum claim.

"Once I get off the bus, I'll be sleeping on the ground tonight," Gaponov said. Others turned their eyes north once again, saying that even though they had already been deported, they had no other option than to continue after crossing the world to reach the US.

The deportees, largely from Asian countries, were part of a deal struck between the Trump administration and Panama and Costa Rica as the US government attempts to speed up deportations. The administration sent hundreds of people, many fam-

ilies with children, to the two Central American countries as a stopover while authorities organize a way to send them back to their countries of origin.

Critics described it as a way for the US to export its deportation process. The agreement fuelled human rights concerns when hundreds of deportees detained in a hotel in Panama City held up notes to their windows pleading for help and saying they were scared to return to their own countries. Under international refugee law, people have the right to apply for asylum when they are fleeing conflict or persecution. Those that refused to return home were later sent to a remote camp near Panama's border with Colombia, where they spent weeks in poor conditions, were stripped of their phones, unable to access legal council and were not told where they were going next.

Lawyers and human rights defenders warned that Panama and Costa Rica were turning into "black holes" for deportees, and said their release was a way for Panamanian authorities to wash their hands of the deportees amid mounting human rights criticism.

Those who were released Saturday night, like Omagh, said they could not return home. As an atheist and member of an ethnic minority group in Afghanistan known as the Hazara, he said returning home under the rule of the Taliban — which swept back into power after the Biden administration pulled out of the country — would mean he would be killed. He only went to the US after trying for years to live in Pakistan, Iran and other countries but being denied visas.

Omagh was deported after presenting himself to American authorities and asking to seek asylum in the US, which he was denied. "My hope was freedom. Just freedom," he said. "They didn't give me the chance. I asked many times to speak to an asylum officer and they told me No, no, no, no, no."

Still, he said that leaving the camp was a relief. Omagh and other migrants who spoke to the AP detailed scarce food, sweltering heat with little relief and aggressive Panamanian authorities. In one case, Omagh and others said, a Chinese man went on a week-long hunger strike. In another, a small riot broke out because guards refused to give a migrant their phone. The riot, they said, was suppressed by armed guards.

Macron's diplomatic comeback: From France's domestic crisis to reshaping Europe's defence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron is back at the centre of global diplomacy, seeking to ease relations with President Donald Trump, championing a Ukraine peace plan alongside his British counterpart, and seeing his longstanding desire to boost European defence turning into reality. Six months ago, Macron seemed weaker than ever after his call for early legislative elections produced a hung parliament, sparking an unprecedented crisis. Known for his nonstop political activism, Macron shifted his focus to foreign policy, leaving domestic struggles largely to the prime minister.

Now, he appears as the one leader who speaks to Trump several times per week and takes the lead in European support for Ukraine, while positioning himself as the commander-in-chief of the European Union's only nuclear power.

Key world player: Macron, 47, is one of the few leaders who knew Trump during his first term in office, maintaining despite disagreements a cordial relationship, which both describe as "friendship".

He was the first European leader to visit Trump since his reelection, seeking to persuade him not to abandon Ukraine in pursuit of a peace deal with Russia. Macron is also a heavyweight of European politics, and shifting US policies gave momentum to his longstanding views.

Since he was first elected in 2017, Macron has pushed for a stronger, more sovereign Europe. That same year, in a sweeping speech at Sorbonne University, he called for a common European defence policy, with increased military cooperation and joint defence initiatives.

He later lamented the "brain death" of the NATO military alliance, insisting the EU should step up and start acting as a strategic world power. On Thursday, EU leaders committed to strengthening defences and freeing up hundreds of billions of euros for security in the wake of Trump's warnings that they might face the Russian threat alone.

Nuclear power: In a resounding declaration last week, Macron announced he would discuss extending France's nuclear deterrent to European partners to help protect the continent.

France's nuclear power is inherited from the strategy set by wartime hero Gen. Charles de Gaulle, president from 1958 to 1969, who sought to maintain France's independence from the US and assert the country's role as a global power.

That went through the development of an independent French nuclear arsenal. Poland and Baltic nations welcomed the proposal. France's Minister for European Affairs Benjamin Haddad praised Macron's efforts, saying they were aimed at ensuring that "in the face of this world upheaval, Europeans are not spectators but players".

New British and German partners: Some other key players appear to back Macron's approach. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, in office for eight months, has sought closer defence cooperation with Europe as part of a "reset" with the EU after years of bitterness over Brexit.

Macron and Starmer are now spearheading a desperate diplomatic drive to bolster Ukraine's defences, drawing up a peace plan with Kyiv at its core. That plan includes the possibility of sending European troops to Ukraine to enforce a potential peace agreement. Meanwhile, Germany's conservative election winner Friedrich Merz said his top priority would be to "strengthen Europe as soon as possible" and gradually move toward "real independence" from the US.

Only three days after his victory last month, Merz, who has called for a discussion on "nuclear sharing" with France, travelled to Paris for a working dinner with Macron. No statement was released after the meeting, but French officials with knowledge of the matter said both men's visions for Europe align. They spoke anonymously because the talks were not to be made public.

Russia's criticism: Russia's foreign ministry accused Macron of "demonstrative militarism dictated by the domestic agenda". The ministry said that Macron seeks to distract the French public from "worsening socio-economic problems in France and the European Union". Moscow dismissed Macron's nuclear deterrent offer as "extremely confrontational," saying the remarks reflected Paris' ambitions to "become the nuclear patron of all of Europe", despite the fact that France's nuclear forces are far smaller than those of the US.

Armed man shot near White House

Washington (PTI): An armed man believed to be travelling from Indiana was shot by US Secret Service agents near the White House after a confrontation early Sunday, according to authorities. No one else was injured in the shooting that happened around midnight about a block from the White House, according to a Secret Service statement. President Donald Trump was in Florida at the time of the shooting.

The Secret Service received information from local police about an alleged "suicidal individual" who was travelling from Indiana and found the man's car and a person matching his description nearby. "As officers approached, the individual brandished a firearm and an armed confrontation ensued, during which shots were fired by our personnel," the Secret Service said in a statement.

The man was hospitalised. The Secret Service said his condition was "unknown". The Metropolitan Police Department will investigate because the shooting involved law enforcement officers. A message left Sunday for the police department wasn't immediately returned.

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh brace for upcoming food reductions

Cox's Bazar (PTI): Rohingya refugees in cramped Bangladeshi camps say they are worried about a US decision to cut food rations by half beginning next month, while a refugee official says the reduction will impact the nutrition of more than 1 million refugees and create "social and mental pressure".

President Donald Trump abruptly stopped most foreign aid and dismantled the US Agency for International Development, which has significantly hampered the global humanitarian sector. Trump's Jan 20 executive order froze the funding for a 90-day review.

The World Food Programme, the main UN food agency, recently announced that cuts to food rations will take effect from April 1 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where dozens of camps are inhabited by Rohingya refugees. More than 700,000 Muslim Rohingya fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar starting in late August 2017 when Myanmar's military launched a "clearance operation". The ethnic group faces discrimination and are denied citizenship and other rights in the Buddhist-majority nation. Following a military takeover in 2021, the country has been engulfed in an armed conflict widely seen as civil war.

It was not immediately clear if the WFP's decision was directly related to the Trump administration's action.

"We received a letter that (says) previously it was \$12.50, and now it is \$6. They used to get \$12.50 per month, and from now \$6, this will greatly affect them," Shamsud Douza, additional refugee relief and repatriation commissioner of Bangladesh, told The Associated Press.

"As the food is cut, they will get less nutritious food, which may lead to a lack of nutrition. There will be social and mental pressure created amongst the Rohingya people in their community. They will have to look for an alternative for the food," he said.

Douza said there are more sectors where budgets have been cut beyond the food rations, but he would not say whether WFP cuts were related to the U.S. funding rollback. "Generally, there will be less (support) for the (Rohingya) response after the funding cuts. The response already has been slowed, and some people, including Rohingya, have lost their jobs, and some services are reduced. It does not bring a good result when the available services get reduced," he said.

The interim Bangladesh government said the end of USAID payments would stop other projects in Bangladesh, but funding for Rohingya refugees will continue to flow. The US has been the top donor to Bangladesh for Rohingya refugees,

Helicopter companies require registration before flying in Nepal's Annapurna area

Kathmandu (PTI): Helicopter operating companies now require registration before flying to the Annapurna Base Camp area, authorities said. Annapurna Rural Municipality in the Kaski district of western Nepal enforced regulations for flights at the base camp area at an altitude of 4,130 metres.

Helicopter companies registered with the rural municipality are required to pay Rs. 10,000 per flight, said Bishnu Bahadur KC, chairman of the rural municipality. Rs. 20,000 will be charged per flight for the unregistered companies, he said.

"The rural municipality for-

mulated the Annapurna Base Camp Helicopter Flight Tourism Fee Management Procedure in 2023 but was not strictly adhered to," he said. Now the rural municipality has strictly enforced the regulation, requiring the helicopter companies to register their company. So far three helicopter companies — Simrisk Air, Air Dynasty, and Heli Everest — have registered their helicopters with the rural municipality, he said.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Gemarbhai Momanbhai Vankar S/o Shri Momanbhai Vankar R/o G.H.NO.-1745, First Floor, Block-C, Jahangir Puri, Delhi-110033 declare that My name has been wrongly written in My bank Account as Gemar Instead of Gemarbhai Momanbhai Vankar. Hence, Gemar & Gemarbhai Momanbhai Vankar both are the Same & One Person.

PD(1654)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that my client Smt. Rekha Rani W/o Sh. Chandar Pal R/o A-155, Defence Colony, Bhopur, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201005 have severed their all relations with their son Deepak Chaudhary and her wife Aakasha Chaudhary debarred/discharged them from movable and immovable properties/assets. My clients shall not be liable for their any act of deeds in any manner whatsoever. Anybody dealing with them will be at his own cost and risk.

Yogesh Kumar (Advocate) Ch.No. M-11, Western Wings Near SBI, Tis Hazari Court Delhi-110054

'New citizens enrich Singapore, invigorate eco'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Singapore

New citizens enrich Singapore and invigorate the city state's economy "in ways beyond what numbers can show", a senior minister said on Sunday.

Singapore minister Lee Hsien Loong welcoming newly naturalised Singaporeans at the citizenship ceremony said new arrivals bring fresh experiences, diverse perspectives and global connections, helping the country plug into the world and thrive as a regional hub and a global node.

"This is how cities like London, New York or Shanghai become great centres of culture and prosperity. They attract enterprising and adventurous people from all over the world to live and work there," Channel News Asia quoted the former prime minister as saying "And the steady infusion of new arrivals

sharpens them, sparks cross-fertilisation of ideas and cultures, and creates an environment of constant innovation and enterprise," he said.

Every year, there are about 30,000 babies born in Singapore, which takes in about 22,000 new citizens to keep up with the demand for manpower across all sectors. Recalling his visit to Google headquarters in Silicon Valley two years ago, Lee noted that most of the presenters he met had grandparents who hailed from all around the world.

"That is America's enormous advantage — it draws top talent from every continent, and therefore it can innovate and stay ahead," he said, adding that Singapore must always be open to ideas and talent from around the world. "This is how we became a shining red dot (a common reference to the city state). Because our ancestors came

here from many lands, made this their home, and built up this country. This is what we must continue to do to shine even brighter in future — not just for our own sake, but for our children and grandchildren too."

Multinational Singapore's population is predominantly Chinese and about 9 per cent Indians whose forefathers came a century ago to the island state and were joined by indigenous Malays, building the city state as an Asian business and financial hub. The Singapore government is "keenly aware" of the need to handle immigration and integration sensitively, especially as the inflows (foreigners into the growing economy) are not small either, said Lee.

"Even dragon year - last year - still not quite 30,000 citizen babies born. So, we do need to bring in more people, more talent, more contributions," he said.

ESAF GOLD AUCTION NOTICE

REGD. OFFICE: ESAF Bhavan, Mannuthy, Thrissur - 680 651, Kerala.

Notice is hereby given for the information of all concerned that Gold ornaments pledged with ESAF Small Finance Bank and not redeemed by borrowers, despite repeated reminders and notices, of our branches, are listed below. This will be auctioned as per the details given below:

DATE OF AUCTION: 21-03-2025 TIME: 2 PM TO 5 PM
AUCTION VENUE: THROUGH E-AUCTION
AUCTION ADDRESS: https://gold.matextnet.org/ Contact Number: 9500173386/9962979770

To register as bidder for the e-Auction with terms and conditions, and full details of e-Auction please visit the above site.

BRANCHES & LOAN ACCOUNT NUMBERS
FARIDABAD: 63240000639215, 75240000414322.

Customers who are interested to release the ornaments by paying the total due amount may do so, at the respective branches, on or two days before the date of the auction.

Bidders who wish to participate in the auction shall produce their KYC documents. GST No. is mandatory for registered firms/companies. Bidders shall deposit a sum of Rs.50,000 as EMD before participating in the auction.

Thrissur Sd/-
Date: 10-03-2025 Authorized Signatory

Public Notice

Notice is hereby given that one Mrs. Swati Rastogi W/o Mr. Vikas Rastogi (hereinafter referred to as the said Mortgagee/Purchaser) have agreed to create mortgage in respect of the Property more particularly described in the Schedule hereunder written in favour of my client PNB Housing Finance Limited, 8th Floor, DCM Building 16, Barakhamba Road, C.P. New Delhi - 110001 to the Seller Mrs. Ruby D/o Mr. Charan Singh has (mistakenly placed the Original Sale Deed executed by Mr. Madan Mohan J.L. S/o Mr. Jyoti Ram in favour of Mr. Anand Chugh) S/O Late Mr. R.C. Chugh, registered on 05.08.2010 in the Office of Sub-Registrar-A/1, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi/Delhi as per Book No. 1 (2) No. 827 Page No. 177/184 & Document No. 3667, in respect of the said property. Any person having any claim against or in respect of the said property more particularly described in the Schedule hereunder or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable or deposit of title deed or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, husband, partnership, possession, lease, sub-lease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to me with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned here below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim, if any, of such person will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned and my client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan and creation of mortgage on the scheduled property. The Schedule showing the description of the property Freehold Residential Second Floor Portion (without roof right) of Built-up Property bearing No. 15421, having its covered area 58.63 sq. mtr., Out of Khata No. 15421 & 15422 situated at Ballar Nagar, Gali No. 15 Residential Colony in Village Sikdarpur, Ilaqa Shahdara Delhi-110032.

Date: 05-03-2025 Place: Ghaziabad
Divesh Singh (pnbfhl Panel Advocate)
Office No. 3C-319 on Ground Floor "Near Double Water Tank" Situated at Block-C Shastri Park, Ghaziabad (U.P.) - 201002 / Also @Chamber No. 76/A, Tehsil Compound, Ghaziabad. (M.) 9811834005

1. Notice is hereby given that in pursuance of sub-section (2) of section 366 of the Companies Act, 2013, an application has been made to the CRC (Manesar) and Registrar at Delhi that Purico Estates LLP shall be registered under Part I of Chapter XXI of the Companies Act 2013, as a company limited by shares.

2. The principal object of the company will be to carry on the business of development of townships, construction of residential/commercial premises, roads or bridges, educational institutions, recreational facilities, city and regional level infrastructure, townships in India or elsewhere.

3. A copy of the draft memorandum and articles of association of the proposed company may be inspected at the office at Flat No 607, 43 Chiranji Tower, Nehru Place, South Delhi, New Delhi-110019, India.

4. Notice is hereby given that any person objecting to this application may communicate their objection in writing to the Registrar at (Delhi), within twenty one days from the date of publication of this notice, with a copy to the company at its registered office.

Dated this 07th day of March 2025
Name(s) of Applicants
1. Pooja Puri
Designated Partner
DIN: 07288888
2. Prachi Khanna
Designated Partner
DIN: 07861894

IPO activity slows down, listings pulled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

After heightened activity in 2024, there has been a slowdown in new listings, with no main-bourse Initial Public Offerings (IPO) hitting the market in the past three weeks due to a correction in the secondary market.

This slowdown in IPO activity is reflected in the numbers, as only five companies went public in January and four in February, compared to 16 listings in December 2024.

Quality Power Electrical Equipment Limited was the recent IPO—which opened for three-day bidding on February 14. However, the trend of slower activity is evident as at least three companies—Advanced Sys-tek, SFC Environmental Technologies, and Viney Corporation—withdrawn IPO plans by pulling their draft papers in January and February.

This shift follows a remarkable 2024 in which 91 maiden public issues collectively raised ₹1.6 Lakh Crore, driven by robust retail participation, a resilient economy, and booming private capital expenditure.

Bhavesh Shah, Managing Director and Head of Investment Banking at Equirus, said that the slowdown is largely a result of the secondary market correction, especially in January and February, which negatively impacted the share prices of several listed companies.



As a result, investors have shifted focus to their existing portfolios rather than exploring new listings.

Shah emphasised that the diminished investor attention on new IPOs has contributed to the slowdown in market activity.

Despite this caution, V Prashant Rao, Director and Head of ECM Investment Banking at Anand Rathi Advisors,

pointed out that the longer-term outlook remains positive, with a strong IPO pipeline.

"We are seeing an impressive number of documents getting filed and waiting for market conditions to stabilise. Currently, 45 companies with Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) approval are looking to raise over ₹67,000 Crore and 69 companies are awaiting SEBI-approval,

aiming to raise over ₹1.15 Lakh Crore.

Notably, out of the 69 companies, 45 companies filed DRHPs in the last couple of months," he said.

In the last two months alone, close to 30 companies have filed preliminary IPO papers with SEBI, and in addition, Knowledge Realty Trust sponsored by Sattva Group and Blackstone last week filed documents to launch its maiden REIT public issue to raise more than ₹6,200 Crore.

This influx of filings suggests that while market conditions are currently subdued, the IPO market is not stagnant.

Looking ahead, Equirus' Shah remains optimistic, forecasting a revival of the IPO market in the next few months as market conditions stabilise.

He believes that investors will eventually return to fresh investments in new companies, supported by strong mutual fund inflows, which continue to show resilience despite some impact from market volatility.

To maintain investor interest amid these fluctuating conditions, Shah suggests that issuers may need to recalibrate their IPO valuations in line with the current market realities, potentially offering more attractive pricing to entice investors.

"To sustain investor interest amid this volatility, the companies may do some adjustments in the IPO pricing, potentially offering more attractive valuations," Anand Rathi Advisors' Rao said.



People shop for colours and other essentials ahead of Holi

PIONEER PHOTO

High demand for Indian products in Holi, says BJP MP

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The festival of colour 'Holi' this year is all set to bring cheer to business communities in the country as it is expected to generate business worth around ₹60,000 Crore for traders and retailers.

For playing Holi with colors, people are demanding white T-shirts, kurta-pajamas, and salwar suits. At the same time, T-shirts with "Happy Holi" written on them are also witnessing steady demand in the market.

According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) Secretary General and BJP MP from Chandni Chowk, Praveen Khandelwal, only Indian-made herbal colors, gugal, water guns (pichkari), balloons, sandalwood, puja materials, apparel, and other items are being sold extensively.

"Along with these, sweets, dry fruits, gift items, flowers and fruits, clothing, furnishing fabrics, groceries, FMCG products, consumer durables, and many other products are also in high demand across markets. Due to increased consumer spending, various business sectors are witnessing a sharp rise in Holi-related sales," he said.

HoliKa Dahan will be held on March 13, while the festival of colors will be celebrated on March 14.

According to CAIT data, the Holi festival this year is expected to generate business worth over ₹60,000 Crore, reflecting a nearly 20 per cent increase compared to the previous year's figure of ₹50,000 Crore.

In Delhi alone, an estimated business of over ₹8,000 Crore is anticipated.

Khandelwal further mentioned that large-scale Holi celebrations are taking place across Delhi and the entire coun-

try, leading to a high demand for venues. As a result, banquet halls, farmhouses, hotels, restaurants, and public parks are fully booked for Holi events.

More than 3,000 Holi Milan celebrations of varying scales are being organised in Delhi alone, bringing visible joy and enthusiasm among the people. Several business, social, cultural, and religious organisations are actively hosting Holi Milan events.

The BJP MP Praveen Khandelwal said that similar to previous years, this time too, both traders and customers have boycotted Chinese goods during Holi sales.

Praveen Khandelwal emphasised that India is a land of festivals, and every festival or religious occasion inevitably boosts trade. Holi is expected to stimulate economic activities, benefiting local businesses, small traders, small-scale industries, and the MSME sector in particular. This Holi festival will also prove to be highly beneficial for traders and retailers across the country.

As the festival of Holi approaches, Delhi's wholesale and retail markets are completely decorated and stocked.

Shops are witnessing heavy footfall, especially for gugal, pichkari, and other festive items as expected, sweets shops are experiencing a massive surge in sales, particularly for Holi-special gujiyas and other festive treats. Markets are already embracing the festive spirit with colorful gugal, water guns, gujiya garlands, and dry fruits filling shop displays.

The increasing number of shoppers indicates a strong festive buying trend.

Praveen Khandelwal also noted that it is customary for people to gift dry fruit garlands along with sweets and fruits to their relatives, which has further boosted market activity.



SRM University's collaboration with Carnegie Mellon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Amaravati

SRM University-AP (SRM-AP), Andhra Pradesh announced a transformative five-year collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University's School of Computer Science (CMU SCS), US— one of the world's foremost institutions in artificial intelligence (AI) and cutting-edge research. This strategic collaboration aims to push the boundaries of knowledge, innovation and education in AI-related disciplines, including machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, infrastructure and systems, and AI ethics and policy.

At the heart of this collaboration is a shared vision to foster an ecosystem that nurtures groundbreaking research, cultivates exceptional talent and accelerates advancements in AI-driven technologies.

"CMU's School of Computer Science is excited to work with SRM University-AP on this landmark collaboration to advance research and bolster AI education. Together, we will shape the future of AI and empower the next generation of researchers, educators and industry leaders to push the frontiers of technology and drive meaningful change in society," said Professor Martial Hebert, Dean of CMU's School of Computer Science.

As part of this collaboration, SRM University-AP's research faculty and researchers will have the opportunity to engage directly with the esteemed faculty and researchers at CMU's School of Computer Science. They will immerse themselves in CMU SCS's pioneering AI labs, working alongside global experts in key research domains.

This will facilitate research, knowledge sharing and the development of state-of-the-art AI innovations that address real-world challenges.

Dr P Sathyanarayanan, pro-chancellor of SRM University-AP said that "To further strengthen research capabilities, this collaboration will also pave the way to

establish advanced AI labs at SRM University-AP.

These labs will be incubators for novel AI research, fostering a stimulating environment that promotes academic rigor, interdisciplinary collaboration and technological innovation."

Beyond research, this collaboration is designed to enrich the academic experience of SRM-AP's teaching faculty and research scholars.

Selected faculty members and scholars can audit cutting-edge AI courses at CMU's School of Computer Science as visiting participants.

This exposure will allow them to engage with CMU SCS faculty and contribute to developing robust AI curricula at SRM-AP.

They will also gain hands-on experience in designing assignments, worksheets and examinations that mirror real-world AI problem-solving scenarios, enhancing the quality of AI education at SRM University-AP.

Professor Manoj K Arora, Vice Chancellor of SRM University-AP expressed that "In a move that underscores its commitment to nurturing future AI leaders, the collaboration will offer SRM-AP students the opportunity to undertake research internships at CMU's School of Computer Science."

Selected students will spend approx. six weeks each summer immersed in a world-class research environment, gaining first-hand experience in tackling complex AI challenges alongside leaders in the field.

This experience will provide students with unparalleled insights and exposure to global research methodologies, setting them apart in the highly competitive AI landscape.

By leveraging Carnegie Mellon University's SCS's expertise and SRM-AP's commitment to academic excellence, this collaboration will drive innovation, expand knowledge horizons and create a lasting impact on the AI ecosystem between the universities.

Chhattisgarh FM presents 100-page handwritten Budget

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Raipur

In an age where even court rulings are drafted using AI-powered chatbots, Chhattisgarh's Finance Minister OP Choudhary showcased his personal dedication by presenting a 100-page handwritten Budget in Hindi, reflecting his hands-on approach and commitment to the budget preparation process.

Choudhary, a former IAS who quit service to join politics as he saw it as a bigger medium to serve the public, literally burnt midnight oil, hardly sleeping for a couple of hours in the day's leading to the March 4 presentation of the Budget for the fiscal year starting April 1 in the Chhattisgarh Assembly.

The rare act that displayed a sense of ownership and dedication to the state's financial planning and goals stood out, especially since most Budget documents are typically prepared by a team of officials or typed out on computers.

"I was writing my own (Budget)

speech and I realised that a handwritten document expresses my feelings, my emotions, my vision, my commitment, and my attachment more. And so, I thought, I should write in my own handwriting," he said.

A handwritten document reflects the attachment and emotions better, he said, displaying his handwritten 100-page document. Asked how long it took to write the entire document, he said the Budget had been in the works for five-six months but the actual writing on the components of the Budget started about a week or 10 days before the presentation.

"I literally did not sleep for four nights (prior to the Budget presentation). I hardly slept one to one-and-a-half hours in those four nights. And this is when I wrote the Budget," he said. The act, he said, about his personal involvement and commitment to the state's finances. This is perhaps the first time a finance minister has presented a handwritten annual Budget in the Assembly.

India, European Union to hold next round of free trade agreement talks amid tariff threats



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen at the Hyderabad House

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India and the 27-nation European Union (EU) bloc will start the tenth round of negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement from Monday in Brussels amid Trump tariff threats, according to an official.

The talks are expected to focus on

resolving remaining issues so that the agreement can be finalised by the end of this year.

During the recent visit of EU Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maros Sefcovic, the two sides have discussed ways to accelerate efforts towards a balanced and mutually beneficial trade pact.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen last month agreed to conclude the ambitious India-EU free trade deal by this year amid fears of the Trump administration's threat of higher tariffs.

"The two sides are scheduled to hold the tenth round of negotiations for the FTA from March 10-14 in Brussels," the official said.

In June 2022, India and the 27-nation EU bloc resumed the negotiations after a gap of over eight years.

It stalled in 2013 due to differences over the level of opening up of the markets.

The two sides are also negotiating an investment protection agreement and an agreement on Geographical Indications (GIs). According to the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), key sticking points include agricultural tariffs, especially on dairy and wine import duties, automobile tariffs, and regulatory barriers affecting labour-intensive goods. India is reluctant to lower auto import duties and is cautious about committing to EU demands on sustainability and labour standards, it said, adding that services trade remains another contested area, with India seeking easier mobility for professionals and data security recognition under the EU's GDPR framework (European Union's General Data Protection Regulation).

ONGC's OPaL exits from Dahej SEZ, eyes local market

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

ONGC PetroAdditions Limited, a subsidiary of the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), has relinquished its 'only-for-export' unit status as it aims to tap into the booming local petrochemical market to drive a turnaround.

In a stock exchange filing, ONGC said OPaL has received the final approval for its exit from the Dahej Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

"Accordingly, OPaL shall operate as a Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) unit with effect from March 8, 2025," ONGC said. "Further, this exit from SEZ will improve the competitiveness of OPaL for supplies to be made to the DTA."

This essentially means primarily catering to the domestic Indian market instead of focusing on exports, which is the primary purpose of an SEZ unit. It will now not have to pay customs duty on products sold within India, helping improve margins.

The move is primarily to gain access to the wider domestic market and potentially benefit from the lower corporate tax regime. ONGC's C2C3 project extracts ethane (C2) and propane (C3) from the liquefied natural gas (LNG) imported from Qatar. C2 and C3 - the basic building blocks of petrochemicals - are provided to OPaL which uses them to make polymers and chemicals like benzene and butadiene.

High debt and unattractive exports had pushed OPaL into the red. It made a loss of ₹3,546 Crore in the 2023-24 fiscal year and ₹2,392 Crore loss in the first nine months of the current year. To mitigate the situation, ONGC extended financial support. It infused additional equity capital upto ₹10,501 Crore, converted back stopped compulsorily convertible debentures (CCDs) amounting to ₹7,778 Crore and paid ₹86 Crore with respect to share warrants, totaling ₹18,365 Crore. This has led to its stake in the company rising from 49.36 per cent to 95.69 per cent. OPaL dealt with global geopolitical uncertainties "by focusing on the strategic pillars of cost-efficiency programs, innovation, brand building, and distribution in order to sustain growth and profitability and a judicious improvement in the petrochemical export market share," according to its latest annual report.

Cityflo expands to Delhi, plans to deploy 100 buses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Premium app-based commute service Cityflo has launched operations in Delhi, aiming to transform daily travel for corporate professionals. Founded in 2015 by IIT Bombay alumni, the Mumbai-based company has already served over 2.5 Million commuters in Mumbai and Hyderabad.

Cityflo will initially operate on key routes like DLF Cyber City, targeting 100 buses and 80,000 riders in its first year. The expansion is expected to add ₹25 Crore to its topline.

Backed by marquee investors, Cityflo promises a reliable, comfortable alternative to existing transport options.

US tariffs to hit pharma sector, auto minimal effect

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Enhanced tariffs on pharma imports in the United States (US) can severely impact Indian drug manufacturers as it would lead to higher production costs, making shipments less competitive against products from other countries.

Smaller drug firms operating on thin margins can face severe pressure potentially forcing consolidation or closure.

The automobile sector, on the other hand, is expected to have a very minimal impact owing to the US being a small export market.

Terminating India as a very high tariff nation, US President Donald Trump has said that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in on April 2.

India currently levies around 10 per

cent import duty on American drugs, while the US does not charge any import duty on Indian drugs.

Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas and Co Partner Arvind Sharma said as of recent history, the US has been a net importer of pharmaceutical products to meet its domestic demand.

"In the event the US decides to impose substantial tariffs on pharmaceutical imports from India, the impact could send noticeable ripples through the Indian pharma sector and simultaneously disrupt its own domestic consumption," he noted.

Indian pharmaceutical companies supply a substantial proportion of drugs to US residents, with four out of ten of all prescriptions filled in the US in 2022 being supplied by Indian companies.

As per industry sources, overall, medicines from Indian companies provided

\$219 Billion in savings to the US healthcare system in 2022 and a total of \$1.3 Trillion between 2013 and 2022.

Generics from Indian companies are expected to generate an additional \$1.3 Trillion in savings over the next five years.

Sharma stated that India's pharmaceutical industry, at present, significantly relies on the American market, with the US accounting for roughly a third of its total exports.

"A sudden tariff increase could significantly raise the cost of medicines manufactured in and exported from India to the US, making them less competitive against products from other countries," he added.

By imposing tariffs, the US might inadvertently increase its domestic healthcare costs, burdening consumers and, in turn, making healthcare access scarcer,

Sharma stated.

Additionally, in the situation where substantial tariffs are imposed by the US on Indian pharmaceutical products, then that might encourage Indian pharma companies to diversify their export markets, possibly shifting focus to Europe, Latin America or Africa, he said.

Elaborating on the automobile sector, Shashi Mathews, Partner, IndusLaw, said the recent announcements and pushback by the Trump Administration on India's tariff, especially in the auto sector, will have a very minimal impact.

"Reason being that while entry into India may be well protected and thus, heavily taxed, a reciprocal tariff for importing into the US, which is a smaller export market for the Indian automotive sector will not affect us much," he added.

Holistic Beauty in a Hectic Lifestyle

In a conversation with **ABHI SINGHAL**, renowned ayurvedic beauty expert Shahnaz Husain offers vital advice on self-care, achieving radiant skin, and inner balance for women juggling with the relentless pressures of modern life



Since women get less time for themselves, what are some affordable and natural skin care routines that women can perform at home?

Neem is the best skin ingredient that comprises natural sulphur compounds that are good for hair and skin. Prepare Neem water by adding Neem leaves to 5 cups of water, bringing it to a boil, and straining the water. This water is a potent elixir for soothing skin, you can rinse your face with this water daily or use it on your hair to keep your hair and skin healthy. For moisturising and cleansing your skin, milk is the best. Use a cup full of milk and add a few drops of Olive oil to it. Use it on your face for cleansing and moisturizing.

What are some of the biggest skin health mistakes that you see women make, and how can they be avoided?

Often, I have seen women complain about dry, flaky skin with a suntan. This is the result of UV rays damage and sun damage to the skin. Avoiding sunblock even if the weather is cloudy is a big mistake. It is essential to use a good quality sunblock and it should not be less than SPF 40 for better protection. Remember to reapply it every 2 hours. The next biggest mistake would be not exfoliating your skin and forgetting to moisturize it.

How can women in their 30s and 40s maintain youthful skin while managing work and family life?

Managing your skincare schedule between your 30s and 40s is difficult. You can begin with including Vegetable Peel and a Thermoherb mask. These are two specialised skin rejuvenating treatments that have produced good results. Some plant extracts used in the formulation of skincare products are powerful rehydrants like Cactus, Aloe Vera, Seaweed and Ginseng.

On this Women's Day, what message would you like to give to women who struggle to prioritise self-care?

I would like to emphasise that self-care is not limited to surface beauty but comprises of maintaining healthy mind and body. Meditation, yoga, healthy diet, including seeds and nuts in your platter and following a de-stressing activity are all a part of self-care.



IN CONVERSATION WITH **SHAHNAZ HUSAIN**

Women today are often overwhelmed by their multiple roles. What are your top recommendations for quick self-care practices for a busy schedule?

Exposure to sunlight, pollution and irregular dieting results in premature skin ageing. It appears tired, dull, dry and flaky, so regular facials are recommended to help manage the symptoms. The Diamond Facial or Pearl Facial are designed

to provide the skin with ample nourishment and rejuvenate the skin, restoring its elasticity. The Ash of Diamond and Pearl Powder acts as a stimulant and awakens dormant cells, giving life and restoring the natural dynamics of a youthful appearance.

With the abundance of skincare products available, what are the key ingredients women should look for, especially those dealing with stress-related skin issues?

These days, the beauty industry is booming, with numerous new brands coming up overnight, and it is hard to choose the right one that is suitable for your skin. Therefore, you must check the labels that state ingredients like extracts of almonds, apricots, cabbage, Carrot, Wheat Germ, essential oils, Vitamins and other botanical extracts. While choosing creams for skincare and treatments, you must keep a lookout for these ingredients suitable for your skin type.

Many women suffer from stress-related skin issues. What natural remedies do you recommend for healthy skin?

I would like to remind you that our kitchen is a natural pharmacy that is full of countless herbs useful in treating skin-related issues and healthy skin. For instance, Turmeric is anti-inflammatory & antiseptic and helps in maintaining healthy, glowing skin. Mixing a pinch of Turmeric with 1 tsp of curd will help achieve an even skin tone, remove tan. However, you need to keep it on for 15 minutes and then rinse off your skin with water. Also, honey has excellent moisturizing properties. Apply raw honey on your face and let it sit for 20 minutes, and then rinse it off with water. Those who have oily skin can use honey with Rose water and a few drops of Lemon juice. It naturally moisturizes your skin without making it greasy.



Every morning is a hectic morning in a woman's life. The alarm blares, and before the snooze button is even considered, the day begins. After waking up, there is a quick breakfast, a hurried school drop-off, a barrage of work emails, and a mental checklist that grows every minute. This is the reality for countless women today. In all this hurricane responsibilities self-care often takes a backseat. But amidst this chaos, women are reclaiming their well-being, recognising that nurturing themselves is not a luxury but a necessity.

To illuminate the path to healthy skin, we turned to Shahnaz Husain, a luminary in Ayurvedic beauty. She offers invaluable guidance for the time-pressed woman, revealing swift self-care practices, nature's potent remedies, and crucial skincare components. Husain champions a holistic approach, advocating for herbal solutions and stressing the imperative of prioritising personal wellness amidst life's relentless pace.



Skin and Hair: Pre and Post Holi Care



The celebration of colours, Holi, brings excitement, happiness, and a burst of colour. However, your skin and hair may suffer from the harsh chemicals in synthetic colours, extended sun exposure, and frequent water splashes. This is your go-to resource for preserving your attractiveness throughout this colourful festival.

Pre-Holi Care for Skin

Moisturize Generously
Colours are more difficult to remove from dry skin because it absorbs them more quickly. Apply a thick layer of moisturizer, coconut oil, or almond oil. Particular attention should be paid to the hands, elbows, neck, and face.

Apply sunscreen

Since Holi is celebrated outside, exposure to the sun can cause skin damage and tanning. At least half an hour before leaving the house, apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 50 or higher. "A waterproof sunscreen is ideal, as water splashes are inevitable."

Use Very Little Makeup

Steer clear of excessive makeup as it may cause skin discomfort due to colour reactions. To keep your lips nourished, use waterproof lip balm and a mild, tinted moisturizer if needed.

Guard Vulnerable Areas

Use petroleum jelly on your lips, ears, and nails to keep colour from getting stuck in nooks and crannies that can be difficult to remove later.

Pre-Holi Care for Hair



Oil Your Hair

To build a barrier against colours, apply coconut, almond, or olive oil to your scalp and hair. Colours are easier to remove from oiled hair since they can't penetrate the cuticles.

Tie Your Hair Up

To reduce exposure, wear your hair in a ponytail, bun, or braid.

Cover Your Hair

Putting on a cap, bandana, or scarf helps shield your hair from colour fading and keep it from being dry and brittle.

Avoid Heat Styling

Refrain from using heat styling tools like straighteners and curling irons a day before Holi, as they can dry out your hair, making it more vulnerable to colour penetration.

Post-Holi Care for Skin

Use Gentle Cleansers

Do not scrub your skin vigorously to remove colours, as this can cause irritation. Instead, use a mild cleanser or oil-based makeup remover to break down colours before washing your face.

Exfoliate with Natural Remedies

Use a homemade scrub of gram

flour (besan) and yogurt or a mixture of honey and oatmeal to gently exfoliate your skin and remove residual colour.

Apply a Soothing Mask

Aloe Vera gel, curd, or mashed banana masks can help soothe any redness or irritation caused by colours. They also help in restoring the skin's natural moisture.

Hydrate and Moisturize

After cleansing, apply a hydrating serum followed by a thick moisturizer.

Avoid Harsh Chemicals

Do not use alcohol-based toners or harsh face washes immediately after Holi, as they can dry out the skin further and increase sensitivity.



Delhi's Growing Waistline

Delhi faces a critical health challenge as obesity rates surge, transforming the city into an obesity capital, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

World Obesity Day cast a stark light on Delhi's escalating health crisis. The city is rapidly becoming an obesity epicenter, with over 80% of residents in the NCR region classified as overweight or obese. This condition, far from a mere aesthetic issue, acts as a silent killer, significantly increasing the risk of severe health problems.

The consequences are devastating. Obesity fuels heart disease, high blood pressure, type-2 diabetes, and various cancers. Breathing difficulties, infertility, and osteoarthritis are also common. Beyond physical ailments, it takes a toll on mental well-being, contributing to depression and anxiety.

Experts identify a confluence of factors driving this epidemic. Processed foods, sugary drinks, and large portions have become dietary staples. Stress-induced overeating and a sedentary lifestyle, propelled by excessive screen time and limited physical activity, further compound the problem. Urban areas like Punjabi Bagh, Rohini, and South Extension are particularly affected.

"Obesity is not merely a cosmetic concern but a severe medical condition that



can lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and even various types of cancer," stated **Dr Sachin Ambekar**, Medical Director and Director of Minimal Access Surgery at MASSH Hospital. Modern medical advancements, including minimally invasive surgical techniques, offer effective solutions. Tackling this issue requires a collective effort. Promoting healthy eating habits, encouraging exercise, and reducing screen time are crucial.



POST-HOLI CARE FOR HAIR

Rinse with Cold Water First

Before applying shampoo, rinse your hair thoroughly with cold water to remove as much colour as possible. This prevents the colours from further settling into the hair shaft.

Apply a Gentle Shampoo

To gently cleanse your hair without depleting it

of its natural oils, use a shampoo without sulfates. To prevent injury, lightly massage your scalp.

Give Your Hair a Deep Conditioning Treatment

To replenish hydration and nutrients, use coconut or argan oil for an oil massage or a deep conditioning hair treatment.

Steer clear of Instant heat styling

After washing, let your hair air dry naturally. To give your hair time to heal, refrain from using curling irons, straighteners, or blow dryers for a few days.

— **By Dr Shweta Mishra**, Facial Cosmetic & Aesthetic surgeon

WPL: Mumbai Indians to face Gujarat Giants



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

With two games left in the league stage, Mumbai Indians will look to make the most of the opportunity and push for a first-place finish on the WPL points table, starting with the clash against in-form Gujarat Giants here on Monday.

UP Warriorz's win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru by 12 runs knocked the defending champions out from the race to the playoffs on Saturday, confirming the

qualification for Delhi Capitals, Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Giants in the process.

But what remains is the final classification of the points table. Harmanpreet Kaur's MI, who return to the Brabourne Stadium here for the final leg of the third WPL — their home ground where they had won the inaugural edition in 2023 — will look for a top-place finish.

The team that tops the points table at the end of the league round will get a direct entry into the final and MI, who play back-to-back matches on Monday and Tuesday,

will aim to go past DC who are currently at the first spot with 10 points and a Net Run Rate of 0.396.

For MI, topping the table will also help them avoid a possible fourth game in a span of six days — the Eliminator — which could test the squad to the hilt in hot and humid conditions here.

MI are currently third with 8 points and NRR of 0.267 and if they win both these matches — against GG and RCB — they can finish at the top with a maximum of 12 points.

The Giants, currently placed second 8 points and NRR of 0.334, can finish at best with 10 points provided they beat Mumbai Indians, which would place them at even keel with DC. In such a scenario, the NRR will determine how teams are placed on the points table.

The teams that finish second and third will meet in the Eliminator on Thursday, with the summit clash slated to be played on Saturday.

But it won't be an easy task to begin with for MI as the Giants have been on a roll recording three heavy wins on the trot to make it to the final three.

Not only have the Giants' batters been firing in unison, their bowlers have also found their rhythm which makes them a team to beat in this knockout round.

A maiden appearance in the WPL playoffs would certainly inspire the Giants, who turned things around after a dismal start that had them losing three of their first four matches.

On the other hand, MI have four wins and two defeats in six outings so far which has helped them to make their third WPL playoffs. Once again, overseas stars Nat Sciver-Brunt (309 runs and 8 wickets), Hayley Matthews (181 runs and 9 wickets) and Amelia Kerr (10 wickets) have been at the forefront of their charge with skipper Harmanpreet (126 runs) in tow.

For the Giants, the troika of skipper Ashleigh Gardner (235 runs, 7 wickets), Beth Mooney (224 runs) and Harleen Deol (200 runs) in the batting line-up have found strong backing from their bowlers.

West Indies' all-rounder Deandra Dottin (132 runs, 9 wickets) has not really put a foot wrong but the revelation has been India's uncapped Kashvee Gautam (9 wickets) this season. Tanuja Kanwer (7 wickets) is not too far behind.



Paris Saint-Germain wins 4-1 at Rennes in Ligue 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Ousmane Dembélé came off the bench to score twice and help a shaky Paris Saint-Germain win 4-1 at Rennes to stay unbeaten in Ligue 1.

Bradley Barcola got one goal and set up another as PSG moved 16 points ahead of second-placed Marseille, which conceded a stoppage-time goal in a 1-0 home defeat to Lens in the late game on Saturday.

Third-placed Nice can move level on points with Marseille if it beats Lyon at home on Sunday.

PSG coach Luis Enrique rested captain Marquinhos ahead of the return leg at Liverpool in the last 16 of the Champions League next Tuesday. PSG lost the first leg 1-0 despite dominating.

Dembélé was joined on the bench by right back Achraf Hakimi, winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma.

PSG controlled the first half but made many mistakes after the break as Rennes attacked strongly, before Dembélé wrapped up the win late on.

Barcola put PSG ahead in the 28th minute when he placed the ball through goalkeeper Brice Samba's legs. Ludovic Blas almost equalised moments later and 17-year-old striker Mohamed Meité headed against the crossbar.

Barcola broke down the left again and picked out striker Gonçalo Ramos in the 50th for 2-0. Three minutes later, sloppy defending allowed defender Lilian Brassier to pull one back and it galvanized Rennes, which came close to equalising several times. An awful mistake from PSG defender Lucas Beraldo saw him

pass to Meité, giving him an easy chance from six meters. But the young striker hesitated to shoot with his weaker left foot and his tame shot with his right was blocked.

Dembélé's stoppage-time brace took him this season to 20 league goals for the first time.

Canada striker Jonathan David moved onto 14 league goals — third in the Ligue 1 scoring charts — after scoring in Lille's hard-fought 1-0 win against rock-bottom Montpellier.

The win moved fifth-placed Lille level on 44 points with Monaco, which is ahead on goal difference, in the race for one of the four Champions League spots.

Marseille loses to Lens

Marseille's Mason Greenwood — second in the scoring charts with 15 goals — was named as a substitute along with Brazilian winger Luis Henrique. Both players came on at the start of the second half at Stade Velodrome.

Luis Henrique's close-range volley was expertly stopped by Lens goalkeeper Mathew Ryan in the 83rd. Moments later, he made a superb one-handed save low to his right to deny forward Neal Maupay. Marseille paid the price when Lens launched a counterattack in the fourth minute of stoppage time and Colombia defender Deiver Machado teed up Neil El Aynaoui for a fine finish as Lens moved up to eighth.

All the players in Saturday's games had "WO=MAN" written on the back of their jerseys instead of their names as part of the French league's initiative centered around International Women's Day.

Jeneath Wong becomes first Malaysian to win WAAP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Da Nang

Saanvi Somu was the best Indian golfer at tied 38th while compatriots Guntas Kaur Sandhu and Mannat Brar finished way behind at the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific (WAAP) Championship here on Sunday.

Somu, who made the cut for the second year running, shot her second straight 1-under par 70. With rounds of 72-74-70-70, she totalled 2-over for the week.

The 14-year-old debutant Sandhu, who impressed by becoming the youngest Indian to make the cut at WAAP, had a

tough final round with a 7-over 78 and was 9-over to finish 47th.

Her aggression and some good putting helped her pick up 14 birdies, the most among the Indians, but she was held back by lack of experience of playing in strong windy conditions.

Brar, who made the cut after three unsuccessful attempts, had a very rough day when things just did not go her way. She shot 78 and with cards of 67-76-73-78, she finished at 10-over and in 48th place.

Meanwhile, Jeneath Wong, who moved to Australia when she was ten years old and

now plays at Pepperdine University in college golf in the United States, became the first Malaysian to win the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship.

She turned in a superb finish which included a clutch par putt on the 16th, a perfect tee shot to within six inches on the 17th and a great pitch for a 8-foot birdie on the 18th for a round of 68.

Wong, who now gets to play three Women's Majors and a host of other iconic events, totalled 18-under, and won by one shot over Korea's Soomin Oh (66), who made a great charge with a bogey-free 66, but fell short in the face of a nerveless finish from Wong.

Wong finished 18th in her only previous experience in 2022, when she also had a hole in one on the second day. In the final round here in Vietnam, she almost had another one on the Par-3 17th, when her tee shot came inside six inches.

Three Koreans finished in top-four as Sumin Hong (68) was sole third while another Korean Yunseo Yang (66) and Australian Jazy Roberts (66) were tied fourth.

The 2026 Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship will be held in Wellington, New Zealand.



Morikawa birdies final hole for a 1-shot lead at Bay Hill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Orlando

Collin Morikawa made a 12-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole on a baked out Bay Hill course for a 5-under 67, giving him a one-shot lead in the Arnold Palmer Invitational and a chance to win for the first time in 17 months.

Russell Henley on Saturday holed a long bunker shot for birdie on the opening hole, ran off four in a row to start the back nine and had a 67 to finish one shot behind. Corey Connors of Canada missed the 18th fairway, chipped out and made bogey for a 69 and was two back.

Even without much wind and occasional cloud cover, the heat and three days of sun brought a yellow shine to fairways and greens. Birdie putts from a reasonable range rolled out past the hole sometimes 8 feet or more away.

Shane Lowry, the 36-hole leader, got a taste of that at end. His tee shot on the 18th ran so far that only the collar of the rough kept it from rolling out into the water. He had a birdie chance just inside 25 feet and watched that roll 7 feet by the hole.

He managed to hole that for a 76, leaving him six shots behind. Rory McIlroy made bogey on three of his last four holes for a 73 to fall seven shots behind.

Scottie Scheffler tried to stay in range, except that birdies were hard to come by. He came up short on the 13th — a front pin and a crispy green — and went into the rocks. He managed to salvage bogey from that but he could only manage a 71 to fall eight shots back.

Collin Morikawa was at 10-under 206

"You have to hit good shots out there," he said. "It can get you from any direction."

The final hour had Morikawa, Henley and Connors trading spots or sharing time

at the top. Morikawa was the only one to avoid a bogey over the final four-hole stretch. He laid up on the par-5 16th and hit lob wedge and let a 6-foot birdie trickle and swirl into the cup.

He barely touched his 12-foot birdie putt on the final hole. Every shot — trying to keep it in the fairway, on the green and putting — required respect. "Some of these pin locations, I feel I'm having to putt very defensively," Henley said.

Jason Day, who opened with a 76, put himself back in the mix with a tournament-low 64 on Friday and a wild round of 69 on Saturday. He was briefly tied for the lead until closing out the front nine with three straight bogeys. He was losing ground until making three straight birdies at the end, including a 20-footer on the 17th.

His measure of how firm it was from waiting his turn to putt. "Any time you put your putter down and you start sliding on your putter, that's when you know the greens are getting pretty slick," Day said. "They're changing colour and you can kind of start to see the change in color."

Michael Kim had two eagles on the back nine for a 67, joining Tony Finau (68) at 5-under 205. Kim is the only player among the top five going into the final round who is not already exempt for the Masters, and a win would take care of that.

Morikawa is a two-time major champion whose last victory was in October 2023 at the Zozo Championship in Japan. He got back with longtime coach Rick Sessinghaus, and that buttery fade that gives him such great control has been giving him more chances.

Golf Channel reminded him it had been 502 days.

"Thank you for putting that in exact days. I hope you have it in hours and minutes," he said.

Leverkusen loses to Werder Bremen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Berlin

Bundesliga leader Bayern Munich squandered a two-goal lead and lost at home to struggling Bochum 3-2, but Bayer Leverkusen was unable to take advantage.

Leverkusen on Saturday lost 2-0 at home to Werder Bremen, a team that lost its previous five games across all competitions.

The Champions League weighed heavily across the league on a day of upsets.

Borussia Dortmund lost at home to Augsburg 1-0, leading to a chorus of whistles from home fans before the "Black and Yellows" go to Lille for the second leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Wednesday. The teams drew the first leg 1-1 last Tuesday.

Also, Stuttgart was held to 2-2 by Holstein Kiel, and Wolfsburg drew with St Pauli 1-1.

Freiburg drew with Leipzig 0-0 in the late game, denting their hopes of

Champions League qualification. Both needed a win to keep pace with Mainz, which won Friday to boost its qualification prospects.

Wirtz injured

Leverkusen's loss — its second blow this week after Wednesday's 3-0 defeat to Bayern in Munich in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie — was compounded by an injury to star player Florian Wirtz early in the second half.

Wirtz, who had only gone on after the break as a substitute, was unable to continue after a foul from Bremen's Mitchell Weiser in the 52nd minute.

Weiser, who was booked, connected with Wirtz's right foot. Both Leverkusen and Bayern had rested players before they meet again for the second leg of their Champions League in Leverkusen on Tuesday.

Bochum wins in Munich

Bochum is celebrating its first win in Munich since 1991. It was also Bayern's

first defeat at home this season.

Raphaël Guerreiro got Bayern off to a flying start in the 14th minute, but Serge Gnabry missed a penalty shortly afterward when his effort crashed off the left post.

Harry Kane, who'd been rested, usually takes Bayern's penalties. Kane hasn't missed any of his last 30.

Guerreiro made the most of his rare start with his second goal in the 28th, only for Jakov Medic to pull one back three minutes later.

The game tipped in Bochum's favor when Palhinha was sent off in the 43rd for a studs-up challenge on Georgios Masouras' ankle.

Ibrahima Sissoko equalized in the 51st and Matus Bero put the visitors in front in the 71st. It proved to be the winner, but Bochum needed goalkeeper Timo Horn at his best to grab its first away win of the season.

Leverkusen's loss means Bayern still leads by eight points with nine rounds remaining.

Barcelona's Spanish league game postponed after death of team doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

Barcelona's home game against Osasuna in the Spanish league was postponed after the death of first-team doctor Carles Miñarro Garcia.

Fans were informed of the decision around 15 minutes before the game was scheduled to kick off at 9 pm local time (2000 GMT) in Barcelona at Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium on Saturday.

Barcelona said in a statement that it was "deeply saddened to announce the passing of first-team doctor Carles Miñarro Garcia this evening" and

extended its "heartfelt condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time." Barcelona did not immediately provide any details on the cause of death, which local media reports said was due to medical reasons.

"I can't believe it," Barcelona defender Ronald Araújo wrote on X. "Rest in peace, Doc."

The 50-year-old Miñarro Garcia joined the medical staff of Barcelona's first team last season after having previously worked with its futsal team.

Osasuna said it agreed to the request by Barcelona to postpone the match. The Spanish soccer federation confirmed that

the decision was official.

Barcelona club president Joan Laporta said that Miñarro Garcia had died "suddenly" as the team gathered hours before the game. Unconfirmed local media reports said the death occurred at a team hotel.

"The players, staff and coach were all incredibly sad because he was a man loved by everyone," Laporta said.

"We thought it was best to ask for the game to be postponed," Laporta thanked Osasuna and La Liga for their understanding. Barcelona leads the league by one point over Atletico Madrid. The Osasuna game will be rescheduled.

Winning with nine

Alaves held on to upset fifth-placed Villarreal 1-0 despite having two players sent off and an injury scare to goalkeeper Antonio Sivera.

Sivera was one of the Alaves players sent off — in the 58th minute — when he fouled Ayoze Pérez during a one-on-one situation that ended in a frightening collision. Sivera seemed to lose consciousness momentarily when his body went limp on the turf before he recovered and was able to walk off the field. Alaves also lost Antonio Blanco with a second yellow card during 15 minutes of second-half injury time.

Manu Sánchez scored the game's only goal in the 11th minute for Alaves' first home win since November 1.

Real Kashmir FC beats Aizawl FC 2-1 in I-League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Srinagar

Real Kashmir FC moved to third spot in the I-League standings with a hard fought 2-1 win over relegation-battling Aizawl FC at the TRC Turf Ground here on Sunday.

Real Kashmir's fifth straight home win, and fourth in the last five overall, took their tally to 32 points in 18 matches, two behind both Churchill Brothers and Inter Kashi.

With just four matches to go, the title race is set to go down to the wire. On the other hand, Aizawl missed the chance to climb out of the relegation zone. The Reds remained in 11th place with 16 points, one behind SC Bengaluru.

Senegalese Karim Samb (31st minute) put the Snow Leopards ahead before Lalrinzuala (58th) equalised for Aizawl with his ninth goal of the season. Brazilian Paulo César (77th), who came on as a substitute, scored the winning goal for the hosts, who also saved a penalty late on to grab all three points.

It was an end-to-end start with both goalkeepers making some routine saves in the early minutes.

Gradually, Real Kashmir began to boss possession and took the game to the visitors. In the 21st minute, Aizawl almost scored an own goal as Samuel Lalmuanpuia, intending to clear an Ocran Idan corner, flicked a header that went just wide of the far post.

The breakthrough for the hosts arrived through a defensive mix-up from Aizawl in the 31st minute. Karim Samb capitalised on it, burst into the box and slotted it past Md Rafique Ali Sardar to score his fifth goal of the season.

Aizawl began the second half better and found the equaliser in the 58th minute despite it coming due to a goalkeeping error. Lalrinzuala cut inside from the left but shot directly at Mohd Arbaz. What should've been a routine save was spilled by the Real Kashmir custodian and Lalrinzuala, the top Indian scorer of the I-League, was on hand to tap it in from two yards out and restore parity.

The contest became more equal after that and both teams came close to scoring again but were let down by poor finishing.

For Real Kashmir, Mohammad Inam crossed for substitute Paulo César, who headed it agonisingly wide from six yards. At the other end, Lalrinzuala cut it back for an unmarked Lalbiakdia inside the box, but he skied his first-time shot.

Eventually, Paulo Cezar did find the net in the 77th minute and it proved to be the match winner.