

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 knife-point 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.

tation" to jointly oppose the Waqf bill. Ramesh also said the Congress will also keep raising the issue of irregularities in the election process, alleging that elections are "no longer free and fair" and are being "masterminded and orchestrated".

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 Gangghiphal 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.

DoE issues admission guidelines for special schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Directorate of Education (DoE) has issued guidelines for admission to Delhi government-run special schools at the entry level for classes one to nine and 11. The guidelines were issued in a circular released by the directorate last week. As per the circular, all admissions would be conducted online. The directorate also noted that admissions would be subject to seat availability and a draw of lots conducted if applications exceeded the seats available.

As per the guidelines, students who have qualified the previous class from a recognised school will get a direct entry in classes 6 to 9. For those seeking admission in class 6 will undergo an assessment to check their basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Students applying for classes seven and eight, who do not have a degree from a recognised school, will be admitted based on a simple undertaking from their parents. On the other hand, students seeking

admission in class 9 will be required to present the degree from a recognised school. According to the guidelines, the age criterion for admission to government special schools is based on class levels, as on March 31 of the academic year.

The age range is three to seven years for students seeking admission to nursery, four to eight years for kindergarten, five to nine years for class one, six to 11 years for class two, seven to 12 years for class three, eight to 13 years for class four and nine to 14 years for class five. The age limits are 10-16 years for class six, 11-17 years for class seven, 12-18 years for class eight and 13-19 years for class nine.

Students seeking admission to class 11 should be between 15 and 21 years old. They must have also passed secondary school examination (class 10). Students who completed class 10 from National Institute of Open Schooling institutions must have at least 50 per cent in five subjects to opt for humanities without skill subjects, and 45 per cent for humanities



with skill subjects. The guidelines also mentioned relaxations of up to six months in some cases, depending on the class level

and school discretion. For children with disabilities, the DoE highlighted that admission to schools for blind students

required a disability certificate or Unique Disability ID (UDID) card.

For students with intellectual disabilities, admission is limited to those classified under moderate to profound disability based on IQ levels. Priority will be given to students residing in Trans-Yamuna areas due to transport limitations.

For hearing-impaired students, the DoE specified that only those with severe to profound hearing loss (above 61 dB) would be eligible, with additional assessments such as PTA (hearing test) and IQ tests being required.

"If any sibling (real brother/sister) of the applicant is studying in any Government Special School of the Directorate of Education and parent prefers to admit the applicant in the same Special School, details of the sibling of the applicant should be provided in the online registration form. For this, applicant/parent must provide student ID and name of the school (with school ID) of the sibling which may be obtained from the student ID-card/mark

sheet of the sibling or directly from the school where the sibling is studying," reads the circular.

Preference will be given to students who have siblings studying in government special schools. While children residing in Delhi will be prioritised, non-residents can apply for hostel facilities if seats are vacant after admitting the eligible Delhi-based students.

Students transferring from feeder schools with valid documents are exempt from the age criterion and the head of schools may grant a six-month relaxation, if requested by the parents.

According to circular, the children residing outside Delhi can apply. However, priority shall be given to those residing in Delhi and those residing outside Delhi may only be accommodated once all the willing and eligible residents of Delhi are admitted. "In case number of applicants for hostel admission is more than vacancy available, priority shall be given according to distance from school," it said.

Delhi police busts syndicate selling stolen phones to Bangladesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police Cyber Cell has busted an international syndicate of mobile phone thieves indulged in disposing of stolen mobile phones from Delhi/NCR to Bangladesh and has arrested a West Bengal-based smuggler from Salimgarh bypass, Kotwali in Central Delhi area.

Total 48 high-end stolen mobile phones have been recovered from the smuggler, while he was fleeing to West Bengal. The value of recovered mobiles is about ₹20 Lakh. Police said the smuggler has been identified as Abdush (24) and is a resident of Murshidabad, West Bengal.

Police said based on the past investigations, multiple syndicates of mobile phone thieves have been actively operating in Delhi/NCR, specialising in the large-scale smuggling of stolen mobile phones to neighbouring countries, like Bangladesh and Nepal.

"To tackle this growing menace, Cyber Cell of Crime Branch launched an intensive operation to identify and dismantle these syndicates. A dedicated team was deployed to gather credible intelligence, focusing on theft-prone areas such as metro stations, buses and crowded markets, where pickpockets and thieves target unsuspecting commuters. After thorough surveillance, digital tracking and human intelligence, Pankaj Gupta and Rajesh identified key players involved in the illegal trade of stolen mobile phones and received specific information that Abdush stockpiled stolen mobile phones in Delhi," said DCP Aditya Gautam.

A core team of Cyber Cell-led by Inspectors Shiv Ram and Manjeet comprising of Senior Inspector Sumit Kumar and others was constituted under ACP Pawan Kumar to nab the accused. Acting on the lead, the team laid a trap at Salimgarh near CATS Office, Kotwali.

The accused was successfully overpowered, while he tried to flee away sensing the presence police. On search, 48 high value stolen mobile phones were recovered from his bag. Accordingly, he was arrested and the mobile phones were seized, police said.

Investigations revealed that the syndicate ensured that stolen mobile phones are swiftly moved out of Delhi/NCR, making it difficult for law enforcement agencies to trace them. Once stolen, the mobile phones are never sold or used locally to avoid detection. Instead, they are immediately collected by smugglers, who purchase them at a nominal price of ₹2,000-₹3,000 per device. These smugglers then transport bulk consignments to West Bengal, where the phones undergo modifications, before being dispatched to Bangladesh. The syndicate further sells these phones for ₹8,000-₹10,000 each in the illegal cross-border market.

Moti Mahal takes trademark battle to Delhi HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The owner of the iconic Moti Mahal restaurant chain, Moti Mahal Delux Management Services Private Limited, has moved the Delhi High Court against a restaurant operating under the same name in Malcha Marg, Chanakyapuri, alleging trademark infringement.

The court also sought the defendant's response to an application filed by Moti Mahal Delux Management Services Private Limited, which seeks an interim injunction to restrain the use of its brand name. Additionally, the defendant has been directed to submit a written statement in the case.

Represented by Advocate Shreya Sethi, Moti Mahal Delux Management Services Private Limited asserted that it holds trademark rights over multiple brand names, including "Moti Mahal," "Moti Mahal Group," "Moti Mahal Management Services," and "Tandoori Trail." However, the defendant restaurant currently unrepresented in

court continues to operate under the disputed name.

During the proceedings, Justice Bansal acknowledged that the Malcha Marg restaurant had been operational for a significant period. Given that Malcha Marg is a prominent diplomatic enclave, the high court observed that the restaurant's presence in such a



location indicated some underlying basis for its operations. "Since the restaurant has been functioning in Malcha Marg, there must be some rationale behind it," the court noted

before proceeding to issue summonses to the defendant.

This is not the first instance of Moti Mahal Delux Management Services Pvt Ltd defending its brand in court. In December last year, another bench of the Delhi High Court granted the company temporary relief in a similar case against its former franchisee, which was found to be infringing on its trademark and copyright. At the time, the court issued an injunction restraining SRMJ Business Promoters Pvt Ltd from using the disputed trademarks or deceptively similar brand names to market, advertise, or operate any restaurant or catering business.

The court's decision in that case reinforced the principle that businesses operating under a franchising model cannot continue using the brand's name and identity once their association with the parent company ceases. Moti Mahal Delux Management Services Pvt Ltd contends that similar legal principles should apply in the current dispute involving the Malcha Marg restaurant.

Begin office allocation process for new MLAs, says Speaker

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In order to facilitate efficient public service and enable newly elected MLAs to maintain seamless communication with their constituents, the Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta has directed the initiation of the office allocation process for them in their respective constituencies.

As per protocol, constituency offices allocated to former MLAs were vacated following the recent Assembly elections in the national capital.

As the newly elected legislators have taken oath, the process of assigning new offices has commenced to ensure smooth legislative and constituency-related activities. The Assembly Secretariat has instructed the concerned departments to expedite the office allocation process, keeping in mind the specific requirements and requests of the MLAs.

This initiative is aimed at ensuring that the new MLAs can effectively engage with

their constituents and address public concerns without any delays.

"Providing our elected representatives with the necessary resources to serve the people efficiently is our top priority. Assembly constituency offices serve as a crucial link between MLAs and the public, facilitating direct communication and problem-solving. We have taken the necessary steps to ensure that all MLAs receive their offices in a timely manner," Gupta said.

Through these offices, MLAs will be able to engage directly with citizens and take prompt action to address their concerns.

Gupta said that the decision marks a milestone in making Delhi's democratic framework more effective and responsive. "By providing elected representatives with essential infrastructure, the initiative will not only empower them to perform their duties efficiently but also enhance transparency and accountability in governance," he added.

Rekha Gupta interacts with women in RK Puram



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday interacted with women and people living in Bhanwar Singh Camp and Nepali Camp falling under the RK Puram Assembly constituency and sought their suggestions and expectations for the upcoming Viksit Delhi Budget 2025. During interactions, locals have raised the issues relating to water availability, drain desilting, potholes and other issues. The chief minister also ordered the police to take strict action to prevent the ongoing drug trade in the area. Accompanied by MP Bansuri Swaraj and MLA Anil Sharma, the Chief Minister issued strict orders to the local police to take action against drug-related activities in the area and instructed officials to immediately resolve issues related to water supply, drain cleaning,

and road maintenance. Additionally, the local women from the area expressed their gratitude to the Delhi government for approving the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, which aims to empower women and enhance their financial well-being.

Speaking at the event, Gupta said, "The government is actively engaging with citizens across all sections of society to shape the Viksit Delhi Budget. The visit to Bhanwar Singh Camp and Nepali Camp was part of this ongoing initiative."

She reaffirmed that the government's top priority is to ensure that every citizen of Delhi has access to basic amenities. To achieve this, the government is directly engaging with people in even the smallest settlements.

During the interaction, women from the colony raised concerns about the closure of public toilets and the increasing drug problem in the area. In response, the chief minister directed the local police and officials to take immediate action. She further told, "A meeting with the Delhi Police Commissioner would be held soon to devise a comprehensive strategy to eliminate drug trafficking."

Gupta also highlighted that several other critical local issues, such as water supply, drain cleaning, and road repairs, were brought up during the discussion. Officials were instructed to take action to address these concerns.

She reaffirmed the government's commitment to fulfilling all promises made in the election manifesto with dedication and transparency. The primary objective of this public consultation initiative is to engage with the citizens of Delhi, address their concerns, and improve their quality of life. The budget will be designed to cater to the needs of all sections of society, ensuring inclusive and sustainable development across the capital.

AAP making irrational statements: BJP



Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva during 'Spring Festival' at Lodhi Garden in New Delhi on Sunday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday said that after the announcement of a committee to formulate registration rules for the distribution of honorarium under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders are unable to respond from Delhi to Punjab and are making irrational statements out of political frustration.

He stated that the provision of ₹5,100 Crore in the 2025-26 Budget by the Delhi Chief Minister clearly shows that the BJP government will soon begin distributing honorarium to the neglected sections of women in society and will fulfill Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantee. Sachdeva said media and social media reports from Punjab show that after the announcement by Delhi's Rekha Gupta

government, the women in Punjab are asking when the Kejriwal-Bhagwant Mann government will start providing the promised women's allowance.

The Delhi BJP President said for the past 37 months, the AAP has been misleading women in Punjab about the women's allowance, and now women across the country have recognised the party's double standards.

He further stated that seeing the daily statements made by AAP leader Atishi, people in Delhi feel that the song "Choron Ko Saare Nazar Aate Hain Chor" sung by the late Lata Mangeshkar perfectly fits on the AAP leaders, especially Atishi.

The public says it is shameful that the AAP leaders, who have themselves deceived the people, are now questioning the BJP's commitment, Delhi BJP chief said.

AAP, Congress attacks BJP for women scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress on Sunday slammed the BJP for forming a committee instead of delivering the promised cash transfer to women as part of Mahila Samridhi Yojana and called it a blatant betrayal of voters.

With Holi just days away, Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Atishi challenged the BJP to at least fulfill its second guarantee providing free gas cylinders for the festival warning that Modi's credibility is now at stake.

Making these claims in a media interaction, she said, "PM had assured all women in Delhi that ₹2,500 would be credited to their bank accounts by March 8. He had even instructed them to link their phone numbers to their bank accounts, promising that they would receive an SMS confirming the deposit," said Atishi.

Atishi further stated that during Saturday's Cabinet meeting, a four-member ministerial committee was formed to look into the scheme.

Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit said "... We have estimated that if this (₹2,500 of Mahila Samridhi Yojana) is given to all women above 18 years of age in Delhi, it will cost around 20-22 thousand Crores. They have kept only around 5 thousand Crores for this. This means that they are going to give this amount to only one-fourth of the women... A committee was formed, if the committee did not decide the criteria, then how was the Budget allocated..."



RD International School in Rohini celebrated its annual sports day with great pomp and show. On this occasion, Deepti Mathur, Additional Divisional Magistrate Haryana, MLA Kulwant Rana, Mukesh Kumar Meena, IPS were present as guests. The school's chairman, former MLA Jai Kishan presided over the program. Addressing the gathering, MLA Kulwant Rana advised parents to keep their children away from the crimes that are increasing these days and make them good citizens. Speaking on the occasion, Jai Kishan advised students to focus both on their studies and sports

New wave of self-reliance on Delhi streets: CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena honoured seven women, including social workers and paralympians, at an event on Sunday.

Speaking at an all-women bike rally organised in the national capital, the Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the women bikers were a symbol of empowerment. "You have proved wrong those who say women cannot do certain things," she said.

"Shakti se Smriti", this bike rally that has been organised, this is a thing of pride for women of Delhi. An incident had created fear in the minds of the daughters of Delhi. 'Darr Ke Aage Jeet Hai', to give that feeling to people, this bike rally has been organised," the Chief Minister said. Taking to X, Rekha Gupta said that such enthusiastic events not only increase enthusiasm and positivity, but also prove to be a strong step

towards self-reliance and progress.

"A new wave of self-reliance and enthusiasm on the streets of Delhi! Joined the All Women Bike Rally with Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and experienced the vivacity, energy and confidence of the capital closely. Such enthusiastic events not only increase enthusiasm and positivity, but also prove to be a strong step towards self-reliance and progress. The zeal and enthusiasm of the people of Delhi made this event even more special!" she wrote on X.

The seven women who were honoured included Humaira Mushtaq, the first international car racer from Jammu and Kashmir; Divya Kakran, an Arjuna award-winning wrestler; Sweetie Mehta, a domestic violence survivor, who established NGOs for women with similar struggles; Rekha Jindal, who works extensively in the field of drug rehabilitation; Nalini Asthana, who has dedicated herself to teaching computer

to slum dwellers; Kanchan Lakhani, a para-athlete, and Neetu Chaudhary, a social worker.

The bike rally took off from Connaught Place at around 11 am on Sunday. Gupta said the event was being organised annually since 2013. "Before that, Delhi witnessed a major tragedy. Women should not live in fear, because victory lies beyond fear," she said.

The CM also recalled that she used to ride a Kinetic scooter during her university years. Lieutenant Governor said the bike rally was a display of women's courage. He emphasised that women in India are moving shoulder-to-shoulder with men. "In fact, in some areas, they are surpassing men. During the Delhi assembly elections, we witnessed that female voters were more than men," he said.

"Our team is fully committed to making Delhi a developed and better city. We aim for a green, Viksit Delhi," Chief Minister Gupta said.

Sangam water fit for bathing: CPCB

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A new report by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) submitted to the National Green Tribunal has said that as per statistical analysis, the water quality during the recently concluded Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj was fit for bathing.

The CPCB report said the statistical analysis was necessitated because of "variability of data" in the samples collected from the same locations across different dates and on different locations on the same day, because of which these did not reflect the "overall river water quality throughout the river stretch".

The report dated February 28 and uploaded on the tribunal's website on March 7 said the board had conducted water monitoring twice a week from January 12 onwards, including on auspicious bathing days, at five locations on Ganga river and two locations on Yamuna river.

"There is a significant variability in the values on various parameters, viz pH, dissolved oxygen (DO), biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and faecal coliform count (FC) for the samples taken from the same location on different dates. The values of the afore-mentioned parameters also vary at different locations for the samples collected on the same day," the report said.

The DO or the amount of oxygen in water, BOD, which measures the amount of oxygen needed to break down organic



Sadhus take holy dip at Triveni Sangam during Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj

10 locations of "mass bathing" and that 20 rounds of monitoring were done.

"It is submitted that as per the above-mentioned statistical analysis, the median value (central tendency of the data) of pH, DO, BOD and FC for the monitored stretches is within the respective criteria/permissible limits," the report noted.

According to the report, the median value for FC was 1,400 as compared to the permissible limit of 2,500 units per 100 ml, while the DO was 8.7 vis-a-vis the stipulated norm of being greater than 5 milligram per litre, and the BOD was 2.56 against the stipulated limit of less than or equal to 3 mg per litre.

On February 17, the CPCB had informed the tribunal through a report that various locations in Prayagraj during the Maha Kumbh were not conforming to the primary water quality for bathing with respect to the level of faecal coliform.

"The river water quality was not conforming to the primary water quality for bathing with respect to faecal coliform at all the monitored locations on various occasions.

"A large number of people bathe in the river at Prayagraj during the Maha Kumbh Mela, including on auspicious bathing days, which eventually leads to an increase in faecal concentration," the report had said. At present, the matter has been posted for hearing on April 7. Advocate Saurabh Tiwari appeared for the petitioner in the case.

matter in water, and FC, a marker of sewage contamination, are key indicators of water quality.

The report said that an expert committee examined the issue of "variability in data" and said that "the data represents a snapshot of water quality at a specific location and time and may vary significantly depending upon factors such as upstream anthropogenic activities (human actions), rate of flow, depth of sampling, time of sampling, river current and mixing of currents, sampling location and such other

multiple factors". "As a result, these values reflect water quality parameters at the exact time and place from where these water samples were collected, and may not fully represent the overall characteristics of the river, therefore, not necessarily reflecting the overall river water quality throughout the river stretch," it said.

The report also said that because of the variability, a statistical analysis of water quality data of various monitoring locations for the key parameters was undertaken from January 12 to February 22 at



India and Kyrgyzstan Army personnel during the exercise Khanjar-XII 2025

India-Kyrgyzstan special drill to start on March 10

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The 12th edition of the India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces Exercise Khanjar-XII is set to take place in Kyrgyzstan from March 10 to 23. Since its inception in 2011, the exercise has evolved into an annual training event, Defence Ministry said here on Sunday.

Giving details, officials said the alternating venues between India and Kyrgyzstan reflect the unique dimension of the thriving strategic relationship. The last edition of the same exercise was conducted in India in January 2024. The Indian contingent is represented by troops from the parachute regiment (special forces) and the Kyrgyzstan contingent is represented by Kyrgyz Scorpion Brigade. Aim of the exercise is to exchange expe-

riences and best practices in counter terrorism and special forces operations in urban and mountainous high altitude terrain scenarios.

The exercise will also focus on developing advanced special forces skills of sniping, complex building intervention and mountain craft. Beyond rigorous training, the exercise will feature vibrant cultural exchanges, including celebration of the Kyrgyz festival Nowruz. This interaction will further cement the bond of friendship between the two nations.

The exercise will provide an opportunity for both sides to fortify defence ties while addressing common concerns of international terrorism and extremism. The exercise reaffirms the commitment of India and Kyrgyzstan to fostering peace stability, and security in the region.

Rajnath Singh calls for increased R and D in aerospace medicine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday highlighted the growing need for expertise in aerospace medicine in view of the continuous increase in air and space traffic.

He made this assertion after visiting Institute of Aerospace Medicine (IAM) of the Indian Air Force (IAF) in Bengaluru.

He is the first defence minister to visit the institute, defence ministry said here. He was briefed about the unique role of IAM in pilot training, their medical evaluation and aeromedical research.

Rajnath Singh said "From the defence perspective, space has emerged as a major domain in warfare. We have taken a step forward in this direction and mastered the most-advanced technologies such as anti-satellite. India has also become the fastest growing aviation market in the world.

As we are touching new heights in space, we need to explore more possibilities in aerospace medicine. There is a need for increased R and D as research in any high-end complex technology provides benefits to many fields," he said.

The defence minister underscored the importance of aerospace medicine, terming it as critical for dealing with challenges such as micro-gravity, radiation, and isolation faced by a human being in space, while also addressing physical and mental changes.

"Whether it is an issue related to neurons, bone loss or mental problems, it is the responsibility of aerospace and space medicine to tackle these challenges. The field must prepare itself for bigger responsibilities in the future," he said.

The defence minister also said the aerospace sector is going to witness an unprecedented growth in the times to come and it will be pivotal in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047. "The sector is going to play a crucial role in deciding technological advancements, national security, and economic growth. In addition, it will be central in achieving milestones such as satellite launching, inter-planetary missions and commercial space services," he said.

Rajnath Singh also inspected the Dynamic Flight Simulator and High Performance Human Centrifuge used for high-G training of fighter pilots and the Spatial Disorientation Simulator for training the pilots of the Armed Forces to avert the risk of spatial disorientation in flight.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind protest against Waqf Amendment Bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind on Sunday extended support to the protest called by All India Muslim Personal Law Board and other organisations against the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, claiming that Muslims are being forced to come out on the streets to reclaim their rights.

Jamiat chief Maulana Arshad Madani said in the working committee meeting of the organisation on February 12, 2025, it was decided that if the Bill is passed, all state units of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind will challenge this law in their respective state high courts.

Additionally, the Jamiat will also approach the Supreme Court with the confidence that justice will be served, as "courts remain the final recourse for us," he said.

Supporting the protest of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and other national organisations at Jantar

Mantar here on March 13, Madani said that Muslims are being forced to come out on the streets to reclaim their rights.

He said that for the past 12 years, Muslims have shown great patience and tolerance.

"However, now, when the concerns of Muslims regarding Waqf properties are being disregarded, and an unconstitutional law is being forcibly imposed, there remains no other option but to protest," Madani said in a statement.

He emphasised that peaceful protest for one's religious rights is the democratic right of every citizen in the country.

The Jamiat chief further stated that since the introduction of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, "we have been making every possible effort in a democratic manner to convince the government that Waqf is a purely religious matter".

"Waqf properties are donations made by our ancestors for the welfare

of the community, and therefore, we cannot tolerate any government interference in them," he said.

"Muslims cannot compromise on their Shariah at all, as this is a matter of their rights, not just their existence. The current government wants to take away the rights granted to Muslims by the country's Constitution by bringing a new Waqf Amendment Act," he alleged.

"We are going to protest to reclaim the rights and powers granted to us by the Constitution. By bringing legislations like the Waqf Amendment Bill, there is an attempt to infringe upon these very constitutional rights," he alleged.

Maulana Madani said Jamiat has made efforts to make those parties in the government, which call themselves secular and in whose success Muslims have also played a part, that what is happening is very wrong.

"However, now even the central cab-

inet has approved it, which clearly means that these parties have openly supported this Bill," he said.

The Jamiat president claimed that this is a betrayal of the Muslims, and playing with the country's Constitution and laws.

"These parties value their own political interests more than the secular Constitution of the country and the Muslims. Therefore, the parties that claim secularism are equally responsible for what is happening in the country today," he said.

"By assisting openly in pushing the country toward destruction and ruin, their role is far more dangerous than that of the communal forces because they are acting like friends while stabbing people in the back," Madani said.

He appealed to people to join the demonstration in large numbers to not only make it successful but also to show their awareness and commitment to the community's cause.

PM Modi, Nadda visits VP Dhankhar at AIIMS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Health minister J P Nadda on Sunday visited AIIMS here to enquire about Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar.

He was admitted there early morning after complaining of uneasiness and chest pain. He is stable and under observation.

In a social media post, Modi said, "Went to AIIMS and inquired about the health of Vice President Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar Ji. I pray for his good health and speedy recovery".

Dhankhar (73) was taken to the hospital around 2 am.

He was admitted to the Critical Care Unit (CCU) under Dr Rajiv Narang, Head of Department of Cardiology at AIIMS, sources said.

Japanese woman falls to death from 14th floor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurugram

In a shocking incident a Japanese woman was found dead after she fell from a balcony on the 14th floor of an upscale residential society in Gurugram, police said. The body was handed over to the family after an autopsy on Saturday and further investigation is under way, police said. In connection with the matter the police have informed the embassy for further proceedings.

According to the police, the victim Madoko Thamano (34) had come to Gurugram with her husband in September last year. She was living in a society here with her husband and two children. The deceased's husband works in a branch of a foreign bank operating in Gurugram. The incident occurred on Friday morning when the police received a call from society guards regarding a woman's body being found lying on the ground, a police officer privy to the matter said.

Following information a police team was immediately dispatched to the incident spot. "The reason behind the incident is yet to be known. We are investigating the matter from all possible angle. The matter is under investigation," said Inspector Sandeep Kumar, SHO of Sector 53 police station.

Congress pushes for simplified GST 2.0

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

With Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserting that the GST rates will come down further, the Congress on Sunday said any changes in the tax must be more comprehensive than a mere rate reduction and stressed the need for a radically simplified and less punitive GST 2.0.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said his party had envisaged a GST 2.0 a truly "Good and Simple Tax" in its manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, and it remains committed to that vision.

"The ball is now in the Union government's court- will they take this historic opportunity?" Ramesh asked in a statement. "The finance minister has declared that GST rates will be reduced soon.

The Indian National Congress reiterates that any changes in GST must be more comprehensive than a mere rate reduction," he said.

Reducing the tax on caramel popcorn, without fundamentally reforming a system that has three rates of tax for popcorn, is just window-dressing, the former Union minister added. The need of the hour is a radically simplified and less punitive GST 2.0, he said. "The first objective of GST 2.0 must be to simplify the tax slabs. The three-slab tax system for popcorn and the differential tax rates for cream buns and regular buns are only the



Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh

tip of the iceberg," he said.

As the Narendra Modi government's former chief economic advisor, Arvind Subramanian, has acknowledged, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has up to 100 different rates, including cesses, the Congress leader pointed out. "This complexity increases the compliance burden on businesses and the government bureaucracy. The multiplicity of rates has facilitated alarming GST evasion of ₹2.01 Lakh Crore, almost double the ₹1.01 Lakh Crore reported in FY23," he claimed, adding that "18,000 fraudulent entities have been uncovered; many more are likely undetected".

The complexity of the current GST regime reflects a lack of seriousness on the government's part to enforce a truly "Good and Simple Tax", Ramesh said.

"Second, a key issue in recent months has been the slowdown in GST net collections due to high refunds. Data from December 2024 showed that net GST collections, after adjusting for refunds, slumped to 3.3 per cent growth partly due to the 45.3 per cent increase in refunds to taxpayers," he said.

While some part of this increase in refunds is certainly credible, a significant component of these refunds is likely fraudulent, he claimed. "The complexity of the GST system especially when combined with a software system that is ridden with loopholes has allowed for large-scale fraud," the Congress leader alleged. Input Tax Credit (ITC) fraud is particularly common, with more than ₹35,132 Crore worth of fraud identified, amidst a recovery rate of just 12 per cent, he noted.

Weak supply-chain tracking means that buyers can claim ITC without receiving supplies, often using false invoices or inflating turnover to secure fraudulent refunds, Ramesh said. "Minimal validation and the lack of physical checks during online registration also enables the creation of fake companies who seek refunds without actual operations.

Firms have also claimed refunds on exports that are ineligible for such benefits," he said. The inadequate enforcement mechanism for GST needs to be one of the key targets of any reforms, the Congress leader said.

Government yet to receive proposals from HCs to appoint ad-hoc judges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Over a month after the Supreme Court cleared the decks to appoint ad-hoc judges in high courts to deal with rising pendency of cases, the government is yet to receive proposals from respective HCs naming candidates.

Considering a backlog of over 1.8 lakh criminal cases, the Supreme Court on January 30 allowed the high courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength.

Article 224A of the Constitution allows the appointment of retired judges as ad-hoc judges in high courts to help deal with pendency.

Sources said the Union law ministry is yet to receive any recommendation from respective high court collegiums for appointing ad-hoc judges. As per the laid down procedure, the respective high court collegiums send recommendations or names of candidates to be appointed as HC judges to the Department of Justice in the law ministry.

The department then adds inputs and details on the candidates before forwarding the same to the Supreme Court Collegium.

The SC Collegium then takes a final call and recommends to the government to appoint the selected persons as judges.

The president signs the 'warrant of appointment' of the newly-appointed judge.

The procedure to appoint ad-hoc judges will be the same except that the president will not sign the warrant of appointment. But the assent of the president will be sought for appointing ad-hoc judges.

Except in one case, there is no precedence of appointing retired judges as ad-hoc HC judges, sources pointed out.

In a judgement on April 20, 2021 on the appointment of ad-hoc judges in the high courts, the top court had imposed certain conditions.

However, later a special Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant had relaxed certain conditions and kept some in abeyance.

Climate change to intensify, cooling effects may weaken: Scientists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Climate change is growing stronger and more robust and the cooling, counter effects of La Nina may not be effective in a warmer future, climate scientists said, assessing current heat trends seen in large parts of the country.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted an early summer this year, with above-normal temperatures and intense, long heat wave spells.

The country experienced its warmest February since 1901, with the fifth lowest rainfall since 2001, it said.

While human-caused climate change is increasingly driving a 'new normal' marked by a warmer winter and shorter spring, scientists also draw attention to the yearly changes in weather patterns, termed 'year-to-year variability'.

"For example, updates from the IMD this year suggest that it was an unusually dry winter," Arpita Mondal, associate professor at the Centre for Climate

Studies at IIT Bombay, said.

She explained that rain is a natural cooling process that helps bring temperatures down.

Raghu Murtugudde, an earth system scientist and professor at IIT Bombay, said, "I see a global wave of warm and cold temperature anomalies (deviations from expected patterns) during Dec-Feb that are related to the swings of jet streams."

Jet streams are strong winds blowing in the upper levels of the atmosphere and influence weather by shifting north and south.

Mondal said, "Our study finds that a northward shift in these winds during pre-monsoon is directly linked with heatwave character, such as its duration and temperature."

Further, El Nino and La Nina phases of the 'ENSO' natural climate driver also contribute to the overall trends, Vimal Mishra, chair professor of civil engineering at IIT Gandhinagar, said.

"So, under El Nino-like conditions, you

will see warm springs or hot temperatures just after winter, whereas if La Nina prevails, you will find more number of cool or cold days," Mishra said.

Much of the world's weather is significantly influenced by the 'El Nino-Southern Oscillation' (ENSO), involving changes in temperatures and atmospheric pressures in the Pacific Ocean.

An ENSO cycle oscillates between the 'El Nino' warm phase linked with warmer ocean temperatures and its counterpart 'La Nina', transitioning each time via a neutral phase. A cycle typically lasts between 2-7 years.

This week, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) notified that the "weak" La Nina that emerged in December 2024 "is likely to be short-lived".

The UN agency had predicted the La Nina a 60 per cent chance of emerging during July-September, following ENSO-neutral conditions that began in May 2024.

Further, temperatures during March 2024-February 2025 were 0.71 degrees Celsius above the 1990-2020 average, and 1.59 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service said this week.

Sea surface temperatures remained unusually high in many ocean basins and seas, it said.

Murtugudde said, "It's not really a La Nina at all. It has some cold waters in the tropical Pacific (Ocean), but in the critical eastern Pacific, some warm anomalies have persisted. And this only emerged at the end of the year, as opposed to peaking during December-February."

"The patterns are a bit unexpected, but likely related to the record warming of 2023 which is still continuing. We haven't really explained the level of warming yet," he added.

Studies have projected that in a warmer future, El Nino events are likely to become more common and intense, with every one in two of these being an

extreme one. The 2023-24 El Nino, one of the strongest five on record, is said to have fuelled rising temperatures and extreme weather events around the world in the period.

India experienced 536 heatwave days during summer 2024, the highest in 14 years, with the northwestern region seeing the warmest June since 1901, according to the IMD.

Mishra said, "The most robust, important signature is that of climate change. Therefore, even under ENSO-neutral conditions very much likely this year we cannot ignore harsh heatwaves, given that we have already started with quite warm temperatures in March."

In its update this week, the WMO has predicted a 60 per cent chance of ENSO-neutral conditions during March-May 2025.

Further, under climate change, "an El Nino will cause a lot of problems for us, but La Nina may not be able to provide comfort to us," Mishra added.

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 remains, 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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".

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.

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.

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.

"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.

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.

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 — Simrirk Air, Air Dynasty, and Heli Everest — have registered their helicopters with the rural municipality, he said.

'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 welcomed 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.

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.

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 SMALL FINANCE BANK 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:

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS CHANGE OF NAME. I, Gemarbhai Momanbhai Vankar S/o Shri Momanbhai Vankar R/o 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

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



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.



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.

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?

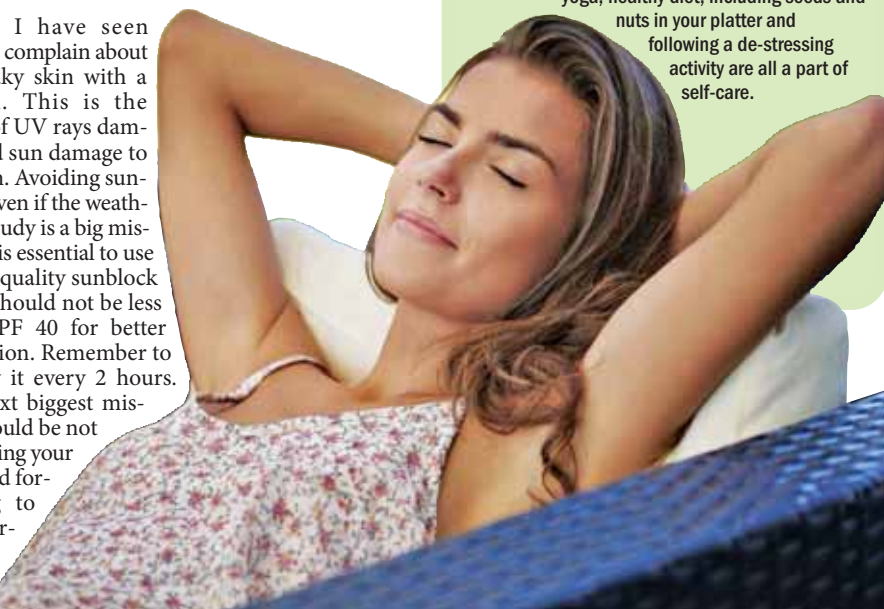
Often, I have seen women complain about dry, flaky skin with a suntan. This is the result of UV rays damage and sun damage to the skin. Avoiding sunblock even if the weather is cloudy is a big mistake. It is essential to use a good quality sunblock and it should not be less than SPF 40 for better protection. 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.



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

