



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta speaks during a felicitation programme organised to mark International Women's Day at Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium PTI

Mahila Samridhi Yojana gets green signal in Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Rekha Gupta-led BJP government in Delhi on Saturday approved the 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana' a welfare scheme aimed at providing monthly financial assistance of ₹2,500 each to poor women, with a Budget allocation of ₹5,100 Crore. Opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) slammed the delay in fulfilling the promise made in the run up to the Assembly elections last month. Announced on International Women's Day, the decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by the Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. The scheme will be overseen by a committee of three ministers led by Gupta. It is estimated that 20-25 Lakh women will benefit from the scheme. The formal announcement was made by BJP National President JP Nadda at an event organised by the BJP Mahila

Morcha at Jawaharlal Nehru stadium to mark the Women's Day after the Delhi Cabinet meeting at Delhi Secretariat. The Delhi government, in a statement following the announcement, said a committee of three ministers Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, Kapil Mishra and Ashish Sood has been formed for implementation of the scheme. The committee will also decide the criteria and other things of the scheme. The scheme will leverage advanced technology to ensure transparency, efficiency, and seamless disbursement of financial benefits. Aadhaar-based e-KYC will be used. The application process is linked to the Aadhaar numbers of the applicants. Eligible applications are required to provide details such as name, location, address and bank account linked with the Aadhaar card, along with information about family members.

"This initiative is a step towards fulfilling our promise to the women of Delhi. By providing direct financial assistance, we are ensuring economic security, greater independence and empowerment for women across the city. This scheme is not just a financial benefit but a commitment to building a stronger, more self-reliant community of women in Delhi," it added. The eligible beneficiaries should be the residents of Delhi and should be between the ages of 18-60, with a family income less than ₹3 Lakh per annum and are non-tax payers. The scheme cannot be availed by government employees or any individual already getting financial help from other schemes run by the government like widow pension, old age pension or any similar assistance.

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India agreed to cut tariffs 'way down': Donald Trump



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House in Washington PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York/ Washington

US President Donald Trump said that India has agreed to cut its tariffs "way down" as he reiterated his claim that the country charges America massive tariffs that make it difficult to sell products there. "Our country, from an economic standpoint and financial standpoint and a trade standpoint, has been absolutely ripped off by almost every country in the world," Trump said in remarks from the Oval Office on Friday. "Canada, Mexico and then you just go right down the line. India charges us massive tariffs, massive, you can't even sell anything into India. It's almost, it's almost restrictive. We do very little business inside," he said. "They've agreed, by the way, they want to cut their tariffs way down now because somebody's finally exposing them for what they've done. And the same thing with China, same thing with a lot of other countries, and the EU has been a terrible abuser of this country," Trump

added. Trump's comments came following Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's visit to the US for trade talks with his counterpart Howard Lutnick. This was the third time this week that Trump has criticised the high tariffs charged by India. On Thursday, Trump said India is a very high-tariff nation and reiterated that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in on April 2. In his address to the joint session of Congress on Tuesday, the first of his second term in the White House, Trump criticised the high tariffs charged by India and other countries and termed them as "very unfair". Addressing lawmakers from the US Capitol, Trump announced that reciprocal tariffs will kick in next month. In the past, Trump has called India a "tariff king" and a "big abuser". Last month, during a joint press conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the White House, Trump said that India has "been very strong on tariffs".

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Death penalty for forced conversion in Madhya Pradesh

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

In a move that has intensified political debates and ideological clashes, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has vowed to introduce the death penalty for those found guilty of forced religious conversions. The announcement, made on International Women's Day, underscores the BJP's escalating campaign against what it terms 'love jihad', a controversial narrative alleging a conspiracy to convert Hindu women under the pretense of marriage. "Our government is committed to protecting our daughters from forced conversions. Such individuals have no right to live in society. Through the Religious Freedom Act, we are working towards introducing the death penalty for those guilty of such crimes," Yadav declared, making it clear that his administration intends to take stringent action against religious conversions deemed coerced. The Congress, has strongly criticised the move, with party MLA Arif Masood accusing the BJP of exploiting religious sentiments and selectively targeting minority communities. "Is the government trying to alter the very essence of the Indian Constitution? If forced conversion is a concern, the law should apply equally to all religions. However, BJP's pattern of targeting a particular community is evident. There are multiple cases of missing girls from various religious backgrounds in Bhopal alone, yet the focus remains singularly on Muslims," Masood argued. Legal experts and civil rights activists have also raised concerns over the proportionality of the proposed punishment. While the existing Madhya Pradesh Religious Freedom Act, enacted in 2021, already imposes strict penalties including up to 10 years imprisonment and an ₹50,000 fine the proposed amendment could set a precedent for capital punishment in cases of religious conversion, a move that has little legal precedent in democratic societies.

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Elderly woman's flight journey turns into nightmare

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

What should have been a routine journey for an 82-year-old woman turned into a nightmare at Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in Delhi. In a tragic incident, the elderly passenger, the widow of a decorated Lieutenant General, landed in the ICU after suffering a brain stroke, following a fall at Terminal 3, after she was allegedly denied a wheelchair which was pre-booked with Air India.

She is being treated for potential brain bleeds. The victim's granddaughter, Parul Kanwar, alleged that no first aid was administered at the airport and that, after eventually being provided with a wheelchair, her grandmother was allowed to board the flight with a bleeding lip and head injuries. The family now says she has been in the ICU for two-days, with the left side of her body showing signs of weakness. The incident happened on March 4 at the Delhi airport, and the passenger later boarded the flight to Bengaluru.

Family alleged when a wheelchair was arranged by the airliner it was too late and passenger boarded without a medical check-up. The flight crew provided ice packs and alerted the Bengaluru airport medical team, where she was given two stitches upon arrival. Family has lodged complaints at DGCA and Air India and awaiting action.

Air India responded amid public outrage and claimed that at no point was the wheelchair or any assistance denied to the passenger. Issuing a detailed statement after investigating the incident, Air India on Saturday said the family members accompanying the passenger had reported at the PRM (Person with Reduced Mobility) desk located near Air India's ticketing office less than 90 minutes before the scheduled time of departure to request for a wheelchair.

"Due to the unprecedented peak demand at that hour, a wheelchair could not be made available within the 15 minutes that the passenger's relatives spent waiting for it," the airline said, adding that the claims of having waited for an hour for the wheelchair are baseless. On their own accord, the passenger decided to walk along with those accompanying her. She unfortunately suffered a fall in the airport premises. Upon noticing the incident, officials of the Delhi Airport, as well as the airport doctor immediately attended to her.

"Upon reaching Bengaluru, the guest was escorted by our staff for further medical attention. At no point was the wheelchair or any assistance denied. Air India's staff cooperated with the guests through their journey. We have reached out to the guest's family and pray for her wellbeing," the airline said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the launch of development works in Navsari, Gujarat PTI

Women empowerment is soul of India: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ahmedabad

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said his government has given topmost priority to women's safety and framed stricter laws and rules to prevent crimes against them, besides making a provision for capital punishment to those indulging in heinous crimes like rape.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaced the colonial-era criminal law (Indian Penal Code), has strengthened the legal provisions related to women's safety and made filing of complaints easier and delivery of justice faster, he said. Addressing a huge gathering at Vansi

Borsli village in Navsari district of Gujarat on International Women's Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that India is walking on the path of women-led development for rapid progress of the country. A security cover comprising only women police personnel was deployed at the event to mark International Women's Day.

"When a girl returns (home) late, her parents ask questions. But they don't do the same when a boy comes late... They should do it. In the past decade, we have given women's safety the highest priority, and in order to prevent crimes against them, we have made stricter rules and laws," the PM said.

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Holi infused with political colours in Aligarh, Sambhal

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Amid the row over Holi celebrations in two important cities of Uttar Pradesh — Aligarh and Sambhal — the State administration is keeping a strict vigil as the issue gained political traction, with BJP MP Satish Gautam declaring, "No one can stop anyone from celebrating Holi inside Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). If any Hindu student faces trouble, I am there to help."

Gautam insisted that no permission was required for Holi celebrations anywhere. When asked about the potential conflicts, he made a strong remark, saying, "Agar koi mar peet karega to usay oopar pahuncha diya jaiga."

The Sambhal local administration has urged both Hindus and Muslims to respect each other's sentiments and also appealed to people to avoid forcibly

applying colours on those who do not wish to participate in the Holi celebrations. The controversy erupted after the administration slotted a time distribution for the celebrations of Holi after which the Namaaz can be offered.

AMU finds itself at the centre of a debate as Holi celebrations return to the campus amid controversy. Following demands from Hindu students and political pressure, the AMU administration has announced that Holi can be celebrated "freely" at the Non-Resident Students Centre (NRSC) Hall on March 13 and 14.

The controversy erupted when a right-wing group accused the University of denying Hindu students permission to hold a 'Holi Milan' function on campus, even as institutions like Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) allow Holi celebrations.

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आवश्यकता है

सर आर० एस० लॉ० कॉलेज का कानून-न्याय विभाग (निकट सैलियामी ब्लाक) फतेहपुर (उत्तर) (संबद्ध- प्रो० राजेन्द्र सिंह (रज्जू बेया) विश्वविद्यालय प्रयागराज) आवश्यकता है (01) स्वयंसेवक योजना के अंतर्गत विधि महाविद्यालय के प्राचार्य - 01 पद (योग्यता एल.एल.एम. 55 फीसदी अंकों के साथ, पीएच.डी./डी. फिल) एवं असिस्टेंट/एसोसिएट प्रोफेसर के पद पर 15 वर्ष का शिक्षण अनुभव) (02) पंचवर्षीय एल.एल.बी. पाठ्यक्रम के सहायक आचार्य विधि 05 पद (योग्यता- एल.एल.एम. 55 फीसदी अंकों के साथ, पी.एच.डी./पी.एच.डी./डी. फिल) (03) विधि संकाय के अंतर्गत अतिरिक्त विधि आचार्य, समाज शास्त्र, दर्शन शास्त्र, राजनीति शास्त्र विभागों के एक - एक पद सहायक आचार्य (योग्यता- पी.एच.डी./पी.एच.डी./डी. फिल) की आवश्यकता है। शैक्षिक योग्यता एवं वेतनमान यूजीसी/विश्वविद्यालय तथा राज्य सरकार के मानकनुसार। नोट - इच्छुक अभ्यर्थी अपने सभी अंक पत्रों एवं प्रमाण पत्रों के साथ विज्ञापन प्रकाशन की तिथि से पन्द्रह दिवसों के अंदर महाविद्यालय कार्यालय के पत्र पर स्वयं या पंजीकृत डाक द्वारा आवेदन करें। साक्षात्कार हेतु सूचना ई-मेल/दूरभाष के माध्यम से दिया जाएगा। प्रवक्ता-न्याय कृष्ण गुप्ता 9415033263, 9969695827 sirslawcollege@gmail.com

Ex-IAS officer's son duped of ₹3.21 cr by Ansal API

Lucknow (PNS): A former IAS officer's son has been allegedly duped of Rs 3.21 crore by Ansal Properties Limited, police said on Saturday. The Ansal group is currently facing scrutiny after the Uttar Pradesh government ordered the filing of FIRs against the company for fraudulent practices and cheating investors out of several crore. A case has been filed at the Hazratganj police station by the son of the retired IAS officer. The complainant, Vyom Varshney, a resident of Mahanagar (Sector A) and the owner of VM PR Infra Developers, alleged the Ansal API's director, in collusion with its employees, of defrauding him of Rs 3.21 crore under the pretense of land dealings. In the FIR, Varshney claimed that Shivansh Infra State Private Limited had purchased a plot measuring 1.93 lakh square feet from Ansal API in Sushant Golf City (Sector J). On December 27, 2012, a payment of Rs 3.21 crore was made to Ansal Properties and Infrastructure based on the agreement. In 2022, Varshney's company, VMPR, bought the same plot from Shivansh Infra State with Ansal API's consent. The entire amount was paid to Ansal and Shivansh Infra State Private Limited. The latter agreed to transfer the plot to Varshney's company, and the transfer took place on June 24, 2022. However, the land was never transferred to Varshney's company, despite paying 30 per cent of the basic cost. Upon investigation, it was revealed that Ansal API did not possess the registry documents for the land. When Varshney sought clarification, Ansal failed to provide any answers. Following the victim's complaint, the Hazratganj police have lodged an FIR against the company's officials.

Youth found dead, kin allege murder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The body of a youth was found on railway tracks in the Gosainganj area here on the intervening night of Friday and Saturday. His family alleged foul play and blocked the road, placing the body outside their house and demanding the arrest of those responsible for his death. The family vowed not to perform the last rites until the arrests are made. The family of Shahnawaz (20), who was a resident of Chandan village in Indiranagar, suspected foul play, claiming there were severe injuries on his hands and legs. Indiranagar SHO reached the scene to speak with the family and other protesters. Shahnawaz's uncle, Rahim, alleged that his nephew's friends were responsible for his death. According to Rahim, Shahnawaz had been taken to a wedding in Gosainganj by his friends, Pradeep and Prabhat, around 8 pm on Friday. The family received the news of his death at around 2 am from the Gosainganj police station. Police confirmed that Shahnawaz's body was discovered on the railway tracks, with visible injuries. Mehboob Alam, a friend of the deceased, revealed that he had received a call from Shahnawaz at 11:13 pm on Friday. During the call, Shahnawaz named Prabhat, Pradeep, and three others from Faridi Nagar, suggesting they were responsible for his distress. Alam mentioned that

Protest erupts after e-rickshaw driver beaten up by police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

An e-rickshaw driver was allegedly beaten by the police in Nishatganj on Saturday. After he fell unconscious, a large group of e-rickshaw drivers, fearing that the victim had died, gathered outside the police post and began protesting. However, the protest subsided after the drivers learned that the victim had merely lost consciousness and was recovering. According to the e-rickshaw drivers' union, if such an incident occurs again, they will take to the streets and block the entire city. The incident occurred around 11 am when the police were taking action to remove encroachments in the Gopal Purwa Chowki area. During the operation, the police allegedly used sticks to dis-

perse the e-rickshaw drivers. The union claimed that Noor Mohammad, an e-rickshaw driver from Preetinagar in Madaion, fell unconscious after being struck by a police baton. The police, however, stated that one individual sustained only minor injuries during the removal of encroachments and was sent to the Civil hospital for treatment. They clarified that reports of his death were false and misleading. The police also confirmed that an inquiry had been initiated against the constable involved in the incident, and he has since been transferred. Irfan Khan, president of the e-rickshaw drivers' union, condemned the police action, calling it completely unjustified. "If an e-rickshaw driver dies due to police brutality, it means his entire family will starve. Why are public service workers like us treated this way? Who gave them the authority to beat anyone? They should follow legal procedures," Irfan said. Irfan further stated, "The livelihood of a victim's family can be destroyed for a long time. If such an incident happens again, the entire union will block the roads across the city." The union leader confirmed that discussions had taken place with the police, and action was being taken against the constable involved. He added that the injured driver had been treated and sent home, and the union would provide immediate financial assistance to the family. A police spokesman confirmed that the accused officer had been removed from duty, and an inquiry was underway.

ve. Prabhat promised to search for Shahnawaz and inform Alam about his whereabouts. Around 2 am, Alam got to know that Shahnawaz's body had been found. The police are currently investigating the case.

LMC spl session marks Women's Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Lucknow Municipal Corporation held a special session for women on the occasion of International Women's Day on Saturday. It was presided over by Mayor Sushma Kharkwal, with Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh and senior officials in attendance. The event honoured women corporators, officials, and safai workers. Kharkwal addressed the gathering, stating that women should be celebrated every day, not just on March 8. She highlighted the contributions of women across all fields, including science and education, and acknowledged the dedication of women officials and corporators. She stressed that societies and countries that respect women thrive. "In India, we call the earth 'Mother Earth'. Today, we have a woman president and a woman governor, showing the significant achievements that have led to these roles. In Lucknow, the mayor and 40 corporators are women," she said. The mayor urged women to strive for independence, encouraging them to stand on their own feet and not rely on others. She also referred to the Women's Reservation Bill, first introduced in 1996, but passed only after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government came to power, granting women 33% reservation. She acknowledged Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's role in ensuring women's safety, claiming that the state has become 'bhay-mukt', allowing women to travel freely at any time. Emphasising the multiple roles of women, she described them as symbols of prosperity, strength, knowledge, love, and pride, and saluted those working for societal change. She noted the progress of women, from once being confined to homes to excelling in various fields, including safai karmacharis. The mayor also spoke about the 'Ek Rashtra Ek Chunav' initiative, aiming to strengthen



democracy, save resources, and promote national development. Meanwhile, International Women's Day was celebrated with enthusiasm in Lucknow, with various events organised by institutions and government departments on Saturday. Lucknow University hosted a two-day event organised by the Institute of Women's Studies in collaboration with Sanskritiki Lucknow. The celebration featured a film screening on women's issues, followed by discussions on gender challenges, social concerns, and cybercrime awareness. Cultural performances by students highlighted women's strength and empowerment. The Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC) honoured 60 women employees for their contributions at 1090 Crossing. The Army Wives' Welfare Association (AWWA) also organised a blood donation camp at Command Hospital, with over 70 women volunteers, including NCC cadets, participating to promote blood donation awareness. At Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Brig (Dr) Jaswinder Kaur Bhatia, the chief guest, emphasised the power of women and encouraged them to overcome obstacles with determination. The university also honoured female teachers, non-teaching staff, and gender champions. Additionally, the Forest department recognised women 'green warriors', and the Institute of Career Studies held a panel discussion on unlocking potential, celebrating the achievements of women like Tehrim Dass. These events collectively highlighted women's empowerment, contributions, and the ongoing efforts to promote gender equality. FELICITATED On the eve of International Women's Day, a ceremony was jointly organised by the Sarojini Nagar Industrial Area Manufacturers Association. Nine exceptional women were felicitated during the event, including Dr Sheetal Sharma, Sonal Gadok, Madhulika Mishra, Pooja Bhatnagar, Prachi Shikha, and Pooja Shrivastava. Patron of SIMA and former chief secretary of the Uttar Pradesh, Alok Ranjan praised the women for their dedication, patience, and passion in their respective fields. He emphasised that women are the backbone of society, and it is our responsibility to recognise and honour their contributions.

BJP Mahila Morcha honours women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

On the eve of International Women's Day, BJP Mahila Morcha workers organised various social programmes at the party's city office located at Gulab Bagh (Sigra) here on Friday in which the workers of Mahila Morcha honoured the women who made their mark in various fields. Along with this, the workers of Mahila Morcha pledged to donate eyes under the banner of Saksham Sanstha, and also inspired others to donate eyes. Bharatiya Janata Party state secretary Meena Chaubey, who was the chief guest, said to make a society strong, women had to be empowered. "Women empowerment means giving women their rights, education, employment and freedom, so that they can live their life on their own terms and can build a strong nation by becoming self-reliant," she said, adding that the Narendra Modi government has launched many schemes for empowerment of women, who are half of the country's population. "By giving the slogan of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Prime Minister Modi has changed the mindset of male dominated society," she added. UP State Commission for Protection of Child Rights member Nirmala Patel said that the main objective of celebrating International Women's Day was to remember the achievements and contributions of women and to reach out to the people and to increase awareness among society about the challenges faced by women so that they could also get equal status in society. On this occasion, under the leadership of Mahila Morcha regional president Namrata Chaurasia and city president Kusum Patel, 50 women pledged to donate

their eyes under the banner of Saksham Sanstha. Apart from this, more than 100 women who made their mark in various fields of society were honoured by Mahila Morcha. Earlier, the activists of Namami Gange performed the aarti of Bharat Mata in Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham premises. Region coordinator and municipal corporation's Swachhata Brand Ambassador Rajesh Shukla said that for the achievement of the resolution of developed India, women should be respected every day, not just on one day. PANEL DISCUSSION A workshop-cum- on 'Accelerate Action: Empowering Women and Girls for Equality' was organised by Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Banaras Hindu University), to mark the International Women's Day on Saturday. In her keynote address, Linki Mishra, vice-president (technology delivery) Thomson Reuters, Bengaluru said equal leadership meant equal representation, power, rights and influences amongst genders. ORIENTATION PROGRAMME Dr Ashutosh Mohan from Institute of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University, said that the National Education Policy-2020 was like a bouquet of diverse knowledge for the students. "This bouquet of knowledge will not only increase the glory of knowledge but will also prepare it for the challenges to come in the future," he said in his keynote address at an orientation programme organised on NEP under IQAC at DAV PG College here.

Second phase of Shri Bade Hanuman Temple Corridor to begin after Holi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

The first phase of the Shri Bade Hanuman Temple Corridor, located near the Sangam, was completed ahead of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. In this phase, the temple's high boundary wall, entrance gate, and decorative paintings on the walls were finished. The second phase will involve the renovation of the pavilion, peak, and sanctum sanctorum of the temple. Work on this phase is set to begin after Holi and is expected to be completed within two to three months. The grand corridor of the Bade Hanuman Temple, also known as the Lete Hanuman Temple, has been constructed in the Sangam area. Although Phase-1 was completed before the Maha Kumbh, the construction of Phase-2 was postponed due to the bathing festivals. The Prayagraj Development Authority is set to complete the temple in the next couple of months. This is one of the most prominent temples in Prayagraj, attracting millions of devotees. Temple priest Suraj Pandey noted that during the Maha Kumbh, lakhs of devotees visited the temple. Navneet Sharma, chief engineer of the Prayagraj Development Authority, explained that due to the vastness of the temple's corridor and the ongoing bathing festivals, it was decided to complete Phase-1 first. This phase involved the construction of large gates and a spacious courtyard on both sides of the temple. Sharma further stated that the construction of Phase-2 will begin soon after Holi and is expected to be completed in the next two to three months. This phase will include the beautification of the temple's peak and pavilion, which will feature carvings in red sandstone. Special artisans from Rajasthan will be brought in to carry out this intricate work.

ited the temple daily. Even on regular days, 5,000 to 10,000 people visit the temple, with the number increasing on Tuesdays and Saturdays. During the Maha Kumbh, several high-profile dignitaries, including President Droupadi Murmu, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and others, visited and worshipped at the temple. Navneet Sharma, chief engineer of the Prayagraj Development Authority, explained that due to the vastness of the temple's corridor and the ongoing bathing festivals, it was decided to complete Phase-1 first. This phase involved the construction of large gates and a spacious courtyard on both sides of the temple. Sharma further stated that the construction of Phase-2 will begin soon after Holi and is expected to be completed in the next two to three months. This phase will include the beautification of the temple's peak and pavilion, which will feature carvings in red sandstone. Special artisans from Rajasthan will be brought in to carry out this intricate work.



The two-day Bougainvillea Festival, organised by CSIR-NBRI, was inaugurated on Saturday by Additional Chief Secretary (Horticulture & Food Processing) Babu Lal Meena, in the presence of Pierrick Fillon-Ashida, First Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to India.

Annual Yadupati Singhania Memorial Lecture today

Kanpur (PNS): Dr Gaur Hari Singhania Institute of Management and Research will host the inaugural 'Annual Yadupati Singhania Memorial Lecture' at the Merchants Chamber auditorium on Sunday, honouring the legacy and contributions of its founding Chairman, the late Yadupati Singhania. At a press conference, Partho P Kar, Joint MD of JK Enterprises Ltd, and Dr Rahul Goyal, Director of GSH-IMR, spoke about Yadupati Singhania's legacy. They highlighted that Yadupati Singhania, an alumnus of the IIT, Kanpur, made significant contributions to the world of technology. His pioneering initiative, JK White Cement, established India's first limestone-based white cement facility, utilising the revolutionary dry-process method. Abhishek Singhania, Chairman of GSH-IMR, along with the Management Committee, decided to make the 'Annual Yadupati Singhania Memorial Lecture' a tradition. This lecture series will invite renowned experts in science to speak on various topics, serving as a tribute to Yadupati Singhania. Dr Priya Abraham, one of India's leading scientists in COVID-19 vaccine research, will be the chief orator for the lecture. Dr Manindra Agarwal, Director of IIT, Kanpur, will also be present as the guest of honour. Additionally, Partho P Kar shared that a monograph (book) on Yadupati Singhania's life will be released at the event. The book will celebrate his life, work, and achievements in the industry. This event will bring together academicians, intellectuals, industrialists, and scientists, providing a platform for discussions on critical issues related to education, science, and technology—topics aligned with the values and principles championed by Yadupati Singhania.

DM discusses 'Lucknow Darshan' plan with officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

District Magistrate Visakh G has directed the preparation of 'Lucknow Darshan' plan aimed at offering tourists a structured way to explore the city's art, culture, heritage, and cuisine. A meeting was held on Saturday to discuss the plan with officials. The initiative will include various routes around the city, incorporating major historical buildings, heritage gardens, religious sites, and famous local crafts such as chikankari. The plan also aims to showcase Lucknow's renowned culinary delights by including popular restaurants along the routes. The DM emphasised the impor-

tance of creating an organised tourist experience that will not only improve tourism but also boost local businesses and create employment opportunities. Special focus will be on arranging heritage walks in areas like Hussainabad and surrounding regions, with the use of double-decker buses to make the tour more attractive for children and tourists. The plan will also aim to highlight Hazratganj and the Heritage Zone, with ongoing development and beautification works to attract more visitors. Visakh G urged the municipal and district officials to ensure the creation of detailed route plans and wide-scale publicity to maximise tourist engagement.

Women's Day celebrated at Nazareth Hospital

Prayagraj (PNS): The Nazareth Hospital family came together to celebrate International Women's Day with a session on women's health on Saturday. The event, held in the hospital premises, featured Dr Priti Srivastava (MBBS, MS) from the department of obstetrics and gynaecology as the keynote speaker. Dr Srivastava shared insights on women's health, emphasising the importance of regular check-ups, early detection of medical conditions, and overall well-being. The session aimed to raise awareness and

empower women to take charge of their health. The session also featured a performance by the third-year nursing students, who presented a song centered on the theme of women's empowerment. Other doctors in attendance included Dr Rinku, Dr Rashmi, Dr Meetu, Dr Vrinda, Dr Sohini, Dr Sonali, Dr Anirvina, and Dr Shahida. Director Vipin D Souza congratulated all the women present and applauded their contributions to healthcare.

CM Yogi lays foundation for MS IDC in Noida

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gautam Buddha Nagar

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Saturday, laid the foundation stone of Microsoft India Development Centre (IDC) in Noida. It will be Microsoft's largest research and development (R&D) hub outside its headquarters in USA.

With IDC at NOIDA spread in 15 acres, UP has joined Hyderabad as Microsoft's key hub.

Chief Minister Yogi called it a landmark moment for the information technology (IT) sector in Noida and North India. He emphasised that Microsoft's investment reinforces UP's position as a top investment destination.

Besides laying the foundation stone for the Microsoft IDC, the chief minister also inaugurated the artificial intelligence (AI) engineering centre of MAQ Software on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, he remarked: "I am told that Microsoft's India Development Centre will be its largest research and development hub outside its headquarters. With this new campus, UP is set to become Microsoft's next major base after Hyderabad."

Extending his best wishes to Microsoft chief executive officer and chairman Satya Nadella and his team, Chief Minister Yogi praised the company's strong presence in North India.

He stated that Microsoft already has a presence in UP, with ongoing programmes in Noida. He emphasised that the new centre, spread across 15 acres, will further establish Microsoft's stronghold in both UP and North India.

"Our government, under the guidance of Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi, has embraced the vision of a 'New Uttar Pradesh for a New India' over the past eight years," he said.

Speaking about the Noida IDC, the chief minister highlighted that it will not only strengthen India's technical ecosystem through AI and cloud computing but also



help in effectively implementing Prime Minister Modi's vision on the ground. "This centre will serve as a hub for innovation in AI, cloud computing and cyber-security," he added.

Chief Minister Yogi emphasised UP's massive population scale, stating, "We have successfully reformed, performed and transformed by combining scale with speed."

He mentioned that in order to support businesses and investments, the state has implemented 33 sectoral policies to improve ease of doing business. To attract and facilitate investments, the state has launched the Nivesh Mitra single-window clearance system, offering over 500 clearances. He added.

"Every investor signing an MoU benefits from an online monitoring process, ensuring transparency. Additionally, all investment incentives are distributed through an online system," he explained.

The chief minister highlighted UP's significant role in the manufacturing sector, stating that the state now accounts for 65 per cent of mobile phone manufacturing in India.

He also emphasised that UP leads in electronic component production, con-

tributing 55 per cent nationwide. "Noida and Greater Noida are rapidly emerging as hubs for electronic manufacturing," he added.

Discussing the positive outcomes of government initiatives, Chief Minister Yogi mentioned the successful integration of AI during Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, the world's largest human gathering. "We made extensive use of AI, making it a major centre for AI-driven technology. As a result, over 66 crore devotees participated safely in the holy event," he said.

He also spoke about UP's progress in digital governance, ensuring efficient ration distribution through e-PoS machines in villages. "Through direct benefit transfer (DBT), government schemes now reach beneficiaries transparently, eliminating corruption," he stated. He also highlighted the successful implementation of the e-office system in the state secretariat.

The chief minister highlighted his government's commitment to making UP's youth digitally empowered. "Under the Vivekananda Empowerment Scheme, we have distributed smartphones and tablets to 50 lakh young individuals," he pointed out.

'Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, Guru Gobind true heroes of India'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gautam Buddha Nagar

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Saturday, said that Maharana Pratap, Veer Shivaji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji were the true heroes of India not Mughal rulers Akbar or Aurangzeb.

He said the attitude of all the Mughals towards the Hindus was the same whether it was Akbar or Aurangzeb.

"Akbar can never be a hero. Whether it was Akbar or Aurangzeb, their mind-set towards Hindus was the same and they conspired against India's eternal traditions. In contrast, Maharana Pratap sacrificed everything to protect Sanatan culture," the chief minister said.

Chief Minister Yogi unveiled a grand statue of Veer Shiromani Maharana Pratap in Dadri on Saturday. Addressing a public gathering, he paid tribute to Maharana Pratap's unmatched dedication to self-respect, faith and the nation, calling him a "true national hero".

The event, held at Maharana Pratap Stadium in the NTPC complex, saw Chief Minister Yogi recount the valiant legacy of Maharana Pratap in great detail. He also highlighted the bravery of Rana Sanga. During the event, the chief minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for 97 development projects worth Rs 1,467 crore for Gautam Buddha Nagar, further boosting the region's progress.

The chief minister paid tribute to Maharana Pratap, highlighting his unwavering dedication to his motherland and faith. "Instead of surrendering for power, he chose self-respect," the chief minister said, recalling that at the age of just 28 years, Maharana Pratap faced Akbar's mighty empire in a battle.

Referring to the Battle of Haldighati, he emphasised that a warrior who fought a massive army with just 20,000 soldiers is "our true hero".

"Haldighati made Maharana Pratap a national icon. He not only reclaimed Mewar's lost territories but also forced Akbar to retreat," he added.

He also praised Chetak, Maharana Pratap's loyal horse, calling its devotion legendary. "Even today, the soil of Haldighati is revered as a sacred site, symbolising India's great heritage," he noted.

Chief Minister Yogi also lauded Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Guru Gobind Singh, calling them true national icons. "Those who do not respect these great leaders suffer from a distorted mindset and need correction," he remarked.

He urged the younger generation to draw inspiration from these warriors, saying that Maharana Pratap's life teaches us never to compromise on self-respect and faith. "This is why the entire nation still remembers him," he added.

The chief minister spoke about the recently concluded Maha Kumbh and the ongoing Holi celebrations in Braj. He stated that between January 13 and February 26, a record-breaking 66.3 crore devotees participated in the Maha Kumbh without any untoward incidents, calling it a testament to both India's culture and security. Discussing the Rangotsav of Braj, Chief Minister Yogi remarked that foreigners are amazed to see the spirit of unity in India, where people of all backgrounds celebrate Holi together without discrimination.

He also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, emphasising that faith is now creating new opportunities for livelihoods, and India's rich cultural heritage is becoming a foundation for prosperity. Yogi criticised those who spread misinformation about Maha Kumbh. "The more attempts were made to create doubts, the stronger was the faith of Sanatan followers, as they arrived in even greater numbers to take a holy dip at Sangam in Prayagraj," he said.

Journalist shot by bike-borne men

Sitapur (PTI): A regional reporter for a Hindi daily was shot dead by bike-borne assailants on the Sitapur-Delhi National Highway here on Saturday, police said.

The attack occurred on the overbridge near the Hemptur railway crossing, within the Imalia Sultanpur police station area.

According to the police, the assailants opened fire on Raghendra Bajpai (35) while he was commuting on his motorcycle. "Three bullets struck him in the shoulder and chest. The assailants then fled the scene on their motorcycle," said Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Sitapur, Praveen Ranjan Singh. With the assistance of local residents, police transported Bajpai to a nearby hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead on arrival. Bajpai's family told media outlets that he had received threatening phone calls in recent days. "Evidence collection has commenced and the district borders have been sealed to apprehend the perpetrators. Call details and other legal proceedings are underway," ASP Singh said. The body has been sent for a post-mortem examination, he added.

BOY KILLED IN SCUFFLE DURING WEDDING

Ballia (PTI): A 15-year-old boy was killed and another was injured following a dispute over a dance at a wedding function here, police said on Saturday.

The deceased was identified as Krishna Rajbhar (15), police said. The incident occurred in the Chakkhan village during a wedding function. A dispute broke out while the victims, including Rajbhar and another relative, were dancing. Superintendent of Police of Ballia Omvir Singh said. The bride's father told the reporters that during the Jaimala ceremony, some people attacked the victims. Rajbhar, the groom's cousin, was killed and another relative was injured. Singh said that upon receiving the information police rushed to the spot and sent the body for post-mortem. A case was registered against four people under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Meanwhile, the villagers blocked the Gorakhpur-Ballia highway in Sikandarpur town on Saturday demanding the arrest of the accused of this incident.

Govt: Remarkable transformation in lives of women, girls in UP

Lucknow (PNS): On Women's Day on Saturday, the Uttar Pradesh government claimed that the state has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the lives of women and girls and the initiatives taken by the state have played a crucial role in the uplift and empowerment of women.

With a sharp decline in crimes against women, quick action on women's issues, and progressive welfare schemes, the government has brought positive change to millions of lives. Several flagship schemes have emerged as a protective shield for women, ensuring their security, dignity and self-reliance.

It pointed out that programmes like Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana, National Livelihood Mission, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, BC Sakhi Yojana, and Bijli Sakhi Yojana have been instrumental in empowering women financially and socially. At the same time, safety measures such as the Anti-Romeo Squad, Pink Booths and One-Stop Centres have created a secure environment for women across the state.

The Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana has helped over 23.24 lakh girls in UP by supporting their health and education and promoting gender equality. Under Mukhyamantri Bal Seva Yojana, nearly 19,000 children affected by COVID-19 and around 65,000 other eligible children have received assistance.

Under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership, over two lakh women have benefited from the PM SVANidhi Yojana, which supports small businesses. The UP State Rural Livelihood Mission has formed nearly nine lakh self-help groups, 58,000 village organisations, and 3,000 cluster-level federations, helping over 95 lakh women in rural areas.

The government has also provided over one lakh women with government jobs and allocated 2,500+ fair price shops to women's self-help groups under the public distribution system (PDS). Additionally, more than 60 lakh mothers have received benefits under the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana. The BC Sakhi initiative has empowered around 40,000 banking correspondents, who have handled transactions worth Rs 31,000 crore and earned Rs 85 crore in profits, enhancing women's financial independence across the state.

The one-stop centres have provided assistance to over two lakh women and girls facing distress, helping them rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society. Additionally, the 181 Women Helpline has supported more than seven lakh women across the state.

Demonstrating its commitment to women's welfare, the Yogi government has built 1,100 pink toilets in 189 urban areas, ensuring better hygiene and safety for women. To support destitute widows, the government provides a monthly pension of Rs 1,000, benefiting 34.14 lakh women. Furthermore, state-run shelter homes offer protection and self-reliance opportunities for destitute and abused women.

AMU says students can 'freely' celebrate Holi at NRSC Hall on March 13-14

PTI ■ Aligarh

Amid demands for allowing Holi celebration on the Aligarh Muslim University campus, its administration has decided that students can do so "freely" at the Non-Resident Students Centre Hall, an official said.

A controversy erupted a few days ago after members of a right-wing group accused the university administration of denying permission to Hindu students to organise a Holi Milan function on campus and demanded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention. Later, local BJP MP Satish Gautam declared that "no one can stop anyone from celebrating Holi inside the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) campus".

"If any Hindu student faces any problem in celebrating Holi on campus, I am there to help them," he had said. Student leader Akhil Kaushal had submitted an application to the AMU administration, requesting approval for a special Holi celebration at the Non-Resident Students Centre (NRSC) Hall on March 9.

Late on Friday, the NRSC Hall provost Professor Brij Bhushan Singh told reporters that any university student could "freely" celebrate Holi at the hall on March 13-14. He also said there was an AMU board examination scheduled for March 9.

"So, I think it would not be appropriate if any student comes (here) and plays Holi on that day. March 10, 11 and 12 are working days and there will be classes... March 13-14 are holidays and everyone is welcome to play Holi," Singh said.

Established in 1943, the NRSC is a centre for non-resident male students of the university from undergraduate to PhD. It is a centre for sports, literary, hobbies and cultural activities. According to the university website, the NRSC has been a symbol of communal harmony and cultural exchange.

Local Congress leader and former Aligarh MLA Vivek Bansal accused the BJP of "deliberately" stoking controversy and called the episode "unfortunate". Bansal, an AMU alumnus, shared his personal experience, saying, "We always used to celebrate Holi with friends at AMU and I never recollect any bitterness or opposition on this issue from anyone. Then why is the BJP engaging in provocative politics and trying to disturb the peace?"

AMU chief spokesperson Professor Vibha Sharma said the university always had a beautiful tradition of celebrating Holi and all other festivals in which students, teachers and non-teaching staff got together and shared the joy.

"Special permission for any such celebration has never been sought and we

never felt the need for such a formal function. It is our continuing endeavour that this spirit of friendship should always continue," Sharma said.

When contacted on Saturday, AMU proctor Mohammad Waseem Ali confirmed the provost's statement.

"As always, the doors of the NRSC would be open for all bona fide non-resident students to come and celebrate Holi on March 13-14," he said.

A senior university official told PTI, "We are very proud of our tradition of celebrating all festivals in the spirit of brotherhood. Last year, however, we had an unpleasant experience when some Hindu students sought permission for a special function."

"Despite our refusal, some external anti-social elements who had nothing to do with any bona fide student barged into the campus and started harassing women students near the Zakir Hussain College of Engineering," the official said.

He added that it could have led to a serious breakdown of law and order on a working day when classes were underway. Fortunately, the crisis was averted. "Since then, we have become increasingly cautious on such occasions," the AMU official said.

Expressing happiness over the development, the BJP's Uttar Pradesh spokesperson Rakesh Tripathi said Holi would now be celebrated in AMU as well.

UP ATS arrests J-K man for 'anti-national' activities

Moradabad (PTI): The Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) of Uttar Pradesh Police arrested Ulfat Hussain, a resident of Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch, on charges of anti-national activities.

As per a press statement, the arrest was made on Friday following intelligence gathered by the ATS, Saharanpur unit, and allied agencies, which indicated Hussain's alleged involvement in terrorism and his 'wanted' status in connection with a case lodged in 2001. This case involved charges, including attempted murder (307 IPC), Arms Act violations, POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) violations, and the CLA (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, read the statement.

Hussain was also wanted in connection with the recovery of a cache of weapons and explosives in 2001, including an assault rifle, hand grenades, timers, detonators, explosive material, and live cartridges. A permanent warrant was issued this year for his arrest, and a reward of Rs 25,000 was also announced. Investigations revealed that Hussain is allegedly a member of the Najab Jahanuddin terrorist organisation.

Minister plays down circle officer's remarks on Holi, Juma namaz

Sambhal (PTI): Uttar Pradesh minister Gulab Devi on Saturday played down the remarks of a circle officer that Holi comes only once a year, whereas the Juma namaz takes place 52 times a year and said in a democracy, everyone is entitled to an opinion. The secondary education minister, who is the MLA from the Chandausi Assembly constituency (reserved for Scheduled Castes) in Sambhal district, also said all communities should celebrate their festivals together and maintain peace and order.

Talking to reporters at the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) district office here, Gulab Devi, when asked about the remarks of Sambhal CO Anuj Chaudhary, said, "In a democracy, everyone is entitled to an opinion. I think there is no such thing in it. How many times do we get the opportunity to have Juma in a year and Holi comes once a year, so both sides should celebrate their festivals together and also maintain peace and order." The minister also said that "Dharam Yogis are sitting in the country and in the state (apparently referring to Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath) and hence, there is Ram Rajya".

The mahant of the Kshemnath Teerth in Sambhal, Yogi Dinanath (who is also associated with the Nath sect) told reporters, "Anuj Chaudhary has not said anything wrong. He has explained this for maintaining law and order."

Meanwhile, in a post in Hindi on X on Friday night, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav asked, "If officials who should not differentiate between people embracing each other on Holi and Eid speak negatively, how will harmony be protected under the rule of the divisive BJP?"

Chaudhary told reporters on Thursday: "Holi is a festival that comes once a year, whereas Friday prayers take place 52 times a year. If anyone feels uncomfortable with the colours of Holi, they should stay indoors on that day. Those who step out should have a broad mindset as festivals are meant to be celebrated together."

He emphasised the need for communal harmony and strict vigilance to maintain law and order.

बैंक ऑफ इण्डिया BOI		POSSESSION NOTICE	
Whereas, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of India under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest, Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 (2) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, had issued a Demand Notice, calling borrower to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of same. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the properties described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section 13 (4) of the Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on the dates mentioned hereunder. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the properties and any dealings with the property lies will be subject to the charge of the Bank of India for mentioned amount and interest thereon. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.			
S. No.	Name & Address of the Borrowers & Guarantors	Description of Immovable property mortgaged / Owner of the property	Amount etc as mentioned in the Notice u/s 13(2) Date of Demand & Possession Notice
1.	Borrower: Mr. Shailesh Kumar Singh S/o Ram Niranjan Add: Village-Iolepur, Pargana - Meeranpur Tehsil-Sadar Sultanpur-228001 Co-borrower: Mrs. Vandana Singh W/o Shailesh Kumar Singh Village & Post Hamjabad, Tehsil-Jaunpur Sultanpur-228132 Guarantor: Mr. Hari Prasad Singh Add:- Village & Post Ravaniya Sultanpur -227813	EQM of property situated at plot No-50mi (Area 2040 Sqft) Village Iolepur, Pargana- Miranpur, Tehsil sadar, Sultanpur, UP-228001 Owner:- Vandana Singh w/o Shailesh Kumar Singh Boundaries:- East: Road West: House of Ram Kumar, North:- Road, South: Plot of Izhar Ahmad	Rs. 10,69,753.97 + Interest & other charges Demand Notice dt. 29.10.2024 Possession Notice dt. 07.3.2025

यूनियन बैंक Union Bank of India		Regional Office : 117/11-1/240, Pandu Nagar, Kanpur	
Head Office : 239, Vidhan Bhawan Marg, Nariman Point Mumbai		Public Notice Branch : Generalganj, Kanpur	
Here by this is to inform that under named borrower has not repaid principal and interest thereon of the loan. Therefore the loan become NPA on below Dated . A notice under section 13(2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 was issued at last known address, which was returned undelivered. Therefore we again inform to under named borrower/ Guarantor by this public notice to repay the loan amount due including interest and other expenses as mentioned in this notice within 60 days from the date of publication of this notice otherwise bank will take action u/section 13(4) of the SARFAESI Act 2002.			
The borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of 13 of the act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets, that after publication of public auction/inviting quotation/tender/ private treaty your right to redeem the secured assets will not be available.			
Name and Address of Borrower / Guarantor and Security agreement with brief description of securities/N.P.A. Date & Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice			
Borrower : M/s Ayushi Enterprises, Address : 156B-1, Dada Nagar, Kanpur and Shadipur Bhawanipur, Ramnagar, Mandhana, Bithoor, Kanpur and also at 55A, Udyog Nagar, Dada Nagar, Kanpur. Proprietor : Ms. Ayushi Verma D/o Shri Ajeet Kumar, R/o : 103, Subedar Nagar, Bithoor, Kanpur. (Near Sahid Bhagat Singh P.G. College). N.P.A. Date : 29-12-2024 • Demand Notice Date: 10.02.2025 Property : Residential Property Abadi Land, Abadi House Situated at Subedar Nagar, Bithoor, Distt. Kanpur. Owner of Property : Ms. Ayushi Verma D/o Shri Ajeet Kumar, Area : 106.22 Sq. Mtr. and Covered Area 28.98 Sq. Mtr., Bounded -North : House Owner Chhotey Lal Valmiki, South : House Owner of Lucky Tiwari, East : 8 Ft. Kharnja Road, West : Donor House and House of Vimal Dixit. O/s Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 26.96,184.95 + Intt. + Others Charges			
Date : 09-03-2025		Place : Kanpur Authorised Officer, Union Bank of India	

STATE BANK OF INDIA			
R.B.O. 3, AGRASEN CHAURAHA, JAIL ROAD, FATEHPUR, 212601			
Branch SBI Industrial Estate Barua (09338) Distt. Fatehpur 212664			
PRE-POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Property) (Under Rule 6(1) Of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rule 2002			
Whereas, the undersigned being the authorized officer of the State Bank of India, R.B.O.-3, Agrasen Chauraha, Jail Road, Fatehpur, 212601, under the securitization & Reconstruction of financial assets and enforcement of security interest act 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under sub section 13(2) & 13 (12) read with rule 8 & 9 of the security interest (enforcement) Rules 2002, issued Demand Notices calling up on the borrower /guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notices with further interest expenses and other charges etc. thereon within 60 days from the date of said notices. The Borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to borrower/guarantor in particular and public in general and that undersigned has taken possession of property described herein below in exercise of power conferred on him/u/s 13 (4) of the said act read with rule 9 of the said rule on the date mentioned and there against the borrower/guarantor in particular and public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with property any delinks with property will be subject to charge of State Bank of India, R.B.O. 3, AGRASEN CHAURAHA, JAIL ROAD, FATEHPUR, 212601, under for Branch SBI Industrial Estate Barua (09338) Distt. Fatehpur 212664 for an amount and interest and other charges thereon mentioned against each account here in below.			
Borrower Name, Guarantor & Address	Account Details Outstanding Amount	Details of property Boundaries	
01. Mr. Ajay Kumar S/o Mr. Ram Sharan Vikal & Mrs. Bhullu Devi Saroj W/o Mr. Ram Sharan Vikal Add.: House No. 579-B, Mohalla - Murain Tola Civil Lines Fatehpur U.P. 212601	State Bank Of India, Branch SBI Industrial Estate Barua (09338) Distt. Fatehpur 212664 A/C No.: 38703945568 Demand Notice dt: 02.01.2025 Possession dt: 07.03.2025 Outstanding Amount: Rs. 28,17,909.98 (Rupees Twenty Eight Lakh Seventeen Thousand Nine Hundred Nine and Ninety Eight paise only) + and further Interest, Costs etc.	Property (House) in the name of Mr. Ajay Kumar S/o Mr. Ram Sharan Vikal & Mrs. Bhullu Devi Saroj W/o Mr. Ram Sharan Vikal Add.: House No. 579-B, Mohalla - Murain Tola Civil Lines Fatehpur U.P. 212601 Admeasuring 168 sq. mtr. registered in the office of sub registrar Fatehpur Distt. Fatehpur on Book No. 01, Zild No. 1409, Page No. 381 to 392, at serial No. 6519 on 16.12.1998 Boundaries: North: Plot Of Rama Shankar Srivastava. South: Road. East: House of Jay Shankar Srivastava. West: Kabirdast. (As per Sale deed).	
Dated: 09.03.2025		Place- Fatehpur Authorised Officer, Fatehpur, State Bank Of India, RBO-3, Fatehpur	

Enhance female workforce for economic growth: Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday underscored the need for increased participation of women in the workforce as the country moves towards becoming the world's third-largest economy.

Speaking on the occasion of International Women's Day at a national consultation organised by the Women and Child Development Ministry, Murmu emphasised that providing equal opportunities in education and employment is crucial for achieving this goal.

"As India progresses towards becoming the world's third-largest economy, the participation of women in the workforce must increase at the same pace," she said.

She stressed that a "self-reliant, independent and empowered woman" is key to building a 'Viksit Bharat'.

"The vision of a Viksit Bharat is our collective aspiration and we must work together to achieve it," she said, urging everyone to support women at every step towards self-reliance and success. Highlighting the contributions of Indian women, Murmu said, "Our daughters are making immense contributions in realising the dream of a Viksit Bharat."

It is imperative that society provides them with an even better environment to progress. She called for creating a society where every girl and boy feels safe and is free to make independent life choices without fear. "We must build an ideal society where no child, be it a son or daughter, hesitates to travel alone or live independently at any time," she said, adding that a culture of respect for women will foster a progressive social environment and enhance national confidence.

On the challenges women face in balancing work and family, Murmu questioned the perception that women may be less committed to their jobs due to childcare responsibilities.

"Is not society responsible for the well-being of the children who will shape our



Droupadi Murmu speaks during inaugural session of 'Nari Shakti Se Viksit Bharat' in New Delhi PTI

future?" she asked. She emphasised that a mother's effort in raising responsible citizens should be recognised and respected rather than seen as a limitation.

"A mother, through her dedication, can shape her children into ideal citizens," she said. President Murmu marked 50 years of International Women's Day celebrations, acknowledging the remarkable progress of women in this period.

"There is no doubt that women have made unprecedented strides over the last five decades. My own journey from a modest background in Odisha to Rashtrapati Bhavan is a testament to the opportunities for equality and social justice available to women in India," she said. She expressed confidence that examples of successful women would continue to multiply. She commended the government's continued efforts toward women's empowerment, highlighting initiatives like the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam', which provides reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

"This is a historic step towards women's political empowerment," she said. The President also spoke about economic empowerment schemes such as self-help groups and the 'Lakshmi Didi' programme that aim to enhance financial independence among women. "The Namo Drone Didi scheme is another example of how women are being equipped with technical skills and financial stability," she said. Murmu called for a collective shift in mindset, emphasising that women and men are equal partners in progress. "In our tradition, both Shiva and Shakti hold equal importance one cannot exist without the other. If one wheel of a chariot does not function properly, how will the chariot move forward?" she said. She urged society to recognise and support women's potential. "Whenever we have honoured the talent of women, they have never disappointed us," the President said.

Nadda emphasises on comprehensive healthcare

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Health Minister JP Nadda on Saturday said the Centre is focused on providing healthcare that is preventive, curative, palliative and rehabilitative. Inaugurating the third "International Symposium on Health Technology Assessment (ISHTA 2025)" at Bharat Mandapam here, Nadda emphasised the vision and commitment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in strengthening India's healthcare system and ensuring accessible and affordable healthcare for all.

He highlighted the critical role of Health Technology Assessment (HTA) in advancing evidence-based policymaking to build an efficient, equitable and high-quality health system, aligned with the goals of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Nadda highlighted that the "government is focused on providing healthcare, which is preventive, curative, palliative and rehabilitative". He informed that the Centre has laid an emphasis on primary, secondary as well as tertiary healthcare. He noted that 22 state-of-the-art AIIMS have been established till now

and there has been a substantial increase in the number MBBS and MD seats, along with a rise in the training of paramedic and nursing staff.

Nadda said the Union government will add 75,000 seats in the medical sector, with 30,000 seats already created last year. The health minister noted that HTA India resource centres are spread over 19 states and these serve as an important mechanism for priority setting and have helped immensely in achieving various health goals, such as for tuberculosis (TB) detection, optimising healthcare costs and incorporating evidence-based data in national health programmes.

On the occasion, Nadda released several key resources, including the Open Real-Time PCR Kit for Diagnosis of Pulmonary Tuberculosis (Quantiplus MTB FAST Detection Kit developed by Huwel Lifesciences), the HTA Technologies Compendium, the HTA Costing Database as well as the Patent Mitra initiative.

"With the launch of these flagship initiatives, our country is taking a significant leap towards supporting our innovators. This platform is designed to provide crucial support to scientists, researchers

and institutions, ensuring that their ground-breaking works are protected through patents and made available to the public through seamless technology transfer," he said. Nadda also highlighted that the "Medical Education Patent Mitra" initiative of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) aligns with the Med Tech Mitra initiative, a testament of the ICMR's commitment to advancing medical innovation.

He concluded his address by saying that HTA helps in reinforcing the Centre's commitment to providing inclusive, affordable, equitable and accessible healthcare for all. "HTA will play an important role in the realisation of Viksit Bharat by 2047, as envisaged by our prime minister," he said. The event was organised by the Department of Health Research (DHR), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) India Country Office and the Centre for Global Development (CGD).

This year, the theme of the symposium was "Bridging Evidence to Policy: Health Technology Assessment for Affordable Healthcare".

Congress urges Centre to address Trump's tariff claims in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Congress on Saturday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take Parliament into confidence on United States (US) President Donald Trump's claims that India has agreed to cut its tariffs.

The Opposition party's general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh asked whether the interests of Indian farmers and manufacturers are being compromised. "Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is in Washington DC to talk trade with the Americans. Meanwhile, President Trump says this," he said in a

social media post.

US President Donald Trump said India has agreed to cut its tariffs "way down" as he reiterated his claim that the country charges America massive tariffs that make it difficult to sell products there.

"What has the Modi Government agreed to? Are the interests of Indian farmers and of Indian manufacturing being compromised? The PM must take Parliament into confidence when it resumes on March 10," Ramesh said. Both houses of Parliament will meet on Monday as the second part of the budget session resumes. In the video shared by Ramesh, Trump is heard saying, "Our country, from an economic standpoint and a financial standpoint and a trade standpoint, has been absolutely ripped off by almost every country in the world Canada, Mexico, and then you just go right down the line."

"India charges us massive tariffs. You can't even sell anything in India. It is restrictive. We do very little business inside. They've agreed. By the way, they want to cut their tariffs way down now because somebody is finally exposing them for what they've done," Trump goes on to say in the clip.

Trump has been threatening several countries with reciprocal trade tariffs ever since he assumed charge as US President.

Army Chief highlights 'high degree of collusivity' with China and Pakistan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a veiled reference to China and Pakistan, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Saturday said there is a "high degree of collusivity" which must be accepted. "What it means, as far as I am concerned, the two-front threat is a reality," he said regarding proximity between China and Pakistan.

During the session, he fielded a broad range of questions about the army's preparedness for the future, lessons from ongoing conflicts, the situation in Bangladesh, and at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the Line of Control. "Now, the second thing that you have brought out is collaboration or the relationship between our western neighbour and Bangladesh."

"As far as I am concerned, since I have said that the epicentre of terrorism is in a particular country, they have a relationship with any of my neighbouring country, I should be looking worried, because as far as I am concerned, the terrorism route can be used from that country also, which is my major concern as of today," General Dwivedi said, when asked about reports suggesting growing proximity between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The General said it was "too early" to take a call on the role of Bangladesh, where a change in government may bring about a change in the relationship between it and India.

"Because as far as I am concerned, I am very clear, the present military to military relationship is very strong. And, we exchanging note on regular basis, to avoid any kind of a misgiving," he added.

He was also asked how the Indian Army looked at the Pakistan-China equation. "What we have to understand is that. We have to be very clear that there is a high degree of collusivity, which we must accept."

In terms of the virtual field, it's nearly 100 per cent, in terms of physical, I would say most of the equipment there is of Chinese origin," the Army Chief said.

"So, this is the situation as of today, as far as collusivity is concerned."

What it means, as far as I am concerned, the two-front threat is a reality for me," he said. In January 2021, the then Army Chief General MM Naravane too said that when it comes to Pakistan and China, "the threat of collusivity cannot be wished away."

General Dwivedi also spoke about the situation along the LAC in eastern Ladakh since the Special Representative-level (SR-level) meeting in December 2024, following an agreement that was finalised between the two countries last year.

I think assassin's mace has lived through its life.

It may not be more relevant today. And, if you see, as far as the terrain of the Himalayas is concerned, the terrain plays a very favourable role as far as India is concerned.

"The second issue is, you may have

superiority in anything, but what is important is at the point of application, are you able to amass that kind of resource application, strength and the impact which is required," he said. "I think that way, Indian Army is adequately poised to take care of that," he said.

The Army Chief, however, called for "coexistence, cooperation and coordination" to opine it was not good for the countries to engage in a war.

"Is the war in interest of both the countries? The answer is no. So, what we are looking at is, how can we harmonise. The situation as of today, and manage it till the diplomatic situation come out," he said.

The last Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) and SRs meeting took place in December.

After that, the foreign secretary again went to China to witness a "lot of positive signalling" from both sides.

The next Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) meeting should be taking place soon, he said.

On a query on the Depsang and Demchok areas, the General said the second and third rounds of patrolling have taken place, and both sides are cooperating with each other.

"We inform each other, there is no issue at all. Grazing, which was required to be carried out, has been opened up. Whenever there is some kind of a difference, they immediately contact each other resolve the issue and get over it," he added.

On the current situation along the Line of Control (LOC), the Army Chief said that since 2018, terrorist-related incidents were down by 83 per cent, as has recruitment been.

The foothold of Amarnath yatis has increased to five Lakh, he said. He said that 60 per cent of terrorists neutralised by Indian armed forces last year were of Pakistan origin.

Of the remaining in the valley and south of Pir Panjal, about 80 per cent are Pakistani terrorists, he added.

"So, there is no let up as far as western adversary is concerned," the Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi said.

All the same, the general batted for "friendly relations" with the neighbour and peace in that country, as well as its transformation from the "epicentre" of terrorism to a stable nation.

He added, "I keep saying, we are always prepared. We will be assertive, but we'll be only aggressive in case we are forced to." On the role of women in the army, the General said, "Yesterday, only I have given the sanction for the Territorial Army to induct women."

And we want this number to increase. Changes that you will see will be gradual."

On the Agnipath scheme, the Army Chief Upendra Dwivedi said, "Let me assure the countrymen that this scheme is proving to be a great success. Creme de la creme coming to us."

PM's social media features extraordinary women

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Marking International Women's Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media handles were taken over by a group of extraordinary women who have excelled in diverse fields, from chess to science to rural entrepreneurship and financial empowerment to accessibility and inclusive development.

Each of them shared their journeys, highlighting the power of India's 'Nari Shakti' and the strides being made towards a more inclusive and empowered nation.

Chess grandmaster R Vaishali, farmer-entrepreneur Anita Devi, nuclear scientist Elina Mishra, space scientist Shilpi Soni, accessibility advocate Anjee Agarwal, and rural entrepreneur Ajaita Shah took over Prime Minister Modi's social media accounts on International Women's Day.

Vaishali, who has been playing chess since the age of six and is the sibling of grandmaster Praggnanandhaa, encouraged young girls to follow their dreams. "Playing chess has been a learning, thrilling, and rewarding journey for me. But there is more. I want to give a message to all the women out there, especially the young girls. Follow your dreams, no matter the hurdles. Your passion will power your success," she wrote from Modi's account on X. She also emphasised family support, acknowledging her parents and brother for their encouragement.

Bihar's Anita Devi, a farmer-entrepreneur, shared her journey of self-reliance and rural empowerment. She narrated

how her venture, Madhopur Farmers Producer Company Limited, has created livelihood opportunities for hundreds of women in her village.

"The women working with me are not just earning a living but also gaining confidence and self-respect. Economic independence strengthens women's social status," she posted. With the recent announcement of a Makhana Board, she is now exploring opportunities in makhana (fox nut) production to expand rural entrepreneurship.

Scientists Elina Mishra and Shilpi Soni highlighted the importance of women's participation in science, urging more women to pursue careers in nuclear and space technology.

"India is the most vibrant place for science, and thus, we call upon more women to pursue it," they wrote. Mishra, a nuclear scientist, has worked on projects involving proton accelerator technology and medical applications for remote healthcare.

Soni, a space scientist with ISRO for 24 years, has contributed to over 35 communication and navigation missions, including India's indigenous space technology advancements. Anjee Agarwal, an advocate for universal accessibility, called for a stronger push towards a more inclusive India under the 'Sugama Bharat' initiative. "Let's ensure that every woman, every individual, can navigate their life with dignity and independence," she posted.

With over three decades of experience, Agarwal has led accessibility audits and policy advocacy efforts to improve infra-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi PTI

structure for persons with disabilities. Ajaita Shah, founder and CEO of Frontier Markets, delivered a message on financial empowerment and rural entrepreneurship for women.

"A financially empowered woman is a confident decision-maker, independent thinker, architect of her own future, and a maker of modern India!" she said. She emphasised technology's role in women's financial inclusion and skilling, highlighting the 'Meri Saheli' app as a tool supporting rural women entrepreneurs.

After their messages, PM Modi reflected on their inspiring journeys. "Since morning, you've all seen inspiring posts by extraordinary women sharing their own journeys and inspiring other women. These women belong to different parts of India and have excelled in different areas, but there's one underlying theme the prowess of India's Nari Shakti."

Their determination and success remind us of the boundless potential

women hold.

"Today and every day, we celebrate their contributions in shaping a Viksit Bharat," he said in a post on X. PM Modi, in his Women's Day message, paid tribute to 'Nari Shakti' and reaffirmed his government's commitment to women empowerment through various schemes and programmes. "We bow to our Nari Shakti on #WomensDay! Our government has always worked to empower women, reflecting in our schemes and programmes."

Today, as promised, my social media properties will be taken over by women who are making a mark in diverse fields!" he posted on X before handing over his social media account for the day. This is not the first time the prime minister has taken such an initiative.

In 2020, on Women's Day, he handed his social media accounts to seven women achievers, giving them a global platform to inspire others.

Planned disruption not appropriate for democratic values: Lok Sabha Speaker

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Jaipur

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said on Saturday that consensus and dissent are the strengths of democracy, but planned disruption in Assemblies and Parliament are not appropriate for democratic values. Birla reiterated that Legislative institutions must become centers of discussion and dialogue to ensure accountability to the public. He was addressing public representatives and other dignitaries at the launch of the 'Constitution Club of Rajasthan'.

The event was also attended by Chief Minister of Rajasthan Bhajanlal Sharma, Speaker of Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha Vasudev Devnani, Union Minister of State for Agriculture, Bhagirath Choudhary, MPs, MLAs and other dignitaries. Lok Sabha Speaker remarked that the Constitution Club is not just a building, but a platform to guide democratic discourse, thoughtfulness, and policy-making. He added democracy is not confined to elections but advances through continuous dialogue and consensus.

Birla hoped that the club will elevate policy-making and good governance to new heights. He mentioned that the concept of the Constitution Club in Delhi was conceived in 1947 during the drafting of



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Rajasthan CM Bhajanlal Sharma at the launch of Constitution Club of Rajasthan in Jaipur PIONEER PHOTO

the Constitution where the need for a platform for informal discussions and policy dialogues was felt. Birla noted that the Constitution club in Rajasthan will also become a key center for democratic dialogue and debate, providing legislators with an opportunity to openly discuss ideas, policies and governance.

Observing that the Constitution of India is not just a compilation of laws,

but a guide for the entire world, Birla said that over the past 75 years, many transformative changes have occurred under its guidance.

Saying that meaningful dialogue and healthy debates must take place in Parliament and Assemblies, Birla underlined that personal allegations and deliberate disruptions are against the core spirit of democracy.

World's first commercial space satellite launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The world's first commercial space surveillance satellite, capable of tracking objects as small as five centimetres orbiting the Earth, was commissioned on Saturday as it captured images over South America, the Bengaluru-based start-up Digantara said. Digantara had launched the space surveillance satellite Space Camera for Object Tracking (SCOT) on January 14 aboard SpaceX's Transporter-12 rocket. The satellite started operations on Saturday. "Space just ran out of hiding spots," the start-up said in a post on X.

In a statement, the company said the SCOT satellite achieved first light on Saturday and its inaugural image while passing over South America a breathtaking view of Earth's limb, with the city of Buenos Aires glowing against the planet's curvature.

"SCOT's first image is more than a technical milestone, it's a symbol of our team's resilience and unwavering commitment to safeguarding Earth's orbits for generations to come," said Digantara CEO Anirudh Sharma.

Women police take charge of security at PM's event

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

As over 1.5 Lakh women gathered in a Gujarat village for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Lakshmi Didi' programme on Saturday, around 2,500 female police personnel took charge of security, ensuring the mega event proceeded smoothly.

In the first such initiative in the country, the entire security cover for the event venue at Vansi Borsi village in Navsari district was provided by only women police officers and constables to mark International Women's Day. Their male peers were deployed for parking and traffic management services, said officials.

Women police personnel were in charge of security at every step during the programme right from Modi's arrival at the helipad till the conclusion of the event during which Modi addressed a sea of women, interacted with beneficiaries of the 'Lakshmi Didi' scheme and felicitated them with the Lakshmi Didi certificates.

Women police personnel have made the security arrangements for the Lakshmi Didi programme, said Additional DGP Nipuna Torwane, who supervised the work of the all-women team. "Since this is a very high-level programme, all precautions have been taken for its security. From constabulary to higher-ranking officials



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with 'Lakshmi Didi's' in Navsari in Gujarat

have been making arrangements, carrying out rehearsals and giving point-to-point briefings over the security arrangements for the last three days," she said.

As many as 2,145 women police constables, 61 women inspectors, 187 women sub-inspectors, 19 women deputy superintendents of police, 5 women superintendents of police, and a deputy inspector general-rank official handled the security from the front, officials said.

An official release quoted State Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi as say-

ing that the decision to make women in charge of security at such a high-profile event would be a milestone not only in Gujarat but in the entire country in policing and law and order.

"This initiative will give a strong message to the world on International Women's Day and it will also convey how women play an important role in making Gujarat a safe and secure state," Sanghavi added. The minister said this would be a historic initiative in India concerning law and order.

Three civilians found dead near waterfall in Kathua

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

A fresh wave of terror gripped the remote hilly area of Lohai Malhar in Billawar tehsil of Kathua district on Saturday soon after the recovery of dead bodies of three civilians, including a young boy near a waterfall.

The dead bodies were spotted with the help of drone cameras in the upper reaches of Billawar during massive combing and search operations launched by the joint team of security forces in the area.

So far, security forces have not ruled out the role of suspected foreign terrorists behind these civilian killings.

According to police the civilians identified as Varun Singh (15), son of Chamel Singh, a resident of village Dehota, Yogesh Singh (32), son of Shori Lal and Darshan Singh (40), both residents of Marhoon, went missing while they were heading to a marriage function in Lohai Malhar area on Thursday.

This is the second such incident since February 16 in the region where dead bodies of civilians have been recovered by the security forces under mysterious circumstances.

Two civilians, Shamsheer (37) and Roshan (45), were found dead on February 16 in Kohag village, Billawar,

after venturing there to collect wood. Senior Superintendent of Police, Kathua district Shobhit Saxena Saturday said, "Yes, the bodies have been sighted in the upper reaches, but it will take a couple of hours to get a clear picture of what exactly happened to them."

The local villagers in the area are feeling insecure following repeated incidents of civilian killings belonging to a Hindu community.

Earlier on Friday, BJP MLA Satish Sharma from Billawar brought up the issue of missing civilians in the Lohai Malhar area during the assembly session. Leader of the Opposition Sunil Sharma also spoke to Inspector General of Police Jammu range to ascertain the whereabouts of the missing civilians.

To coordinate the ongoing search and combing operations senior officers of the Jammu and Kashmir police and army were rushed to the spot. Since last year, the upper reaches of Kathua district are witnessing incidents of terrorist violence.

In July 2024, five soldiers were ambushed by the foreign terrorists near Macchedi area of Kathua. Additional forces were rushed to the area to plug the gaps and strengthen the security grid to prevent such targeted strikes.

Delhi police arrests Vikas Lagarpuria gang member wanted for attempted murder

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Police has arrested a 29-year-old member of Vikas Lagarpuria gang wanted in an attempt to murder case, an official said on Saturday.

The accused, identified as Rohit Gahlot, had been absconding for the past four months and was arrested from Murthal in Haryana, police said.

According to police, the incident occurred on October 30, 2024, when a man was shot during a birthday celebration in the Najafgarh area in Delhi.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Satish Kumar said that the complainant, Himanshu told them that around midnight, the accused, Dhare arrived at the spot with his accomplices in a car and began hurling abuses at them.

In response, Himanshu and others approached the group to confront them, he said. Following this, Gahlot fired a shot, striking Rohit Bhardwaj near the waist. Subsequently, the assailants fled the scene after threatening the group again, the officer said.

Delhi police busts cricket betting racket, arrests three

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Police's Crime Branch has allegedly busted a well-organised illegal cricket betting racket operating in Delhi's Karampura area, arresting three people and recovering more than ₹22 Lakh an official said on Saturday.

The accused have been identified as Manish Sahani (42), Yogesh Kukreja (31) and Suraj (24), he said. "A raid led to the arrest of three suspects who were found betting on the South Africa-New Zealand Champions Trophy semi-final match, which took place in Lahore, Pakistan, on March 5," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Aditya Gautam said. Several betting-related equipment and cash, were confiscated during the raid, including ₹22.62 Lakh deposited in different accounts. One laptop, nine mobile phones, one LED TV, an assistant sound box used for voice recordings and multiple notepads and betting slips were also recovered, he added.

The raid was conducted following a tip-off about a betting syndicate run by Sahani and an investigation was launched.

"On March 6, a well-coordinated raid was conducted in Karampura. Manish acted as the key organiser of the racket, operating independently without middlemen. He used voice recordings to document conversations with bettors and managed financial transactions through both bank accounts and cash dealings," the DCP said.

MoHUA minister inaugurates DMRC-Udaan children home

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Minister of State, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Tokhan Sahu, inaugurated the DMRC-Udaan Children Home near Dilshad Garden Metro Station in a virtual mode. Constructed by the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), it is designed to provide a safe, nurturing, and enriching environment, and caters to destitute girls aged 5 to 18 years.

DMRC built the 'Udaan Children Home' and formally transferred it to Salaam Baalak Trust.

The NGO is well recognised for its extensive work with street children, offering comprehensive care, education, healthcare, and skill development to ensure these young individuals have the opportunity to build a brighter future. It has also been managing Children's home for boys at Tis Hazari.

Speaking on the occasion, Sahu, expressed his appreciation for the initiative, stating, "On the occasion of International Women's Day, I am pleased that DMRC and Salaam Baalak Trust have come together to create a secure and nurturing home for girls. This initiative will provide them with safety, education, and a strong foundation for a promising future. It is commendable that this home will support young girls who have faced immense hardships at an early age. With this initiative, they can now dream without fear."

The DMRC Girls Home, spread over an area of 3,142 square meters, has been designed to ensure the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of its residents.



DMRC-Udaan Children Home near Dilshad Garden metro station

Key features of the facility include, four dormitories with a capacity of 96 beds, a dedicated dormitory for differently-abled children with ten beds, an eight-bed medical room with an attached washroom, and a sick room for specialised care.

Four spacious classrooms, a fully equipped computer lab, a dedicated

library, and an activity hall for extracurricular activities such as dance, theatre, and martial arts and a large dining hall accommodating 50 children at a time, an adjacent well-equipped kitchen, and a ration store for monthly provisions.

The premises are under CCTV surveillance, and the building is earthquake-resistant with fire safety provisions.

Death penalty for forced conversion in Madhya Pradesh

Continued from >> P1

The move aligns with similar legislative efforts in other BJP-ruled states, such as Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, which have implemented stringent anti-conversion laws. Maharashtra, under Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, has also constituted a panel to explore additional measures to curb forced religious conversions.

Critics argue that such legislative measures serve as political tools to reinforce Hindutva narratives ahead of upcoming elections. With the BJP aggressively pursuing a hardline stance on religious identity, these laws resonate with a section of its core voter base but have sparked fears of misuse and communal polarisation.

The push for capital punishment in

forced conversions is expected to face significant legal scrutiny. India's Supreme Court has consistently held that the death penalty should be reserved for 'rarest of rare' crimes, typically involving heinous acts of violence. Introducing such a measure for religious conversion, an act that can involve complex questions of personal choice, persuasion and social pressure, could trigger a constitutional challenge.

Furthermore, the law stipulates that individuals seeking to convert must notify the district administration 60 days in advance. This requirement, critics argue, places unnecessary restrictions on personal freedom and contradicts Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion.

While the BJP projects this move as an effort to protect vulnerable individuals from coercion, the opposition sees it as part of a broader pattern of targeting religious minorities. Historically, BJP governments have framed issues of religious conversion and interfaith marriages through the lens of national security and cultural preservation, a strategy that has yielded electoral dividends in the past.

As Madhya Pradesh inches closer to the next round of state elections, Yadav's hardline stance is likely to be a key talking point. Whether this proposed amendment ultimately withstands legal scrutiny or ends up as an electoral maneuver remains to be seen. However, one thing is certain—the debate over religious freedom versus state intervention in personal choices is far from over.

Mahila Samridhi...

Continued from >> P1

On the occasion, the Chief Minister said BJP has fulfilled the promise we had made to Delhi's sisters in our Sankalp Patra (manifesto) under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana.

AAP leader and Gupta's predecessor Atishi launched a scathing attack, accusing the new Delhi government of failing to deliver on its election promise before International Women's Day. She called the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantee a "jumla" and alleged that the saffron party had misled voters. The Leader of Opposition claimed that instead of starting disbursements, the government has only formed a four-member committee.

Women empowerment is soul of India: PM Modi

Continued from >> P1

"My government changed the law to introduce capital punishment for heinous crimes like rape," he said. To ensure swift justice in serious crimes against women, the government has set up fast-track courts, he said, adding that around 800 courts have been approved across the country, most of which are now operational.

"The newly-implemented Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which wiped out the colonial law, further strengthened provisions related to women's safety. A separate chapter has been added in it to address crimes against women and children in new criminal laws," he said.

Victims facing delay in justice was a common grievance earlier. But in order to address this, the new law mandates that charges in cases of heinous crimes, like rape, be framed within 60 days and verdicts delivered within 45 days, he added. The new laws allow for e-FIRs to be filed from anywhere, making it easier for the police to take immediate action. Under the provision of zero FIR, any woman can file an

FIR at any police station if she faces atrocities, the Prime Minister said. The police can now record the statements of rape victims through audio-visual medium, which has been legally recognised, he added.

"A time-frame of seven days has been fixed for doctors to forward medical reports, providing significant assistance to the victims," he said. Underlining that the new provisions in the BNS are already showing results, Modi recalled charges were framed in a gang-rape case in Surat within 15 days of the incident and the culprits were sentenced to life imprisonment within a few weeks.

Modi said blessings of women were his greatest strength and protective shield. "I am the wealthiest person in the world. My statement will raise hackles of some listeners. But I will reiterate that I am the wealthiest person in the world not in terms of money, but because of the blessings from crores of mothers, sisters and daughters. These blessings are my greatest strength, capital and protective shield," Modi said.

Respecting women is the first step towards the development of society and the

nation. India is now walking on the path of women-led development for the rapid progress of the country, Modi said. "Our government places utmost importance on 'samman' (honour) and 'suidha' (facilities) for women. We built thousands of toilets and gave dignity to women. Our government brought in stringent law against Triple Talaq and saved lives of lakhs of Muslim women from being destroyed," the Prime Minister said.

He stressed the need to empower women from rural parts. "(Mahatma) Gandhiji used to say that the country's soul lies in its villages. I would like to add that women are the soul of our rural areas, and the soul of rural India resides in empowerment of rural women," Modi said.

Our government has prioritised women's rights and opportunities, he said. India has become the world's fifth-largest economy, with the foundation of this economic progress laid by millions of women. Rural economy has played a significant role in this achievement, Modi said.

"Over 10 Crore women are running more than 90 Lakh Self-Help Groups (SHGs) across the country, with over 3

Lakh SHGs operating in Gujarat alone. The government is committed to increasing the income of these millions of women, aiming to make them 'Lakshmi Didi's', he said.

The PM added that around 1.5 Crore women have already become 'Lakshmi Didi's', and the government aims to make a total of 3 Crore women 'Lakshmi Didi's' in the next five years, he said. The Lakshmi Didi scheme was launched by the Union government in 2023 and recognises women members of SHGs, who have an annual income of at least ₹1 Lakh from agriculture, animal husbandry, and small industries, as 'Lakshmi Didi's'.

Before addressing the programme, the Prime Minister engaged in 'Prerna Samvaad' interaction at Vansi Borsi village with a group of 'Lakshmi Didi's', who shared their experiences. Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Navsari MP CR Paatil were also present there. During the Navsari programme, the PM disbursed ₹450 Crore in financial assistance to more than 2.5 Lakh women from over 25,000 SHGs.

India agreed to cut tariffs 'way down': Donald Trump

Continued from >> P1

"I don't blame them, necessarily, but it's a different way of doing business. It's very hard to sell into India because they have trade barriers, very strong tariffs," he had said.

India on Friday said it is looking at deepening trade ties with the US including by reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers under a bilateral trade agreement.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US last month, both sides announced plans to negotiate a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral

Trade Agreement (BTA), External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in New Delhi.

Commerce Minister Goyal was in the US and met his counterparts and the two governments are in the process of advancing discussions on a multi-sector bilateral trade pact, he said.

"Our objective through the BTA is to strengthen and deepen India-US two-way trade across the goods and services sector, increase market access, reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, and deepen supply chain integration between the two countries," Jaiswal added.

Holi infused with political colours in Aligarh, Sambhal

Continued from >> P1

The demand for Holi celebrations was led by student leader Akhil Kaushal, who requested permission to hold an event at NRSC on March 9. However, AMU officials pointed out that university board examinations were scheduled that day, and March 10-12 were working days. Subsequently, NRSC Provost Professor Brij Bhusan Singh clarified that March 13 and 14-both holidays-were suitable for Holi celebrations.

"I think it would not be appropriate if any student comes and plays Holi on the campus on March 10, March 11 and March 12 as these are working days and there will be classes... March 13 and March 14 are holidays and everyone is welcome to play Holi," Singh said.

While AMU maintains that Holi has always been celebrated informally on campus, political tensions have escalated. Local Congress leader and former Aligarh MLA Vivek Bansal accused the BJP of manufacturing controversy, stating, "Holi was always played at AMU. Why is the BJP trying to disturb communal harmony?"

AMU spokesperson Professor Vibha Sharma echoed this sentiment, saying, "The University has a tradition of celebrating all festivals. Special permission has never been required." However, a senior AMU official recalled last year's

incident when external elements entered the campus despite a denial of permission and allegedly harassed female students. "We have since become cautious," the official noted.

The controversy also raises a larger question - if Jamia Millia Islamia, another central university with a Muslim-majority student body, permits Holi celebrations without restrictions, why was AMU's stance initially different? BJP spokesperson Rakesh Tripathi questioned, "Why was there silence when Holi was not celebrated at AMU? Why was it restricted in the first place?"

While in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh Minister Gulab Devi on Saturday played down the remarks of a circle officer that Holi comes only once a year, whereas the Jumma Namaaz takes place 52 times a year and said in a democracy, everyone is entitled to an opinion.

The secondary education minister, who is the MLA from the Chandausi Assembly constituency (reserved for Scheduled Castes) in Sambhal district, also said all communities should celebrate their festivals together and maintain peace and order.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav asked, "If officials who should not differentiate between people embracing each other on Holi and Eid speak negatively, how will harmony be protected under the rule of the divisive BJP?"

Muslim nations reject Trump's call to empty Gaza Strip

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Deir Al-Balah

Foreign ministers from Muslim nations on Saturday rejected calls by US President Donald Trump to empty the Gaza Strip of its Palestinian population and backed a plan for an administrative committee of Palestinians to govern the territory to allow reconstruction to go ahead. The foreign ministers gathered in the Saudi city of Jeddah for a special session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to address the situation in Gaza, at a time when the 7-week-old ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has been thrown into doubt.

In a statement put out Saturday, the gathering threw its support behind a plan to rebuild Gaza put forward by Egypt and backed by Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Jordan, aimed at countering Trump's call. The OIC groups 57 nations with largely Muslim populations.

Without specifically mentioning Trump, the ministers said 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" that they said aim to push

Palestinians to leave.

The OIC also reinstated Syria as a member of the grouping.

Syria was removed from the OIC in 2012 over then-President Bashar Assad's brutal crackdown on opposition protests. After some 14 years of civil war, Assad was ousted in December by Islamist-led insurgents who since have created a transitional government.

The ceasefire that began in mid-January brought a pause in Israel's campaign of bombardment and ground offensives in Gaza aimed at destroying Hamas after its October 7, 2023 attack on southern Israel. The ceasefire's first phase saw the release of 25 Israeli hostages held by militants in Gaza and the bodies of eight others in exchange for the freeing of nearly 2,000 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

But an intended second phase of the deal — meant to bring the release of remaining hostages and a lasting truce and full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza — has been thrown into doubt.

Israel has balked at entering negotiations over the terms of the second phase.

Instead, it has called for Hamas to release half its remaining hostages in return for an extension of the ceasefire and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Since Sunday,



Israel has barred all food, fuel, medicine and other supplies from entering Gaza for some 2 million people, demanding Hamas accept the revised deal.

At the same time, 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 an Egyptian-backed proposal that

an administrative committee replace Hamas in governing Gaza.

The committee would work "under the umbrella" of the Palestinian Authority, based in the West Bank. Israel has rejected the PA having any role in the Gaza Strip, but has not put forward an alternative for post-war rule in the territory.

Under the ceasefire, Israeli forces have pulled back to a zone along Gaza's edges.

Early Saturday, an Israeli strike killed two Palestinians in Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. The Israeli military said it struck several men who appeared to have been flying a drone that entered Israel from Gaza.

Israel's military offensive has killed over 48,000 Palestinians in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were militants.

The campaign was triggered by Hamas' October 2023 attack, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, inside Israel and took a total of 251 people hostage.

Most have been released in ceasefire agreements or other arrangements. Hamas is believed to still have 24 living hostages and the bodies of 34 others.

South Korea's impeached President Yoon released from prison

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

South Korea's impeached conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol was released from prison on Saturday, a day after a Seoul court cancelled his arrest to allow him to stand trial for rebellion without being detained.

TV footage showed Yoon waving his hand, clenching his fists and bowing deeply to his supporters who were shouting his name and waving South Korean and US national flags. He climbed into a black van to travel to his presidential residence in Seoul.

In a statement distributed by his lawyers, Yoon said that he "appreciates the courage and decision by the Seoul Central District Court to correct illegality", in an apparent reference to questions over his arrest.

He said he also thanks his supporters and asked those who are on hunger strike against his impeachment to end it.

Yoon was arrested and indicted by prosecutors in January over his December 3 martial law decree that plunged the country into huge political turmoil. The liberal opposition-controlled National Assembly separately voted to impeach him, leading to his suspension from office.

The Constitutional Court has been deliberating whether to formally dismiss or reinstate Yoon. If the court upholds his impeachment, a national election will be held to find his successor within two months.

The Seoul Central District Court said Friday it accepted Yoon's request to be released from prison, citing the need to address questions over the legality of the investigations on the president.

Yoon's lawyers have accused the investigative agency that detained him before his formal arrest of lacking legal authority to probe rebellion charges.

The Seoul court also said the legal period of his formal arrest expired before he was indicted.

Yoon's release came after prosecutors decided not to appeal the decision by the



Supporters of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol attend a rally to oppose his impeachment near the presidential residence in Seoul, South Korea.

AP/PTI

Seoul court. South Korean law allows prosecutors to continue to hold a suspect while pursuing an appeal, even after his or her arrest is cancelled by a court.

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party, which led Yoon's December 14 impeachment, lashed out at the prosecutors' decision, calling them "henchmen" of Yoon, a former prosecutor general.

Party spokesperson Cho Seung-rae urged the Constitutional Court to dismiss Yoon as soon as possible to avoid further public unrest and anxiety.

At the heart of public criticism of Yoon over his martial law decree was his dispatch of hundreds of troops and police officers to the National Assembly after placing the country under military rule.

Some senior military and police officials sent to the assembly have testified that Yoon ordered them to pull out lawmakers to thwart a parliamentary vote on the decree. Yoon has countered that he aimed to maintain order.

Enough lawmakers eventually man-

aged to enter an assembly hall and voted unanimously to overturn Yoon's decree.

Investigators have alleged Yoon's martial-law decree amounted to rebellion. If he's convicted of that offense, he would face the death penalty or life imprisonment.

Yoon has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecutions but that doesn't cover grave charges like rebellion and treason.

Yoon has said he didn't intend to maintain martial law for long as he only attempted to inform the public of the danger of the Democratic Party, which obstructed his agenda and impeached many senior officials and prosecutors.

In his martial law announcement, Yoon called the assembly "a den of criminals" and "anti-state forces".

South Korea's conservative-liberal divide is severe, and rallies either supporting or denouncing Yoon's impeachment have divided Seoul streets. Experts say whatever decision the Constitutional Court makes, the division is certain to worsen.

12 wounded by 3 men shooting randomly at Toronto pub

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Toronto

A dozen people were injured in a shooting at an eastern Toronto pub in what police called a reckless act of violence by three men who entered the bar and fired randomly without warning.

Superintendent Paul MacIntyre of the Toronto Police Service said police received numerous emergency calls reporting a shooting at the Piper Arms around 10:40 pm Friday. A preliminary investigation determined three males entered the pub and began shooting at customers, MacIntyre said during a news conference at the scene. There were no immediate arrests.

"One male was armed with what appears to be an assault rifle, the other two males were armed with handguns, and they walked into the bar, they produced their guns and they opened fire indiscriminately on the people sitting inside," MacIntyre said, adding there were no fatalities.

Police arrived at the scene and found 12 people suffering from various injuries. The victims were transported to local hospitals and six were confirmed to have gunshot wounds that were not life-threatening, MacIntyre said, calling the victims "extremely lucky." The remaining six victims were hurt by flying and broken glass.

The motive was not immediately clear, MacIntyre said, calling the shooting "a brazen and reckless act of violence that's

really shaken our community and the city itself," MacIntyre said he and other officers were "horrified" by what they saw on a security video. "These guys just looked at the ground and opened fire," he said.

Shortly after the shooting, police said a suspect wearing a black balaclava was seen fleeing in a silver car and was still at large after the shooting. People were being warned to stay away from the area.

Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow said she had spoken to Police Chief Myron Demkiw and was told "all necessary resources" had been deployed.

"This is an early and ongoing investigation — police will provide further details," Chow wrote on social media. "My thoughts are with the victims and their families."

Myanmar's military leader announces dates for general election

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

Four years after seizing power from the elected administration, the head of the military government declared Myanmar will hold a general election within 10 months, state-run media reported Saturday.

Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing said Friday the election will take place either in December or January 2026 at the latest, according to the Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper.

He announced the dates in a press conference while on an official visit to Belarus, one of the few allies of Myanmar's military government, saying that 53 political parties have already submitted their lists to participate in the election.

However, Min Aung did not mention exact election dates.

The announcement comes as Myanmar

is roiled by a civil war in which the army has been forced onto the defensive against pro-democracy militants as well as ethnic militias seeking autonomy in much of the country. The army takeover from Aung San Suu Kyi's elected government in February 2021 has been met with widespread popular opposition, triggering armed resistances, and large parts of the country are embroiled in conflict. The ruling military has since said an election was the primary goal but has repeatedly pushed back the date.

The plan for a general election is widely seen as an attempt to normalise the military's seizure of power through the ballot box and to deliver a result that ensures the generals retain control.

Critics have already said the military-planned election will be neither free nor fair because there is no free media and most of the leaders of Suu Kyi's National

League for Democracy party have been arrested.

Suu Kyi, 79, is serving prison sentences totalling 27 years after being convicted in a series of politically tainted prosecutions brought by the military.

The country's current security situation poses a serious challenge to holding elections, with the military believed to control less than half the country. The military government had previously said the election would be prioritized in areas under its command.

In October, the military attempted a census that it said was to compile voter lists for a general election, but data from only 145 of 330 townships was successfully gathered. In a published report, the military government said the areas where the census could not be completed included towns controlled by ethnic armed forces and pro-democracy guerrillas.

Swiss cops rescue dogs kidnapped for \$1m ransom

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Zurich

Swiss police said Saturday they had solved a kidnapping involving two dogs and a demand for ransom of 1 million Swiss francs (about \$1.135 million).

Zurich police said that two Bolonka dogs were stolen from the home of a 59-year-old man in Schlieren near Zurich last week, while the dog owner was away.

When the man returned, the dogs were gone and he found a letter demanding money to release the small dogs.

Instead of paying the ransom, the man, who was not identified by name in line with Swiss privacy rules, called the police.

In the course of the investigation, police on Thursday arrested a 30-year-old Norwegian man at Zurich Airport who police said was strongly suspected of being involved in the theft.

Following further leads and cross-European cooperation, police in Poland then detained a 38-year-old suspect and discovered the kidnapped Bolonkas, which they returned safely to their owner on Friday.

Swiss police said the Norwegian is in custody in Switzerland and authorities in Poland are further investigating the Polish suspect.

A Bolonka is a toy breed of dogs bred in Russia and sold for up to a couple of thousand dollars.

South Carolina man executed by firing squad in US

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Columbia

A South Carolina man convicted of murder was executed by firing squad Friday, the first US prisoner to die by that method in 15 years.

Three volunteer prison employees used rifles to carry out the execution of Brad Sigmon, 67, who was pronounced dead at 6.08 pm.

Sigmon killed his ex-girlfriend's parents with a baseball bat in their Greenville County home in 2001 in a botched plot to kidnap their daughter. He told police he planned to take her for a romantic weekend, then kill her and himself.

Sigmon's lawyers said he chose the firing squad because the electric chair would "cook him alive," and he feared that a lethal injection of pentobarbital into his veins would send a rush of fluid and blood into his lungs and drown him.

The details of South Carolina's lethal injection method are kept secret in South Carolina, and Sigmon unsuccessfully asked the state Supreme Court on Thursday to pause his execution because of that.

On Friday, Sigmon wore a black jumpsuit with a hood over his head and a white target with a red bullseye over his chest.

The armed prison employees stood 15 feet (4.6 meters) from where he sat in the state's death chamber — the same distance as the backboard is from the free-throw line on a basketball court. Visible in the same small room was the state's unused electric chair. The gurney used to carry out lethal injections had been rolled away. The volunteers all fired at the same time



through openings in a wall. They were not visible to about a dozen witnesses in a room separated from the chamber by bullet-resistant glass. Sigmon made several heavy breaths during the two minutes that elapsed from when the hood was placed to the shots being fired.

The shots, which sounded like they were fired at the same time, made a loud, jarring bang that caused witnesses to flinch. His arms briefly tensed when he was shot, and the target was blasted off his chest. He appeared to give another breath or two with a red stain on his chest, and small amounts of tissue could be seen from the wound during those breaths.

A doctor came out about a minute later and examined Sigmon for 90 seconds before declaring him dead.

Witnesses included three family members of the victims, David and Gladys Lark. Also present were Sigmon's attorney and spiritual advisor, a representative from the prosecuting solicitor's office, a sheriff's investigator and three members of the news media.

Sigmon delivered a closing statement that he said was "one of love and a calling to my fellow Christians to help us end the death penalty."

The firing squad is an execution method with a long and violent history in the US and around the world. Death in a hail of bullets has been used to punish mutinies and desertion in armies, as frontier justice in America's Old West and as a tool of terror and political repression in the former Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

Since 1977 only three other prisoners in the US have been executed by firing squad. All were in Utah, most recently Ronnie Lee Gardner in 2010. Another Utah man, Ralph Menzies, could be next; he is awaiting the result of a hearing in which his lawyers argued that his dementia makes him unfit for execution.

In South Carolina on Friday, a group of protesters holding signs with messages such as "All life is precious" and "Execute justice not people" gathered outside the prison before Sigmon's execution.

Supporters and lawyers for Sigmon asked Republican Gov. Henry McMaster to commute his sentence to life in prison. They said he was a model prisoner trusted by guards and worked every day to atone for the killings and also that he committed the killings after succumbing to severe mental illness.

Pakistan asks Afghan Citizen Card holders to leave by March 31

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

The Pakistan government has set March 31 as the deadline for Afghan Citizen Card (ACCs) holders to leave Pakistan voluntarily as part of a plan to repatriate all illegal foreigners, according to an official document.

The document, purportedly leaked to the media on Friday night, indicated that the ACC holders staying in Islamabad and Rawalpindi would be moved out and sent back to Afghanistan as part of a multiphase relocation plan for Afghan migrants, including those awaiting resettlement in third countries.

The decision comes amidst deteriorating ties between Islamabad and Kabul over the issue of terrorism and it may impact over 800,000 documented Afghan refugees holding Afghan Citizen Cards and are included in the category of documented refugees, contrary to hundreds and thousands of undocumented ones.

It stated that the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Programme (IFRP) has been implemented since November 1, 2023 and in "continuation to the government's decision to repatriate all illegal foreigners, the national leadership has now decided to also repatriate ACC holders".

"All illegal foreigners and ACC holders are advised to leave the country voluntarily before March 31, 2025; thereafter, deportation will commence with effect from April 1, 2025," it warned.

It highlighted that sufficient time has already been granted for their dignified return and emphasised that no one will be maltreated during the repatriation process and arrangements for food and healthcare for returning foreigners have also been put in place.

It concluded by saying that Pakistan has been a gracious host and continues to fulfil its commitments and obligations as a responsible state.

It is reiterated that individuals staying in Pakistan will have to fulfil all legal formalities and abide by Pakistan's Constitution," it said.

The decision may also further complicate the resettlement of about 15,000 Afghans awaiting relocation to the United States after President Donald Trump last month halted the US Refugee Admission Programme, jeopardizing the repatriation of those Afghans who moved to Pakistan after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and were promised resettlement in the US.

Meanwhile, A major terror attack was foiled with the arrest of two "most dangerous" terrorists of the TTP among the 10 arrested by Pakistan's Punjab police, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) said on Saturday.

A major terror plan in Punjab was foiled with the arrest of 10 terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) during operations in different areas of the province in the last couple of days, a CTD spokesperson said.

Ravi Shastri picks India as favourites against New Zealand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri has picked India as the favourites in Sunday's Champions Trophy summit clash against New Zealand but pointed out that the advantage will be minuscule, given that the Black Caps are a formidable side. India, who have played all their matches here, stormed into the final with an all-win record, and defeated Australia in the semifinal.

New Zealand, who finished second behind India in Group A after losing their league match, secured their spot in the final with a one-sided win over South Africa in the second semifinal in Lahore.

"If there is one team that can beat India, it's New Zealand," Shastri said in "The ICC Review." "So India start as favourites but only just," he said referring to the final, which will be a rematch of the 2000 Champions Trophy title clash, where New Zealand triumphed by four wickets in Nairobi.

The 62-year-old, who has seen both teams evolve over the years, picked four players from the New Zealand squad

who could make a difference in the high-stakes final.

He singled out Rachin Ravindra, calling him "immensely talented", Kane Williamson for his "stability and calmness like a saint", and captain Mitchell Santner, whom he described as an "intelligent" leader who can influence the game alongside Glenn Phillips, who could be the X-factor for the team.

Shastri also highlighted Virat Kohli's current form as a potential game-changer, while also acknowledging Williamson's ability to seize crucial moments.

"Now (on) current form, Kohli. When these guys get hot and you let them get their first 10 runs, then they're trouble. Whether it's Williamson, whether it's Kohli," Shastri said.

"So from New Zealand, I would say Williamson. To an extent, Ravindra, he is a fabulous young player."

"But these guys when they smell the coffee and you let them, in a final, get to that 10-15, then they are doubly dangerous," Shastri said.

Ravindra, at just 25, has already accumulated five centuries in ICC 50-over



tournaments — the youngest to achieve the feat.

"I just like the way he moves in the

crease," Shastri said. "There's an element of fluency, which is fabulous to see. He's either forward, he's back, he'll cut, he'll

sweep it, play the quicks well and he's got a very good temperament.

"You don't get hundreds in big tournaments like this just like that. You've got to have something up your sleeve, and I think he's immensely talented."

Apart from his batting prowess, former skipper Williamson's leadership and calm demeanour make him a vital asset for New Zealand in the final.

The veteran has been in red-hot form with scores of 81 against India and 102 in the semifinal versus South Africa.

"He's very stable and there's an element of calmness, a no-nonsense element about him the way he goes about his job," Shastri said.

"He's like a saint, a sage, just sitting, meditating. Lot of people look at the big shots, I look at the way he moves in the crease. There is an element of fluency."

"Joe Root when he's batting at his best. He's forward, back. Kohli (as well). When people move in the crease, the footwork is sound."

"It's a joy to watch. And then with their experience, their talent, the volume of runs they've got, doesn't matter what format they play," added Shastri.

Shastri also made special mention of Santner, who has impressed in his first ICC event as New Zealand captain.

"He's an intelligent man. And I think this captaincy suits him," Shastri said. "It just adds that edge to him as a batter, as a bowler, as a cricketer."

"So I think it's a smart move by New Zealand opting for that and just the way he goes about his job, like I said, he's a good reader of the game, is an intelligent bloke and should be there for some time for New Zealand."

Shastri also didn't hold back his admiration for Phillips' ability to turn a match around single-handedly as he also picked him as one of the Player-of-the-Match contenders alongside India's Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja.

"Player of the Match, I would go for an all-rounder," he said in The ICC Review. "I'll say Axar Patel or Ravindra Jadeja from India."

"From New Zealand, I think that Glenn Phillips has something up. He might just show flashes of brilliance in the field. He might come and smash a cameo of 40, 50 and probably surprise you by taking a wicket or two."

IOC president sees 'new world order' ahead of LA Olympics



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lausanne

Thomas Bach says he feels a rare calm in his final weeks as IOC president even as a "new world order" gains speed ahead of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Bach led the International Olympic Committee through two locked-down Games in a global pandemic and several affected by Russian doping and military aggression, among other crises.

His successor will be elected March 20 and inherit an IOC financially secure with future Olympic hosts that today look stable and reliable.

Still, the biggest event for the next IOC president — the LA Summer Games — could yet challenge Bach's faith in the Olympics' power to unite the world in peaceful competition and mutual acceptance.

"We have a new world order in the making, and this making... will not happen without rumbling," Bach said this week, without criticising US President Donald Trump.

Signature Bach policies have been gender parity and inclusive acceptance of all 206

national teams, plus refugee athletes. Political neutrality is an ideal Bach clings to even as Trump has warned of denying visas to athletes based on the government's gender interpretations.

"I am also convinced that President Trump and his administration will fully support the Olympic Games," Bach told The Associated Press in a rare interview at IOC headquarters.

"He likes sport, so there I don't see a risk." The American people, Bach added, "appreciate and love that the Games are about sport but they are about more than sport. They will want to welcome the athletes from all over the world."

The IOC has defended female boxers Imane Khelif and Lin Yu-ting — the Paris Olympic gold medalists. Both had been disqualified from the 2023 world championships run by the Russian-backed International Boxing Association, which said they failed eligibility tests.

"These two women boxers have been born as women, they have been raised as women, they have competed as women and nobody ever claimed even that they are transgender," Bach said in AP's

interview. "What happened there was a Russian-led misinformation campaign which then distorted the truth, the facts and now we have this unfortunate situation that these two athletes are considered to be transgender. But. They. Are. Not."

Before the Paris Olympics, Bach warned of "deeply disturbing" trends, including "narrow self-interests trumping the rule of law."

"What I see is very heated discussion in the United States," Bach told the AP. "But this is for the citizens of the United States to have. Our values are very clear and on those values the Olympic Games are based."

Pandemic and Russian doping

Bach's presidency since 2013 saw two Games impacted by Covid-19; one shadowed by Korean political tensions; several affected by Russian doping and military aggression; and one almost imploded with a chaotic local organising team in Rio de Janeiro that pulled the IOC into vote-buying allegations.

"I'm experiencing the first period during my presidency where I do not have an existential problem of the Olympic Games or the Olympic Movement on my desk," Bach said. The 71-year-old German lawyer and 1976 Olympic gold medalist in fencing leaves office in June. "I am fit and very happy in great health."

Future commercial deals

A key decision early in Bach's presidency was extending NBC's broadcast rights in the U.S. Through 2032. Renewing or finding a new partner is a big decision for the next president. Bach suggested a free-to-air network is important.

"You can say of streaming. They are paying such a lot of money, let's go for streaming. But what does it mean for our values?" Bach said. "The Olympic Games has to be accessible to everybody and not only the

ones that can afford it. This balance you have to find."

Diplomatic skills

Bach and predecessor Jacques Rogge were Olympic athletes who rose to represent the IOC with various heads of state.

"That is one of the privileges as IOC president is that you get everybody on the phone," Bach said. "I haven't experienced any situation where somebody would have said, I am not interested to talk." The late Henry Kissinger "gave very valuable advice" in real-world diplomacy.

Spy target?

Bach's potential as a future Olympic leader was clear from 1981 when he and Sebastian Coe, a candidate to succeed him, helped represent athletes at a key IOC meeting in Baden-Baden, West Germany. He later worked for Horst Dassler and Adidas who reportedly were monitored for the Stasi, East Germany's secret police.

Asked if there was a Stasi file on him, Bach said, "Not that I knew. I cannot imagine." Bach had warm relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin during the 2014 Sochi Winter Games. Bach and the Olympics have been targets of Russian misinformation, cyber attacks and deep fake videos during the past decade of sanctioning the state-backed doping scandal and fall-out from the invasion of Ukraine.

Cleaning up voting

Bach's legacy includes changing how hosts are picked. No more blockbuster contests vulnerable to vote-buying.

"The atmosphere was just not clean, not sober. It put the whole credibility of the IOC in doubt." There were no allegations of wrongdoing in how the French Alps, Brisbane and Salt Lake City were selected as hosts of the Olympics from 2030-2034.



Javed Akhtar ask Shami to not pay attention to criticism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Days after cricketer Mohammed Shami was criticised for not observing roza (fast) in the month of Ramzaan during the ICC Champions Trophy (CT) semi-final match against Australia, veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar voiced his support for the bowler asking him to pay no attention to "reactionary bigoted idiots".

Shami, who is part of the Indian squad for the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy tour, was spotted consuming an energy drink as the match was underway in Dubai on Tuesday.

After the visual of the lead pacer went viral on social media, the national president of the All India Muslim Jamaat, Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Bareilly, said Shami had committed a sin by not fast-

ing during the Islamic holy month of Ramzaan. Akhtar, known for openly voicing his opinions, advised the cricketer to ignore all the negativity and praised his performance in the game.

Shami saheb, do not give a damn to those reactionary bigoted idiots who have any problem with your drinking water in a burning afternoon at a cricket field in Dubai.

"It is none of their business. You are one of the great Indian team that is making us all proud My best wishes to you and our whole team," he wrote in an X post on Friday.

India emerged victorious in Tuesday's match, becoming the first team to qualify for Sunday's final. The Men in Blue will fight it out with New Zealand to claim the Champions Trophy for the third time (2002 and 2013).

I'm open to all formats, but classical chess brings excitement: Gukesh



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Unfazed by the evolving chess landscape, reigning world champion Ding Liren is open to compete in all formats but asserted that while freestyle chess brings excitement, the classical chess, with its rich history, will always hold the greatest significance.

With two distinct sets of chess enthusiasts emerging — one supporting freestyle and the other the showing loyalty to classical — concerns have been raised about a potential split in the sport. Gukesh, who beat Ding Liren to become world champion last year, sees no reason for division.

"I do not think much about it. Freestyle is exciting, and I'm happy to play it. But it's too early to say where it's going. We have had just two serious tournaments in freestyle so far," he said at the 'India Today Conclave 2025'.

"I wish freestyle becomes big, but I don't see it taking over standard chess. The history and legacy of classical chess give it more value. The World Championship cycle still holds the biggest importance for now."

"Freestyle is a great addition to classical, rapid, and blitz. But yeah, we just have to see how it works. I'm open to all," said Gukesh who has confirmed his participation for the Paris leg of Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour slated from April 7-14. World No 1 Magnus Carlsen, Gukesh are

among the top 12 GMs who have confirmed participation for the Paris leg boasting a prize purse of \$750,000.

German rising star Vincent Keymer won the first Grand Slam in Weissenhaus.

Parents do not have to think about money anymore

Gukesh's rise to the top was anything but easy. Just a few years ago, his family relied on the generosity of friends to support his international tournament expenses.

"I remember my parents' friends sponsoring me to play tournaments abroad. It was quite difficult at that time, and we had a lot of help from very, very nice and selfless people. Now, the last year was financially very good for us," he recalled.

The change in circumstances has brought relief not just to him, but more so to his family, he added.

"I think it means a lot to me that my parents don't have to think about money anymore. We can lead a comfortable life, not struggle like before." With 13 Indian players in the top-100, Indian chess is experiencing an unprecedented boom post-COVID 19. Gukesh credits much of this to the legendary five-time former world champion Viswanathan Anand.

"One of the biggest contributions, without a doubt, is what Vishy sir has been doing. Not just his achievements and inspiration, but also his efforts through the WestBridge Anand Chess Academy."

French soccer to have 'WO=MAN' written on jerseys to mark International Women's Day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Every player in the top two divisions of men's soccer in France will have "WO=MAN" written on the back of their jerseys instead of their names this weekend.

The French league initiative, centred around International Women's Day on Saturday, started on Friday with Toulouse's home game against Monaco, which finished 1-1. The initiative was continuing on Saturday and Sunday with the other teams in Ligue 1 and Ligue 2 as part of the league's fight against sexism.

"The message resonates as a strong statement," the LFP said in a statement. "Highlighting the importance of gender equality, not only on the field, but also in the stands."

LED panels around the pitches will display "WO=MAN" at all games and official match balls have the motto written on them. Match broadcasters DAZN and beIN SPORTS will raise awareness with halftime messages.

Making stadiums safer for women The French league has been working all season to make stadiums safer for women in conjunction with three organisations — The Foundation for Inclusive Sport, Her Game Too and Colossus with feet of Clay — and with six pilot clubs: Toulouse, Rennes and Auxerre in Ligue 1 and Metz, Paris FC and Troyes in Ligue 2.

Among the measures in place are a system for reporting sexual and gender-based violence and a support and protection procedure in case of incidents, including post-incident monitoring.

Anoush Morel, the director of Her Game Too in France, has liaised with clubs to have female ambassadors inside stadiums on matchdays, when they help to promote inclusivity, equality and diversity.

"We create a supportive atmosphere for all fans and raise awareness of the campaign through fan engagement,



social media, and community outreach," Morel told The Associated Press. "We also make sure that safe zones are ready (in stadiums)."

Her Game Too has seven ambassadors in Ligue 1 and three in Ligue 2. They wear visible pins and distribute flyers. Morel knows what a distressing matchday experience feels like. In April last year, she and other female Paris Saint-Germain supporters endured "abusive" body searches while entering Barcelona's stadium for a Champions League match.

"We work to ensure that football matches are a safe and welcoming environment for all fans, especially women," Morel told The AP. "Sexism and abuse are not tolerated."

Government backs project

Lise Ducrocq, the LFP communications and corporate brand manager, first came up with the WO=MAN motto.

"It's very inspiring to be part of such a big project led by a woman," Morel said. "All the clubs were very excited." French sports minister Marie Barsacq attended the game and held up the jersey, surrounded by girls.

No discussion on Rohit and Kohli's retirement: Gill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Speculation is rife on the ODI future of skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli after the Champions Trophy (CT) but vice captain Shubman Gill on Saturday said the Indian dressing room is not discussing retirement of the two modern-day greats.

Kohli and Rohit are still batting strong in the format but it is being discussed in cricketing circle that if India wins the Champions Trophy, both the batters or at least one can call time on his career.

"There is no talk about retirement in the dressing room, now," Gill said during the pre-match press conference ahead of the Champions Trophy final against New Zealand on Sunday.

Gill feels privileged to be a part of "best batting line-up" but said the depth in their order allows the top three to express themselves freely.

"This is the best batting line up I am part of. Rohit is one of the best openers (in the world) and Virat, we need not tell about him. But our team has depth in batting and that allows the top order to bat with bit more freedom," Gill, India's most prolific 50-over batter in the last two years, said.

On the match front, Gill is aware of the huge pressure on them to win the trophy but exuded confidence that they will come up trumps unlike 2023 ODI World Cup which they lost to Australia.

"We are all excited for the final. Last time we could not win the 50 over World Cup but we are determined to win this time," he said.

The prolific ODI batter believes that the team that handles pressure on big day will win the blue riband trophy.

"There will be big match pressure. But whichever team deals with pressure will win the final. We just need to take it like any other match, and good teams will do that. We have played four matches here and done well, so there is no added pressure on us."

HER Name Belongs on the Label

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

On Women's Day, we celebrate the fearless women in fashion, breaking barriers, redefining style, and empowering generations with every stitch, says SAKSHI PRIYA

PAYAL JAIN: RESILIENT VISION

Have you ever felt the need to fight for your space in a male-dominated industry?

Fashion offers freedom, yet top brands are still led by men. As in finance or banking, women must work harder to prove their worth. Early on, I knew I needed a strong voice and identity. Inclusivity, sustainability, and craft revival have been my focus, especially supporting women artisans. Success and failure have shaped me, and I wouldn't change a thing.

If you designed an outfit symbolising women's journey in fashion, what would it look like?

My work would tell a story of purpose, strength, faith, and transformation. It would celebrate craftsmanship, bridging tradition and the struggles women face in a man's world. My retrospective Soul of a Woman interprets a woman's facets—her struggles, emotions, and triumphs. I see myself as an artist creating textile sculptures, not just outfits. I've worked with natural textiles, handcrafted by women artisans, repurposed into new forms—just like a woman standing tall through every setback.

Has the industry evolved for women, or does the glass ceiling remain?

The industry has evolved. There are more women in leadership, shaping trends and brands. But the glass ceiling still exists. While more women take charge, greater inclusivity is needed for diverse voices. True progress requires an inclusive, unbiased work culture where women have not just a seat but an equal voice in shaping the future.

What has been your most defining career moment?

Curating Soul of a Woman, a retrospective of my three-decade journey, was a powerful moment. Seeing my work come together, telling stories of craft



and sustainability, was humbling. It's no longer just about my label—it's about connecting craftsmanship, sustainability, and design. That's when I truly felt I had made a difference.

What's one piece of advice you would give to young women entering this industry?

To young women entering the design world, I would strongly advise to have a voice that is unique to you

and your design language, to stay true to your aesthetic and vision, never underestimating the power of hard work, commitment, faith and resilience. Stay grounded in your values, keep pushing boundaries, and above all, never lose sight of the joy and art in fashion, and the very reason you chose this as a career path!



Fashion is often seen as a world of glamour, but behind the shimmering fabrics and runway lights lies a space built stitch by stitch, fight by fight. Unlike industries where power is openly contested, fashion subtly shapes narratives, dictating not just style but identity.

Speaking to Payal Jain, Dolly J, and Rina Dhaka, it's clear that success is about talent and persistence. They stepped into a field where men historically controlled the business, yet instead of pushing against a system, they built their own. They transformed fashion into a canvas for empowerment, where clothes become statements of strength, identity, and evolution. Their stories remind us that fashion is resilience threaded into every design, a reflection of those who refused to be stitched into the background.

DOLLY J: REDEFINING CONFIDENCE

Did you ever feel the need to prove yourself, and how did you navigate that space?

Fashion is not about gender—it's about vision, craftsmanship, and the ability to create something timeless. I never saw it as proving myself in a male-dominated space; I saw it as making my mark in an industry that values creativity above all. My focus has always been on refining my craft, pushing boundaries, and delivering designs that speak for themselves.

As a woman, was there a moment in your career when you faced resistance or doubt just because of your gender? How did you turn that into motivation?

Fashion is one of the most expressive industries, where talent dictates success, not gender. Challenges exist for everyone, but I've never allowed any label to limit my potential. Instead of focusing on resistance, I've always channelled my energy into my work—because at the end of the day, design excellence speaks louder than any bias.

How do you ensure that your designs give women a voice in an industry where men have traditionally set the rules?

My designs are created for those who value artistry, craftsmanship, and self-expression. It's never been about following rules set by anyone—it's about redefining them. Every piece I create is meant to empower the wearer, making them feel like the truest, most confident version of themselves.

What changes do you hope to see for women in fashion in the next decade?

Fashion is evolving into a space



where creativity is the only measure of success. The future should not just be about "equal representation" for women but about ensuring that talent—regardless of gender—is recognised and nurtured. I hope to see an industry where the focus is solely on innovation, originality, and craftsmanship.

If you could share one piece of advice with young women looking to make their mark in a male-dominated industry, what would it be?

Don't look at industries as "male-dominated," look at them as spaces where pioneers, dreamers, and innovators thrive. If you have the passion, the skill, and the vision, nothing can stand in your way. Focus on mastering your craft, staying true to your creativity, and letting your work do the talking.

RINA DHAKA: FEARLESS VISION

What was the biggest challenge you faced as a woman in fashion, and how did you overcome it?

When I started in fashion, there were few reference points to learn from. Initial resources were mostly archival-vintage textiles, antique jewellery, cinema costumes. Early on, I relied on old PCs and historical clothing to understand design. Eventually, I discovered Indian museums as a valuable resource for learning and inspiration. But what truly shaped me was working closely with artisans, understanding their craft, their techniques. As my understanding grew, creating became easier.

Do you feel fashion today empowers women more than before, or do societal expectations still shape how women dress?

After seeing the Oscars and the Vanity Fair party, I understand that boldness is real now. When I began working, I was called 'Dare-Bare Dhaka.' Looking back, what I once considered bold is now wearable fashion. But empowerment, in my view, is not about revealing choices—it's about acceptance. True empowerment is allowing women to dress as they choose, free from judgment.

How has your creative vision evolved from your first collection to now?

My early years were shaped by studying historical fashion, museum archives, and cinema cos-



tumes. But over time, direct interactions with artisans gave me a deeper, more hands-on understanding of craftsmanship. Today, my work blends those influences, tradition, heritage, and modernity.

If you had to describe the journey of women in fashion through one design element, what would it be and why?

If I had to find a common thread, it might be shoes; the way women walk forward, step by step. Footwear symbolises progress, movement, and the journey women have taken to claim their space in the industry.



ABHINETRI'S AS BOLLYWOOD DIVAS: Ruling THE SILVER SCREEN

After tough times in Bollywood, acceptance of films without male superstars shows growing appreciation for female talent, writes ABHI SINGHAL

I have been a binge-watcher for many years now. I love watching web series, movies, short films, and anything and everything with a story. To be honest, the genres excite me like nothing else. I am a cinema lover. Watching films evolve all these years is the most beautiful change of acceptance I have seen. With this change, I talk about the entry of female-led films on the silver screen being the hit.

Also, with that, the stories of movies have become female-centric, breaking taboos and barriers that play a huge part in shaping society.

From films having just male protagonists to films only led by female actors, it has been a journey of hardships and flops for the actors. Women have also aced criticism and backlash on the roles they play. An exam-

ple of the same is *Deepika Padukone*. Be it *Padmavati*, or be it *Fighter*, where she was criticised for her costume in the film, it has always been hard for women.

There have been web series bashed by the audience like *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar* for the showcasing of women as tawaifs and at the red light areas.

But over time, scenarios have changed many misconceptions, and the audience has started to accept films with women protagonists and even films that don't have a male superstar. The journey of female-centric films in Indian cinema is ongoing. While challenges remain, the progress made is undeniable. The increasing number of impactful female-led stories reflects a change.



THE SHIFT: FROM PERIPHERAL TO PROTAGONIST

FASHION (2008): Priyanka Chopra's portrayal of Meghna Mathur, a small-town girl going through the cutthroat world of modeling.

QUEEN (2013): Kangana Ranaut's Rani was a revelation. Rani's journey from a heartbroken bride to an independent woman struck a chord with viewers, proving that a female-led film could be a massive commercial success.

NH10 (2015): Anushka Sharma's production and performance in *NH10* offered a raw and gritty portrayal of a woman fighting for survival.

NEERJA (2016): Sonam Kapoor's acting as Neerja Bhanot, a flight attendant who sacrificed her life to save passengers. This film highlighted the courage and heroism of an ordinary woman, proving that female-led stories could be powerful and impactful.

HICHKI (2018): Rani Mukerji again, this time as Naina Mathur, a teacher with Tourette syndrome. This movie displayed that women can be strong role models.

VEERE DI WEDDING (2018): The film, starring Kareena Kapoor Khan, Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, Swara Bhasker, and Shikha Talsania, celebrated female friendship and challenged societal expectations of women.

GANGUBAI KATHIAWADI (2022): Alia Bhatt's powerful performance as Gangubai, a brothel madam who fought for the rights of sex workers, was a testament to the changing landscape of Indian cinema.

DARLINGS (2022): Alia Bhatt and Shefali Shah's film explored domestic violence with a dark comedic twist, keeping all the responsibility to themselves.

MRS. CHATTERJEE VS NORWAY (2023): Rani Mukerji, starring, brought to light the struggles of an immigrant mother without a male actor in any sort of lead.

CREW (2024): This very recent film starring Tabu, Kareena Kapoor Khan, and Kriti Sanon is a comedy about flight attendants, showing that women can carry a comedy film.

Get in touch at vivacity@dailypioneer.com

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Printed and Published by Shobori Ganguli for and on behalf of CMYK Printech Ltd., 4th Floor, Sahara Shopping Centre, Faizabad Road, Lucknow-226016 and Printed at The Indian Express Pvt Ltd., C-26 Amausi Industrial Area, Nadarganj, Lucknow. Editor-in-Chief Shobori Ganguli, Resident Editor Vijay Prakash Singh. RNI No. 2016/57. Lucknow Telephones: EPABX: 4036600 Fax: 2345582. Allahabad Office: (0532) 2420818, 2421018, 3290460. Kanpur Office: (0512) 2304006, 2304416. Varanasi Office: (0542) 2414294, 2414295. Delhi Office: 100K, Milap Bhawan, 8/A, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110 002, Phone: 011-40110455. Corporate Office:- 201-205, 2nd Floor, Pratap Bhawan 5, B.S.Z. Marg, New Delhi-110002 Phone: 011-46035729, 011-69342500.



The Pioneer AGENDA

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair"
— Shirley Chisholm

SHE is a daughter, a mother, a wife, and a leader. From sacrifices at home to commanding spaces once deemed unimaginable, women have done it all. Every woman's life is a symbol of already fought societal norms, unbreakable strength, unshattractive confidence and living grace. SHE is a force, a beacon and change, writes
ABHI SINGHAL

कोई सीता, कोई राधा
कोई झांसी की रानी।
हर रूप में नारी ने
दुनिया है संभाली।।



WAAH WOMANIYA!

Me being a woman have always heard and read that for HER the sky is the limit, but SHE, in every role and everytime knows that the limit doesn't stop at the sky.

The Durga Incarnates

Despite being nature's greatest marvel, women have long been denied the respect and autonomy they deserve. Forced to navigate paths imposed by others, many Indian women have dared to challenge these norms, rewriting the rules and forging their destinies. They dare, they challenge societal norms. Here are a few of them who have excelled and made their mark despite all odds in different fields that were a taboo.

KIRAN BEDI: THE FIRST WOMAN IPS OFFICER

As India's first female IPS officer, she broke barriers in a male-dominated force, transforming challenges into opportunities. Her journey from towing the Prime Minister's car for illegal parking to reforming Tihar Jail, demonstrates how determination and the right support can overturn deep-seated biases. Raised in an environment where education and independence were encouraged, she never let societal expectations define her aspirations. "Any girl child who is loved by her parents and given the vision and resources to realise her potential is ready to take on the world, as I was," says Kiran Bedi.

But entering a profession dominated by men was not without its challenges. The biases and prejudices were apparent. "The prevailing biases and prejudices inspired me to question them. And prove them wrong. Which I did. It gave me a sense of achievement" she added.

NIDHI SALGAME: THE OFF-ROADER MAKING HER PATH

Nidhi Salgame, founder of Wander Beyond Boundaries, exemplifies excellence in a field where skill matters more than gender. An accomplished off-roader and explorer, Nidhi has overcome stereotypes and judgment by letting her actions speak for themselves. Nidhi says, "You just have to prove yourself again and again. I faced judgment, and immense stereotyping. I had to prove myself twice over, just for people to acknowledge my skills. That's not a burden any man would carry, yet it was placed on me. But in the end, actions speak louder than words." She further added that the outdoors does not judge you by gender. The machine doesn't treat you differently. It is a leveller. And that's what makes it so liberating. Her journey has never been about fitting into stereotypes or shattering them, it has been about mastering what she does and doing it exceptionally well.

In off-roading extreme overland expeditions, capability is the measure of success.

POOJA SHARMA: AN ACTIVIST WHO DEFIED TRADITIONS

A social activist who turned personal tragedy into a mission of dignity. After witnessing her brother's untimely death, she vowed to honour those forgotten by society. Defying long-held traditions that barred women from performing last rites, Pooja armed herself with knowledge from ancient scriptures and has since bestowed dignity on over 5,000 unclaimed bodies. In a society where women are excluded from cremation grounds, Pooja stood as a lone warrior.

When she attempted to perform the last rites, temple priests blocked her path. "I started reading the Vedas, our scriptures, the Shiv Puran, the Garud Puran. Nowhere is it written that women cannot perform last rites" said Pooja. Armed with knowledge, she fought against centuries-old beliefs and proved that religion did not forbid women from giving dignity to the departed. Together, these women embody a spirit that transcends societal constraints. They remind us that while rules may exist, they do not define the power of a woman, the true force of creation, resilience, and change.

BIDISHA MUKHERJEE: BREAKING BARRIERS IN GOVERNANCE AND TOURISM

Entering the IAS amid a traditionally male realm, she now leads initiatives at the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board that empower women and promote sustainable tourism. Her work proves that when women lead, they not only participate but they redefine the landscape. Under her leadership, initiatives like women-run hotels, such as Amaltas, have not only created economic independence for women but also reshaped the tourism landscape in Madhya Pradesh.

"The desire to create meaningful change led me from teaching to public administration. While the gender imbalance in governance was a challenge, I saw it as a chance to redefine norms," said Bidisha. Her initiatives have set new benchmarks, proving that when women are given platform, they don't just participate they lead.

— BY DIVYA BHATIA

Now you don't have to picture such women, you can also see them behind the wheels of the massive DTC buses, their presence a powerful symbol that defies the notion that such roles are for men.

nised and their dreams are within reach and not pressure. Yet, amidst the general narratives of limitation, stories of extraordinary defiance emerge. Women, with an undying spirit, have ventured into segments previously deemed unimaginable, shattering the foundations of societal expectations. They carved paths where none existed, proving that ambition knows no gender. Consider the women who drive auto rickshaws through the chaotic city streets, their hands firm on the wheel, their eyes fixed on a future they are building. Witness the rural women at a construction site, carrying their babies on the back and bricks on their head.

A recent example was witnessed during the Mahakumbh Mela. A video from New Delhi Railway Station went viral, showing a mother in uniform with her child strapped to her front, holding a lathi in one hand while maintaining peace and order at the station.

Each of these roles comes with its own set of hardships and often the lack of respect from those who are not used to seeing women in these roles. Stories of such women are etched in courage and perseverance, are the true celebration of Women's Day. They deserve our respect, support, and endless celebration.

I grew up in a normal middle-class joint family. From a young age, I have seen my mother, a master's degree holder in Mathematics which was a huge deal in the 1990's, working eighteen hours a day as a homemaker. Her journey, fraught with obstacles and setbacks, revealed the harsh reality of how women's dreams were systematically stifled, even after years of dedication, sacrificed in the name of marriage and domesticity. It was a revelation that struck a deep chord for a silent lament for countless unfulfilled aspirations. In the same family, my sister and I had strict timings for returning home.

Mahila, Aurat, Nari, whatever you call her, she has always been categorised into different bases in life in vast job roles, but those were always restricted to the domain of her home. In India, women have largely been confined within the four walls of their homes, entrusted with the responsibility of managing the household and raising children. Their clothing choices, curfews, lifestyle, and behavior have long been dictated by societal norms and patriarchy. Any deviation from these expectations is seen as defiance and often equated with a decline in moral values.

Time moved forward, western influence came in and scenarios started taking turns, women started stepping out for work and everything changed. Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, the rigid structures that had defined a woman's existence began to show cracks. The long-held idea of women confined to hearth and home with domestic threads, began to fray. The world outside, once a forbidden territory, beckoned. Doors, previously firmly shut, creaked open, revealing the promise of new horizons for the literate women. This International Women's Day, it's important to remember the countless struggles faced by generations of women. The fight for equality has been long and arduous, marked by societal barriers and entrenched prejudices. Even now, despite significant progress, women continue to move through a world where their contributions are often undervalued. They strive not just for financial independence, but for something far more profound: respect and dignity. The desire to live a life on their own terms, free from the constraints of outdated expectations, fuels their determination. Many women are working tirelessly, balancing professional ambitions with personal responsibilities. They seek a future where their voices are heard, their talents are recog-



Kiran Bedi



Bidisha Mukherjee



Pooja Sharma



Nidhi Salgame



Kalpana Chawla



Sarla Thakral



Sania Mirza



Bachendri Pal



Sushmita Sen

WOMEN WHO SCRIPTED HISTORY

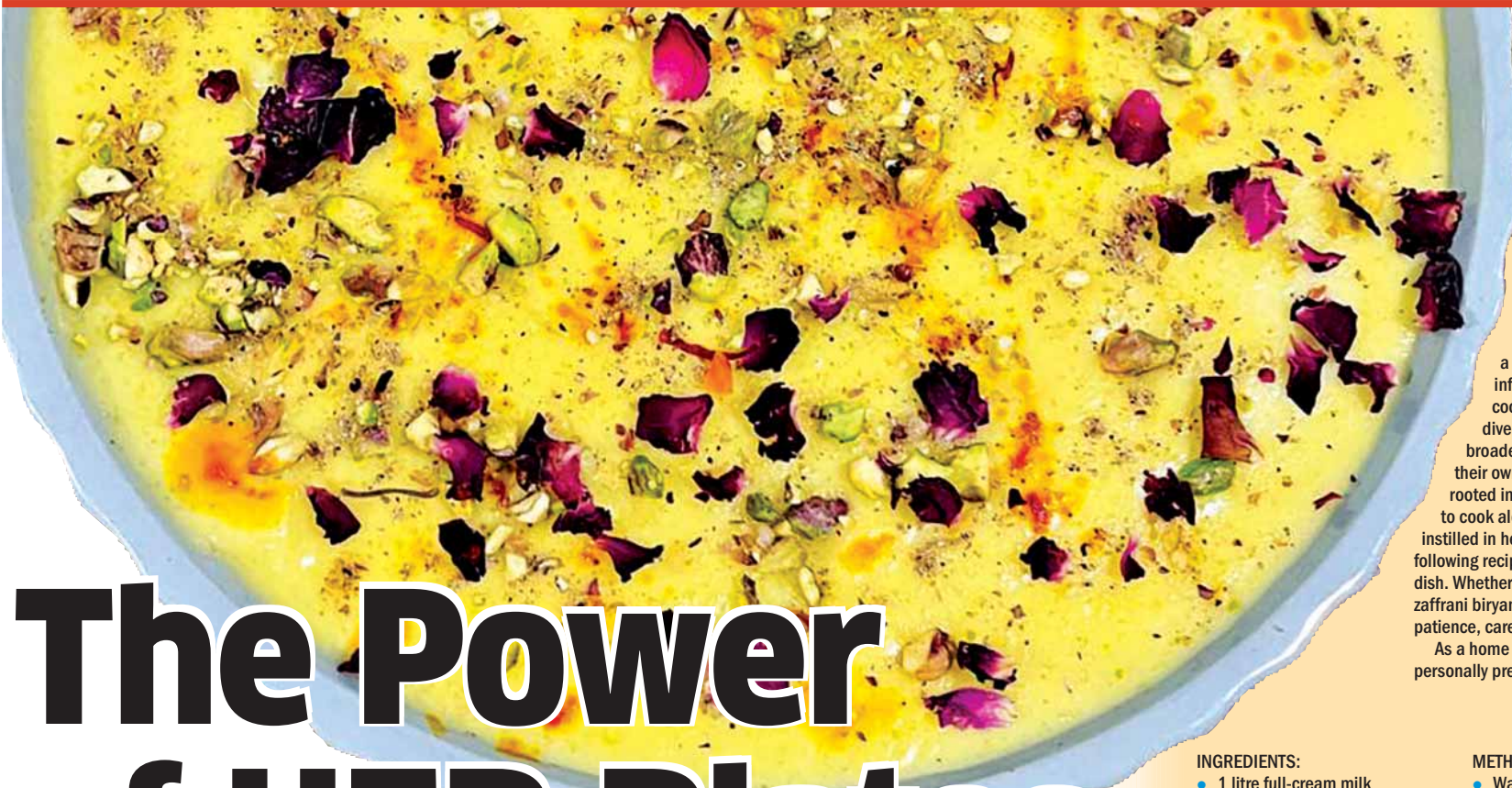
Kalpana Chawla's journey to space was an example to her extraordinary intellect and courage. She became an icon, inspiring countless young women to pursue careers in STEM fields. Her dedication to exploration and scientific advancement left an indelible mark on the world. During the wonders that she did, her life was tragically cut short but her legacy continues to propel humanity's quest for knowledge.

Sarla Thakral, in 1936, became India's first female pilot. At 21, she flew a Gypsy Moth, defying societal norms. Her courage shattered barriers, inspiring generations. Her achievement symbolised female empowerment, proving women's capabilities in traditionally male-dominated fields. Her legacy is one of resilience and pioneering spirit.

Sania Mirza's victory in the 2005 WTA Hyderabad Open doubles title was a watershed moment for Indian tennis. She shattered glass ceilings, proving that Indian women could excel in international sports. Her powerful serves and unwavering spirit inspired a generation of aspiring athletes. Mirza's success not only elevated Indian tennis but also empowered women to pursue their dreams.

Bachendri Pal's ascent of Everest in 1984 etched her name into history. With unflinching determination, she conquered the world's highest peak, inspiring generations of Indian women. Her courage shattered barriers, proving that no summit is too high to reach. Pal's achievement is a testimony to the strength and resilience of women and a beacon of hope.

Sushmita Sen's victory at Miss Universe 1994 transcended beauty pageants. She became a symbol of grace and intelligence, showcasing the modern Indian woman to the world. Her poise and eloquence captivated audiences, shattering stereotypes and empowering young girls to dream big. Sen's triumph was a moment of national pride, highlighting India's evolving identity on the global stage.



The Power of HER Plates

Celebrating the women in food, shaping flavours, traditions, and the future of cooking with passion, says TEAM AGENDA

CHEF MANSI'S CULINARY JOURNEY



Hailing from Lucknow, the cultural heart of Awadh, Mansi Kapoor grew up surrounded by a rich culinary heritage where diverse communities contributed unique flavours and traditions. Coming from the UP Khatri community, traditionally strict vegetarians who exclude even onions and garlic, she was raised with a deep respect for food. However, the influence of close friends and a shared love for cooking led her family to embrace a more diverse range of culinary experiences, broadening their appreciation for flavours beyond their own traditions. Her passion for food is deeply rooted in her family's love for hospitality. She learned to cook alongside the women in her household, who instilled in her the belief that cooking is not just about following recipes but about pouring one's heart into every dish. Whether preparing a simple dal or an elaborate zaffrani biryani, she believes that good food requires patience, care and attention to detail. As a home chef, Mansi remains committed to personally preparing every dish she serves, following

traditional recipes without compromise. She strongly believes in the philosophy of "sahaj pake so meetha hoye", meaning slow-cooked food is the most flavourful, embracing a methodical and mindful approach to cooking. By using fresh, seasonal and local ingredients, she ensures that every meal she prepares is not just nourishing but also a sensory delight. Her culinary talents have been widely recognised at food festivals and her Awadhi tables, hosted at her home, have received high praise from renowned connoisseurs. Mansi's dedication to preserving and celebrating authentic flavours makes her a true ambassador of Awadhi cuisine.

ZAFRANI PHIRNI

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 litre full-cream milk
- 60g basmati rice
- 150g granulated sugar
- A pinch of saffron
- ½ tsp cardamom powder
- 1 tsp kewra water (optional)
- 10 almonds, blanched and finely chopped
- 10 pistachios, sliced
- Rose petals for garnish (optional)

METHOD:

- Wash and soak the rice for about 30 minutes. Drain and grind it into a semi-coarse paste.
- Soak the saffron in 2 to 3 tsp of warm water.
- Heat the milk in a saucepan or karahi, then add the cardamom powder, sliced almonds and saffron.
- Bring the milk to a boil, then

lower the flame. Gradually add the rice paste while stirring continuously to prevent lumps.

- Cook until the rice is fully cooked and the mixture thickens.
- Add sugar and stir until it dissolves completely.
- Mix in the kewra water for a fragrant touch.
- Pour the phirni into pre-soaked earthenware bowls (sakoras) or

- glass serving dishes.
 - Garnish with sliced pistachios and rose petals.
 - Refrigerate for at least an hour before serving chilled.
- A slow-cooked delicacy infused with saffron and cardamom,

Mansi's Zaffrani Phirni is a perfect celebration of traditional Awadhi flavours, offering a rich, creamy and aromatic treat.



CHEF NISA YIMTHONG'S CULINARY JOURNEY

Chef Nisa Yimthong boasts an impressive professional history that spans continents and has left an indelible mark on esteemed establishments worldwide. Her odyssey began as a junior sous chef at Bangkok's revered Blue Elephant Thai Restaurant, where she honed her craft. She ascended through prestigious roles, including Chef de Partie at the Dusit Thani Hotel and Junior Sous Chef at the Bolan Thai Restaurant in Bangkok.

Chef Nisa's journey took her to international opportunities, where she showcased her culinary prowess at esteemed establishments such as the Sukhothai Hotel in Bangkok and the Leela Palace in Chennai. Her expertise truly blossomed during her first stint at Shangri-La Eros New Delhi, where she wowed diners with her exceptional skills in the realm of Thai cuisine at Tamra. This journey led to her assuming the esteemed role of Chef de Cuisine Thai at Intercontinental Century City Chengdu in China, solidifying her reputation as a true maestro of gastronomy.

Adding depth to her culinary mastery is Chef Nisa's educational foundation; she holds a bachelor's degree in hotel management from Suan Dusit Rajabhat University in Thailand. Her expertise extends beyond traditional culinary offerings, encompassing the intricate art of fruit and vegetable carving, creative food presentation, and innovative menu development. Her unwavering commitment to cleanliness and hygiene underlies her steadfast pursuit of culinary excellence.

Colorful Swirl Mathri

- 200 gms Maida
- 75 ml Refine oil
- 2gm Ajwain
- 2gm Red food colour
- 2gm Green food colour
- 2 gm Baking soda
- 2 gm Salt

METHOD:

- In a bowl mix the flour, salt, carrom seeds and salt and mix it properly
- Add the oil to the flour mix and incorporate it nicely and a little warm water and knead it to a tight and smooth dough without ant granules
- Divide the dough into 3 equal portions and add the red and green food coloring each to two portions and knead it properly so that the colour gets incorporated in each dough.
- To give equal colour roll out separately all 3 doughs into thin sheets and place it on top of each other according to the colours you want in your swirl and roll it out like cigar.
- Roll carefully into a cigar shaped roll brushing a little water at the end so that it sticks properly.
- Finally cut the roll into thin slices
- Meanwhile heat the refine oil for frying in a wok, fry the dough slices 5-6 together in a medium sized wok for 5-6 minutes in medium low flame till they are cooked properly.



RANGO KE GUBAARE : A PALETTE OF TRADITION

BY TEAM AGENDA

Recipes by Chef Ashu Chugh, Executive Chef, Jaypee Greens Golf Resort, Greater Noida
Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup rava, 1 ½ tsp whole wheat flour, 1 tsp gram flour
- Salt, pepper, red chilli powder, fennel powder, baking soda
- 1 tsp oil, water as needed, oil for frying
- 50g fried makhana, 100g moong sprouts, 100g boiled potatoes
- 20 mini bhalle (optional), chopped onions, tomatoes, green chillies, green apple
- 200g yoghurt, 4 tsp blueberry compote, 4 tsp green & tamarind chutneys
- Black salt, cumin powder, chaat masala, red chilli powder
- 8-10 papdi, sev, 4 tsp pomegranate arils, coriander

INSTRUCTIONS

- Make Dough: Mix flours, spices, oil and water into a firm dough. Rest 30 mins.
- Fry Kachori: Roll into discs, fry until crisp and golden.
- Assemble: Break the top, fill with sprouts, potatoes, bhalle, onions, apple.
- Top & Serve: Add yoghurt, chutneys, spices, crushed papdi, sev, pomegranate and coriander. Serve immediately.

A crunchy, tangy Holi special delight!



A CLASSIC HOLI TREAT BURSTING WITH FLAVOUR

BY TEAM AGENDA



Recipes by Chef Amardeep Singh Bhatia, Executive Chef, Jaypee Siddharth

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg refined flour, 1 kg khoya
- 50g each cashew nuts, pista, almonds
- 5g green cardamom, 20g fennel seeds
- 100g coconut powder, ghee as required
- Sugar syrup as required

METHOD

- Mix flour, ghee, and water to form dough. Knead and rest for 10-15 minutes.
- Prepare a sugar syrup by boiling 2 cups of sugar with 5 cups of water.
- Roll out small dough balls into thin circles.
- Fill with the khoya mixture, fold, and seal edges.
- Fry in ghee until golden brown.
- Drain excess oil and serve warm or at room temperature.

EMBRACING THE SPIRIT OF HOLI SWEETNESS

BY TEAM AGENDA

Holi is a festival of colours, but it's also a festival of flavours. It's the time when kitchens fill with the aroma of saffron, cardamom and slow-cooked khoya, as families come together to prepare festive treats. The first bite of a perfectly crisp Rango ke Gubaare, breaking into a rich, nutty filling or the cool, spiced embrace of Thandai Rasmalai, soaked in saffron-infused milk, these are the tastes that make Holi special. Each sweet carries a story of tradition, celebration and the simple joy of sharing, making Holi as much about food as it is about colours.



By Chef Vaibhav Bhargava - Consultant Chef, Food Stylist and Entrepreneur

Chenna Rasmalai Thandai

- A delightful fusion of saffron-infused chenna, served in chilled thandai.
- Preparation Time: 20 minutes
- Cooking Time: 2 hours
- Total Time: 2 hours 20 minutes
- Course: Dessert
- Cuisine: Indian
- Servings: 4

Thandai Recipe

INGREDIENTS:

- Milk - 250ml
- Water - 1500ml
- Sugar - 375g
- Fennel seeds (saunf) - 7g

- Cardamom powder - 3g
- Almonds - 15g
- Pistachios - 15g
- Skinned watermelon seeds - 15g
- Poppy seeds - 7g
- Rose water - 3g
- Whole peppercorns - 3g
- Dried or fresh rose petals - 50g

METHOD:

- Soak the almonds, pistachios, and watermelon seeds for 3-4 hours, then drain and grind them into a fine paste.
- Lightly roast the cardamom, fennel seeds, and peppercorns, then grind them into a fine powder.
- In a pan, bring the milk to a boil. Add saffron and sugar, then let it cool to room temperature before refrigerating.
- Once chilled, mix in the ground nuts

- and spice powder.
- Add rose petals and rose water for a fragrant finish. Your Thandai is now ready.
- Rasmalai Recipe

INGREDIENTS:

- Milk - 1000ml
- Refined flour - 5g
- Granulated sugar - 500g
- White vinegar (for curdling milk) - 60ml
- Water - 1500ml

METHOD:

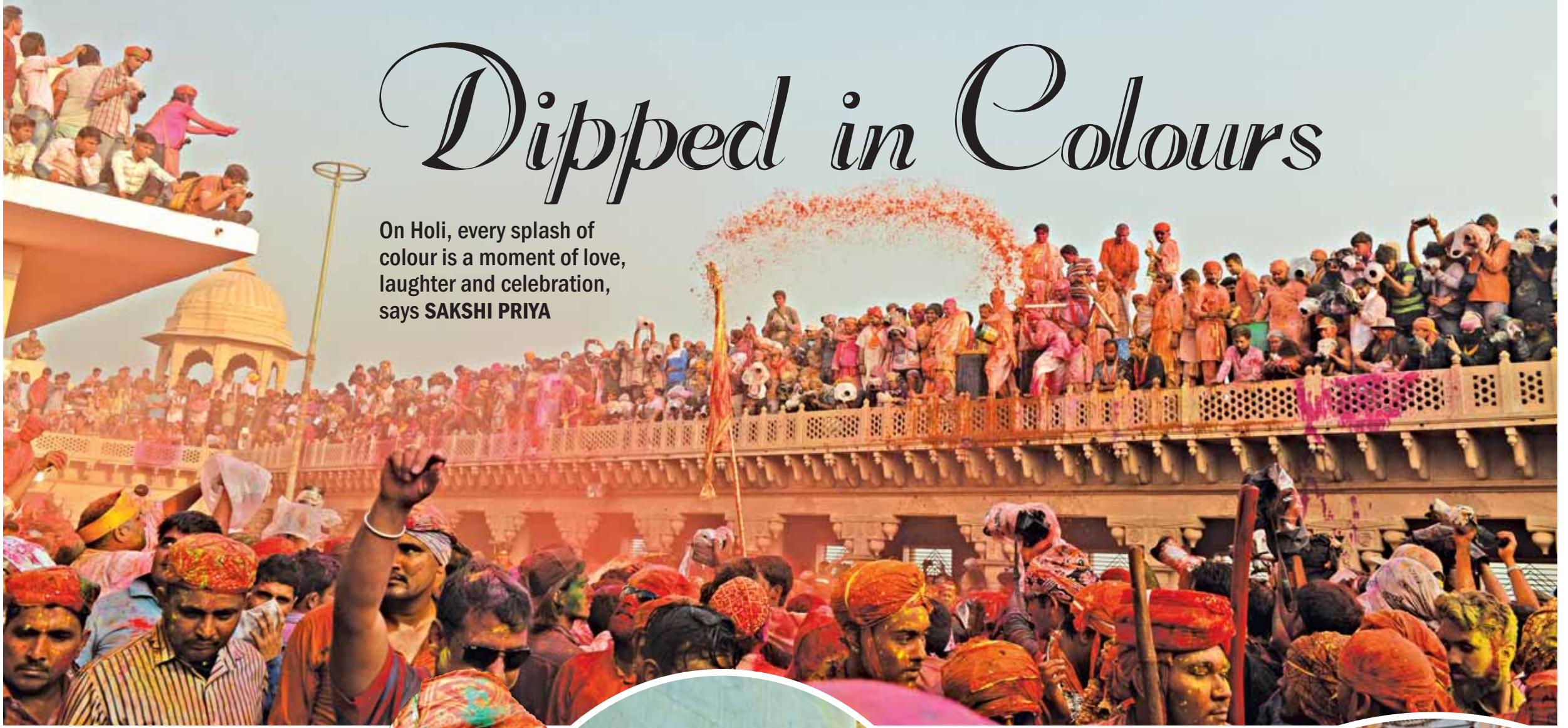
- Dilute the vinegar with 2-3 cups of water.
- Bring the milk to a boil and slowly add the diluted vinegar. Stir until the milk curdles and forms soft chenna.
- Add 2-3 cups of water and ice cubes to

cool it down, then strain to remove any vinegar traces.

- Drain excess water by placing the chenna in a muslin cloth and hanging it for 2-3 hours.
- Knead the chenna until smooth, then mix with refined flour to form a soft dough.
- Shape the dough into small dumplings.
- Prepare a sugar syrup by boiling 2 cups of sugar with 5 cups of water.
- Add the dumplings to the boiling syrup and cook for 5-10 minutes. Your Rasmalai is ready.
- Assembly - Thandai Rasmalai
- Squeeze the excess syrup from the Rasmalai.
- Submerge them in the chilled Thandai.
- Garnish with nuts and serve elegantly.

Dipped in Colours

On Holi, every splash of colour is a moment of love, laughter and celebration, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Rang barse bheege chunar wali, rang barse..." a song that instantly reminds everyone of Holi, bringing back memories of laughter, colours and streets filled with celebration.

This timeless Bollywood song has become the soundtrack of the festival, capturing its playfulness and joy. Whether it is Amitabh Bachchan's deep baritone or Ranbir Kapoor's youthful energy, cinema has long celebrated.

As Holi approaches, the streets fill with music, laughter and a riot of colours begins. Holi as a time of revelry. People come together, smearing each other with colours, dancing and setting aside their worries for a day. "Bura na maano, Holi hai!" becomes the anthem, inviting everyone to join in the fun.

Beyond the festivities, Holi holds deep cultural and religious significance. It symbolises the victory of good over evil, with the *Holiika Dahan* on the eve of Holi marking this victory. The festival also signifies the arrival of spring, a time of renewal and joy. While Holi is celebrated across India in different ways, the traditions of *Braj*, especially in Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana and Nandgaon, are among the most vibrant and unique.



THE SIGHT OF THOUSANDS OF PETALS RAINING DOWN IN THE TEMPLE PREMISES IS BREATHTAKING, A SERENE CONTRAST TO THE MORE BOISTEROUS CELEBRATIONS



Lathmar Holi

Holi in Barsana and Nandgaon, two villages in Uttar Pradesh, is unlike anywhere else. Here, the festival takes on a unique and playful form known as Lathmar Holi, where women chase men with sticks while the men protect themselves with shields. It is a spectacle that draws thousands of visitors each year, blending tradition with festivity in a way that is both energetic and deeply rooted in local culture.

Curious about what it feels like to experience Lathmar Holi firsthand, I spoke to Aneesh Sharma, a traveller who recently visited Barsana during the festival. "The moment we entered the village, it felt like stepping into a different world," he recalled. "Women stood ready with sticks in hand, their faces filled with excitement. The men from Nandgaon, laughing and teasing, willingly walked into this playful battle. It wasn't aggression, it was pure joy."

He described the sounds of dhols filling the air as colours flew in every direction. "At one point, I just stood there watching. The energy was surreal. One of the men near me held up his shield, pretending to be terrified of the women approaching him, and everyone burst into laughter. It's a Holi unlike anything I had ever seen before."

A week before the main Holi celebrations, men from Nandgaon visit Barsana. As they enter the village, they are welcomed with colours, teasing and, most famously, sticks. The women of Barsana, dressed in traditional attire, await them with lathis (sticks) in hand, ready to chase them away in a playful mock battle. The men, armed with shields, try to dodge the blows, but many willingly surrender, laughing and embracing the spirit of the festival.

The next day, the women of Barsana visit Nandgaon, continuing the celebration on the men's home ground. The entire event is accompanied by traditional folk songs and the beating of dhols, with chants of "Shri Radhe!" and "Jai Kanha!" filling the air.

While it may seem intense to an outsider, Lathmar Holi is all in good fun, a symbolic exchange rather than a true battle. It represents the spirited playfulness that defines Holi in this region, where joy, music and community come together in a festival unlike any other.

HOLI IN VRINDAVAN

A short distance from Barsana and Nandgaon, Vrindavan is home to one of the most visually stunning Holi celebrations. Here, Holi is an expression of devotion.

At the Banke Bihari Temple, the celebrations begin days in advance, with priests and devotees showering each other with gulaal and flower petals. Unlike the lively Lathmar Holi, the atmosphere here is more devotional. The temple doors open and the deity of Krishna is brought closer to the devotees, as if participating in the celebrations. Pilgrims sing bhajans, dance in joy and immerse themselves in a Holi that is deeply spiritual.

I also spoke to Ananya Patel, who experienced Holi in Vrindavan for the first time. "It was about colours, it felt like

a blessing," she said. "The temple was packed, but there was this beautiful sense of harmony. When the petals started falling from above, it was almost surreal. Everyone around me had their hands raised, singing, completely lost in the moment. It was Holi, but in the purest, most peaceful form." As locals and visitors immerse themselves in a tradition that has been carried forward for generations. One of the most mesmerising aspects of Vrindavan's Holi is the Phoolon Ki Holi, the Holi of flowers, where instead of coloured powders; fragrant flower petals fill the air. The sight of thousands of petals raining down in the temple premises is breathtaking, a serene contrast to the more boisterous celebrations outside.

WOMEN STOOD READY WITH STICKS IN HAND, THEIR FACES FILLED WITH EXCITEMENT. THE MEN FROM NANDGAON, LAUGHING AND TEASING, WILLINGLY WALKED INTO THIS PLAYFUL BATTLE. IT WASN'T AGGRESSION, IT WAS PURE JOY



A FESTIVAL THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

Holi is a festival of colours, it is a festival of unity. Whether it is the playful combat of Lathmar Holi, the devotional celebration in Vrindavan or the modern citywide festivities, Holi breaks down barriers. For one day, differences fade away and people come together in laughter and celebration.

In a world often divided by differences, Holi serves as a reminder

of shared joy and togetherness. The act of applying colour on someone is a playful gesture; it is an acceptance, a moment of unity. Strangers become friends, old grievances are set aside and for those few hours, life is lived in its most carefree and joyous form.

So, as Holi nears, whether you celebrate with lathis in Barsana, bhajans

in Vrindavan or Bollywood beats in your own city let the spirit of the festival take over. Dance freely, laugh without restraint and embrace the colours of Holi with open arms.

Bura na maano, Holi hai!



**YOUR
WEEK
AHEAD**



MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

Everything is flowing smoothly in your life right now, with long-held aspirations coming to fruition. There's a sense of peace and harmony that surrounds you, making it a perfect time for celebration. However, you seem to be holding back your emotions, perhaps due to past hurts, which might prevent you from experiencing deeper connections. As the week progresses, consider this an opportune moment to foster closer relationships with your family and embrace the abundance of blessings that life offers. This could lead you toward the peace and happiness you seek. If there are any familial tensions, now is the time to actively work towards reconciliation. By the week's end, anticipate receiving something you've hoped for. Consider engaging in charitable activities or visiting spiritual places, which reflects your kind and generous nature.

**Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Plum
Lucky day Thursday**



LEO July 23-Aug 22

Significant transformations are on the horizon, shifting the dynamics from favorable to less favorable conditions and vice versa. During this period, you might face concerns over diminishing finances or business, prompting doubts about past decisions. However, your inclination toward optimism will encourage you to await the outcomes patiently. Shifts in your career, residence, or family structure are likely, signaling a period of upheaval. Embracing these shifts can propel you towards a mindset characterized by greater personal liberation. You are keen on forging new connections or achieving success in entrepreneurial ventures. Your choices and actions will play a crucial role in shaping these endeavors. Your vibrant and dynamic personality shines through in both professional and social circles, marked by your reliability, innovation, and vivacity.

**Lucky number 5 | Lucky colour Tan
Lucky day Wednesday**



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week finds you embracing strength and gaining control over your emotions, positioning you to seize various opportunities. Balancing influence and emotional resilience is key, as self-mastery leads to broader influence over your surroundings. Your disciplined approach helps you navigate life's challenges effectively, making you a dependable source of guidance for your family and peers. Your advice is valued by all, reflecting your ability to maintain a clear perspective without allowing emotions to cloud your decisions. As the week progresses, expect a burst of inspiration to ignite a new creative venture. This fresh insight might come unexpectedly, guiding you towards innovative ideas. Additionally, the week may culminate with uplifting news or a joyful event, adding a celebratory note to your achievements.

**Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour White
Lucky day Saturday**



TAURUS April 20-May 20

The week begins with the challenge of managing various demands, fostering teamwork, and ensuring progress while maintaining balance. Trust in your abilities and rise to the occasion. Recall times when you successfully navigated through competing priorities—balancing personal, professional, and financial responsibilities while maintaining wellness. You understand the rhythm of action and patience. By midweek, stay vigilant against misleading ambitions. Pay attention to potential hazards in your environment, such as accidents or safety concerns at home or work. Address these risks promptly. As the week closes, a sense of fulfillment emerges. Your financial endeavors or business investments are likely to yield significant rewards, leaving you satisfied with the outcomes.

**Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Saffron
Lucky day Saturday**



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

You are on the brink of achieving long-term financial stability and prosperity. The outlook for your economic growth looks promising, with potential gains through unexpected sources, including gifts or inheritances. Commitment in relationships may deepen, symbolized through meaningful gestures that signify long-term bonds. It's crucial now to maintain a practical approach; success will come from diligent effort rather than idle daydreaming. To enhance focus and productivity, consider incorporating practices like meditation into your routine, allowing you to view challenges with fresh perspectives. As the week concludes, you will find yourself in a leadership position, demonstrating authority and providing guidance. Your experience will be invaluable to others as you inspire and instill confidence, embodying a figure of respect and loyalty.

**Lucky number 10 | Lucky colour Teal
Lucky day Thursday**



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

Significant transformations are on the horizon for you. You may find yourself on the winning side of a legal dispute or decision. This period marks a fresh beginning where previous obligations are resolved, allowing you to move forward unburdened. It's time to leave behind old challenges and embrace new opportunities, setting the stage for a clean slate. The conflicts that once tested your resolve are now behind you, paving the way for a phase of accomplishment. There's potential for your dedication and effort to be acknowledged and celebrated. Take this as a confirmation that you're on the correct path. Move forward with optimism and assurance, as the achievements you've worked towards are within reach and your contributions are likely to be acknowledged widely.

**Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Brown
Lucky day Tuesday**



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week, you may find yourself filled with ambitious desires ranging from achieving financial stability, enjoying a harmonious home life, to seeing your family thrive. The urge to realize these goals swiftly could lead you to momentarily overlook other important duties. It's crucial to strike a balance in your endeavors to turn your aspirations into reality. Taking a pragmatic approach and focusing on practical steps rather than getting lost in daydreams will serve you well. As the week progresses, expect opportunities that could enhance your financial standing, such as making valuable connections, discovering new projects, or stumbling upon potential job offers. By the week's end, you might experience a sense of self-sacrifice, prioritizing the needs and ambitions of others above your own.

**Lucky number 19 | Lucky colour Scarlet
Lucky day Sunday**



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week holds the promise of many positive developments in your life. You are in a robust state, both in terms of health and financial stability. At work, you've reached a level of expertise where you're applying your accumulated knowledge effectively in practical scenarios. Your superiors have taken note of your skills and are entrusting you with significant projects that will further hone your abilities. Your determination is at its peak, empowering you to tackle challenging tasks successfully. It's also a favorable period for strengthening bonds with friends, as your confidence and decisiveness remove any room for doubt. Additionally, your dedication and resilience are setting a powerful example for your children, inspiring them to admire and emulate your qualities. You're poised to be an influential figure for both your peers and family this week.

**Lucky number 6 | Lucky colour Peach
Lucky day Monday**



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

You possess a natural charisma and an ability to persuade others with your eloquent communication. Your insight and self-assurance are tools you effectively utilize for constructive purposes. This is the moment to translate your aspirations into tangible goals, and thoughts into definitive actions. If setbacks have recently occurred, you now have the opportunity to transform these experiences into triumphs. Unexpected opportunities for new beginnings might arise, such as the development of a new friendship, welcoming a child, or finding deeper joy and fulfillment in an existing relationship. Your kind and empathetic nature often seeks harmony. Though occasionally you might find yourself feeling variable due to your deep connection with the emotional and spiritual realms, your perceptive abilities allow you to understand the core of any matter clearly.

**Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Sky Blue
Lucky day Wednesday**



CANCER June 21-July 22

This week, you may find yourself increasingly drawn to deepening personal connections, whether that's cultivating a new relationship or strengthening an existing one. Trusting your intuition is crucial now, as it guides you to align more closely with your true self. The theme of unconditional love is prominent, suggesting significant moments such as forming new bonds, engagements, or celebrating unions might be particularly meaningful during this period. Engaging in activities that challenge you physically or mentally could also be appealing, allowing you to test and surpass your previous limits. However, you might also encounter some disagreements or competitive scenarios that could disrupt your peace. It's important to seek common ground and foster a sense of balance in interactions, striving for mutual understanding and compromise to mitigate any extremes.

**Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Silver
Lucky day Monday**



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week finds you feeling fulfilled and content, both emotionally and financially. You naturally excel in roles that involve offering support and healing, always ready to lend a sympathetic ear or a helping hand. Your innate purity and appealing essence draw people to you effortlessly. You possess a remarkable ability to understand the motivations and behaviors of those around you. Plans may materialize to pass on your accumulated wealth, which could include tangible assets or invaluable wisdom that impacts lives more profoundly than mere financial wealth. As the week concludes, you'll find joy in the deepening of personal connections, witnessing the blossoming and stabilization of significant relationships, celebrating the joyous union of kindred spirits.

**Lucky number 18 | Lucky colour Mint
Lucky day Friday**



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week, those of you who are adept at strategic planning may find yourselves navigating opportunities for financial gain. These could arise from diligent efforts or unexpected sources like inheritances. Remember, this period isn't about emotional rewards but managing material assets wisely. Without careful handling, there's a risk of either squandering resources or becoming overly cautious to the point of hoarding, which could lead to frustration and disappointment. It's crucial to harness your innate ability to transform and manifest your desires. Strive to find a balance between potential and actual creation. Additionally, this is an excellent time to focus inward, utilizing your abilities to enrich and transform your personal growth and self-realization.

**Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Dark Pink
Lucky day Friday**

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THOUGHTFUL INSIGHTS



Ananda Tirtha Dasa

Meditation, for instance, has emerged as the foundation of tech-driven spirituality, with tools like AI-powered 'gurus'

Can SpiriTech Redefine Meditation to the Next Gen?

The journey toward spiritual awakening is quietly evolving. Traditional practices like meditation, once rooted in serene retreats and ancient texts, are now finding a new home in the digital age. Modern technology has enabled centuries-old traditions to be reimagined for a generation often weighed down by disconnection and overwhelm.

Smartphones, often seen as drivers of distraction, are being redefined as tools for self-discovery. From guided meditations to mindfulness reminders, technology is making it easier to pause and find moments of calm in our hectic lives. Yet, this intersection of the digital and meditative invites reflection: can technology truly deepen our connection to meditation, or does it risk reducing it to surface-level routines?

Meditation, for instance, has emerged as the foundation of tech-driven spirituality, with tools like AI-powered 'gurus' and wearable biofeedback devices that transform the practice into a measurable and personalized experience.

At its heart, meditation is a timeless practice of reconnecting with ourselves and the Divine within us. It's about stripping away the filters that color our perception of reality, much like removing tinted glasses to see the world as it truly is. In an age where noise and distraction often dominate, meditation offers much-needed clarity.

It helps us refocus on what truly matters, allowing the mind to settle and rediscover

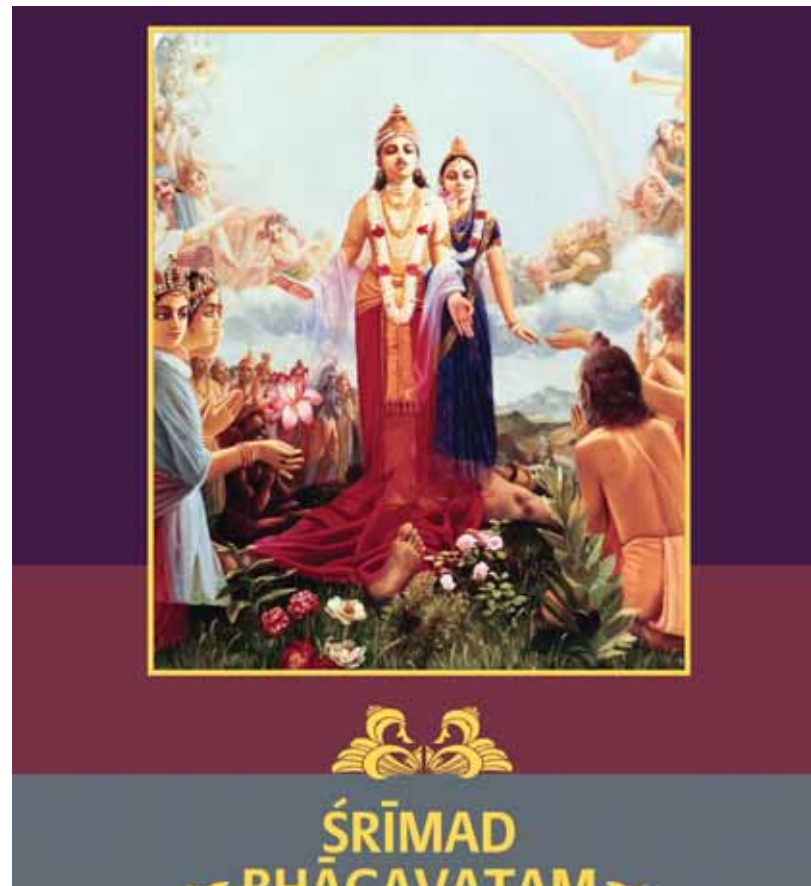
its innate peace. Technology often serves as a natural entry point to this process for younger generations, especially those immersed in the digital landscape.

Apps and guided meditations allow people to begin exploring practices that might otherwise feel intimidating. But the journey doesn't end there. When understood, meditation invites us to go beyond momentary calm and explore the essence of who we are.

This deeper potential is echoed in the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, where Arjuna compares controlling the mind to controlling the wind, an effort that requires incredible strength, patience, and grace. To navigate this challenge, Vedic scriptures recommend mantra meditation, especially chanting the Hare Krishna Maha Mantra, as a powerful method to calm our restless minds and connect with the Divine, transcending the temporary worries of life.

Another compelling example is Dhruva Maharaj, a young prince who, after facing rejection from his stepmother and fueled by ambition for power, initially sought a greater kingdom.

However, guided by his mother, he turned to Lord Narayana within his heart and practiced deep meditation. With his sincere devotion and focus, Dhruva met the Divine, and his worldly desires faded away. What once seemed important (power and revenge) lost its value and felt trivial, like broken pieces of glass. Instead, he discov-



ŚRĪMAD
BHĀGAVATAM

ered the priceless diamond of divine grace and enlightenment - a clear understanding of true fulfillment found in service and devotion.

Dhruva's journey shows that meditation can lead to significant personal transformation, which can heal our pain, shift our priorities, and help us find fulfillment that surpasses any material goals. The blending of tradition with today's technology that allows us to achieve this, or 'SpiriTech' as we can call it, is not about replacing ancient wisdom with gadgets.

Instead, it's about creating a partnership. Technology offers access and immediacy, while traditions bring depth and meaning. Together, they offer a new pathway that feels relevant yet remains deeply rooted in timeless truths. While technology cannot replicate the profound depth of traditional practices, it can act as a guide. SpiriTech provides an opportunity to pause and reconnect in a world of distractions.

Ultimately, the tools are just that - tools. The real journey is within. And for those willing to take that journey, the rewards are immeasurable.

Ultimately, the tools are just that - tools. The real journey is within. And for those willing to take that journey, the rewards are immeasurable. Embrace the ease technology offers, but remember the essence lies in inner stillness.

The author is the Trustee of ISKCON & CEO of Bhaktivedanta Book Trust

Now you can write to us at agendapioneer@dailypioneer.com