

First session of Dhyanchand Sports University to start this year: Yogi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Meerut

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, made several significant announcements regarding the development of Meerut.

During an interaction with the media here, Chief Minister Yogi said that Uttar Pradesh's first sports university, named after Major Dhyanchand, was being established in Meerut and its construction was expected to be completed by November 2025.

The chief minister, who recently inspected the site, said that the university's first session would commence this year.

Initially, the classes will be held at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology.

This institution is set to play a crucial role in nurturing sports talent in the state.

Highlighting Meerut's enhanced connectivity under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Yogi noted that the city has witnessed remarkable progress over the past decade.

He said, "The nation's first rapid rail service has been launched between Delhi and Meerut, complementing the existing 12-lane expressway. Additionally, the Ganga Expressway, which will connect Meerut to Lucknow and Prayagraj, is nearing completion. This year's budget has been allocated to extend the expressway from Meerut to Haridwar to strengthen connectivity further. Following the successful infrastructure development in Prayagraj, special attention is now being focused on Meerut." The chief minister also discussed key urban issues such as the inner ring road, traffic congestion, vending zones, sewerage, drainage, and solid



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during inspection of the under-construction Major Dhyanchand Sports University, Meerut, on Sunday PTI

CM: Youths can overcome any challenge with govt's support

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Meerut

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday hailed the youths of the state, saying they can overcome any challenge with the government's support. Speaking at

a loan distribution function in Meerut, Chief Minister Yogi said, "For youths, a challenge is not a challenge. If the government stands by them, they can pave their way through any challenge. The youths of Uttar Pradesh have worked to take themselves forward."

waste management in meetings with local officials and public representatives.

He assured that adequate funds would be allocated promptly upon receipt of relevant proposals.

Chief Minister Yogi reiterated his commitment to equipping Meerut with world-class infrastructure and praised the proactive role of public representatives in accelerating the region's development. He also emphasised the vision of transforming Meerut into a model city through comprehensive planning and effective execution.

Wanted criminal killed in encounter in Mathura

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

A wanted criminal carrying a cash reward of Rs 1 lakh on his arrest was killed in an encounter with the police in the highway area of Mathura district on Sunday.

A team of Mathura police led by Senior Superintendent of Police Shaileendra Pandey, killed wanted gangster Fati alias Asad in an encounter in the wee hours of Sunday. In the exchange of fire, Asad sustained bullet injuries and was rushed to a hospital where doctors pronounced him dead. Sources in the UP Police said that on August 19, 2020, the Asad gang had killed Indian cricketer Suresh Raina's uncle Ashok Kumar, aunt Asha Devi and their son Kaushal Kumar.

"Asad was wanted by the police since then. In 2023, the Muzaffarpur police had killed Asad's accomplice Rashid in an encounter," they said. Asad, who was the kingpin of the interstate Chhaimar gang, was wanted by the Mathura police. "The slain criminal, a native of Garh Mukteshwar in Hapur district, had more than three dozen cases registered against him in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Jammu Kashmir," the sources said. SSP Shailesh Pandey said that information was received from an informer that a hardened criminal of the Chhaimar gang, along with his three accomplices, was seen in a house in the Krishna Kunj Colony under the highway police station. "Acting on the tip-off, I, along with my team, rushed to the spot and cordoned off the area," he said. The SSP said that on seeing the police team, the criminals opened indiscriminate fire on the cops. "In the retaliatory firing, Asad sustained a bullet injury and was taken to the hospital, where

he was pronounced dead. Rest of the criminals fled from the spot and combing is being done to arrest them," he said.

It may be mentioned that on August 19, 2020, three people, including cricketer Suresh Raina's aunt and uncle, were murdered by the Chhaimar gang for robbery in Pathankot. The police had also announced a reward of Rs 50,000 on Rashid alias Sipai, an accomplice of notorious criminal Asad. A month later, the police killed the main murder accused Rashid in an encounter on Soram-Goyla road. The search for Asad was on.

Pandey said that on August 19, 2020, Chhaimar gang chief Asad had prepared the entire plan for robbery in Pathankot. After this, his accomplice Rashid raided the house of cricketer Suresh Raina's aunt and uncle. When they opposed the robbery, Rashid seriously injured Suresh Raina's uncle Ashok Kumar, aunt Asha and his cousin Kaushal Kumar. Raina's uncle Ashok died on the spot, while aunt Asha and brother Kaushal died in the hospital.

Two miscreants related to this case were caught by the city Kotwali police during an encounter in Kidwai Nagar on September 19, 2022. One miscreant was identified as Kaka alias Golu alias Shahjan, of Dhalapada village slum in Thana Gangoh, district Saharanpur, while the other miscreant was Talib alias Fajjan alias Asim of Moradabad Peepal Sana. The name of Rashid came to the fore in the police investigation. He was absconding and a reward of ₹50,000 was announced on his arrest. On April 1, 2023, Rashid was injured in an encounter with the police and the Special Operation Group (SOG) in Shahpur police station area. He was taken to Shahpur community health centre where doctors pronounced him dead.

Govt to upgrade technological skills of top transport officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has stressed on reducing road accidents by equipping officials of the Transport Department with the latest technology.

To achieve this, he regularly provides guidelines to department officials through meetings. In line with this vision, top officials and employees of the Transport Department will now undergo training in advanced technology.

The Institute of Driving Training and Research (IDTR) in Rae Bareilly is being developed as a Centre of Excellence to facilitate this initiative. A dedicated training cell, headed by the additional transport commissioner (administration), has been established by Transport Commissioner Brajesh Narayan Singh to oversee the training programmes. Additionally, Fariduddin, the divisional transport officer of Basti, has been appointed as the nodal officer for the Centre of Excellence.

Singh said, "The IDTR Rae Bareilly will focus on building a permanent and modern training system for transport officers across Uttar Pradesh. The training will cover the latest technology, data-driven policy-making, enforcement strategies and e-governance."

He said specialised programmes would be organised for officers at all levels, including RI, PTO, ARTO, RTO, DTC and ATC. Besides this, refresher courses for existing staff and training for new officers would also be conducted regularly, he added.

The transport commissioner stated, "The training curriculum for transport officers would be designed to meet the specific needs of UP, align with evolving trends in the national transport sector, and adhere to guidelines from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH). Additionally, the curriculum will incorporate the latest global developments in the transport sector, ensuring officers stay informed about international best practices." The IDTR in Rae Bareilly is being developed as a Centre of Excellence. It will host workshops focused on training, refresher courses, new schemes, and reforms for transport officers.

The curriculum will emphasise technical upgradation, data analytics, and artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance digitalisation, efficiency and data-driven decision-making in transport management. Key areas such as smart traffic management, automated driving test systems, road safety analysis, and e-governance will be integral parts of the training.

To ensure practical learning, the curriculum will follow a case study-based approach, enabling officers to gain a deeper understanding of policy-making and enforcement processes, and to develop effective solutions for modern transport challenges. Regular training sessions will cover topics like road tax collection, permit systems, enforcement techniques and modern traffic management systems, aiming to improve the administrative efficiency of transport officers.

A dedicated training cell has been established to design and implement these programmes. This cell will be led by the additional transport commissioner (administration). It will include members such as the Additional transport commissioner (enforcement), additional transport commissioner (revenue), additional transport commissioner (road safety), additional transport commissioner (IT), the finance controller of the transport commissioner's office, and the nodal officer of the Centre of Excellence at IDTR Rae Bareilly.

Singh further claimed that in line with the chief minister's vision, there is a strong focus on reducing road accidents and equipping officers and employees with the latest technology. Comprehensive training will be provided to achieve this, he added.

Lovers killed for 'honour' in Baghpat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In a case of honour killing, a 19-year-old youth and his girlfriend were killed, allegedly by the family members of the girl after they reportedly found them together at her home in Baghpat district early on Sunday.

According to the police, Balram Kataria of Sadakpur Jonmana village in Baghpat was having an affair with 18-year-old Shrishti Singh of the same village for the last two years, but her family members were not aware of this.

Early on Sunday morning, Kataria went to Singh's home, where the two met in an empty room. However, the girl's family members grew suspicious, apprehending

a stranger in the house, and found them together. They beat both of them and allegedly strangled them to death with a rope in the room.

"We rushed to the spot following the double murder. A first information report (FIR) has been lodged at the Baraut Kotwali police station by family members of the deceased. Pushpendra Singh, the father of the girl, is in our custody. Investigation is underway after which formal arrests of those involved in the double murders will be made," said Baghpat's Superintendent of Police Arpit Vijayvargiya.

The bodies of both the victims were sent for post-mortem.

In Agra, a youth was killed and his

brother was injured after they were stabbed by neighbours during an altercation at Chunnipura village in Basauni area of the city late on Saturday night.

According to Additional Commissioner of Police Virendra, Dev Singh (27) and his brother Ramveer (25) were trying to mediate a dispute between their neighbour Ram Lal and his nephews Amar Chand and Suraj.

He said the victims' mother Sheela told police that all the three neighbours attacked her sons with knives.

Both the brothers were rushed to a hospital, where Dev Singh succumbed to his injuries. The accused are at large, and police have launched a search for them, ACP said.

Interstate child trafficking gang busted, 4 held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ballia

Police have busted an interstate gang involved in child trafficking with the arrest of four men, officials said on Sunday.

Two missing girls have also been rescued from the gang, they said.

According to the police, two teenage girls had gone missing from the Maniyar police station area within a month.

On December 24, 17-year-old Kalyatri Prajapati went to appear for a practical exam at Maniyar Inter College but did not return. Following a complaint from her mother, a case was registered on December 29 against unidentified persons.

Similarly, on January 13, Anjali Rajbhar (16), a Class 10 student, went to the same school and disappeared. Based on her mother's complaint, a case was registered on January 22.

Superintendent of Police Omvir Singh said that during the investigation, police gathered crucial evidence and conducted raids, leading to the arrest of Ashok Kumar Kumawat (25) and Kishan Bhati from Pali district in Rajasthan, along with Mohan Yadav (24) from Gaura Bagahi (Gangapur) village in Maniyar, and a 17-

year-old boy on Saturday.

The police rescued both the missing girls, he said.

During interrogation, the accused revealed details about their interstate trafficking network, which allegedly targets girls estranged from their families and sells them in other states for marriage and domestic work.

The police also recovered Rs 35,000 from the possession of the arrested persons.

SP Singh stated that further investigations are underway to uncover the full extent of the racket.

Couple booked for selling their infant for ₹1.6L

In Barabanki, four people, including a couple here, have been booked for allegedly selling their two-month-old child to a businessman from Lucknow for Rs 1.6 lakh, police said on Sunday.

The incident came to light on Friday night, prompting police action that resulted in recovery of the child from a businessman's house in Lucknow on Saturday, officials said.

Police said that the infant was now

under the protection of the Child Welfare Committee.

According to Child Helpline district coordinator Manoj Kumar, the couple from Kotwali area had handed over their child for adoption to Mohammad Yasir, a scrap business owner from Lucknow, on March 5.

"Yasir, who runs a business in Kaiserbagh Ghasiyari Mandi, allegedly emotionally blackmailed the couple, who were struggling financially, into giving up their infant," Station House Officer Alok Mani Tripathi said.

"Yasir was detained, and the child was returned to Barabanki on Saturday evening," the station house officer said.

Based on a complaint police have booked the parents along with Yasir and his wife in the matter.

The station house officer said that police were currently investigating the involvement of other people in the gang responsible for the illegal transaction. The accused father, who already has two other children, cited financial constraint as reason for taking this step.

"I was hopeful that the third child would have a better future," the father told media persons in Barabanki on Sunday.

MDA campaign sees 90% participation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Mass Drug Administration (MDA) campaign for filariasis eradication, spearheaded by the Yogi Adityanath government, concluded successfully by administering medicine to 90 per cent of the targeted population.

A significant achievement of the campaign was its success in convincing 93 per cent of those who initially refused to take the medicine.

State Programme Officer for Filariasis, Dr AK Chaudhary, reported that the campaign was conducted in 45 blocks across 14 districts of Uttar Pradesh from February 10 to 25. In several districts, a follow-up round was conducted to provide medication to those who initially refused or were unavailable during the main drive.

The campaign aimed to cover 1.10 crore people, of which 98,95,981 were successfully administered the medicine. Except for Jaunpur, all districts reported a medicine intake rate of over 80 per cent. In the final rankings, Barabanki secured the top spot, followed by Bareilly, Jalaun and Lucknow.

Dr Chaudhary highlighted that a major breakthrough was achieved in addressing refusal cases. Of 1.58 lakh people who initially refused, 92.7 per cent were convinced to take the anti-filariasis medicine.

He added, "Only children below one year, pregnant women, seriously ill patients and those who were outside the district were exempted. PSP played a crucial role in this success, with filariasis

The campaign also benefited from inter-departmental coordination. Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak and Principal Secretary for Medical and Health Partha Sarathi Sen Sharma contacted public representatives and heads of education and Panchayati Raj departments, urging cooperation.

patients and other PSP members actively contributing to the refusal conversion."

The campaign also benefited significantly from inter-departmental coordination. Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak and Principal Secretary for Medical and Health Partha Sarathi Sen Sharma contacted public representatives and heads of education and Panchayati Raj departments, urging cooperation.

As a result, public representatives, village heads, ration dealers and subdivision development officers extended full support to the campaign. Additionally, the Education department played a key role in spreading awareness among the public.

Symptoms of filariasis include fever attacks, pain and swelling in the affected body part; swelling in organs, genitals or breasts and discomfort or pain in the affected area

PAC jawan's mutilated body found

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bareilly

Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) jawan deployed at the Uttar Pradesh chief minister's residence in Lucknow was found dead on a railway track in the Mirganj area on Sunday morning, police said.

The mutilated body of Ankur Kumar, 26, belonging to the 47th Battalion, H-Dal PAC, Ghaziabad, was found near Gula Phatak around 6:30 am, police said.

His mobile phone was found nearby, ringing. The call led to the identification of the body. Additional Superintendent of Police (South) Anshika Verma said the body was found on the Bareilly-Moradabad railway track. "Upon reaching the spot, we found a mobile phone next to the deceased. A call on the phone revealed that he was PAC constable Ankur Kumar, son of Rakesh Kumar, a resident of Manohara village in Muzaffarnagar's Sikhedha police station area," she said.

Meanwhile in Bahraich two workers died due to electrocution at a house here, police said on Sunday. Mohammad Ahmed (35) and Afzal (40), both natives of Gonda district, had been working for several days at the house of a man named Sajjan in Harchanda village. On Saturday afternoon, the duo was carrying an iron ladder to the terrace when it accidentally came in contact with an overhead electric wire near the house. Both men suffered a severe electric shock and died on the spot.

Preps on to welcome skimmer chicks on sands of Ganga

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow/Prayagraj

Following the record-breaking arrival of over 6.6 billion devotees at the Maha Kumbh Mela, preparations have now begun to welcome the rare Indian skimmer chicks on the sands of the Ganga. At the beginning of the Maha Kumbh fair, more than 150 pairs of Indian skimmers, a species that typically lays eggs from December to late February or early March, arrived in Prayagraj. Along with these skimmers, their eggs and newborn chicks are now being protected from wild animals through the deployment of a large number of watchers. Additionally, the wildlife team has been put on high alert. Over 90 species of native and foreign birds have also arrived at the

world's largest fair, contributing significantly to pollution control. Bird enthusiasts from across the globe visit the Maha Kumbh to witness these species. Considering this, a bird festival has also been organised. Under the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, a special plan has been designed to promote eco-tourism, ensuring environmental conservation while also creating new employment opportunities for local communities.

Indian skimmers find a home on the sands of Sangam: According to Divisional Forest Officer (Prayagraj) Arvind Kumar Yadav, more than 150 pairs of Indian skimmers have settled in the Sangam region, blending seamlessly into the natural environment alongside millions of devotees during the Maha Kumbh. To protect their eggs from wild animals, these birds bury them in the sand.

Several preventive measures have been implemented by the Yogi government to ensure the safety of both the skimmers and their chicks, as well as to boost eco-tourism. A large number of watchers have been deployed to safeguard these rare eggs and young skimmers from wild animals and other threats. The wildlife team is also actively monitoring the area, ensuring both security and conducting a census of the birds. Continuous patrolling efforts are underway to protect both the birds and their eggs from potential dangers. A comprehensive plan has been prepared to promote eco-tourism, keeping environmental conservation at the forefront while generating significant employment opportunities for locals. More than 90 species of native and foreign birds have arrived, enhancing the region's biodiversity and contributing to its ecological balance

Editor's TAKE

A promise is a promise!

Delhi Government approves ₹2,500 aid for women despite PM Modi's opposition to freebies

Delhi Government, powered by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, has approved the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, a scheme aimed at providing financial assistance of ₹2,500 per month to women from economically weaker sections. The initiative, a key promise made during the BJP's election campaign in Delhi, is expected to cost the exchequer ₹5,100 crore. The eligibility criteria for the scheme include an annual income cap of Rs 2.5 lakh and an age range of 18 to 60 years. The Delhi Chief Secretary, along with other officials, has finalised these conditions, ensuring that the financial aid reaches the most deserving beneficiaries. However, the announcement understandably will concretise over a period of time as no date for disbursement has been declared yet, despite earlier promises of payments beginning on March 8. Besides, it has also been pointed out that the eligibility criteria were not communicated to voters during the election campaign. In its layout, the Mahila Samridhi Yojana seeks to ward off any criticism of the so-called "freebie culture," which political parties across the spectrum accuse each other of.

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

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

The approval of the Mahila Samridhi Yojana initiative is expected to strengthen the BJP's party's appeal among women voters, a crucial demographic in electoral politics. Therefore, the real success of the scheme will depend on its swift and transparent implementation. With opposition parties already raising concerns over delays and additional conditions, the Delhi Government must ensure that the scheme does not remain a mere electoral promise and delivers tangible benefits to the intended beneficiaries. As the political landscape of Delhi continues to evolve, the implementation of welfare schemes such as this will play a pivotal role in shaping the public's perception of the ruling party. The question remains whether the BJP can balance its ideological opposition to freebies with the electoral necessity of welfare measures. Indeed, the politics is the art of possible.

Judiciary under malicious attack by influential groups

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



ANOOP BOSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whither the women of this country?

SECOND Opinion



PAYAL AGARWAL

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

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

While urban areas have witnessed increased awareness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leaderspeak



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

AMIT SHAH, MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



Letters to the Editor

Unique ID for voters

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

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

RRK JAIN | BARWANI

Russian strikes on Ukraine

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

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

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Unfair criticism of Shami

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

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

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

TRUMP IMPOSES RECIPROCAL TARIFF

The United States of America is all set for rolling out the reciprocal taxation policy for the world. And his particular taxing targets are China, Brazil and India, all the major BRICS countries, along with Canada, the EU and Mexico.

Donald Trump claims their tariff rates are unfair for US products. Trump claims that India charges more than 100 per cent tariff rates, whereas South Korea charges four times higher tariffs on the USA. This is a clear indication of the fact that this time Trump 2.0 is actually trying to establish fair trade conditions, at least from the American domestic perspective. His wish to play fair on the tariff ground against those nations that have charged tremendously higher amounts of tariffs on America will become a costly affair for the respective targeted countries. Although Trump achieving this trade fairness is definitely a challenging task. As the nation will feel, it is challenging to adjust themselves to the new reciprocal tariff system.

The opinion of Trump to achieve this trade fairness is welcoming, as every country has the right to bargain, compete and charge

the tariff for protecting their local businesses. But at the same time, the US must not forget that the world is still on the juggernaut of unfair competition, resource and income divide. Still, the developing countries stand nowhere in comparison to the trade figures of the developed nations. In such a trade paradox milieu, the idea of tariff fairness and equity seems a little vague. Trump must pave the way for fair trade opportunities before initiating the idea of tariff fairness and reciprocity.

Trump must understand that no nation can grow unilaterally; we all need each other for our holistic development altogether. Trump must understand that America is a hegemonic state, and it holds its accountability for setting a balanced world order. It just can't do tit for tat with the world, calling it fairness. At the same time, Trump must stop taking help from Elon Musk, a smart capitalist. Since the administration of America is not like the running of a company, where risk-bearing is conditioned for profit only. Sometimes, our loss is the genuine profit of others, and we have to do so to pave the way for an equivalent and just society.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

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

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

The National Citizens Party (NCP) or Jatiya Nagorik Party (NJP) in Bengali, was born in Bangladesh on February 28, 2025. It is a progeny of the student leaders who spearheaded the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) that ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina from power on August 5, 2024, and the National Citizens Committee (NCP) or the Jatiya Nagorik Committee (JNC), that emerged from the same political cradle on September 8, 2024. The country was pregnant with it for almost seven months. A report by Reuters, dated August 16, 2024, and issued under the heading 'Student protesters plan new party to cement their revolution,' quoted Mahfuz Alam, who then chaired a committee charged with liaising between the interim government, which had assumed office on August 8, and groups like teachers and activists, that the decision to form such a party would be known in about a month. It further quoted Alam, who had been a key leader of the ADSM and is now an adviser to the interim government, as saying, "People are tired of the two political parties (obviously the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party). They trust in (sic) us."

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

The main focus was to maintain the spirit of the mass uprising and to consolidate the government. Others also expressed the same view.

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

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

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



committee. Wrangling and power struggles seem programmed into the genes of all political parties. In the case of the NCP, however, factional fissures are accompanied by the presence of incompatible ideologies. The NJP includes alumni of the Shibir, Jatiotabadi Chhatradal (Bangladesh Nationalist Students Party) affiliated with the BNP, several students' organisations of both leftist and fundamentalist Islamist outfits and those without any political involvement prior to joining the ADSM. They seem to be sticking together because they feel that the future belongs to the new party. What would happen when the latter loses its sheen with time? Signs of trouble are already manifest. Questions have been asked as to how the enormous amounts of funds needed to mobilise for the gargantuan rally that marked the NCP's formation were found. According to a report in *The Daily Star* dated March 2, 2025, the Pirojpur district administration had requisitioned several privately owned buses to facilitate local students joining the NJP's inaugural rally on February 28.

It was a partisan act and a grim pointer of this becoming a regular factor if the NJP comes to power. Besides, the declaration of the party's vision for Bangladesh raises questions. It talks of a "cruel fascist" regime—ostensibly referring to Sheikh Hasina's—ruling for 15 years, destroying state institutions and democracy, and making all-encompassing corruption and money laundering a part of state culture. A lot of what it says—relief to marginalised and disadvantaged communities, the protection of fundamental rights, preserving ethnic, social, gender, and cultural diversity, and ensuring strong safeguards against poverty, inequality, and abuse of power—is unexceptionable. One, however, wishes that it said more about the 'Second Republic,' which, and the enactment of a new constitution, are the party's overarching goals. Also, one wonders as to how seriously are pronouncements to



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

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

juridical fairness. Will the NCP come to power following the next parliamentary elections? It might have enjoyed a sweeping victory if an election had been held immediately after Sheikh Hasina's ouster, when its popularity was at its peak.

Since then, issues like a steep decline in the law-and-order situation, runaway inflation and economic instability have been eroding the public's confidence in the interim government. Given the latter's links with the founders of the new party, they too have started attracting a measure of cynicism, which is bound to be transferred to the NCP.

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

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

Bangladesh: A backgrounder

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

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

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

The Supreme Court eventually reduced the quota in late July to 5 per cent. The reversal was too little, too late. Violence between the protesters and the police increased, further fuelled by Hasina's refusal to release detained student leaders. The protesters, viewing Hasina as responsible for the deaths of some 600 people killed in the clashes with the police, began seeking her overthrow.

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

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

Breaking Free from Cloth Clutter

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

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

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

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

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

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

Various studies and research have shown that a cluttered environment negatively affects mental wellbeing, making it harder to focus and feel at ease. Today, the textile industry is one of the largest contributors to pollution.

Overproduction of clothing has led to increased carbon emissions, water consumption and waste. Many discarded clothes end up in landfills, as most fast fashion items are made from synthetic fabrics that take decades to decompose. Constantly buying new clothes without fully utilising existing ones results in unnecessary expenses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let your wardrobe smile!

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)



SHAINY SHARMA

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

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

US Demands and India's Position

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

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

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

The Indian Diaspora's Growing Influence

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

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

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

trade deal dialogue.

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



KS TOMAR

If Trump successfully distances Russia from China, India stands to benefit. Moscow has historically been a key defense and energy partner for New Delhi. Europe's Strategic Shift under Trump Trump's presidency has been marked by tensions with European allies over defense spending, trade policies, and multilateral agreements like the Paris Climate Accord. His criticism of NATO and demands for Europe to shoulder more security costs have strained US-Europe ties. Trump's questioning of NATO's Article 5 (the

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

Indo-Pacific Security Dynamics

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

Trump's Alignment with Russia

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

ing any reference to Russia's invasion.

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

The Future of India-US Trade Relations

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

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

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

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Kyiv

Russian special forces walked inside a gas pipeline to strike Ukrainian units from the rear in the Kursk region, Ukraine's military and Russian war bloggers reported, as Moscow moves to recapture parts of its border province that Kyiv seized in a shock offensive. Ukraine launched in August a daring cross-border incursion into Kursk, in what marked the largest attack on Russian territory since World War II. Within days, Ukrainian units had captured 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of territory, including the strategic border town of Sudzha, and taken hundreds of Russian prisoners of war. According to Kyiv, the operation aimed to gain a bargaining chip in future peace talks, and force Russia to divert troops

away from its grinding offensive in eastern Ukraine. But months after Ukraine's thunder run, its soldiers in Kursk are weary and bloodied by relentless assaults of more than 50,000 troops, including some from Russia's ally North Korea. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers run the risk of being encircled, open source maps of the battlefield show. According to Telegram posts by a Ukrainian-born, pro-Kremlin blogger, Russian operatives walked about 15 kilometers (9 miles) inside the pipeline, which Moscow had until recently used to send gas to Europe. Some Russian troops had spent several days in the pipe before striking Ukrainian units from the rear near the town of Sudzha, blogger Yuri Podolyak claimed. The town had some 5,000 resi-

dents before the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, and houses major gas transfer and measuring stations along the pipeline, once a major outlet for Russian natural gas exports through Ukrainian territory. Another war blogger, who uses the alias Two Majors, said fierce fighting was underway for Sudzha, and that Russian forces managed to enter the town through a gas pipeline. Russian Telegram channels showed photos of what they said were special forces operatives, wearing gas masks and moving along what looked like the inside of a large pipe. Ukraine's General Staff confirmed on Saturday evening that Russian "sabotage and assault groups" used the pipeline in a bid to gain a foothold outside Sudzha. In a Telegram post, it said Russian troops were "detected in a timely manner" and that Ukraine responded with rockets

and artillery. "At present, Russian special forces are being detected, blocked and destroyed. The enemy's losses in Sudzha are very high," the General Staff reported. The Associated Press could not independently verify these accounts, and there was no immediate comment from Russian officials. Meanwhile, French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said Sunday that France will use profits from frozen Russian assets to finance an additional 195 million euros package (USD 211 million) in arms for Ukraine, the latest in a series of military aid deliveries funded through the mechanism. In an interview with the La Tribune Dimanche newspaper, Lecornu said that Paris will send new 155-mm artillery shells and glide bombs for Mirage 2000 fighter jets it previously gave to Ukraine.

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Beirut

The death toll from two days of clashes between Syrian security forces and loyalists of ousted President Bashar Assad and revenge killings that followed has risen to more than 1,000, a war monitoring group said on Saturday, making it one of the deadliest acts of violence since Syria's conflict began 14 years ago. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in addition to 745 civilians killed, mostly in shootings from close distance, 125 government security force members and 148 militants with armed groups affiliated with Assad were killed. It added that electricity and drinking water were cut off in large areas around the city of Latakia. The clashes, which erupted Thursday, marked a major escalation in the challenge to the new government in Damascus, three months after insurgents took authority after removing Assad from power. The government has said that they were responding to attacks from remnants of Assad's forces and blamed "individual actions" for the rampant violence. Retribution killings between Sunnis and Alawites: The revenge killings that started Friday by Sunni Muslim gunmen loyal to the government against members of Assad's minority Alawite sect are a major blow to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the faction that led the overthrow of the former government. Alawites made up a large part of Assad's support base for decades. Residents of Alawite villages and towns spoke to The Associated Press about killings during which gunmen shot Alawites, the majority of them men, in the streets or at the gates of their homes. Many homes of Alawites were looted and then set on fire in different areas, two residents of Syria's coastal region told the AP from their hideouts. They asked that their names not be made public out of fear of being killed by gunmen, adding that thousands of people have fled to nearby mountains for safety. Residents speak of atrocities in one town: Residents of Baniyas, one of the towns worst hit by the violence, said bodies were strewn on the streets or left unburied in homes and on the roofs of buildings, and nobody was able to collect them. One resident said that the gunmen prevented residents for hours from removing the bodies of five of their neighbours killed Friday at close range. Ali Sheha, a 57-year-old resident of Baniyas who fled with his family and neighbors hours after the violence broke out Friday, said that at least 20 of his neighbors and colleagues in one neighbourhood of Baniyas where Alawites lived, were

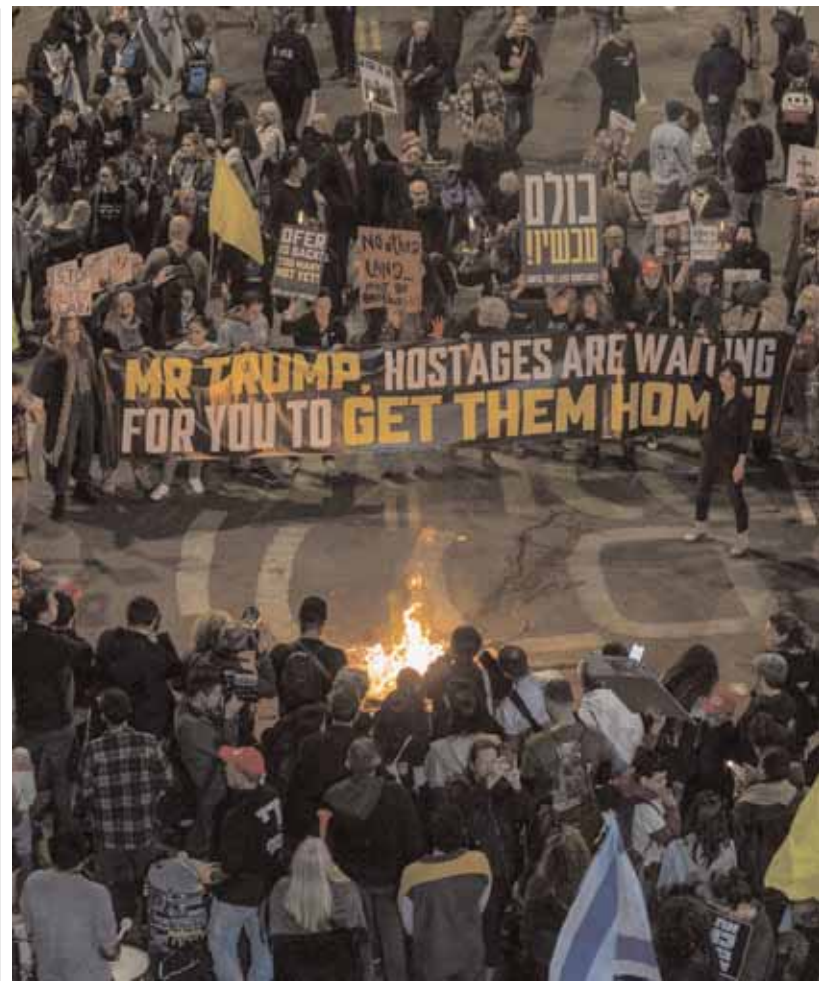
killed, some of them in their shops, or in their homes. Sheha called the attacks "revenge killings" of the Alawite minority for the crimes committed by Assad's government. Other residents said the gunmen included foreign fighters, and militants from neighbouring villages and towns. "It was very very bad. Bodies were on the streets" as he was fleeing, Sheha said, speaking by phone from nearly 20 kilometers (12 miles) away from the city. He said the gunmen were gathering less than 100 meters from his apartment building, firing randomly at homes and residents and in at least one incident he knows of, asked residents for their IDs to check their religion and their sect before killing them. He said the gunmen also burned some homes and stole cars and robbed homes. Death toll has multiplied: The Observatory's chief Rami Abdulrahman said that revenge killings stopped early Saturday. "This was one of the biggest massacres during the Syrian conflict," Abdulrahman said about the killings of Alawite civilians. The previous figure given by the group was more than 600 dead. No official figures have been released. A funeral was held Saturday afternoon for four Syrian security force members in the northwestern village of Al-Janoudiya after they were killed in the clashes along Syria's coast. Scores of people attended the funeral. Official reports say Syrian forces regaining control: Syria's state news agency quoted an unnamed Defense Ministry official as saying that government forces have regained control of much of the areas from Assad loyalists. It added that authorities have closed all roads leading to the coastal region "to prevent violations and gradually restore stability." On Saturday morning, the bodies of 31 people killed in revenge attacks the day before in the central village of Tuwaym were laid to rest in a mass grave, residents said. Those killed included nine children and four women, the residents said, sending the AP photos of the bodies draped in white cloth as they were lined in the mass grave. Lebanese legislator Haidar Nasser, who holds one of the two seats allocated to the Alawite sect in parliament, said that people were fleeing from Syria for safety in Lebanon. He said he didn't have exact numbers. Nasser said that many people were sheltering at the Russian air base in Hmeimim, Syria, adding that the international community should protect Alawites who are Syrian citizens loyal to their country. He said that since Assad's fall, many Alawites were fired from their jobs and some former soldiers who reconciled with the new authorities were killed.

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Deir Al-Balah

Israel said that it would send a delegation to Qatar on Monday "in an effort to advance the negotiations" around the ceasefire in Gaza, while Hamas reported "positive signals" in talks with Egyptian and Qatari mediators on starting negotiations on the truce's delayed second phase. The statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office gave no details except to say it had "accepted the invitation of US-backed mediators." Hamas spokesman Abdel-Latif al-Qanawa also gave no details. Talks on the second phase should have started a month ago. There was no immediate comment from the White House, which on Wednesday made the surprise confirmation of direct US talks with Hamas. Over the past week, Israel has pressed Hamas to release half of the remaining hostages in return for an extension of the first phase, which ended last weekend, and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Hamas is believed to have 24 living hostages and the bodies of 35 others. Israel last weekend cut off all supplies to Gaza and its more than 2 million people as it pressed Hamas to agree. The militant group has said that the move would affect the remaining hostages as well. The ceasefire has paused the deadliest and most destructive fighting ever between Israel and Hamas, sparked by the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The first phase allowed the return of 25 living hostages and the remains of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. Israeli forces have withdrawn to buffer zones inside Gaza, hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have returned to northern Gaza for the first time since early in the war and hundreds of trucks of aid entered per day until Israel suspended supplies. Before their weekly rally in Tel Aviv, relatives of hostages appealed to U.S. President Donald Trump, who met with eight former hostages on Wednesday. "Mr. President, a return to war means a death sentence for the living hostages left behind. Please, sir, do not allow Netanyahu to sacrifice them."

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

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Pope thanks volunteers for 'miracle of tenderness'

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Rome

Pope Francis issued a message Sunday thanking volunteers for the "miracle of tenderness" they offer the sick, as he continued his recovery from double pneumonia and doctors reported positive news. After more than three weeks in the hospital, the 88-year-old pope is responding well to treatment and has shown a "gradual, slight improvement" in recent days. For the fourth Sunday in a row, the 88-year-old Francis didn't appear for his weekly noon blessing, but he met with his top deputies and the Holy See distributed the text he would have delivered if he were well enough. In it, the Argentine pope thanked all those who were caring for him and others who are sick and experiencing a "night of pain." "Brothers and sisters, during my prolonged hospitalisation here, I too experience the thoughtfulness of service and the tenderness of care, in particular from the

doctors and health care workers, whom I thank from the bottom of my heart," read the message from Gemelli hospital. "And while I am here, I think of the many people who in various ways are close to the sick, and who are for them a sign of the Lord's presence. We need this, the miracle of tenderness which accompanies those who are in adversity, bringing a little light into the night of pain," he wrote. Francis, who has chronic lung disease and had part of one lung removed as a young man, has remained in stable condition at Gemelli, with no fever and good oxygen levels in his blood for several days, doctors reported in a Vatican statement Saturday. The doctors said that such stability "as a consequence testifies to a good response to therapy." It was the first time the doctors had reported that Francis was responding positively to the treatment for the complex lung infection that was diagnosed after he was hospitalised on February 14. But they kept his prognosis as "guard-

ed", meaning he's not out of danger. On Sunday morning, the Vatican reported he was resting after a quiet night. In his absence, the Vatican's day-to-day operations continued alongside celebrations of its Holy Year, the once-every-quarter-century Jubilee that brings millions of pilgrims to Rome. On Sunday, Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, who is close to Francis, celebrated the Holy Year Mass for volunteers that Francis was supposed to have celebrated. During the Mass in St. Peter's Square, the giant banner bearing Francis' papal coat of arms fluttered from the loggia of

the basilica above. Even while in the hospital, Francis is very much still the pope and in charge of the Catholic Church. That was evident too by the fact that the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra, visited the pope on Sunday, for the third time since he has been in the hospital. The Vatican has noted that such meetings are the routine way the pope governs while at the Vatican, making clear that he was getting essential work done from Gemelli. Francis has been using high flows of supplemental oxygen to help him breathe during the day and a noninvasive mechanical ventilation mask at night. Francis was hospitalised February 14 for what was then just a bad case of bronchitis. The infection progressed into a complex respiratory tract infection and double pneumonia that has sidelined Francis for the longest period of his 12-year papacy and raised questions about the future.



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

London (AP): A man was arrested early Sunday after he climbed the Big Ben tower at the Palace of Westminster in central London while barefoot and holding a Palestinian flag. The man, who appeared to be staging a protest on a ledge several metres (yards) up Elizabeth Tower, which houses Big Ben, stepped off the building after midnight and onto a cherry picker following a long conversation with negotiators. He got into a waiting ambulance. Traffic around the Palace of Westminster in London had come to a standstill for much of Saturday as emergency crews tried to reach the man. Negotiators were lifted up on a fire brigade ladder platform several times before eventually talking him down. Westminster Bridge and a nearby street were closed for much of the day and several emergency services vehicles were at the scene as crowds looked on. Police also blocked off all pedestrian access to Parliament Square. A small group of supporters shouted "Free Palestine" from behind a police cordon nearby. Officials said tours of the Houses of Parliament were cancelled because of the incident. The Metropolitan Police confirmed that the man has now been arrested. "This has been a protracted incident due to the specifics of where the man was located and the need to ensure the safety of our officers, the individual and the wider public," it said in a statement.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beijing

China on Sunday defended its USD 249 billion defence budget, which is next only to the US, saying it faces tough challenges in safeguarding sovereignty and the increased amount will be used to develop new-domain forces with the latest combat capabilities and joint strikes by its armed forces. Chinese Premier Li Qiang announced on Wednesday in the parliament that the planned defence expenditure for the country this year is 1.784665 trillion yuan (about USD 249 billion). "The Chinese military faces tough challenges in safeguarding national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Defence Spokesperson Sr. Co. Wu Qian said during the ongoing annual parliament session. Last year, China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 232 billion (1.67 trillion yuan). China has the world's second-largest military budget after the US, whose latest defence spending amounted to over USD 890 billion as proposed by President Donald Trump. While China cites the heavy US budget, its increasing defence spending is putting pressure on neighbours, especially India. The Chinese defence spending

amounted to three times that of India's Rs 6.81, 210 crore (about USD 78.8 billion). China's defence budget figures are viewed by critics with scepticism in light of massive military modernisation, including building aircraft carriers, rapid construction of advanced naval ships and modern stealth aircraft being carried out at a feverish pitch by the Chinese military. Wu said the increased expenditure will be mainly used to develop new-domain forces with new combat capabilities and to enhance systems and capacity for reconnaissance and early warning, joint strikes, battlefield support and integrated logistics support. The spending will also be put into improving military training under combat conditions and deepening national defence and military reform, Wu said. Compared to major military powers like the US, China's defence spending remains relatively low in terms of the spending's share in GDP, its share in national fiscal expenditures, the country's per capita defence spending, and expenditure per service member, he added. On Tuesday, Lou Qinjian, spokesperson for the National People's Congress, also defended China's increasing defence expenditure, saying that "peace needs to be safeguarded with strength".

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

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

The leaders of both Canada and Mexico got on the phone with President Donald Trump this past week to seek solutions after he slapped tariffs on their countries, but China's president appears unlikely to make a similar call soon. Beijing, which unlike America's close partners and neighbours has been locked in a trade and tech war with the US for years, is taking a different approach to Trump in his second term, making it clear that any negotiations should be conducted on equal footing. China's leaders say they are open to talks, but they also made preparations for the higher US tariffs, which have risen 20 per cent since Trump took office seven weeks ago. Intent on not being caught off guard as they were during Trump's first term, the Chinese were ready with retaliatory measures — imposing their own taxes this past week on key US farm imports and more. "As Washington escalates the tariff, Beijing doesn't see other options but to retaliate," said Sun Yun, director of the China programme at the Stimson Centre, a Washington-based think tank. "It doesn't mean Beijing doesn't want to negotiate, but it cannot be seen as begging for talks or mercy." As the world's second-largest economy,

China aspires to be a great power on both the regional and global stage, commanding respect from all countries, especially the United States, as proof that the Communist Party has made China prosperous and strong. After the US this past week imposed another 10 per cent tariff, on top of the 10 per cent imposed on February 4, the Chinese foreign ministry uttered its sharpest retort yet: "If war is what the US wants, be it a tariff war, a trade war or any other type of war, we're ready to fight till the end." The harsh rhetoric echoed similar comments in 2018, when Trump launched his first trade war with China and it scrambled to line up tit-for-tat actions. Beijing's leaders have since developed a toolkit of tariffs, import curbs, export controls, sanctions, regulatory reviews and measures to limit companies from doing business in China. All are designed to inflict pain on the US economy and businesses in response to the American measures. That allowed the Chinese government to react swiftly to Trump's recent across-the-board doubling of new tariffs on Chinese goods by rolling out a basket of retaliatory measures, including taxing many American farm goods at up to 15 per cent, suspending US lumber imports and blacklisting 15 US companies.

Beijing showed restraint in its response to leave room for negotiation, analysts say. Xi Jinping's leadership of the ruling Communist Party spans both of Trump's terms, giving Beijing more continuity in its planning. He is the one who decided it's not yet time to speak with Trump, said Daniel Russel, vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute. "That's not a scheduling issue, it's leverage for China," said Russel, who previously served as the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. "Xi won't walk into a call if there's a chance he'll be harassed or humiliated and for both political and strategic reasons, Xi won't play the role of a supplicant." "Instead, China is hitting back promptly — but judiciously — to each set of tariffs," Russel said. At his annual press conference Friday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that "no country should fantasize that it can suppress, contain China while developing good relations with China." "Such two-faced acts not only are bad for the stability of bilateral relations but also will not build mutual trust," Wang said. He added that China welcomes cooperation with the US, but noted that "if you keep pressuring, China will firmly retaliate".

IPO activity slows down, listings pulled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

aiming to raise over ₹1.15 Lakh Crore.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



People shop for colours and other essentials ahead of Holi

PIONEER PHOTO

High demand for Indian products in Holi, says BJP MP

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



SRM University’s collaboration with Carnegie Mellon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Amaravati

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

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

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

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

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

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

establish advanced AI labs at SRM University-AP.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chhattisgarh FM presents 100-page handwritten Budget

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Raipur

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

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

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

“I was writing my own (Budget)

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

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

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

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



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

PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

The talks are expected to focus on

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

US tariffs to hit pharma sector, auto minimal effect

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

India currently levies around 10 per

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sharma stated.

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

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

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

Cityflo expands to Delhi, plans to deploy 100 buses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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



Holistic Beauty in a Hectic Lifestyle

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



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

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



IN CONVERSATION WITH
SHAHNAZ HUSAIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Skin and Hair: Pre and Post Holi Care



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

Pre-Holi Care for Skin

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

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

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

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

Pre-Holi Care for Hair



Oil Your Hair

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

Tie Your Hair Up

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

Cover Your Hair

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

Avoid Heat Styling

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

Post-Holi Care for Skin

Use Gentle Cleansers

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

Exfoliate with Natural Remedies
Use a homemade scrub of gram

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

Apply a Soothing Mask

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

Hydrate and Moisturize

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

Avoid Harsh Chemicals

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



Delhi's Growing Waistline

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



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

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

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

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



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



POST-HOLI CARE FOR HAIR

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

Apply a Gentle Shampoo
To gently cleanse your hair without depleting it

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

Give Your Hair a Deep Conditioning Treatment
To replenish hydration and nutrients, use coconut or argan oil for an oil massage or a deep conditioning hair treatment.

Steer clear of instant heat styling
After washing, let your hair air dry naturally. To give your hair time to heal, refrain from using curling irons, straighteners, or blow dryers for a few days.
— **By Dr Shweta Mishra, Facial Cosmetic & Aesthetic surgeon**

WPL: Mumbai Indians to face Gujarat Giants



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

With two games left in the league stage, Mumbai Indians will look to make the most of the opportunity and push for a first-place finish on the WPL points table, starting with the clash against in-form Gujarat Giants here on Monday. UP Warriorz's win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru by 12 runs knocked the defending champions out from the race to the playoffs on Saturday, confirming the

qualification for Delhi Capitals, Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Giants in the process. But what remains is the final classification of the points table. Harmanpreet Kaur's MI, who return to the Brabourne Stadium here for the final leg of the third WPL — their home ground where they had won the inaugural edition in 2023 — will look for a top-place finish. The team that tops the points table at the end of the league round will get a direct entry into the final and MI, who play back-to-back matches on Monday and Tuesday,

will aim to go past DC who are currently at the first spot with 10 points and a Net Run Rate of 0.396. For MI, topping the table will also help them avoid a possible fourth game in a span of six days — the Eliminator — which could test the squad to the hilt in hot and humid conditions here. MI are currently third with 8 points and NRR of 0.267 and if they win both these matches — against GG and RCB — they can finish at the top with a maximum of 12 points.

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

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

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

Not only have the Giants' batters been firing in unison, their bowlers have also found their rhythm which makes them a team to beat in this knockout round. A maiden appearance in the WPL playoffs would certainly inspire the Giants, who turned things around after a dismal start that had them losing three of their first four matches.

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

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

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



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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Marseille loses to Lens

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

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

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

Jeneath Wong becomes first Malaysian to win WAAP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Da Nang

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Orlando

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

Russell Henley on Saturday holed a long bunker shot for birdie on the opening hole, ran off four in a row to start the back nine and had a 67 to finish one shot behind. Corey Conners of Canada missed the 18th fairway, chipped out and made bogey for a 69 and was two back. Even without much wind and occasional cloud cover, the heat and three days of sun brought a yellow shine to fairways and greens. Birdie putts from a reasonable range rolled out past the hole sometimes 8 feet or more away.

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

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

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

to fall eight shots back.

Collin Morikawa was at 10-under 206

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

The final hour had Morikawa, Henley and Conners trading spots or sharing time at the top. Morikawa was the only one to avoid a bogey over the final four-hole stretch. He laid up on the par-5 16th and hit lob wedge and let a 6-foot birdie trickle and swirl into the cup.

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

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

His measure of how firm it was from waiting his turn to putt.

"Any time you put your putter down and you start sliding on your putter, that's when you know the greens are getting pretty slick," Day said.

"They're changing colour and you can kind of start to see the change in colour."

Leverkusen loses to Werder Bremen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Berlin

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

Leverkusen on Saturday lost 2-0 at home to Werder Bremen, a team that lost its previous five games across all competitions. The Champions League weighed heavily across the league on a day of upsets.

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

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

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

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

Wirtz injured

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

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

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

Bochum wins in Munich

Bochum is celebrating its first win in

Munich since 1991. It was also Bayern's first defeat at home this season.

Raphaël Guerreiro got Bayern off to a flying start in the 14th minute, but Serge Gnabry missed a penalty shortly afterward when his effort crashed off the left post. Harry Kane, who'd been rested, usually takes Bayern's penalties. Kane hasn't missed any of his last 30.

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

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

Ibrahima Sissoko equalized in the 51st and Matus Bero put the visitors in front in the 71st. It proved to be the winner, but Bochum needed goalkeeper Timo Horn at his best to grab his first away win of the season. Leverkusen's loss means Bayern still leads by eight points with nine rounds remaining.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Srinagar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aizawl began the second half better and found the equaliser in the 58th minute despite it coming due to a goalkeeping error.

Laltanzova cut inside from the left but shot directly at Mohd Arbaz. What should've been a routine save was spilled by the Real Kashmir custodian and Lalrinzuala, the top Indian scorer of the I-League, was on hand to tap it in from two yards out and restore parity.

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

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

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

Barcelona said in a statement that it was "deeply saddened to announce the passing of first-team doctor Carles Miñarro Garcia this evening" and extended its "heartfelt condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time."

Barcelona did not immediately provide any details on the cause of death, which local media reports said was due to medical reasons.

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

"Rest in peace, Doc." The 50-year-old Miñarro Garcia joined the medical staff of Barcelona's



first team last season after having previously worked with its futsal team.

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

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

"The players, staff and coach were all

incredibly sad because he was a man loved by everyone," Laporta said.

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

Winning with nine

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

Sivera was one of the Alaves players sent off — in the 58th minute — when he fouled Ayoze Pérez during a one-on-one situation that ended in a frightening collision. Sivera seemed to lose consciousness momentarily when his body went limp on the turf before he recovered and was able to walk off the field.

Alaves also lost Antonio Blanco with a second yellow card during 15 minutes of second-half injury time.

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