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PIONEER IN SHORT

ASSAM SR: OVER 2.43 LAKH NAMES DELETED

After a Special Revision (SR), the Election Commission on Tuesday published the final electoral roll for poll-bound Assam, deleting over 2.43 lakh names from the draft list. The final roll has 2.49 crore voters, a decline of 0.97 per cent from the draft roll of 2.52 crore published on December 27, according to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO). The list comprises nearly 1.25 crore men, over 1.24 crore women and 343 third-gender voters. During the SR exercise, authorities identified 4.78 lakh deceased electors, 5.23 lakh voters who had shifted residence and 53,619 multiple entries, with changes reflected only after the claims and objections process. The CEO said electors whose names were deleted as "permanently shifted" can seek inclusion under provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, either by appeal or by filing Form 6 at their new address. District election officers have been directed to conduct rigorous checks while processing such applications. The revision has triggered political controversy, with opposition parties alleging voter harassment ahead of the Assam Assembly elections due in a few months.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday decided that he will not attend the proceedings of House till disposal of his removal notice submitted by Opposition MPs. Birla directed Lok Sabha Secretary General to examine the notice served by the Opposition.

After Opposition parties submitted its notice on Birla's removal, Lok Sabha took up a discussion on the Union Budget in the post-lunch session. The discussion had been held up for days over Opposition protests. Since February 2, the Lok Sabha has witnessed unruly scenes and repeated disruptions that led to the suspension of seven Congress members and one CPI(M) member for the rest of the Budget session.

About 120 Opposition MPs submitted the notice for moving the resolution to remove Birla from office for



including his party, Samajwadi Party, NCP (SP), Shiv Sena (UBT) and DMK. The TMC MPs, however, did not sign the notice and were not a party to it.

BJP slammed the opposition for submitting the notice saying the time has come for India to "impeach" Rahul Gandhi and the Congress from politics. "Those who have been impeached of their consciousness are the ones who want to impeach all the constitutional posts of India," BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra told reporters when asked about the opposition's notice.

BJP also alleged that the Congress and its allies have been attacking constitutional institutions and posts at the behest of US-based billionaire George Soros since the BJP-NDA returned to power for a third consecutive term under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

not allowing Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi and other opposition leaders to speak in the House on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, as well as for suspending eight MPs. The notice further alleged that he had acted in a "blatantly partisan" manner in conducting the business of the House and abused the con-

stitutional office by making "blatantly false" allegations against Congress MPs.

Birla however has a constitutional right to defend himself in the House if the resolution is discussed in the Lok Sabha.

Congress MP and chief whip K Suresh submitted the notice to the Lok Sabha secretariat on behalf of several opposition parties,

MAN FALLS INTO OPEN DRAIN IN ROHINI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Four days after a young man died after falling into a pit dug by water authority in west Delhi's Janakpuri, another incident involving unsafe civic infrastructure was reported from Rohini on Tuesday evening. A young man fell into an open drain, prompting an urgent rescue operation by police and emergency teams.

The incident occurred near the Mahashakti Kali Temple in Rohini Sector 32, an area that falls under the Begumpur police station. Police officials said a PCR call regarding the fall was received at around 7.45 pm, following which local police, rescue teams and other emergency responders were immediately dispatched to the spot.

According to the police, search and rescue operations are currently underway to locate the victim.

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Govt tightens AI rules, cuts social media takedown time



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeITY) on Tuesday set a three-hour deadline for social media platforms to take down any AI-generated and synthetic content flagged by the competent authority or courts. It notified amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which formally defines AI-generated and synthetic content. The new rules will come into force from February 20, 2026.

Under the old rules, content

had to be taken down in 36 hours. User grievance redressal timelines have also been shortened. Calling for ban on illegal AI content, the latest amendment requires platforms to deploy automated tools to prevent AI content that is illegal, deceptive, sexually exploitative, non-consensual, or related to false documents, child abuse material, explosives, or impersonation.

The amendment defines synthetically generated information as any audio, visual or audio-visual content that is artificially or algorithmically created, modified or altered using a computer resource.

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4

The ByStander

PM instructed the army chief to act according to the situation...! I detest it...!!



MACRON TO VISIT INDIA FROM FEB 17

French President Emmanuel Macron will undertake a three-day visit to India beginning February 17, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Tuesday. Macron will hold wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi besides attending the AI Impact summit. Both the leaders will hold discussions on strengthening bilateral cooperation across a wide spectrum of areas, the MEA said. In addition, the leaders will discuss regional and global issues of mutual interest, including cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, it said. Modi and Macron will also be in Mumbai to jointly inaugurate the 'India-France Year of Innovation', the MEA said in a statement.

US LEADER SEEKS TO END H-1B

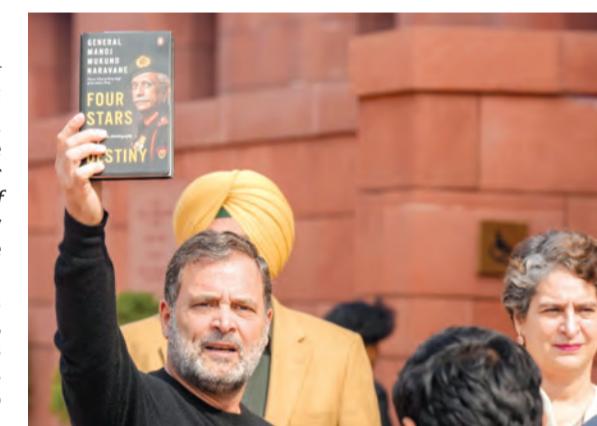
A Republican lawmaker in the US has introduced a bill seeking to end the H-1B visa programme, alleging that it has been misused by corporations to import cheaper foreign labour at the expense of American workers. US Representative Greg Steube of Florida tabled the "Ending Exploitative Imported Labour Exemptions (EXILE) Act", which proposes amending the Immigration and Nationality Act to scrap the H-1B system altogether. Steube said prioritising foreign labour undermines US national interests and claimed the programme has displaced American workers and graduates. The statement accompanying the bill said over 80 per cent of H-1B recipients are Indian or Chinese nationals. It cited instances of job losses at major companies, including Disney, Microsoft and Southern California Edison, allegedly linked to H-1B hiring.

ROSES, CHOCOLATES AND CYBER SCAM: PUNJAB COPS SOUND ALERT ON VALENTINE'S WEEK

MONIKA MALIK ■ Chandigarh

Cupid may be busy shooting arrows this Valentine week, but the Punjab Police are watching inboxes. As hearts, roses, and chocolates flood social media timelines, the State police have chosen an unconventional way to join the celebration — by warning people that love online can sometimes come disguised as a scam.

Blending romance with realism, the Punjab Police has rolled out a creative cyber safety awareness campaign through Valentine week, using the language of Rose Day, Chocolate Day, Teddy Day and Propose Day to flag the growing dangers of cybercrime. The messaging is light, playful and witty —



Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi displaying a copy of ex-Army chief's memoirs in the Parliament

As lawyers boycott poll, BNP urges citizens to vote

ASHOK RAJ ■ Dhaka

A group of Bangladeshi lawyers has expressed grave concern over the upcoming national election, describing it as a "dangerous deviation" from the country's democratic traditions and announcing their decision to boycott the poll. They warned that the election risks becoming a staged exercise rather than a genuine expression of the people's will.

The group of more than 700 lawyers had previously been largely aligned with the Awami League party led by Sheikh Hasina.

In a press statement issued on Sunday, the lawyers said the forthcoming polls undermine constitutional guarantees of voting rights, freedom of expression, and meaningful political participation. According to them, organising an election without ensuring free, equal, and inclusive participation of all political parties constitutes a direct betrayal of the Constitution and the democratic spirit enshrined in it.

The statement alleged that several major and representative political parties, including the Bangladesh Awami League, have effectively consolidated power.

They further claimed that



Women walking on a street on the eve of national election in Dhaka

BANGLADESH ELECTIONS

REPORTS FROM DHAKA

the electoral process. The lawyers argued that an election conducted in the absence of key political stakeholders cannot be considered legitimate and instead serves to artificially legitimise an unlawful consolidation of power.

They further claimed that an atmosphere of fear and

repression now dominates the political landscape. Allegations of violence, extrajudicial killings, false and politically motivated cases, excessive administrative control, and the partisan use of state machinery, they said, have severely obstructed citizens' ability to express their political will freely.

Under such circumstances, voters are deprived of their constitutional right to choose their representatives without

coercion or intimidation. Strong criticism was also directed at the interim Government, which the lawyers accused of failing to act as a neutral caretaker of the electoral process. Instead, they alleged, the Government is behaving like an active participant in the election, thereby stripping the process of its "free and fair" character and directly contradicting the constitutional principle of equality before the law.

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Posters released by the Punjab Police



Posters released by the Punjab Police



Posters released by the Punjab Police

but the warning underneath is serious.

"Let kindness bloom like a rose, don't let fake news prick others," read the Rose Day post on Punjab Police's official 'X' handle. Chocolate Day came with a sharper

twist: "Share chocolates, not OTPs or personal data. Some offers look tempting like chocolates — verify before you click."

Teddy Day carried a reminder many social media users ignore at their

peril: "Not every cute-looking profile is genuine, and fraudsters often hide behind attractive online identities". On Propose Day, the police had a proposal of their own — pause before you trust. Verify before you fall. Stay alert online.

The campaign, to be continued for the remaining days of the week also, is rooted in alarming numbers. Punjab witnessed a steep surge in cybercrime over the past year, with the State

cybercrime helpline receiving more than 35,000 complaints in 2024 — an 82 percent jump compared to the previous year. Financial losses crossed ₹476 crore, underlining how costly a single careless click can be.

Certain districts bore the brunt. In Ludhiana alone, investors lost an estimated ₹70 crore to online investment scams in 2024. State police also cracked a ₹92-crore nationwide "digital arrest" scam, in which fraudsters impersonated law enforcement officials to extort money by threatening victims with fake legal action.

Recent operations underlined the scale of the threat. In Phagwara, police arrested 38 alleged cyber fraudsters, uncovering the use of fake

CONTINUED ON ▶ P4



CM launches Lakhpatti Bitiya Yojana to support girls' education

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Delhi Government on Tuesday launched the Delhi Lakhpatti Bitiya Yojana, an expanded and restructured version of the Ladli Scheme. The scheme aims to ensure financial security and uninterrupted education for girls from economically weaker families from birth to higher education.

Announcing the scheme, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the initiative seeks to ensure that no girl child in Delhi is forced to discontinue her education due to financial constraints. She said the scheme will also help create a long-term savings corpus that grows as a girl achieves key educational milestones and matures into adulthood.

Under the new scheme, the Government will provide financial assistance of up to ₹56,000 per beneficiary. The amount will be deposited in

phased instalments linked to age and education milestones, starting from birth and continuing through graduation or diploma-level studies. The deposited amount will be invested through a structured financial instrument and, with interest, is expected to mature to more than ₹1 lakh. The final amount will be credited directly to the beneficiary's Aadhaar-linked bank account.

"This is an investment in the future of our girls and the future of the country," the Chief Minister said. She added that the Government is determined to ensure that no girl drops out of school or college for want of funds. As girls progress through education, the Government will continue to support them financially.

The Chief Minister said the Ladli Scheme, launched in 2008, had not been adequately implemented over the years. After assuming office, the present Government found



Chief Minister Rekha Gupta during a media interaction at the Delhi Secretariat in New Delhi

PHASED INSTALMENT STRUCTURE	
Stage of Education/Life	Assistance Amount
At Birth	₹11,000
Admission to Class I	₹5,000
Admission to Class VI	₹5,000
Admission to Class IX	₹5,000
Passing Class X	₹5,000
Admission to Class XII	₹5,000
Completion of Graduation/Diploma	₹20,000 (in phases)
Total Base Investment	₹56,000

at the birth of the girl child, ₹5,000 on admission to Class I, ₹5,000 on admission to Class VI, ₹5,000 on admission to Class IX, ₹5,000 on passing Class X, ₹5,000 on admission to Class XII. Another ₹20,000 will be credited to the accounts of beneficiaries in phases on completion of diploma or graduation. The deposited amount will earn interest over time, creating a substantial maturity value.

The maturity amount can be claimed once the beneficiary has passed Class XII and attained the age of 18, or after completing graduation or a diploma and attaining the age of 21. If educational milestones are not met within the prescribed age, or if the amount remains unclaimed, the funds will be credited back to the Government. The Chief Minister said the entire process, from application to payment, will be fully digital and transparent.

income does not exceed ₹1.20 lakh. Benefits are limited to two surviving girl children per family. Girls can be registered within one year of birth or at later stages, such as admission to Class I, VI, IX, or XI, or upon admission to a recognised graduation or diploma course.

Eligibility conditions have been slightly modified under the revamped scheme. It applies to girls born in Delhi whose families have lived in the city for at least three years and whose annual family

beneficiaries is being ensured and delivered, she said.

A key expansion under the scheme is the inclusion of girls pursuing graduation or professional diploma courses in government-recognised institutions anywhere in India.

This includes universities

and colleges affiliated with the UGC or other statutory bodies. Conditions have also been relaxed for girls living in child care institutions under Government protection to ensure wider inclusion.

Financial assistance will be deposited at different stages of a girl's educational journey, beginning at birth and continuing through school and higher education. The Government will deposit the assistance amount in instalments at critical stages: ₹11,000

Over 600 get lifetime memberships of Roshanara Club

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Over 600 new members have been granted lifetime membership of the iconic Delhi Development Authority (DDA) Roshanara Club. It has a unique legacy as the cradle of Indian cricket and the birthplace of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

With this membership initiative, the DDA continues to provide an opportunity for sports enthusiasts and heritage aficionados to become part of an enduring legacy, one that has witnessed history and nurtured excellence, it said on Tuesday. The new members will now join this legacy and will be able to avail themselves of the exclusive facilities at Roshanara Club, including the newly



launched Clubhouse, which offers F&B services, a card room, and a gymnasium.

All the club facilities will be available for members and their dependents. Members can bring up to six guests.

The list of members, comprising 339 in the Non-Government category and 298 in the Government category, will shortly be uploaded on the official website for

public information.

Under the direct supervision and guidance of Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena, the DDA introduced this rare opportunity for sports enthusiasts to secure lifetime membership of the iconic and heritage Roshanara Club.

The meticulously restored Roshanara Club now offers a wide array of state-of-the-

art facilities, including indoor amenities like a reception, main lounge, card and billiards rooms, kids' play area, dining hall, banquet, library, swimming pool with changing rooms, gym and fitness centre, squash board and badminton hall, as well as a yoga, sauna and steam area.

Outdoor facilities have been upgraded to include grass, clay, and synthetic lawn tennis courts, cricket grounds and practice pitches, mini football and basketball zones, and a dedicated jogger's park.

Particular attention has been paid to preserving the club's architectural legacy, with the European-style doors and windows, Mangalore-tiled roof, and intricate wooden trusses all carefully restored. Antique chandeliers and original fur-

nishings have been refurbished to revive their classic charm.

DDA Roshanara Club, sprawling over 22 acres of green serenity in the heart of North Delhi, now over a century old, was officially taken over by the civic body DDA on 29th September 2023 and given a new lease of life under the continuous guidance of the Lt Governor.

Furthering the vision of Fit India and promoting sports culture, the DDA provides a wide range of sports activities across its extensive network of sports infrastructure in the national capital.

This includes 18 sports complexes, 4 mini sports complexes, and 3 golf courses, reaffirming DDA's long-standing commitment to making high-quality sports facilities accessible to the public.

Govt directs officials to be present during deliberations of committees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

To streamline the legislative process and ensure that the Delhi Assembly has direct access to the expertise required for effective governance, the State Government has directed officials to be present during deliberations of the committees.

This directive issued mandating the presence of all administrative secretaries and officials on Tuesday is to ensure that policy-level discussions are supported by the primary decision-makers of each department. The order was issued by the General Administration Department.

The circular emphasises that House Committees may regularly require the attendance of



Recognising the complexities of administrative schedules, the government has established a protocol for unavoidable absences.

In instances where an administrative secretary is unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances, a suitable senior officer fully conversant with the specific subject matter must be deputed. This substitution requires prior approval and is intended to prevent any delays in the submission of records or the conduct of official proceedings, maintaining the momentum of legislative oversight.

Furthermore, the Delhi Government has called for the timely submission of all documents, reports, and materials requested by the House Committees.

RECORD REWARDS, ASSURED JOBS, AND SPECIAL SPORTS SCHEME

Rekha Gupta Government Reshapes Delhi Sports Ecosystem

ONE YEAR OF THE REKHA GOVERNMENT: A POWERFUL BEGINNING TOWARD MAKING DELHI A SPORTS CAPITAL



Kudan Sports Complex has been developed at an approximate cost of ₹3.5 crore.

The complex features a 200-metre synthetic track, modern facilities for field events, and a multi-purpose ground, offering athletes a strong platform for both training and competition. These facilities are open to the public under a pay-and-play model, ensuring that access to sports is no longer limited to select areas or sections of society.

The government's sports policy is guided by the principle of equal opportunity for every athlete. In line with this vision, divyang-friendly stadiums are being developed, and the construction of an international-level Delhi Sports University in Mundka is underway to strengthen sports education and professional training.

Delhi Sports Mahakumbh Sets the Stage from 13 February

To inculcate sports culture in the capital, the grand Delhi Sports Mahakumbh will be held from 13 February 2026. Notably, the national capital will witness such a large-scale sports platform for the first time.

The Mahakumbh will be organized across 16 different stadiums, where more than 20,000 athletes will compete in sports such as kabaddi, football, athletics, wrestling, basketball, volleyball, and squash.

Attractive prize money has also been announced for teams and individuals delivering outstanding performances:



FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ATHLETES

Elite Athletes: Annual assistance of up to ₹20 Lakh for training and diet, along with ₹10 Lakh medical insurance

School Athletes: Support of up to ₹5 Lakh for emerging talent, along with ₹5 Lakh medical insurance

International Travel: Financial assistance of up to ₹2 Lakh for travel and meals during overseas tournaments

Record Investment to Bolster Sports Infrastructure

The Delhi Government has made record investments in sports infrastructure, setting a new direction for the development of world-class sporting facilities across the capital. As part of this initiative, the Hiran

TEAM EVENTS

- Gold: ₹1,75,000
- Silver: ₹1,51,000
- Bronze: ₹1,31,000

INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

- Gold: ₹11,000
- Silver: ₹9,000
- Bronze: ₹7,000



India climbs up in corruption index

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

India climbed five places to the 91st position out of 182 countries and territories in the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released on Tuesday.

Denmark retained its position at the top of the index, scoring 89 points, ahead of Finland and Singapore. At the other end of the scale were South Sudan and Somalia, both registering nine points, followed by Venezuela. The leading three nations saw no change, while South Sudan's one-point gain brought it level with Somalia. While the US has been ranked at the 29th spot, the UK bagged the 20th spot.

According to Transparency



International's latest CPI report, India's score has gone up by one point since previous year while its rank has improved from the 96th position. There has been a slow growth in anti-corruption progress in Asia Pacific as many countries witnessed public anger in the previous year, the report said.

According to report, 2025 saw a wave of anti-corruption protests led by Gen Z, mostly

in countries in the bottom half of the CPI whose scores have largely stagnated or declined over the past decade. Young people in countries such as Nepal (34) and Madagascar (25) took to the streets to criticise leaders for abusing their power while failing to deliver decent public services and economic opportunity.

"The 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index shows that corruption remains a serious threat in every part of the world, although there are limited signs of progress.

"Leaders must act to tackle abuses of power and the wider factors driving this decline, such as the roll-back of democratic checks and balances, and attacks on independent civil society," the report said.

"Anti-government protests in many parts of the world show that people are fed up with unaccountable leadership and are demanding reform," it added.

The CPI ranks 182 countries and territories worldwide by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. The results are given on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The report also listed India among countries "dangerous for journalists reporting on corruption".

"When journalists are attacked or killed for investigating corruption, power cannot be held to account effectively and corruption tends to worsen. Since 2012, in non-conflict zones worldwide, 829 journalists have been murdered. "Over 90 per cent of

these killings happened in countries with a CPI score lower than 50, including in Brazil (35), India (39), Mexico (27), Pakistan (28) and Iraq (28), which are particularly dangerous for journalists reporting on corruption," it noted.

"While 31 countries have significantly reduced their corruption levels since 2012, the rest are failing to tackle the problem – they have stayed stagnant or got worse during the same period. The global average has fallen to a new low of 42, while more than two-thirds of countries score below 50.

And people are paying the price, as corruption leads to under-funded hospitals, unbuilt flood defences and blights the hopes and dreams of young people," it said.

IYC holds protest over Centre's silence on serious issues

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) on Tuesday held a protest alleging that the Central Government has remained silent on serious issues, including references made in retired Army Chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane's unpublished "memoir".

The demonstrators alleged a lack of transparency in the India-US trade agreement and a compromise on the country's security at the China border.

A spokesperson of the Indian Youth Congress claimed that more than 150 people who were protesting



peacefully at the Jantar Mantar were detained by the police.

In a social media post, IYC National President Uday Bhanu Chib said, "Every single worker of IYC is on the streets. When the leadership starts compromising on national interest, the youth cannot sit quietly. We will keep fighting until we get answers."

"Today, the entire truth is staring the country in the face. The prime minister's

silence is raising many questions: Why the mysterious silence on the Epstein files? Why the lack of transparency in the India-US trade agreement? Why compromise on the country's security at the China border?" he said.

"The Indian Youth Congress organised a gherao of the Prime Minister's residence on Tuesday. Workers from across the country gathered at Jantar Mantar for this gherao," IYC said in its statement. It added that when the Youth Congress workers, led by IYC President Uday Bhanu Chib, were moving towards the gherao, the Delhi Police barricaded them and detained over 150 Congress workers.

Qayamat day will never come, Babri structure won't be rebuilt: Yogi Adityanath

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Barabanki (UP)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday asserted that the day of 'Qayamat' (doomsday) will never come and hence the Babri Masjid will never be rebuilt.

Speaking at an event in Barabanki, Adityanath said, "We had said that 'Ram Lalla, hum aayenge, mandir wahi banaayenge' (Child Ram, we will come and build the temple right there).

Has the temple been built? Is there any doubt?" The audience replied by chanting 'Jai Shri Ram'.

"The day of 'Qayamat' (doomsday) will never come, and hence the Babri structure will never be rebuilt.

Those who are dreaming of the day of 'Qayamat' will rot away, that day will



come," Adityanath said.

Settling the fractious Babri Masjid issue, a Supreme Court verdict on November 9, 2019 backed the construction of a Ram temple by a trust at the disputed site in Ayodhya, and ruled that

an alternative five-acre plot must be found for a mosque in the Hindu holy town.

The dispute over the site of Babri Masjid, a three-domed mosque built by or at the behest of Moghul emperor Babur, dates back more than a century with Hindus contending that the invading Muslim armies had razed an existing Ram temple to erect the mosque.

However, it turned into a legal dispute in 1885 when a mahant went to court seeking permission to build a canopy outside the mosque.

The plea was dismissed. In December 1949, unidentified miscreants spirited a Lord Ram idol into the mosque. The structure was destroyed by a large mob of kar sevaks on December 6, 1992.

Property dealer found dead in south Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Acting on the information, the enquiry officer, along with the beat staff, rushed to the spot and found the house locked from the inside.

The PCR personnel and a Delhi Fire Services team official opened the door forcibly. Inside, the police found the body of a man hanging from a ceiling fan with the help of a plastic rope.

Officials said the body was emitting a foul smell and appeared to be partially decomposed, suggesting that the man had died at least a few days earlier. The crime team was called to inspect the spot, and after preliminary examination.

Interim trade pact with US one-sided: Akhilesh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Samajwadi Party supreme Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday dubbed the interim trade agreement with the United States as "one-sided" and alleged that it will hurt the farming community, as agricultural imports will be unable to save for the future.

He claimed that while "invisible people" will benefit from the Budget, the Government has forgotten the poor, Dalits, minorities and women.

Referring to his home state of Uttar Pradesh, Yadav said the status of Ahilya bai Holkar was recently rated at the historic Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi, which is represented by the Prime Minister in the Lok Sabha.

He alleged that about 100 temples have been bulldozed in the holy city and the "pradhan" constituency of Varanasi has been deprived of a metro rail and modern highway due to paucity of funds.

Yadav also claimed that the Government has done little in the healthcare sector, and funds for flagship schemes have been constantly dwindling.

Delhi Government withdraws all cases filed by AAP against Centre

RAJESH KUMAR

■ New Delhi

The Rekha Gupta government has withdrawn all cases filed by the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) administration against the Union government, the Lieutenant Governor, and several senior bureaucrats.

This follows the Supreme Court's permission for the Delhi government to withdraw multiple cases on key administrative and policy issues, which had been a major point of contention between the former AAP regime, the Centre, the L-G's office, and Delhi government bureaucrats.

These cases filed by the former AAP government over a period of time included the



appointment of Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) chairman, control over service-related matters, implementation of Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission, funding for the Delhi Jal Board, appointment of lawyers in the Delhi riot cases, and the constitution of a high-level committee on Yamuna river pollution. When the AAP was in power, the Delhi government

assumed power following the Assembly elections in February 2025.

Continuing with these cases posed legal challenges, as it would have been difficult for the BJP, which governs Delhi, to pursue cases against its own government at the Centre and its appointed L-G. Additionally, persisting with the cases would have wasted government resources without producing any benefits, an officer stated.

In May 2025, the Supreme Court allowed the Delhi government to withdraw seven cases filed against the L-G. During the same month, the Delhi High Court also permitted the government to withdraw its petition challenging the L-G's decision to appoint lawyers to argue cases related

to the farmers' protest and the 2020 Delhi riots.

An internal proposal moved by the law department stated that such litigation caused "hardship" to the bureaucracy and resulted in "administrative paralysis," delaying policy decisions and execution of projects.

The withdrawn cases also included one concerning the 2023 ordinance promulgated by the president, which amended the GNCTD Act of 1991, the interpretation of Section 45D of the Act, appointments to the DERC, cessation of funding, and issues related to the alderman case pending before the Supreme Court. Officials noted that the L-G Secretariat had approved the proposal to withdraw these cases. The

AAP and the LG were at loggerheads over the appointment of the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission chairman because the party believed that letting the Centre control the body could lead to the power subsidy scheme – which was very popular among voters – being ended. In 2020, then LG Anil Baijal was accused by the AAP of interfering in the appointment of public prosecutors to argue cases linked to the Northeast-Delhi riot cases. Furthermore, the Health Department submitted applications to withdraw cases filed by former minister Saurabh Bharadwaj.

There were approximately eight to nine such cases filed by former AAP ministers, officials said.

Mumbai to recover 61 tonnes plastic via waterway barriers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

At least 61 tonnes of plastic is expected to be recovered every year from Trombay and Malad waterways in Mumbai, where barriers will be installed in phases to stop the flow of plastic waste into the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, officials said on Tuesday.

The initiative is being led by The Ocean Cleanup, a Netherlands-based non-profit



organisation that develops technologies to remove plastic from the oceans, in collaboration with the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai and the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB).

"Mumbai will witness the deployment of barriers to stop the flow of plastic waste into the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. The first deployments will focus on the Trombay and Malad waterways, identified through a data-driven analysis

as significant contributors to ocean-bound plastic waste.

"The technology is scheduled for deployment over 2026. Once operational, these initial systems are expected to recover 61 to 92 tonnes of plastic per year. Research found that 80 per cent of marine litter along India's coastlines is made up of plastic," the Ocean Cleanup said in a statement.

The deployment, which will kick off before the monsoon season arrives, will take place in phases.

Congress MP seeks annual social justice report in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Rajya Sabha Congress MP Mukul Balkrishna Wasnik on Tuesday asked the Government to come out with an annual report on social justice and table it in Parliament on the lines of the economic survey.

"This report should serve as a data-driven strategic guide to uphold the constitutional values of equality and inclusivity, and should be available for discussion in and outside Parliament,"



he said. The Congress MP said the report on social justice must systematically evaluate existing legal and policy frameworks to ensure they meet constitutional mandates.

It should focus on security to examine the implementation of various schemes and laws that exist for the protection of the life and dignity of persons from the disadvantaged sections.

Govt tightens AI rules, cuts social media...

Om Birla to stay away from LS till removal...

Congress MP and chief whip K Suresh submitted the notice to the Lok Sabha secretariat on behalf of several opposition parties, including his party, Samajwadi Party, NCP (SP), Shiv Sena (UBT) and DMK. The TMC MPs, however, did not sign the notice and were not a party to it.

BJP slammed the opposition for submitting the notice saying the time has come for India to "impeach" Rahul Gandhi and the Congress from politics. "Those who have been impeached of their consciousness are the ones who want to impeach all the constitutional posts of India," BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra told reporters when asked about the opposition's notice. BJP also alleged that the Congress and its allies have been attacking constitutional institutions and posts at the behest of US-based billionaire George Soros since the BJP-NDA returned to power for a third consecutive term under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

As lawyers boycott poll, BNP urges citizens...

Serious concerns were raised over the accuracy and credibility of the voter list. The lawyers claimed that it has not been properly updated and includes fake and deceased voters, under-

mining transparency and public confidence. They also highlighted allegations of advance manipulation and irregularities in the newly introduced postal ballot system, raised by participating political parties, which have further deepened doubts about electoral neutrality.

According to the statement, proceeding with the election without conducting an independent, credible investigation into these allegations has called the neutrality of the Election Commission into question. Such conduct, they argued, is inconsistent with the spirit and intent of Article 118 of the Constitution, which mandates an independent and impartial Election Commission.

Quoting Supreme Court Advocate Aslam Mia, the statement emphasized the broader constitutional implications of the situation. "An election is not merely a procedural exercise; it is the highest expression of the sovereignty of the people," Mia said. "For an election or referendum to be legitimate, it must be conducted under conditions that ensure political neutrality, equality of opportunity, freedom of expression, transparency, and public confidence. Unfortunately, the prevailing circumstances fail to satisfy these fundamental constitutional and democratic requirements in the upcoming 13th National Election and Referendum."

Mia further noted that the absence of a level playing field, the erosion of institutional independence, restrictions on civil and political rights, and the lack of public trust render the election con-

stitutionally questionable. "A referendum held without the largest political party like the Bangladesh Awami League, genuine public participation, and informed consent cannot reflect the true will of the people and therefore lacks democratic validity," he said.

The lawyers stressed that under constitutional principles and international democratic norms, any election conducted without credibility, inclusiveness, and fairness is liable to be rejected by citizens. Participation in such a process, they warned, risks legitimizing an outcome that does not genuinely represent popular sovereignty.

However, BNP Vice President and Mohila Dal leader Zeba Amina Khan urged voters who have decided not to vote to reconsider, calling on them to "come out of their homes and cast their votes for a better Bangladesh." She said, "Sheikh Hasina has left the country with her family, but not the citizens who supported the Awami League. Now it is our responsibility to take care of them."

Roses, chocolates and cyber scams: Punjab...

To counter the rising threat, Punjab has set up 28 dedicated cybercrime police stations, blocked thousands of malicious URLs, registered hundreds of FIRs, and expanded its cyber policing infrastructure. This Valentine Week, the message

from Punjab Police is clear: enjoy the romance, savour the chocolates, but guard your data like your heart. Because online, not every love story has a happy ending.

Man falls into open drain in Rohini

"Our teams reached the site soon after receiving the call. Rescue efforts are in progress," a senior police officer said, adding that the operation is challenging due to the depth of the drain and limited visibility.

Police said the identity of the man who fell into the drain has not yet been confirmed. Rescue teams are using torches and specialised equipment to scan the drain and nearby stretches. The area has been cordoned off to prevent further mishaps.

Officials added that civic agencies would be asked to provide details about the maintenance of the drain and whether proper safety measures were in place. Any further legal action will depend on the findings of the inquiry.

With two serious incidents reported within a span of days, questions are being raised about public safety and monitoring of infrastructure works in Delhi. Authorities said they are reviewing safety arrangements at vulnerable locations across the city as rescue operations in Rohini continue.



Govt forms task force to track darknet drug networks



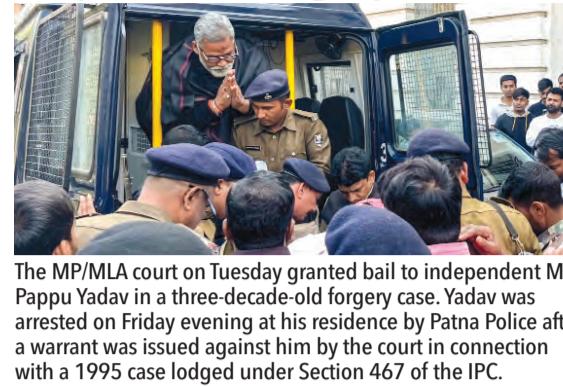
The Government has set up a task force on darknet and cryptocurrency under the multi-agency centre (MAC) to monitor platforms facilitating narco-trafficking, Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday. In a written response, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said the Government has taken various steps to curb cross-border and inter-state drug smuggling.

PM Modi highlights changing face of Maoist-hit Bastar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday highlighted the changing face of Chhattisgarh's Bastar, which was once known for Maoist violence. He also lauded the special celebration of 'Bastar Pandum' organised between February 7 and 9. "During this festival, the rich culture, traditions, and tribal heritage of Bastar were showcased in a magnificent way," Modi said in a social media post.



Pappu Yadav gets bail in 30-year-old forgery case



The MP/MLA court on Tuesday granted bail to independent MP Pappu Yadav in a three-decade-old forgery case. Yadav was arrested on Friday evening at his residence by Patna Police after a warrant was issued against him by the court in connection with a 1995 case lodged under Section 467 of the IPC.

₹1,389 crore loans given to 1.39 lakh via PM-SURAJ portal: Govt

As many as 1.39 lakh entrepreneurs were provided ₹1,389.61 crore in loans through the PM-SURAJ portal in the 2024-25 fiscal against a target of extending benefits to one lakh entrepreneurs, Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. The loans were provided by the National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation, National Safai Karamcharis Finance & Development Corporation, and others through the portal, according to the minister.



Bihar's image improved under NDA rule: BJP Chief Nitin Nabin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Patna



BJP National President Nitin Nabin waves during the Budget session of the Bihar Assembly in Patna on Tuesday

and took his seat, members of the BJP, which is now the single largest party in the 243-strong assembly, erupted in slogans like "Jai Shri Ram" and "Bharat Mata Ki Jai".

Speaker Prem Kumar, a veteran BJP leader himself, told the House that it was a matter of pride that Nabin, a young member, has made it to the top in national politics.

The Speaker, thereafter, let members of different parties speak a few words on the rise to national prominence of the 45-year-old leader.

Those who spoke included minister and JD(U) MLA Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, Vijay Singh and minister Mangal Pandey (all BJP), minister Ashok Choudhary of JD(U), and MLA Raju Tiwari of LJP-RV. As Nabin entered the House

has improved substantially and Bihar is now being treated with respect," the BJP chief said.

Incidentally, Kumar, who heads the JD(U), was not present inside the House during the nearly 45-minute period that Nabin spent among fellow MLAs.

BJP slams Opposition over move to remove speaker OM Birla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi



The BJP on Tuesday criticised the Opposition for submitting a notice for moving a resolution to remove Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla from office, saying the time has come for India to "impeach" Rahul Gandhi and the Congress from politics.

"Those who have been impeached of their consciousness are the ones who want to impeach all the constitutional posts of India," BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra told reporters when asked about the Opposition's notice.

The BJP also alleged that the Congress and its allies have been attacking constitutional institutions and posts at the behest of US-based billionaire George

Soros since the BJP-NDA returned to power for a third consecutive term under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

The comments came after the Opposition submitted a notice for moving a resolution to remove Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla from office, for disallowing Rahul Gandhi and other Opposition leaders from speaking in the House on

the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, as well as for the suspension of eight MPs.

Congress MP and chief whip K Suresh submitted the notice to the Lok Sabha Secretariat on behalf of several Opposition parties, including the Congress, Samajwadi Party and the DMK. The TMC MPs, however, did not sign the notice and were not a party to it.

Budget 2026 pragmatic, pro-people, balanced: BJP MP Sarangi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Budget 2026 is pragmatic, pro-people and balanced, and it was prepared with the objective of making the country developed by 2047, BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi said in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Participating in the debate on the General Budget, Sarangi congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for the "growth-oriented" Budget which reflected the central government's "commitment,



conviction and consistency" for the "welfare" of people and "overall growth" of the country.

She said India's economy has become the fourth-largest in the world, surpassing Japan, and is poised to become the third-largest, surpassing Germany.

"We are intending to be a Viksit Bharat by 2047 and for that, we have to be future-ready. The Government is moving forward with conviction in that direction," she said.

The Bhubaneswar MP said unemployment in the country has declined and remains at just 4.8 per cent, while inflation is at its lowest level compared to a decade ago.

Amit Shah inaugurates new cybercrime branch of CBI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi



Union Home Minister Amit Shah delivered a keynote address at the National Conference on "Tackling Cyber-Enabled Frauds & Dismantling the Ecosystem" in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The Home Minister presided over an investiture ceremony of CBI officers and inaugurated the New Cybercrime Branch of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

Shah also launched the State Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (S4C) dashboard of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs. On this occasion, Union Home Secretary,

Secretary, Department of Personnel and Training (DOP), Director, Intelligence Bureau (IB), Director, CBI and other senior officers were present.

In his keynote address, Union Home Minister congratulated the CBI and the I4C for organising this important conference. He said that multiple Government agencies are working together in a coordinated manner to prevent cybercrime. He added that the initiative by the CBI and I4C is extremely significant,

fore, safeguarding economic, social, administrative, and national security dimensions, while continuing to advance the digital revolution, is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders.

He further said that our goal is to bring together all relevant stakeholders, including the CBI, NIA, RBI, state police forces, other investigating agencies, and Government departments, to create a coordinated and highly secure ecosystem.

Amit Shah informed about the critical role of the CBI and NIA in preventing cybercrime, particularly crimes originating from outside the country. He stressed the importance of strong communication and coordination among all institutions.

MP Kartikeya Sharma urges Govt to regulate online gaming

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Rajya Sabha MP Kartikeya Sharma on Tuesday urged the Government to regulate online gaming, from development to streaming, to ensure that the digital space is safe for children.

Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the House, the independent MP also demanded that the Government should grant official sports status to esports, which is recognised globally.

"I want to address a digital frontier that is full of promise as it is of peril. I am talking about the world of electronic gaming as we march towards the vision of a Viksit Bharat in 2047. We must

recognise the Orange Economy. Our creative and digital sector is no longer a peripheral industry. It is a vital pillar of our USD 1 trillion digital economy goal," Sharma said.

He said that India's creative economy is valued at about \$30 billion, contributing to nearly 8 per cent of our working population.

"However, we must distinguish between two very different realities within the sector. On one hand, we are witnessing the crisis of unregulated amateur gaming and its impact. The sprawling nature of unregulated amateur online gaming has led to grave repercussions,"

Sharma said, as he referred to death of some children because of game addiction.

"As a parent, not merely as a member of parliament, I request the Government to regulate the entire ecosys-

tem from game development to streaming, and mandate game audits to ensure these digital spaces are safe for our children."

He emphasised the need to create a safe and conducive ecosystem.

On the other hand, Sharma said there is a potential for professional esports, which

largely remains untapped. "We have millions of serious, highly skilled electronic gamers who are passionate about this craft. India now boasts of 500 million amateur gamers, the largest gaming audience in the world, and lakhs of professional gamers," he said, and added that India's gaming market is currently valued at about \$3.7 billion and projected to soar to \$10 billion by 2030.

He further said the animation, visual effects, gaming and comics (AVGC) sector alone would require roughly about 20 lakh skilled professionals by 2030.

"It is a great opportunity for our youth, for employment, particularly to unlock the full value of gaming

design development professional leagues. I urge the Government to grant official sports status to esports, as they are also being accepted by international competitions, Olympics and other bodies," Sharma said.

In her Zero Hour mention, Sumitra Balmik (BJP) had expressed concern over the increasing use of mobile phones among children and their exposure to social media.

"Phone has become an addiction among them," she said, and added that children keep vying for maximum likes on their social media posts. The BJP member emphasised the need to implement a digital detox initiative to promote the overall well-being of students.

Shashi Tharoor slams India-US deal as pre-committed purchase agreement

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi



Congress MP Shashi Tharoor speaking during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday

withstand scrutiny.

"While India may have obtained tariff reductions of one or two percentage points, no East Asian economy has agreed to deliberately dilute its trade surplus with the

United States through guaranteed purchase commitments," he said.

The Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram argued that this effectively converts a surplus into a long-term deficit by executive assurance rather than by market demand.

one side and zero per cent on the other. "It looks less like a free trade arrangement and more like a pre-committed purchase agreement that overturns every principle of reciprocity," he said.

At a time when India's total bilateral trade with the US stands at roughly \$130 billion and a trade surplus of nearly \$45 billion, the Government has surprisingly promised to buy \$50 billion worth of American goods over five years.

Commenting on the video that showed Opposition women MPs coming to the treasury benches on February 4, Rijiju asked if anyone could justify the behaviour of the Opposition members.

He said the direction from the BJP leadership was very clear that members belong-

ing to the ruling alliance must maintain the dignity of the House and no MP of the ruling party should get into physical confrontation with the "rude Opposition MPs".

The Congress party is proud of the most degrading behaviour by their MPs. If we had not stopped all the BJP MPs and allowed the women MPs to confront the Congress MPs, it would have led to very ugly scenes. We have very high consideration to protect the dignity and sanctity of Parliament," he told reporters here.

The parliamentary affairs minister accused the Opposition MPs of disrupting proceedings in an unprecedented manner and claimed that the BJP and NDA MPs

were very angry because of the behaviour of their Congress counterparts. "The Congress MPs crossed the treasury benches and even reached the prime minister's seat. The Congress has shown no respect for the dignity of the House. The fact is, they are celebrating on their social media accounts, claiming that women MPs scared the prime minister. This is utterly shameful," he said.

Rijiju said the BJP women MPs have submitted a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla against the behaviour of the Congress members.



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

brating on their social media accounts, claiming that women MPs scared the prime minister. This is utterly shameful," he said.

Rijiju said the BJP women MPs have submitted a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla against the behaviour of the Congress members.



States Focus



5 LAKH PEOPLE TO VISIT SOMNATH TEMPLE ON MAHASHIVRATRI

Nearly five lakh devotees are expected to visit Gujarat's Somnath Temple during the Mahashivratri festival this weekend, with officials noting a surge in visitors following last month's 'Somnath Swabhiman Parv'. Preparations are in full swing at the world-famous Somnath temple for the Mahashivratri festival on February 15. Keeping in mind the massive crowd expected this year, the temple administration and local authorities are making extensive arrangements for security and facilities, Gir Somnath District Collector NV Upadhyay told reporters on Monday. The Somnath Swabhiman Parv was organised from January 8 to 11 as a national commemoration marking 1,000 years since the first recorded attack on the Somnath Temple in January.



BABA SIDDIQUE CASE: MCOCA FRAMES CHARGES AGAINST 27

A special court on Tuesday framed charges under MCOCA and BNS against 27 accused in the 2024 murder case of former Maharashtra minister and NCP politician Baba Siddique after they pleaded not guilty. The charges were framed by special judge, Satyanarayan R Navander, under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita (BNS) for murder, MCOCA, the Arms Act and the Maharashtra Police Act. Framing of charges is the first stage in a criminal trial under the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS), where the court formalises accusations based on evidence.

India showcases manufacturing prowess at World Defence Show

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

At its first-ever pavilion at the World Defence Show in Saudi Arabia, India showcased the country's manufacturing prowess as demonstrated by defence public sector undertakings and private Indian companies.

Minister of State for Defence, Sanjay Seth, led an Indian delegation to the World Defence Show (WDS) 2026, held in Riyadh on February 8-9, the defence ministry said.

"He joined international dignitaries to witness the opening ceremony of WDS and inaugurated the first-ever India Pavilion at the event, which showcased India's manufacturing prowess by defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs) and private Indian companies," it said in a statement.

Seth also held discussions with the Assistant Minister of Defence for Executive Affairs, Saudi Arabia, Khaled bin Hussein Al-Biyari, aiming to enhance cooperation and engagement between the armed forces of both countries. He also met the Governor of the Saudi Arabian General Authority for Defence Development (GADD), Faleh bin Abdullah Al-Sulaiman, and highlighted India's emergence as a global export hub, the statement said.

Seth visited the exhibition areas of Saudi Arabia Military Industries (SAM) and the Saudi Ministry of Defence to review their latest indigenous technological developments.

He invited the GADD officials to visit India's research and development facilities to explore opportunities for the co-development of defence technologies, the ministry said. Seth also met with the Governor of the General Authority of Military Industries (GAMI), Saudi Arabia, Ahmed bin Abdulaziz Al-Ohal, and held discussions on the common areas of strategic cooperation and strengthening the supply chain ecosystem of both countries.

Raj Thackeray slams Bhagwat's language-as-disease remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray on Monday said that if RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat is of the opinion that protesting for one's language is a "disease", then a majority of the states in the country suffer from it.

In a post on X, Thackeray also claimed that those who attended Bhagwat's programme here on February 7-8 to mark the RSS centenary did not come out of love for him but due to the fear of Narendra Modi's Government.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), however, dismissed the remarks, saying people attend Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) programmes voluntarily and with discipline.

On the issue of the Marathi language and identity, the ruling BJP said Marathi is a matter of pride but stressed that a language should remain a medium of com-



Raj Thackeray and Mohan Bhagwat

munication rather than conflict. Thackeray noted that the regional sentiment in the southern states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka is fervent. There is a similar sentiment in Punjab, West Bengal and even in Gujarat.

When hordes of people from four or five states in the country go to different states, act arrogantly there, reject the local culture, insult the local language, and create their own vote banks, it leads

to resentment among locals, leading to outbursts, he noted. Will Bhagwat call it a disease? the MNS president asked.

During an event in Mumbai over the weekend, Bhagwat interacted with people from different walks of life and responded to a series of questions. On the language row, he had said the "localised disease" should not spread. Reacting to it, Thackeray

said, "If Bhagwat feels love for language and state is a disease, then a majority of the states in the country suffer from it."

Thackeray said Bhagwat did not give these "sermons" to Gujarat when thousands of people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were driven away from there. Why were such lessons not given to Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Punjab? he asked.



he held. After Ajit Pawar's death, leaders of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) had claimed that merger talks were at an advanced stage between the two factions and that February 12 had been finalised to announce the reunification.

Asked about MNS president Raj Thackeray's remark about RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, Fadnavis said persons who were not invited to the Sangh's programme to mark its centenary were feeling bad and were resorting to criticism.

NCP factions will settle issues, says Fadnavis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday said leaders from the two NCP factions will settle the issue of their merger, and the BJP will comment on it only after a decision is made.

Speaking to reporters, Fadnavis said he presided over the first Cabinet meeting on Tuesday since the death of NCP chief and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar last month. "We paid tributes to the late leader and welcomed Sunetra Pawar. Under her leadership, the NCP performed well in the Zilla Parishad elections. We wish her well. Regarding the merger of the two NCP factions, it is up to the parties to decide. The BJP will react when a decision is made," Chief Minister said.

Ajit Pawar was killed along with four others after his aircraft crashed at Baramati in the Pune district on January 28. His wife, Sunetra Pawar, has since been appointed deputy chief minister and has taken over the portfolios

drawing strength from his (Ajit Pawar's) way of working, his ability to make decisions and his close bond with the people. Completing his unfinished dreams and doing justice to the expectations of farmers, women, youth, and common citizens will be my top priority," she said.

The Deputy CM noted that no one can replace Ajit Pawar Saheb, but she will make a sincere effort to preserve his legacy and to build a stronger and more capable Maharashtra. "The love, support and trust shown by the people during this difficult time are my greatest strength," she stated.



Newly appointed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar assuming charge at Vidhan Bhavan in Mumbai



video featuring him on social media, Sarma said he will continue speaking up as he has been doing now.

"It is good that they have filed the case. What does communal mean? You all know who I am against," the CM said. "What will happen to me if a case is filed? For me, white is white, black is black. They cannot frighten me. Sibani Bora, Diganta Barman, and their *malik* Rahul Gandhi can file a case against me. My thumb to them," Sarma added.

Maharashtra Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar takes charge of duties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar on Tuesday assumed her ministerial duties at the state secretariat, 13 days after the death of her husband and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar in a plane crash, and attended her maiden cabinet meeting.

Besides Parth, senior Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leaders Praful Patel, Sunil Tatkare, Chhagan Bhujbal and Dhananjay Munde accompanied Sunetra to the Deputy CM's office in Mantralaya.

The Deputy CM later attended her first cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Expressing her feelings after assuming the charge, Sunetra Pawar, in an X post, stated that she felt a deep sense of trust, duty and

"I will move forward

sacrifice as she took up her new assignment.

"The lifelong commitment of Ajit Pawar Saheb to the development of Maharashtra and his tireless work for the people will always guide me," she said.

Sunetra Pawar took oath as the state's first woman Deputy CM on December 31, three days after her husband was killed in the air crash in Pune district.

She was allotted the portfolios of State Excise Duty, Sports and Youth Affairs and Minorities Development and Augaf held earlier by her late husband, except Finance.

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sacrifice as she took up her new assignment.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday filed a ₹500 crore defamation case against Congress leaders for their "land grabbing" allegations against him and his family. He accused Congress leaders Jitendra Singh, Bhupesh Baghel and Gaurav Gogoi of making "false, malicious and defamatory allegations" during a recent press conference, leading to the legal suit against them.

"Over the last few days,

Congress leaders have been

saying that I have benami land of 12,000 *bighas* (over 3,960 acres).

I have filed a case in court so that they can submit the list before the court itself,"

Sarma told reporters on the

sidelines of an official event in

Bongaigaon. He said that if

they cannot provide the list,

they have to pay him ₹500 crore, he added.

In a post on X earlier, the

CM said, "Today, I have filed

a defamation case seeking

₹500 crore in damages

against Congress leaders

for circulating a controversial

video featuring him on social

media, Sarma said he will

continue speaking up as he

has been doing now.

"It is good that they have

filed the case. What does

communal mean? You all

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the CM said. "What will happen to me if a case is filed? For me, white is white, black is black. They cannot frighten me. Sibani Bora, Diganta Barman, and their *malik* Rahul Gandhi can file a case against me. My thumb to them," Sarma added.

Addressing a joint press

conference on February 4,

State Congress president

Gogoi had claimed that the

party's "investigation" has

revealed that "almost 12,000

bighas of land have been

occupied by the CM and his

family across the State".

Asked about Congress

filling a police complaint in

Guwahati against the BJP

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Jana Nayagan censor row: Producers withdraw petition in Madras HC



The Madras High Court on Tuesday permitted the producers of Tamil film *Jana Nayagan*, starring actor-turned-politician Vijay, to withdraw their petition, which sought a direction to the CBC to grant a censor certificate to the film. Justice P T Asha, before whom the petition came up for hearing, granted permission to M/s KVN Productions LLP, producers of the movie, to withdraw the petition. The judge dismissed the petition as "withdrawn".

The judge on January 9 allowed the petition filed by M/s KVN Productions LLP and gave a direction to the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to grant a censor certificate forthwith. The judge had also quashed a communication dated January 5 of the Regional Officer, informing the producers of the film that based on a complaint, the Chairperson of the Censor Board had referred the matter to the revising committee.

Ravi Nair convicted in criminal defamation case filed by Adani Enterprises

The Magistrate court in Mansa, Gandhinagar, has convicted journalist Ravi Nair in a criminal defamation case and sentenced him to a year's imprisonment and a fine. The case followed from a complaint filed by Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL), the Adani Group's flagship company, alleging that Ravi Nair had published and disseminated a series of tweets containing false and defamatory statements intended to damage the reputation of AEL and the Adani Group.

AEL argued that the impugned tweets did not amount to fair comment or legitimate criticism, but were designed to undermine the credibility of the company in the eyes of the public and investors. The court held that AEL had successfully established its case and found Ravi Nair guilty of criminal defamation. The court convicted Ravi Nair and imposed a sentence of one year's imprisonment along with a fine.

decision was taken at a meeting of Delhi's Sentence Review Board (SRB), held last December.

According to a letter issued to the Director General of Prisons, Tihar, on February 5, the SRB considered 51 cases for premature release in its meeting held on December 23, 2025. Of these, 24 cases were rejected. Bhullar's name figured among those denied early release.

According to sources, the SRB recommended premature release of Ningshen,

subject to concurrence of the Central Government. Besides, the SRB rejected the premature of Bhullar.

Bhullar was convicted in connection with the killing of nine people and injuring of 31 in the blast in 1993. Among those who survived the attack is former Youth Congress chief MS Bitta.

Bhullar was awarded death penalty by a designated TADA court in August 2001 but his capital punishment was commuted to life sentence in 2014. He was shifted to

Amritsar Central Jail from Delhi's Tihar Jail on health grounds, in June 2015.

In 2022, his premature release case was deferred by the SRB, despite his "poor health condition" and "vegetative state", officials said. Later, his premature release was declined by the SRB in its meeting in 2024.

The Centre had in September 2019 recommended special remission to eight Sikh prisoners, including Bhullar, to mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru

Nanak Dev. However, his release was objected by some members of the SRB based on the fact that his action as a terrorist claimed innocent lives, and that sending him out at a time when voices in favour of Khalistan were trying to resurrect abroad as well as in Punjab, would embolden them further, the sources said. The issue of Bhullar's release had resurfaced in recent months after Rajya Sabha MP Vikramjit Singh Sahney urged the Delhi

Government to convene the SRB and reconsider the case. Writing to Chief Minister Rekha Gupta ahead of Guru Nanak Dev's Gurpurab on November 5, Sahney had said Bhullar had completed more than 30 years in jail and was entitled to a fair review in line with Supreme Court directions. His name also appeared in the Union Government's 2019 list of prisoners considered for special remission to mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev.

An order issued by Home Bhullar's long hospitalisation and argued that the delay in taking a decision amounted to continued injustice. After his death sentence was commuted in 2014, Bhullar was granted parole for the first time in April 2016 for 21 days and has since received multiple extensions. His name also appeared in the Union Government's 2019 list of prisoners considered for special remission to mark the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev.

The order said that Onyeagha would be deported to his native country immediately after his release. department of Delhi Government last week, stated that Delhi's Lt Governor has remitted un-expired term of sentence of 26 life term convicts on the recommendation of the SRB. The released convicts included a Nigerian national Kenneth Chidi Onyeagha. He was convicted with life sentence in connection with murder and robbery in Delhi, in 2022.

The order said that Onyeagha would be deported to his native country immediately after his release.

SC order shifts the spotlight on Banks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Supreme court has directed CBI to investigate the role/involvement of senior bank officials in sanctioning loans to the defaulting company in the matter of Reliance Communication Ltd.

The Supreme Court in its order dated February 4, 2026 has directed the CBI to investigate the role of senior officials of the banks who had sanctioned loans to Reliance Communication Ltd. (RCOM).

The court in its order directed the CBI to investigate the conduct of the banks authorities to determine whether the loans were released in collusion with the management of the defaulting company. According to sources, there were 14 Public Sector Banks who were part of the lenders' consortium of Reliance Communication (RCOM). The SC categorically ordered the CBI to investigate whether bank officials acted in collusion, con-

nection or conspiracy with the company concerned while releasing financial assistance.

Emphasising the breadth of the investigative mandate, the Supreme Court categorically said that Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act cannot be a deterrent in starting the investigation against the bank officials.

"It is imperative upon the CBI to investigate the conduct of the bank authorities to determine whether financial assistance was released in collusion and connivance with the management of the defaulter company.

In this vein, the reference by the CBI to Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act is totally misconceived. We direct that, regardless of any such provision, the CBI must look into the nexus/collusion/connivance/conspiracy, if any, and for that purpose, all lawful measures for taking the investigations to their logical conclusions must be adopted," the

Supreme Court said in the same order.

The judgment makes it clear that no statutory provision can be used to block or dilute an investigation into an alleged collusive linkage between banks and corporate entities. The Court has expressly directed the CBI to probe the conduct of bank authorities wherever the facts so warrant.

Authorising the adoption of all lawful and appropriate measures, the Supreme Court has instructed the CBI to carry the investigation to its logical and conclusive end. The ruling underscores that accountability of banks and public officials is paramount and integral to the integrity of the financial system.

The Court further observed that procedural technicalities cannot be permitted to shield financial misconduct, reiterating that investigations into serious financial irregularities must proceed independently, effectively and without impediment.

Resolve disputes: Delhi HC to Sunjay Kapur's mother, wife

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday asked the mother, wife and family members of late industrialist Sunjay Kapur to "peacefully" resolve their differences and not let God's "blessing" of financial wealth turn into a "curse". Calling it a "sorry" situation, Justice Mini Pushkarna observed that the family members, who are in litigation with each other over their estate, were grieving and efforts should be made to be respectful of each other.

The judge therefore asked the senior counsel appearing for Sunjay Kapur's mother, wife as well as sister to sit together to resolve the issues in a manner that everyone's interest was safeguarded. "Any chance of mediation? Dirty linen is being washed in court. God has blessed you with financial wealth," the court said during the hearing.

"All of you should try to respect relations... Way forward is resolution in a peaceful manner. Blessing should not become a curse. Efforts need to be from both sides," the court orally observed. The court was dealing with a lawsuit by Sunjay Kapur's mother, Rani Kapur, seeking

that their purported family trust be declared "null and void".

In her lawsuit against her daughter-in-law Priya Kapur and others, 80-year-old Rani Kapur has alleged that the trust, which was constituted in her name in October 2017, was a product of "forged, fabricated and fraudulent" documents and she had been wrongly divested of all her rights, assets and legacy. During the hearing, Justice Pushkarna observed that the daughter-in-law should see that it was the plaintiff's husband who "founded everything" and fruits of his labour should be shared by all.

The court issued notice to Priya Kapur on an application by Priya

SC seeks Centre's reply on creamy layer issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Centre to file its response to the pleas seeking a direction to lay down criteria for exclusion of creamy layer of Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes from availing benefits of reservation in admissions and public employment.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and NV Anjaria was hearing the petitions filed by O P Shukla and the Samta Andolan Samiti seeking enforcement of the landmark judgement of August 1, 2024 on reservation.

It asked the Centre to file its response on the pleas and said that they will be taken up after some time.

The creamy layer principle was laid down in the famous



Mandal Commission judgement and under the principle, the affluent people among OBCs were barred from taking quota benefits in admissions and jobs.

In a landmark verdict, a seven-judge constitution bench headed by the then Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, by a majority of 6:1, held that states are constitutionally empowered to make sub-classifications within the Scheduled Castes (SC), which

form a socially heterogeneous class, for granting reservation for the uplift of castes that are socially and educationally more backward among them.

Justice BR Gavai (since retired), who was also part of the majority opinion, had held that the "finding of M Nagaraj, Jarnail Singh and Davinder Singh to the effect that creamy layer principle is also applicable to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes lays down the correct position of law".

ED issues fresh summons to Anil Ambani, wife in money laundering case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate has issued fresh summons to Reliance Group chairman Anil Ambani and his wife Tina Ambani to appear for questioning in a money laundering case next week, officials said on Tuesday. Tina Ambani, 68, a former actor, was asked to depose by the federal agency here on Monday but she skipped appearance.

Officials said she has now been asked to depose on February 17 followed by Anil Ambani, 66, on February 18. Their statements will be recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) once they depose, the officials said. Anil Ambani was questioned by the ED once last year as part of these investigations linked to multiple



Anil Ambani and his wife Tina Ambani

Reliance Group companies and their bank loans.

It is understood that Tina Ambani has been called for questioning with regard to a money trail linked to the purchase of a luxury condominium in New York's Manhattan. The ED had recently arrested former RCOM (Reliance Communication) president Punit Garg in this case. The New York property was "fraudulently" sold in 2023 during the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) of RCOM by Garg, the ED had claimed in a statement earlier. It is understood that RCOM informed the stock exchange about this "fraudulent" sale in 2025.

PM's degree: HC gives DU time to file objections to delay in filing appeal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday granted three weeks' time to Delhi University for filing its objection to the delay in appeals against an order refusing disclosure of details of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bachelor's degree.

Appearing for the university, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued that "there was nothing in the matter" and it was "only to sensationalise". He sought time to file a reply on the aspect of delay in filing the appeals challenging the single judge's order passed in August 2025, as well as on merit.

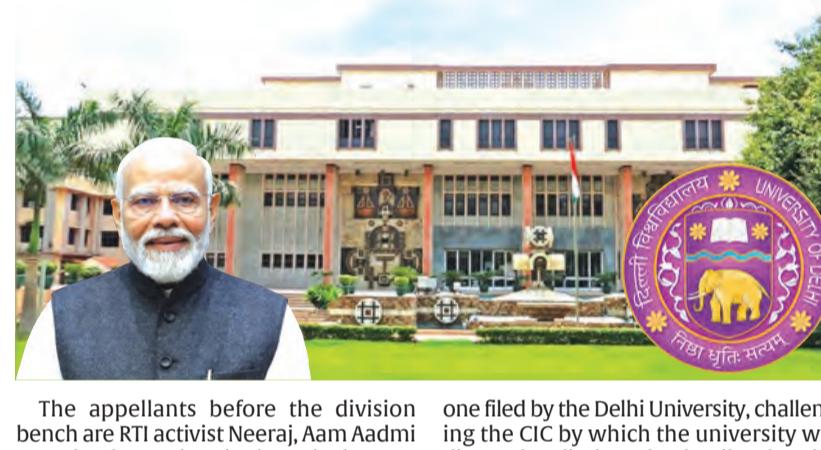
"As prayed, three weeks' time is granted to file an objection to the application seeking condonation of delay," said a bench of Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia and listed the matter for hearing on April 27.

The senior counsel, appearing for an appellant, said objections to the delay had not been filed even after two-and-a-half months of the court permitting Delhi University (DU) to do so. He added that it was a "small" delay of 15 to 45 days, and the court could condone it.

He also pressed for the issuance of a formal notice in the matter if DU wanted to respond to the main appeals. "Notice can only be issued to sensationalise something," SG Mehta said. Appeals have been filed challenging a single judge's order, which had set aside a Central Information Commission (CIC) decision directing disclosure of Prime Minister Modi's degree.

Following an RTI application by one Neeraj, the CIC on December 21, 2016, allowed inspection of records of all students who cleared the BA exam in 1978 — the year Prime Minister Modi also passed it.

The single judge had passed the combined order in six petitions, including the



one filed by the Delhi University, challenging the CIC by which the university was directed to disclose the details related to Prime Minister Modi's bachelor's degree.

The university's counsel had sought the CIC order to be set aside, but said the varsity had no objection to showing its records to the court. The single judge had opined that the educational qualifications were not in the nature of any statutory requirement for holding any public office or discharging official responsibilities.

The situation might have been different, had educational qualifications been a prerequisite for eligibility to a specific public office, the judge had said, calling the CIC's approach "thoroughly misconceived".

The high court had also set aside the CIC order, which directed the CBSE to provide copies of Class 10 and 12 records of former Union minister Smriti Irani.

Calcutta HC rejects bail plea Kuldeep Rai in bank fraud case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Sri Vijaya Puram

The Calcutta High Court on Tuesday rejected the bail applications of former MP of Andaman and Nicobar Islands Kuldeep Rai Sharma and Sanjay Lal, another accused, in connection with a ₹500 crore bank fraud case.

The Criminal Miscellaneous case heard by a Single Bench (CRM-SB) of Justice Apurba Sinha Ray, however, granted bail to K Murugan, former managing director Andaman and Nicobar State Cooperative Bank (ANSCLB), on health grounds.

Sharma, who is also the ex-chairman of the ANSCLB, and Murugan were arrested on September 17, 2025 while Lal was picked a month later by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

"Upon hearing both sides at length, Justice Apurba Sinha Ray rejected bail application of ex-Andaman MP Kuldeep Rai Sharma and Sanjay Lal, while granting bail to K Murugan on health grounds," an ED official said. "They were arrested in connection with an ANSCLB fraud case of more than ₹500 Crore," the official said.

The investigation stems from an FIR registered on May 15, 2025, by the Crime & Economic Offences Cell, Andaman & Nicobar Police, against bank officials and private individuals. On July 18, the Cell arrested Sharma in connection with the case involving loan irregularities.

The arrest was made following a complaint from the deputy registrar of the cooperative societies, which alleged gross irregularities in sanctioning loans to various people by the lender.

Later, ED started a parallel investigation and conducted search operation at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on July 31 that year.



Kuldeep Rai Sharma

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Editor's TAKE

Anchoring the Indian Ocean

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a \$175 million special economic package for Seychelles is a timely investment

India's vision of MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) is steadily taking shape. India's growing affinity with Seychelles shows that its MAHASAGAR vision is becoming a reality on the ground. Its engagement with Seychelles reflects New Delhi's intent to be proactive in the Indian Ocean and to engage closely with its maritime neighbourhood. President Patrick Herminie's State Visit to India is more than a routine diplomatic engagement. It marks the emergence of a new synergy between the two countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a \$175 million special economic package for Seychelles demonstrates how much value India assigns to the island nation. However, this is not merely a goodwill gesture; it is a calibrated investment in a partnership that is both historic and strategic. The two nations share over 50 years of uninterrupted diplomatic relations, a testament to their cooperation and smooth ties. The details of the package are noteworthy. By targeting social housing, e-mobility, vocational training, health, defence, and maritime security, India has crafted a development blueprint that balances human welfare with strategic stability. This is not simply an aid announcement; it is a statement of intent. Social housing and health infrastructure address immediate developmental needs. Vocational training creates pathways to employment. E-mobility aligns with global climate commitments. However, what makes the package particularly strategic is its emphasis on defence and maritime security. Seychelles occupies a strategic location in the western Indian Ocean. From this vantage point, it can help monitor vital global trade routes, which have gained significance due to ongoing tensions in the Gulf. In Seychelles, India has yet another partner in maritime security that can play a crucial role in safeguarding India's supply lines.

Prime Minister Modi has reiterated that India's development partnerships are guided by the "priorities and needs" of its partners. Indeed, this is a win-win situation for both countries, regardless of their size. Unlike China, India has consistently adopted a principle-based approach, earning trust and respect. For Seychelles, these targeted investments can have a transformative impact, particularly in employment generation and skill-building. The symbolism surrounding the visit adds another layer of depth. President Herminie's tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat is deeply significant. Gandhi's principles of non-violence and cooperation resonate in India's diplomatic philosophy, especially in its engagement with the Global South. In recent years, India has positioned itself as a leading voice of the Global South and a key pillar of the Quad. India provides the Quad with its Indian Ocean anchor. With its strategic geography and naval reach, India plays a pivotal role in maintaining balance in the region.

As India positions itself as a voice for developing nations, its friendship with Seychelles demonstrates that it practises what it preaches. By combining development assistance with security cooperation, New Delhi signals that prosperity and stability are deeply intertwined.

PIC TALK



Children run through a mustard field holding balloons in Nadia.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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GOLD AND SILVER STRUGGLE TO HOLD HISTORIC GAINS

Precious metals began 2026 on a strong note, with both gold and silver reaching fresh record highs in January. However, recent trading sessions have seen sharp volatility, with prices cooling by nearly 10 per cent from their peaks. Gold and silver traditionally move in tandem, and many investors still consider gold a lifetime store of value. Prices fluctuate according to market trends, and falling rates often stimulate renewed buying interest in bullion markets.

The current turbulence follows an extended rally, prompting experts to advise close monitoring of daily price movements before making investment decisions. As of February 2026, silver fell by 12 per cent in a single session after touching record highs, while

gold also experienced wide swings amid rising margin requirements and geopolitical tensions. Markets are responding to high-level US discussions in Oman and speculation over potential changes in Federal Reserve leadership.

Despite recent corrections, both metals have recorded strong gains in recent years, with silver rising over 225 per cent and gold nearly 88 per cent in the past two years.

Volatility in gold is at levels not seen since the 2008 financial crisis, while silver's turbulence echoes conditions last witnessed in 1980, highlighting the uncertain outlook for precious metal investors.

CK SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

When politics drowns democracy

This breakdown in dialogue culminated in the Lok Sabha being adjourned for the day last Wednesday, preventing the Prime Minister from delivering his usual reply to the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address. This was unprecedented in Parliament's history



KALYANI SHANKAR

Communication between the Modi government and the Opposition has broken down, as evidenced by the turbulent proceedings in Parliament last week. There have been no back-channel negotiations to resolve the paralysis.

The protests intensified on Monday when Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla announced that the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, could not read from a magazine containing an excerpt from a book by retired General Naravane, citing parliamentary rules.

This breakdown in dialogue culminated in the Lok Sabha being adjourned for the day last Wednesday, preventing the Prime Minister from delivering his usual reply to the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address. This was unprecedented in Parliament's history: the Prime Minister was unable to speak in the Lower House on the President's Address, underscoring the seriousness of the disruptions.

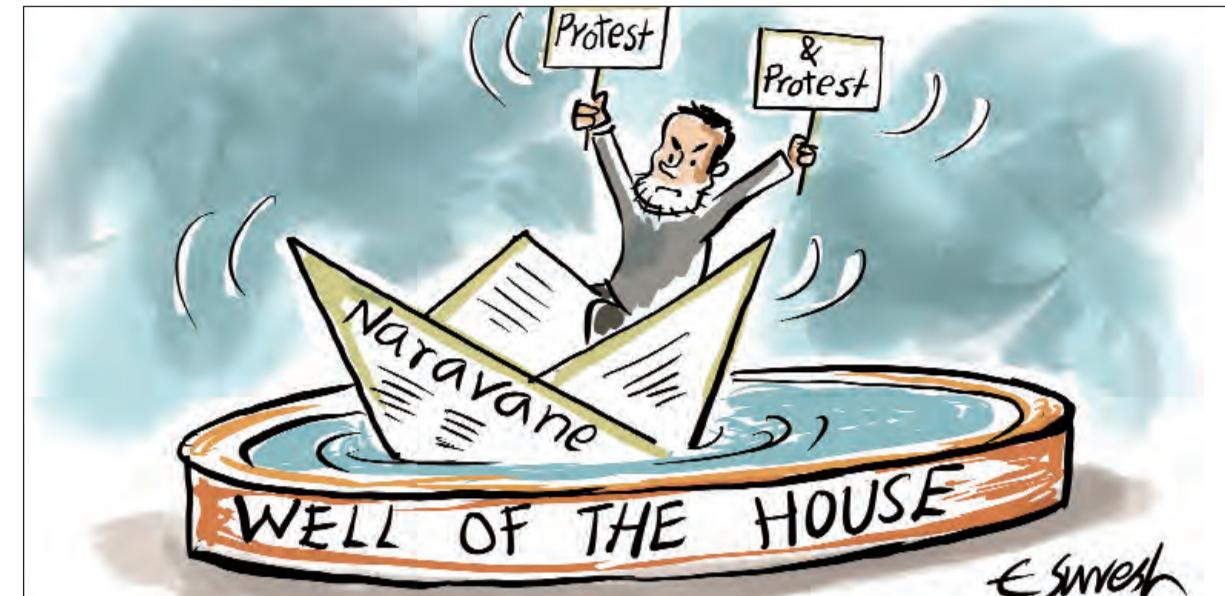
Opposition Members of Parliament from both Houses protested, especially in the Lok Sabha. These protests led to repeated adjournments of the Lower House, often just minutes after it reconvened. During the protests, members chanted slogans, entered the Well of the House, and held banners and placards in front of the Speaker. They also staged a demonstration outside Parliament.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was unable to enter the House because Opposition women MPs had positioned themselves near his seat in the Lok Sabha.

Speaker Om Birla clarified the following day that he had advised the Prime Minister to avoid the House due to concerns about potential disruptions near his seat. He stated: "When the Prime Minister was scheduled to respond to the President's Address, I had received indications that some Congress members might attempt to create a disturbance close to the Prime Minister's chair. Such actions could undermine our democratic traditions. To prevent this, I felt it was necessary to advise the Prime Minister not to attend the House. As the presiding officer, it is my duty to safeguard these traditions."

Women Members of Parliament obstructed the aisle near the Prime Minister's seat just before his arrival, highlighting the active role of Opposition women MPs in the disruptions.

In a related development, Rahul Gandhi commented on a memoir by a retired Army



chief that has yet to be released. The memoir, written by General Naravane in March 2023, is slated for publication in December. General Naravane has been widely recognised for his integrity.

Overall, Parliament faced significant disruptions due to repeated adjournments. This turmoil highlights the challenges of maintaining parliamentary decorum and the importance of respectful debate for effective governance. In earlier years, there were several high-quality debates.

The following day, the Prime Minister spoke extensively in the Rajya Sabha about his government's achievements and various initiatives it had launched. He addressed India's position in global affairs and its increasing influence on the world stage. The Prime Minister praised his 11 years in office while strongly criticising the Nehru-Gandhi family for their failure to develop the country effectively. The speech resembled an election rally, filled with punchlines.

Members of Parliament often create disturbances to protest and gain media attention. Their actions include rushing to the Well of the House, shouting slogans, holding up signs, and at times even tearing up Bills. This behaviour reflects deep political divisions and a shift towards confrontational politics.

There has been a noticeable increase in time lost to disruptions, as well as in the costs of running Parliament. It costs approximately ₹2.5 lakh per minute, ₹1.5 crore per hour, and ₹9 crore per day of taxpayers' money, highlighting the financial impact of these disruptions on public resources.

According to NDTV, losses continue to mount even when the Houses are adjourned, with expenses including the operational

costs of the high-tech Parliament building, staff salaries, and expenditure on security, among others.

Disruptions in Parliament not only hinder government accountability and limit meaningful discussion but also delay the passage of crucial legislation, affecting public welfare and policy implementation. This underscores the urgent need for reform.

Many committees have recommended reforms for Parliament and have emphasised the need for positive change and support for necessary improvements. In a parliamentary democracy, frequent disruptions not only hinder legislative progress but also erode public trust and weaken democratic legitimacy.

To address this, electoral reforms are needed to improve the quality of elected representatives. Greater understanding among political parties should also be encouraged, using both formal and informal mechanisms. By increasing public awareness of Parliament's role and how disruptions harm the public interest, these disturbances can be reduced.

Parliamentary standing committees, such as those in the UK and Canada, have successfully mediated conflicts and improved decorum through structured dialogue and conflict resolution. Such examples can inspire support for similar reforms and demonstrate their effectiveness in strengthening parliamentary functioning.

These reforms should be implemented sooner rather than later, with political cooperation playing a crucial role in restoring faith and ensuring the smooth functioning of Parliament. Above all, strong political will is required.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

The writer is a popular columnist
dailypioneer
@kalyanishankar
in The Pioneer

When taxes start feeling like a punishment



RACHNA LAKHPATI

2ND OPINION

The moment the word taxes enters a conversation, shoulders slump. Faces tighten. For many Indians today, taxes no longer feel like a civic duty; they feel like a quiet penalty for choosing to earn honestly in this country.

The irony is painful. An entire year is spent working relentlessly — long hours, skipped family dinners, postponed holidays, and strained mental health. We plan our finances carefully, invest where we can, and chase stability in an economy where inflation quietly eats into every salary slip. And then, almost ceremoniously, a portion of that hard-earned income is taken away.

Professional tax is deducted without question. Income tax follows if your salary crosses the ₹12 lakh threshold. For someone earning ₹13-14 lakh annually, the income tax outgo can equal nearly a full month's salary. One

month of work — gone. Not spent. Not saved. Simply surrendered.

This would not sting as much if incomes were rising faster than costs. But they are not. Inflation has turned everyday living into a careful calculation — rent, school fees, healthcare, fuel, groceries. Savings are already stretched thin. So when taxes take away what could have been a safety net, the feeling is not anger alone. It is anxiety. It is fear. It is exhaustion.

We grow up being taught a beautiful lesson: give without expectation. Give and forget. Charity, generosity, seva — these values are deeply Indian. But taxes do not feel like charity. They feel compulsory. And unlike voluntary giving, they refuse to be forgotten, because their absence is felt every month, in every compromised plan.

Some well-meaning people say, "Treat taxes like a donation to the government." That sounds noble but donations work on trust, visibility, and certainty. When we donate to a cause, we know where the money is going. We see the school built, the child educated, the hospital equipped. Taxes, on the other hand, disappear into abstraction.

Research consistently shows that tax morale — people's willingness to pay taxes — increases when governments communicate clearly about how tax money is used. Countries that publicly link taxes to healthcare systems,

transport infrastructure, education, and social security see higher compliance and lower resentment. Transparency builds trust. Uncertainty breeds resistance.

In India, the average taxpayer often feels invisible. The benefits of taxation feel distant, uneven, or inaccessible. Roads remain broken, public hospitals overcrowded, and middle-class families continue to self-fund education, healthcare, and retirement — despite paying substantial taxes. This disconnect is where resentment grows.

People are not unwilling to contribute. Indians donate generously, volunteer tirelessly, and support communities instinctively. What they resist is paying without knowing. Giving without seeing impact. Sacrificing without assurance. If taxpayers were clearly shown — this portion funded rural healthcare, this built urban infrastructure, this supported education — many would pay with pride, not pain. Accountability would transform taxes from a burden into participation.

Until then, taxes will continue to feel less like nation-building and more like a survival negotiation. And the question will linger in every honest earner's mind: Why does earning more feel like losing more?

The writer is a freelancer who writes on education, development, and social issues

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bridging gender gap in Science

International Day of Women and Girls in Science, observed on 11 February, highlights the need for inclusive scientific progress. Science and technology for sustainable development, along with women's empowerment, are critical for national growth. Yet women and girls continue to lag behind their male counterparts in India's research ecosystem in terms of participation, though not in quality.

Studies in STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering, and mathematics — show that girls become increasingly under-represented as they advance in their education and careers. Less than 30 per cent of technology researchers are women. The aptitude exists; what is often missing is sustained support.

Gender inequality, career breaks, workplace bias, and inadequate institutional support prevent many talented women from reaching leadership roles. Employers must adopt more flexible recruitment, retention, and remuneration policies. A worker-friendly environment, supportive of work-life balance, is the strongest incentive. If nurtured, women's scientific potential can significantly strengthen India's innovation and development landscape.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Banks must curb digital fraud

The Supreme Court's call for a standard operating procedure to protect victims of digital fraud is timely. Reports of senior citizens losing their life savings to cybercriminals are increasing at an alarming rate. Coerced transfers and online scams are leaving victims financially and emotionally devastated.

Banks already require prior intimation for cheque payments above a threshold. Similar safeguards can be applied to online transactions, with customer consent. Most Indian banks use AI to detect unusual high-value transactions that deviate from account history; this system should trigger temporary holds and mandatory verification.

For joint accounts, banks should confirm such transfers with all account holders. Customers could also opt for a protective hold that requires in-person verification before large transfers are processed.

When a new beneficiary is added, a mandatory cooling-off period of at least 24 hours should be enforced. Banks could cross-check beneficiaries against an RBI-maintained database of mule accounts and suspicious entities. Ultimately, sustained public awareness campaigns against digital fraud are essential to reduce vulnerability.

V JAYARAMAN | CHENNAI

Parliamentary norms face erosion

The adoption of the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address in the Lok Sabha without the Prime Minister's reply marks a troubling break from parliamentary convention.

The Speaker's explanation — that security concerns warranted the Prime Minister's absence — sets an uneasy precedent. Parliament must remain a forum for debate, not suspicion.

Equally concerning was the refusal to allow the Leader of the Opposition to cite excerpts from a former Army Chief's book, despite his willingness to authenticate them. Restricting discussion on issues of national importance weakens democratic oversight.

The Motion of Thanks debate is a constitutional mechanism through which the executive is held accountable. Bypassing the Prime Minister's reply without formal resolution undermines both procedure and principle. Increasing disruptions and mistrust are replacing reasoned debate.

Invoking security threats to limit parliamentary speech risks eroding faith in democratic institutions. The nation's highest law-making body must function with dignity, transparency, and adherence to established norms.

SANJAY CHOPRA | PUNJAB



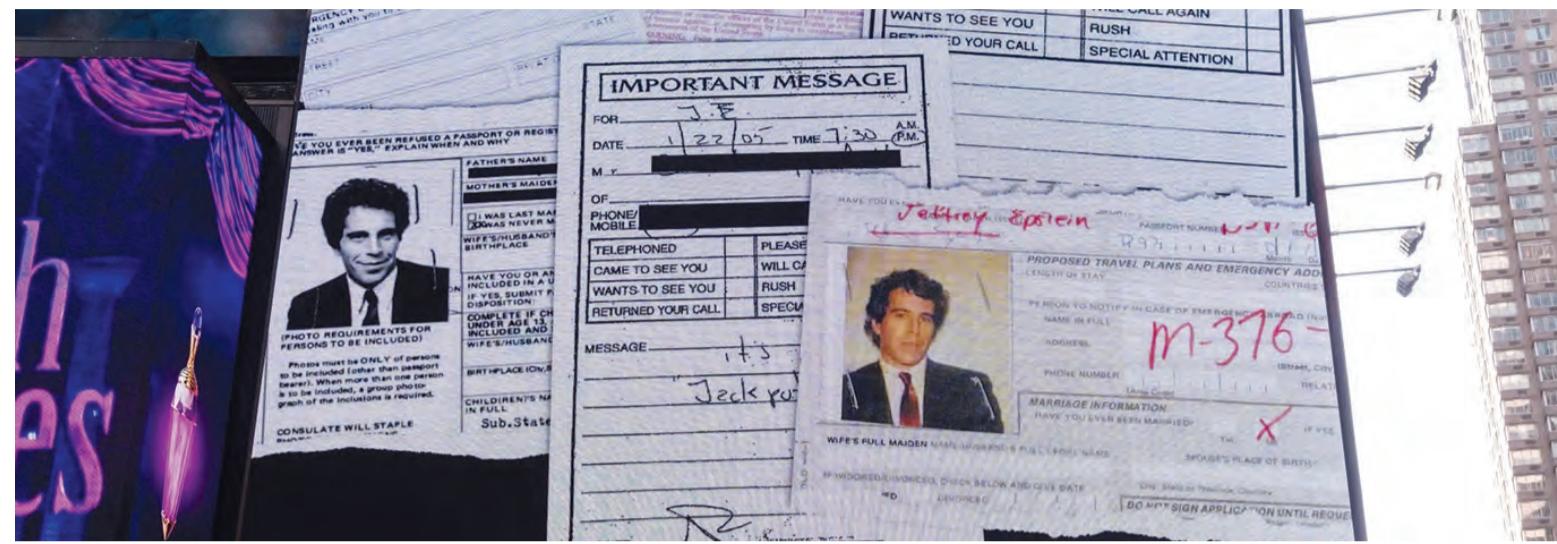
The Epstein mirror: How power and money colluded in plain sight

In Epstein's cold abstractions – where harm dissolves into systems and money washes away its origins – we glimpse a deeper, more unsettling truth: the architecture of Western power did not merely tolerate him; it understood him, and often found him useful

FIRST Column



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA



EPSTEIN WAS
NOT AN ALIEN
INTRUSION.
HE WAS
CULTIVATED
BY
INSTITUTIONS
THAT PRIZED
OUTCOMES
OVER
METHODS, BY
CULTURES
THAT
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ACCESS FOR
INSIGHT, AND
BY ELITES
WHO
CONFUSED
PROXIMITY
WITH VIRTUE

The writer is a columnist
based in Colombo

@dailypioneer
@TheDailyPioneer
nilanthailangamuwa

sibility of exactitude. Hair, skull, height, decimals. The question dissolves into semantics. Nothing lands. Nothing sticks.

This is the rhythm of the interview. Whenever responsibility approaches, the language lifts off the ground.

Epstein frames history as a long record of misunderstanding. Newton, he says, could describe motion but not explain it. Quantum physics only widened the mystery. "We just cannot explain," he repeats. Electrons are not things but clouds. Solids are not solid. At small scales, reality collapses into probabilities. From this, he draws a broader claim: that science, mathematics, and formal systems are the wrong tools for understanding life. "No really new ideas have come out," he says of modern institutions, because they are trapped using the wrong instruments.

He applies this logic everywhere. Markets are not calculable; they are felt. Traders succeed through intuition, not models. Mathematics follows action, never the reverse. Measurement arrives after the fact, to justify what instinct already decided. Crises are not moral failures; they are structural inevitabilities. Collapse is not crime. It is mechanics.

Rockefeller and JP Morgan appear in his telling as honest predators, men who never pretended capitalism was humane. Modern leaders, by contrast, are described as symbolic figures, trapped inside systems they cannot read, repeating language about growth and stability while liquidity moves independently of them. Whether this is true is almost irrelevant. What matters is that Epstein speaks as if

proximity to power grants ontological superiority. Understanding, in his world, is not earned; it is inherited through access.

The files released alongside this interview make the same argument without words. Names recur. Flights recur. Dinners recur. Foundations recur. What disappears is responsibility. Everything is coincidence. Everyone was only passing through. The documents do not need to prove every allegation to expose the structure. Power does not operate through direct orders. It circulates. It accumulates. It protects itself through diffusion.

When Bannon asks whether institutions should take money from someone like him, Epstein does not deny the question's legitimacy. He reframes it. He speaks of polio vaccines in Pakistan and India. He asks whether mothers would refuse money if told it came from the devil himself. "I don't care, I want the money for my children," he imagines them saying. Utility overrides origin. Outcome erases source. Pressed further, Bannon asks the question directly: is your money dirty money? Epstein answers simply: no.

He earned it – advising terrible people, perhaps, but earning it nonetheless. Ethics, he suggests, are always complicated. This is not a defence. It is a declaration of how the world works.

At one point, Bannon asks whether Epstein thinks he is the devil. Epstein does not laugh. He deflects. The devil, he says, scares him. Satan, he notes, was brilliant, an archangel who rebelled because he

could not be number one. The comparison lingers without resolution. The interview ends shortly after. No absolution. No reckoning.

What emerges from this last interview is not a man in denial, but a man entirely comfortable with abstraction. Shame is translated into systems. Harm dissolves into theory. Victims never appear as subjects, only as variables implied offstage. Consciousness, intuition, the soul all enter the conversation only to establish that nothing essential can be pinned down.

The files show how well this posture was accommodated. Universities accepted money while insisting they were neutral. Politicians appeared alongside him while assuring themselves they were merely polite. Media figures attended dinners while calling it observation. Everyone performed a role and trusted that performance itself was protection.

The West likes to describe itself as transparent, but it survives through selective blindness. Confession is demanded from the weak. Silence is granted to the useful. When scandals erupt, they are framed as deviations rather than products. Epstein's story is intolerable precisely because it refuses that comfort. He does not apologise for understanding the rules as they are practised rather than preached.

There is an instinct to personalised the horror, to catalogue names and savour disgrace. That instinct misses the deeper point. Epstein's circle was not united by

ideology or loyalty, but by convenience. People who would never share a moral code shared aircraft. People who condemned exploitation in public tolerated it in private. This is not casual hypocrisy. It is structural compartmentalisation.

The West has learned to split its self-image from its conduct, to celebrate progress while outsourcing its costs to the unseen. Epstein did not disrupt this order. He navigated it fluently. Financier, philanthropist, intellectual – he shifted registers with ease. The files show how often this worked.

His death resolved nothing. It converted a living problem into an archival one. Documents replaced testimony. Speculation replaced trial. The anger dispersed into procedural arguments. Meanwhile, the structures that enabled him remain untouched: reverence for wealth, fear of disruption, and the confusion of success with legitimacy.

What makes the interview disturbing is not bravado. It is tone. Epstein speaks without urgency, without fear, as if describing weather patterns. Consequences are acknowledged but not absorbed. Effects are catalogued without weight. In another setting, this might be called rational detachment. Here, it reads as something closer to anaesthesia.

The West will move on. It always does. New crises will arrive. New villains will be named. Epstein will become shorthand, a symbol stripped of texture. But the interview and the files reflect that reduction. They insist on something more uncomfortable: that the conditions which allowed him to exist were not aberrations, but habits. If there is value in revisiting this material, it lies in resisting the urge to externalise evil. Epstein was not an alien intrusion. He was cultivated by institutions that prized outcomes over methods, by cultures that mistook access for insight, and by elites who confused proximity with virtue. His story is not a warning about one man. It is a mirror.

Franz Kafka understood that once life becomes performance, sincerity becomes dangerous. Masks protect, but they also suffocate. The Epstein saga shows what happens when a civilisation forgets how to remove them. The disgust now surfacing is not directed only at him. It is the nausea of recognition – the awareness that the distance between what is condemned and what is tolerated was never very wide at all.

Congress dilemma: Why Rahul Gandhi must decide the Party's future now



ANIL
ANAND



Two decades in politics is not a small period. Though the learning curve never ceases to exist, the time comes in the life of a political leader to give a real account of himself or herself and accordingly take tough decisions. Such a situation cannot be allowed to linger on forever in view of the dynamically changing political landscape.

Ironically, after two decades of active politics and, in between, an unsuccessful bid for the presidency of India's oldest political party, the Indian National Congress, Mr Rahul Gandhi still finds himself at a crossroads. Which way to go and which road to take – he seems to be stuck in a dilemma.

He has allowed himself to become the de facto chief of the party, and at the same time his close aides take pains to deflect this perception by painstakingly reminding the country that Mr Mallikarjun Kharge is the fully elected president of the party. There is no denying this fact, but ground realities point in a different direction.

Mr Kharge has been Congress president for over three years after defeating Mr Shashi Tharoor, with the full support of Mr Gandhi and his family. Everyone knows that Mr Kharge's candidature was openly backed by Mrs Sonia Gandhi, which set the course for the poll outcome. Ever since, Mr Tharoor, being suspect in the eyes of Gandhi-camp backers, has acquired the status of a rebel, while Mr Gandhi remains the de facto boss calling the shots.

Whatever Mr Gandhi did during the last three years (Mr Kharge's tenure) naturally has his stamp, and whatever he did not do also bears his stamp. The "not doing" part pertains to indecisiveness – it being taken over the mantle as Congress president, bringing far-reaching organisational changes, or implementing his own words expressed from time to time. He must take equal credit or blame for decisions taken or not taken.

Solo acts without the backing of a solid organisation will not take you very far, Mr Gandhi. Nor will closing your eyes to rejuvenating the Congress.

This prolonged paradox has now begun manifesting dangerously and is desperately awaiting a rescue act. On the contrary, the situation has become more serious, with the positive impact generated by Mr Gandhi's strenuous Bharat Jodo Yatras (BJYs) almost on the verge of evaporation. In the absence of a follow-up plan, and with

Avimuktеш्वरानन्द ji, Shankaracharya of Jyotish Peeth, at the Prayagraj Magh Mela – where he sat on dharma protesting against alleged insults by the administration, with no word of pacification coming either from Prime Minister Mr Modi or UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath – has added new grist to the political whirlwind. This is a serious development which Congress cannot ignore, particularly in the face of the aggressive Hindutva agenda of Mr Modi and the Shankaracharya questioning its veracity.

Unfortunately, the Congress does not seem prepared to act in consonance, or preferably remain a step ahead of the situation, amid these fast-paced developments. In contrast, the BJP and the Modi government's fire-fighting techniques are ever ready, rediscovering ways at a fast pace to repeatedly turn the tables.

The Congress and Mr Gandhi must shun lethargy if he is to remain in the game. There are misdemeanours of the ruling dispensation, such as the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls and various other measures that tilt the balance in its favour, thereby preventing a level playing field. Mr Gandhi's fight on this front is laudable, but nothing will succeed without setting his own house in order. He cannot be seen as fighting as a loner, but as a leader heading a strong pack, which he must develop speedily.

Firstly, he must clear his mind on whether he wishes to perpetuate the current de facto model of Congress leadership, intends to lead from the front, or is prepared to give a chance to someone else. In any situation, decision-making should not become a casualty. It is because of indecisiveness and opaqueness in the AICC's functioning that things have worsened by the day.

Someone might say that even Mr Modi is far removed from the BJP's rank and file, yet his graph has been rising for the past decade. The strong organisational system, backup support, and capacity to take hard decisions make the difference in his case. There is a multi-tier mechanism in the saffron party's organisational setup which keeps both Mr Modi and his party going through all seasons.

An opposition leader like Mr Gandhi, who is continuously under the scanner of his political opponents, cannot afford the luxury of remaining oblivious to emerging situations or the challenges with which his own party has been beset. There is a strong case for transition and generational change, which he ostensibly wishes to pursue. It requires courage, conviction, fortitude, flexibility, and, at the same time, the will to take strong decisions.

The writer is a political and national affairs analyst
@dailypioneer
@dhountli
dailypioneer

How could rare earth scarcity push India into a China trap?



PRADEEP
RANA



India's march towards becoming a technology superpower in the domains of electric vehicles, defence systems, energy grids, space and science critically depends on rare metals which most people have never heard of. These are the 17 rare earth elements that make or mar any country's achievements in the technology sector.

India is not short of them. From Odisha's beach sands to the coastal stretches of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the country holds around 6 to 7 per cent of the world's rare earth reserves. Yet it contributes barely 2 per cent of global output. The problem is not below the soil, but above it – the near absence of policy, foresight, and perhaps the inability to match China's mining and exploration economics.

China controls nearly two-thirds of the world's production and almost 90 per cent of its refining facilities. Even ores mined in the US or Australia are often sent to China for processing. This dominance gives Beijing quiet but immense leverage – the ability to decide who gets to build the next generation of technology.

India's monazite-rich sands are managed largely by Indian Rare Earths Limited (IREL) under the Department of Atomic Energy, but for decades private mining was restricted due to nuclear sensitivity concerns. While China built a massive ecosystem of mines, magnets and finished electronics, India kept its resources idle or exported raw sand.

The result is a form of strategic dependence that undermines India's technological sovereignty. Without rare earths, no electric vehicle motors, wind turbines, advanced radars, or smartphones can exist.

China's rare earth offer to India unsettles Washington

India's recent drive towards rare earth self-reliance has gathered quiet momentum. The government has rolled out new incentives to attract domestic refining and magnet manufacturing, while strengthening the Indian Rare Earths Limited network to handle processing locally.

This shift comes as China, the world's dominant rare earth supplier, has made a calculated move – offering to resume limited supplies to India on the condition that the mate-

rials are not re-exported to any third country. The unspoken reference is to the United States, which has been struggling to secure its own non-Chinese supply chains.

China's conditional offer to India emerged just as US officials were pressuring allies to diversify rare earth sourcing away from Chinese control. Beijing's signal that India could buy only for its own consumption – not as a back door for American industries – most likely angered Trump, who imposed even

higher tariffs on China. What began as a trade war over steel and semiconductors has thus extended into a strategic contest over the raw minerals that underpin modern technology. India is now caught between opportunity and caution, wary of being drawn into the rivalries of its two biggest trading partners.

India's problem is not geological scarcity but the lack of refining and processing capability. Even if India mined aggressively, the ores would still have to be sent abroad for separation – mostly to China. That is where the true choke point lies.

To break out, India needs a national rare earth mission: open mining to private investment under strict safeguards, establish domestic refining clusters, and link universities and defence laboratories for downstream innovation. Until India can turn its rare sands into strategic strength, it will continue to build on borrowed elements.

The writer is an expert in science, research and development
@dailypioneer
@TheDailyPioneer
The Pioneer



As Sam Altman's OpenAI experiments with advertising in ChatGPT, its fiercest competitor, Anthropic (with Claude's AI tool) mocked the former, and released a long blog to explain why advertising has no place in AI. In this column, we reproduce the blog:

There are many good places for advertising. A conversation with Claude is not one of them. Advertising drives competition, helps people discover new products, and allows services like email and social media to be offered for free. We have run our own ad campaigns, and our AI models have, in turn, helped many of our customers in the advertising industry. But including ads in conversations with Claude would be incompatible with what we want Claude to be a genuinely helpful assistant for work, and for deep thinking. We want Claude to act unambiguously in our users' interests. So, we have made a choice: Claude will remain ad-free. Our users will not see 'sponsored' links adjacent to their conversations with Claude; nor will Claude's responses be influenced by advertisers, or include third-party product placements our users did not ask for.

When people use search engines or social media, they have come to expect a mixture of organic and sponsored content. Filtering signals from noise is part of the interaction. Conversations with AI assistants are meaningfully different. The format is open-ended; users often share context, and reveal more than they would in a search query. This openness is part of what makes conversations with AI valuable, but it is also what makes them susceptible to influence in ways that other digital products are not. Our analysis of conversations with Claude (conducted in a way that keeps all data private and anonymous) shows that an appreciable portion involve topics that are sensitive or deeply personal, the kinds of conversations you might have with a trusted advisor. Many other uses involve complex software engineering tasks, deep work, or thinking through difficult problems. The appearance of ads in these contexts would feel incongruous and, in many cases, inappropriate.

We still have much to learn about the impact of AI models on the people who use them. Early research suggests both benefits, like people finding support they could not access elsewhere, and risks, including the potential for models to reinforce harmful beliefs in vulnerable users. Introducing advertising incentives at this stage would add another level of complexity. Our understanding of how models translate the goals we set them into specific behaviours is still developing; an ad-based system could therefore have unpredictable results. Being genuinely helpful is one of the core principles of Claude's Constitution, the document that describes our vision for Claude's character, and guides how we train the model. An advertising-based business model would introduce incentives that could work against this principle.

Consider a concrete example. A user mentions they are having trouble sleeping. An assistant without advertising incentives would explore the various potential causes, stress, environment, habits and so on, based on what might be most insightful to the user. An ad-supported assistant has an additional consideration: whether the conversation presents an opportunity to make a transaction. These objectives may often align, but not always. And, unlike a list of search results, ads that influence a model's responses may make it difficult to tell whether a given recommendation comes with a commercial motive or not. Users should not have to second-guess whether AI is genuinely helping them or subtly steering the conversation towards something monetisable. Even ads that do not directly influence an AI model's responses, and instead appear separately within the chat window would compromise what we want Claude to be: a clear space to think and work. Such ads would also introduce an incentive to optimise for engagement, (or) for the amount of time people spend using Claude, and how often they return. These metrics are not necessarily aligned with being genuinely helpful.

The most useful AI interaction might be a short one, or one that resolves the user's request without prompting further conversation. We recognise that not all advertising implementations are equivalent. More transparent or opt-in approaches, where users explicitly choose to see sponsored content, might avoid some of the concerns outlined above. But the history of ad-supported products suggests that advertising incentives, once introduced, tend to expand over time as they become integrated into revenue targets, and product development, blurring boundaries that were once more clear-cut. We have chosen not to introduce these dynamics into Claude.

Anthropic is focused on businesses. Developers, and helping our users flourish. Our business model is straightforward: we generate revenue through enterprise contracts, and paid subscriptions, and we reinvest that revenue into improving Claude for our users. This is a choice with tradeoffs, and we respect that other AI companies might reasonably reach different conclusions. Expanding access to Claude is central to our public benefit mission, and we want to do it without selling our users' attention or data to advertisers. To that end, we have brought AI tools, and training to educators in over 60 countries, begun rational AI-education pilots with multiple governments, and made Claude available for non-profits at a significant discount.... Should we need to revisit this approach we will be transparent about our reasons for doing so.



Gen Z's study flight, home landing

Two-thirds want to go abroad; one in eight will work overseas

OUR TAKE

Recently, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said that India did not talk about H-1B visa concerns with the US as it finalised the bilateral trade framework. He cited the main reason as the lack of interest among the IT firms to send techies abroad. Looking at the same problem from the potential employees' perspective, a recent survey finds that most of Gen Z's desire to go abroad to study, although a lower percentage wishes to work there. Maybe Goyal is on the right track. Like Indian firms, Indian job seekers have lost interest in overseas jobs.

A recent Snapchat survey among Gen Z, which was conducted in partnership with a media firm, finds that the young cohort views education as "an investment that unlocks options rather than as a fixed pathway." Career, for them, is "marked by flexibility and continuous upgrading." More than three-fourths of the respondents hope to pursue higher education, and more than two-thirds of the total want to study abroad. Hence, better education, especially abroad, is crucial. Hence, if the doors and windows to the American universities are shut, or partially closed due to the ongoing visa controversies, they will need to seek new options, maybe to Europe, Australia, or Asian colleges.

But there is a dramatic change when it comes to careers. Despite the craving for overseas education, Gen Z does not want to work overseas. A mere 13 per cent of the respondents wanted jobs away from India. Nearly half of them wanted to work in India, 28 per cent in the private sector, and 21 per cent in government or public sector. A quarter of them wished to become Indian entrepreneurs, possibly because of the opportunities related to ideas and innovation, wealth creation, and financial and other official benefits. Despite the myth that they fixed jobs,

only 10 per cent want "creative or freelance" careers.

Yet, Gen Z desires work flexibility. Even in corporate jobs, they do not want fixed 9-to-5 hours. More than a third of the respondents were for hybrid models (a mix of work-from-office, and work-from-home), and another 17 per cent wanted only work-from-home options. Since 13 per cent wanted to be entrepreneurs, and nine per cent preferred field jobs, just over a quarter of the respondents wanted to be present in offices for 8-12 hours. Given this mix, it is logical that salary, which is largely a consequence of being in offices, is a motivator for just over a third of the respondents. Other factors such as work-life balance (24 per cent), security (17 per cent), and passion (15 per cent) are crucial.

The seemingly-tech obsessed younger people use the new tools in myriad ways. Artificial Intelligence (AI), for example, acts more like a "practical assistant" in areas such as study, work, and problem-solving. Tech does not lead these young people. Instead, they are a step ahead of tech, and decide how and when to use the AI tools. "I do not use ChatGPT to write my content. But I use it extensively to do my research, and give me some insights, which I can incorporate," says a young 24-year-old budding journalist-writer. The same is true in other professions, where they understand the limits of AI.

Similarly, the use of tech in daily non-professional lives is functional. Two-thirds of the respondents agreed that AR tools help them to "understand products better than regular images or videos." More than 60 per cent believe that AR-based demos for products are more "believable and trustworthy." Thus, augmented reality



is almost a substitute for reality, rather than traditional 3-D models. In social media, which is the place to generally express themselves, Gen Z uses AR to create content that is unique, and nearly 60 per cent prefer such content compared to static photographs, even videos. AR, most feel, helps them to express their online personalities better.

Personalities and identities reflect in other areas. Brands become important to Gen Z only if they feel personal, and have meanings that are relevant to the individuals. Savvy, polished, and finessed advertising does not work. This may imply critical messages to the advertisers. Single and uniform messaging may not work with this cohort. Even regional, and community may prove to be relevant. What is required, perhaps, are messages that appeal to individuals, and their friends, families, and social media acquaintances. Hence, Gen Z work and respond in closed groups that are smaller and more personal-oriented. Thus, social media groups may be a better advertising option.

As a report in the media that partnered with Snapchat states, "The 2025 data highlight a clear decision framework. Desi brands evoke pride. Products must 'vibe' with personal values. Purchases are made only if they offer clear value for money. Safe spaces are defined by inner circles rather than public platforms. Mutual wellness is seen as essential, not optional. Wealth creation is a long-term focus, while technology is used for efficiency, not just for visibility." In essence, most values associated with decisions are related to personality, closed-group, specific values, and the so-called inner circles.

Logically, this mindset seeps into the emotional arena. Gen Z can discuss sensitive issues like mental health but within trusted circles. Intimate and intense support system is crucial. While one can talk about views, ideas, and opinions on social media platforms, personal conversations like daily life updates are reserved for close friends, and family. But there is openness within these closed systems. More than 70 per cent discuss mental health openly. Nearly 80 per cent share life updates. Yet, bizarrely, nearly 90 per cent give or get opinions on social media, and 64 per cent talk about personal lives there.

Like with brands, shopping follows the same paradigm. As the media report stated, "93 per cent research both offline and online to find the best deals. 87 per cent buy brands that have personal meaning. 84 per cent follow influencers who share real, authentic feelings. 79 per cent are open to buy niche or less-known products. 88 per cent take pride in buying Indian-origin brands. 79 per cent trust influencers who look and talk like them." In a way, Gen Z is not about us versus them, or our generation versus others. It is more about 'us' within a small, intimate, trusted, and close group that shares and talks. As some of them maintain, "Deal hunting is a lifestyle. I just do not buy names, I buy meaning. If it feels like me, it wins. Only real influencers matter."

The Tech Wrecker

AI's mountain-slope pattern

Initial excitement and gains may lead to fatigue and burnouts



Employers are enthused by it. There is a section of employees who are consumed by it. But new research on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) shows that the benefits may not be sustainable, and soon result in employee burnouts, and work fatigue. A recent study within a firm that uses AI tools, and has 200 employees, indicates that the graph of AI gains may follow a mountain-slope pattern.

After the initial excitement, and unexpected hikes in productivity, AI may frustrate, disgust, and jeopardise the employees. This may lead to low morale, lower productivity, and possible losses for the firms over the medium term. In effect, AI is not a double-edged sword that helps some firms, and hurts others, and benefits some employees, and makes others redundant. It is a single-edged sword whose initial slices and slashes may seem positive but lead to a disruptive and chaotic work environment.

Published in the Harvard Business Review magazine, the study concludes that in the initial phase, employees work at a faster pace, as expected, took on a broader scope of tasks, as desired, and extended work into more hours of the day, "often without asking to do so." As the study adds, "On their own initiative, workers did more because AI made 'doing more' feel possible, accessible and, in many cases, intrinsically rewarding." Although this may seem like a dream come true for the managers, and unexpected benefits to the employees, who feel more productive, smarter, and on an upward trajectory, the problems become evident. Suddenly, the workers realise that their workload has quietly stretched and expanded, they spend more hours in office which disrupts the work-life balance, and they juggle with more on their plates. This may lead to "cognitive fatigue, burnout, and weakened decision-making." The productivity surge slumps, which is akin to walking up the slope quite fast, and plummeting downwards after the peak.

The research identifies three forms of work intensification, or growth in responsibilities that lead to the negatives. The first relates to task expansion. AI fills in the gaps in knowledge and skills, and subconsciously nudges the employees to take on more, especially work that needs to be done by colleagues, juniors, or seniors. It is an empowering cognitive boost, which "reduced dependence on others, and offered immediate feedback and correction." According to the study, "Workers described this as 'just trying things' with the AI, but these experiments accumulated into a meaningful widening of job scope. In fact, workers increasingly absorbed work

that might previously have justified additional help or headcount." Suddenly, people took on semi-formal and informal work, which was not a part of their responsibilities. This is akin to the Gen Z feeling of 'I do because I can.' Employees did more, went beyond their calling because it was easy.

Over time, as expected, the trends blurred the boundaries between work and non-work. Since the initial assimilation of extra work was easy and simple, as well as faster, "workers slipped small amounts of work into moments that had previously been breaks." It was logical for them to prompt AI tools during lunchtimes, and coffee breaks, or during conversations with colleagues. Indeed, many admitted that they would send a "quick last prompt" before they left the office so that AI could keep working overnight while they were at home.

This enabled them to come in the mornings, and start work straight away on a problem or issue. It did not feel like extra work. In fact, AI was filling in the hours when the employee was not at work. But the result was a typical workday when the employee spent more time at work. Although it started as chatting with AI, work spilled into late evenings.

Finally, the extra use of AI, which was fun and exciting earlier, as well as empowering and satisfying, translated into a new work rhythm that typified, and accelerated the art and science of multi-tasking. Now, the employee seems to work with a tech partner, who was helpful, non-complaining, and ever-ready to share the work burden. Since two people, a real and virtual one, were at work, they could do several tasks at the same time. "While this sense of having a 'partner' enabled a feeling

of momentum, the reality was a continual switching of attention, frequent checking of AI outputs, and a growing number of open tasks," states the study. Hence, over time, the new rhythm "raised expectations for speed, not necessarily through explicit demands, but through what became visible and normalised in everyday work." In the end, the employees felt the pressures, and found that their workloads were higher, although AI use was supposed to achieve the opposite.

Logically, the workers felt busier than before after a period. One of the engineers, who worked for the firm, said, "You had thought that maybe, oh, because you could be more productive with AI, then you save some time, you can work less. But then really, you do not work less. You just work the same amount, or even more." Firms may see this scenario as a win-win-win, for which manager does not like voluntary initiative on the part of the employees to work harder, and put in more hours. In today's corporate jungle, working more hours is ideal. In the case of AI, the delivery was implicit. This was a productivity explosion at its best. The employees seem to be caught in work warp, and trap, and that too without a human prompt. The employers got the best of the AI bargain without a major push. Tech offered what it needed to.

"But our research reveals the risks of letting work informally expand, and accelerate: What looks like higher productivity in the short run can mask silent workload creep, and growing cognitive strain as employees juggle multiple AI-enabled workflows," concludes the study. In fact, overwork can impair judgments, increase errors, and make it harder to differentiate genuine gains from unsustainable intensity. The firms' expectations rise, even as the employees feel the brunt of burnouts and fatigue, with almost no way to step away. Firms plug away with the higher use of AI, nestled in the comforts of the visible benefits, and employees seek ways, mostly in vain, to find their earlier rhythm. In the end, the employees' fall on the steep downward slope is followed by the firm's similar trajectory, which may come with a lag. AI, which pushes both to a new high, pulls them down to unbelievable lows. The trend is one-way, upwards, and downwards, with no choices and options.



How India's new CPI will measure inflation in a changing economy

 GYANESHWAR DAYAL
 ■ New Delhi

What affects us daily is not India's foreign policy or its defence preparedness; it is the price of everyday goods that one needs to carry home to survive and lead a happy, healthy life. The way the rise in the market affects all of us is measured by the Consumer Price Index, or CPI, which measures the price rise and fall — inflation, to be technical.

It is one index that decides the performance of the Government and its prospects in the coming elections. That is why the importance of CPI cannot be overstated. It normally gets a new base year every ten years, but this time it is around 12 years, as it could not be done due to the Corona pandemic.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) is all geared up to shift the base year from 2012 to 2024. This revision will redefine how inflation is captured in a rapidly digitising, services-heavy, and urbanising economy. As Saurabh Garg, Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), the new CPI will therefore "materially alter how inflation is measured" by anchoring it in today's consumption reality rather than yesterday's habits.

But the changes go well beyond just weights. The coverage of

Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, has underlined, the objective is simple yet ambitious: to make the CPI a more accurate mirror of how Indians actually spend today.

The single most important change in the new CPI series is the updating of the item basket and weights using the latest Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023-24. Over the past decade, the consuming patterns of Indian households have changed. Now apart from food, housing, transport, health, and education, services also figure prominently in his budget. The 2012 basket, designed for a far more food-dominated consumption structure, was increasingly losing relevance. According to Saurabh Garg, Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI),



Secretary, MoSPI Saurabh Garg

markets — both rural and urban — has expanded by about 25 per cent, improving geographical and price representativeness. Housing has also been given a methodological upgrade; for the first time, rural housing is

included, employer-provided accommodation is excluded to avoid distortions, and the rent index is now far more holistic. These refinements matter because housing is emerging as a key driver of urban inflation.

Perhaps the most striking feature is the integration of digital India into inflation measurement.

E-commerce prices will now be directly captured for large cities, treating online platforms as an additional "market" alongside

physical shops. Prices of airline tickets, OTT subscriptions, mobile and landline charges will also draw from online sources. In a world of flash sales and algorithmic pricing, CPI will continue to capture transaction prices at a fixed time and date, ensuring consistency between offline and online markets.

The new CPI has expanded the number of consumption divisions from six to twelve. The food and beverages weight appears to fall sharply to about 36.75 per cent.

In reality, much of this decline is due to the reclassification of items such as restaurant meals into services rather than food. When viewed on a comparable basis, the food share has declined far more modestly — reflecting genuine shifts in household spending rather than statistical sleight of hand.

Critics worry that lower food weights could mute inflation during food price spikes. MoSPI's response is that CPI must reflect what people actually spend, not what they used to. If food's share

in the household budget has fallen, then its influence on inflation must fall too. At the same time, higher weights for housing and services will ensure that persistent cost pressures in urban India are better captured.

To preserve continuity, MoSPI will release a back-series and an official linking factor between the 2012 and 2024 series.

This will allow policy makers, researchers, and markets to track inflation trends without disruption. For the RBI, a more representative CPI will mean a sharper tool for monetary policy; for wage and pension revisions, a fairer index; and for welfare schemes, a more credible inflation yardstick.

In essence, the CPI rebasing is not about lowering or raising inflation numbers — it is about measuring reality more faithfully. As Saurabh Garg, Secretary of MoSPI, has repeatedly emphasised, the new series is a refinement of a robust framework, designed to keep India's inflation compass aligned with how its people actually live, spend, and consume in 2024 and beyond.

Strike dilutes workers' rights

SP TIWARI

The implementation of the four new Labour Codes marks a significant step toward improving the ease of living for India's vast workforce, particularly those in the informal and unorganised sectors. These reforms aim to ensure floor-level minimum wages for all workers, without the hurdles of complex industry classifications. By introducing mandatory identity cards for every worker, the Codes seek to empower them with direct access to social security benefits. Regular and compulsory health check-ups will help safeguard workers' well-being, enabling them to lead healthier and more productive lives. Furthermore, a time-bound grievance redressal mechanism promises to reduce the mental stress and uncertainty faced by aggrieved workers. Collectively, these measures represent a progressive framework focused on dignity, security, and inclusive growth for Indian workers.

However, despite these positive provisions, a section of politically motivated central trade unions frequently resorts to strikes, often without fully considering their



adverse impact. Such strikes result in significant wage losses, particularly for the nearly 380 million workers in the informal economy, who depend on daily earnings for survival. Instead of resolving their issues, frequent strikes tend to weaken the process of constructive and rigorous collective bargaining, thereby undermining the possibility of achieving fair and balanced outcomes for workers and employers alike.

Over time, the repeated call for strikes has proved to be both ineffective and counterproductive. The frequency of such actions has led to widespread fatigue among workers,

causing an overwhelming majority to disengage or ignore these calls. In some cases, a small section of workers is compelled to participate in strikes against their own will, further eroding the moral legitimacy and collective strength of these movements. Ultimately, this trend diminishes the overall impact of labour welfare measures and weakens solidarity within the workforce.

The broader consequences of strikes extend beyond the workplace. Industrial production suffers, daily commuters face severe inconvenience, and the livelihoods of street vendors, domestic workers,

and small service providers are disrupted. For these workers, even a single day's loss of income can trigger a livelihood crisis, forcing them to exhaust their limited savings and plunge deeper into economic insecurity.

In emerging economies like India, trade unions must prioritise dialogue, negotiation, and constructive engagement with employers and the Government. A model based on sustained bargaining and cooperative problem-solving can resolve workers' concerns without disrupting manufacturing, employment, and overall economic growth. In the current context, Indian central trade unions, which are gradually losing their influence, need to introspect and adapt to more effective and forward-looking approaches followed elsewhere.

Indian workers should be organised with a holistic vision that emphasises ease of living, social security, and positive engagement. Resolving disputes through dialogue rather than confrontation will ensure that the operational process remains uninterrupted and the engine of national growth continues to run smoothly. Only through such balanced and pragmatic strategies can workers' rights be genuinely strengthened and protected in the long run.

Author is a National General Secretary, Trade Union Co-ordination Centre (TUC)

Sensex, Nifty rise for 3rd straight day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mumbai

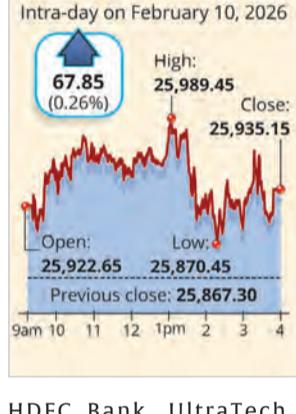
Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty advanced for the third straight session on Tuesday driven by firm global cues and optimism over India-US trade agreement, even as investors turned to profit-booking at higher levels.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 208.17 points, or 0.25 per cent, to close at 84,273.92. During the session, the benchmark jumped 417.2 points, or 0.49 per cent, to hit a intraday high of 84,482.95.

The 50-share NSE Nifty rose 67.85 points, or 0.26 per cent, to finish at 25,935.15. In the intraday session, the index appreciated by 122.15 points, or 0.47 per cent, to hit a high of 25,989.45.

Among the Sensex constituents, Eternals, Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, PowerGrid, Tech Mahindra, NTPC, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services, Maruti Suzuki India, Axis Bank, Titan and Hindustan Unilever were among the gainers.

On the other hand, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finance, Bharti Airtel, Asian Paints,



market trajectory is expected to hinge on Q3 earnings, which have been mixed and below expectations so far.

"Investors are now focused on the combined impact of recent fiscal and monetary measures to revive earnings momentum in the coming quarters," Nair said.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Hong Kong's Hang Seng, South Korea's Kospi and Shanghai's SSE Composite index closed in the positive territory. European markets were mostly trading higher in mid-session deals.

Rupee rises 9 paise against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mumbai

The rupee pared initial losses and settled on a positive note on Tuesday, higher by 9 paise at 90.57 (provisional) against the US dollar, supported by positive cues from domestic equities and weakening of the American currency in the overseas market.

Forex traders said the rupee is witnessing sideways price action as the support from positive domestic equities and foreign fund inflows was

strength in the domestic markets and trade deal optimism.

Weak dollar and fresh foreign inflows may further support the rupee.

"However, geopolitical tensions and dollar demand from importers may cap sharp upside. Traders may remain cautious ahead of the non-farm payrolls report on Wednesday. USD INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 90.30 to 90.80," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar

India ranks 2nd globally in enterprise AI usage; security risks loom

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Mumbai

Amodei, and Qualcomm CEO Cristiano Amon.

Zscaler pointed out that despite strong momentum in AI adoption in India, significant security challenges persist. These include the weaponisation of agentic AI and a critical gap between innovation and security measures.

The report, drawing on an analysis of nearly one trillion AI and machine learning transactions on the Zscaler Zero Trust Exchange platform from January to December 2025, indicates that enterprises have reached a tipping point where AI is shifting from a productivity tool to a primary vector for autonomous, machine-speed conflict. The study examines AI and ML traffic together, as enterprise AI systems depend on machine learning models to function at scale.



According to the report, Indian enterprises logged a staggering 82.3 billion AI/ML transactions between June and December 2025. This volume accounts for 46.2 per cent of all AI activity in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region, comfortably placing India as the regional leader.

"India's growth aligns with continued Government-

prior years," the report noted. AI activity in India was driven primarily by the Technology & Communication (31.3 billion transactions), Manufacturing (15.7 billion), Services (12.6 billion), and Finance & Insurance sectors (12.2 billion).

Despite this momentum, the report highlights a key shortfall: many organisations lack even a basic inventory of their active AI models and embedded features, leaving them unaware of exactly where sensitive data is exposed.

India's scale of enterprise AI adoption is accelerating faster than most organisations' ability to govern it, said Suvarbha Sinha, CISCO-in-Residence, India at Zscaler.

"With AI now embedded in everyday business applications and workflows, the security priority for Indian

enterprises is clear: understand where AI is being used, inspect the data being shared, and enforce the right controls consistently. A zero-trust approach with strong data protection and continuous visibility is essential to secure AI-driven transformation at the speed the market now demands," he said.

A key theme at the India AI Impact Summit is around the rise of "Agentic AI"—autonomous systems that can plan and take actions independently. The report warns that this technology is already being weaponised.

Zscaler researchers revealed that when enterprise AI systems are tested under real adversarial conditions, they break almost immediately. In controlled scans, critical vulnerabilities surfaced in minutes, not hours.

Silver, gold futures decline as traders book profits, firm dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ New Delhi



index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.01 per cent higher at 96.82.

The dollar index has fallen below the 97 level amid ongoing weakness and shifting away from dollar assets. The Chinese regulators have urged banks to cut exposure on US Treasury exposure due to US policy risks.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.16 per cent lower at \$68.93 per barrel in futures trade.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex climbed 208.17 points to settle at 84,273.92, while Nifty was up 67.85 points to 25,935.15.

Gold futures declined to ₹677, or 0.43 per cent, to ₹1,57,389 per 10 grams. In the previous session, the yellow metal climbed ₹2,615, or nearly 1.7 per cent, to settle at ₹1,58,066 per 10 grams.

"Gold and silver prices saw profit-taking and some consolidation on Tuesday, with MCX gold trading around the ₹1,55-1,57 lakh per 10g zone after earlier strength, while silver struggled

US, India to work toward finalising interim pact to concluding BTA

YOSHITA SINGH

■ New York/Washington

In the coming weeks, the US and India will work toward finalising the interim agreement on trade with a view to concluding a mutually beneficial Bilateral Trade Agreement, the White House has said. The two countries will also continue negotiations to address remaining issues, including services and investment, labour and Government procurement, it said.

Days after India and the US announced in a joint statement the framework for an Interim Agreement regarding reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade, the White House issued a fact sheet on 'The United States and India

tree nuts, and fresh and processed fruit. Certain pulses, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products and India has committed to buy more American products and purchase over \$500 billion of US energy, information and communication technology, agricultural, coal, and other products. (PTI)



FROM THE WORLD

NEPAL

Bus crash kills 12

At least 12 persons were killed, and 8 others were injured after a passenger bus fell into the Tamakoshi River in central Nepal, local media reported on Tuesday. The incident occurred around 11 am when the bus enroute to Okhaldhunga from Kathmandu fell into the river near Lilauti in Ramechhap municipality in Bagmati province. Police Inspector Rajan Prasad Timilsina of the District Police Office, Ramechhap, confirmed that five bodies, including one of the bus owner, have been recovered from the site, reported The Kathmandu Post. Residents, security personnel, and rescue teams at the accident site were helping to evacuate the injured. Three people have been rescued till now and sent for treatment. Rescue operation for others trapped in the bus continues.

CUBA

Fuel shortage hits travel

Air Canada said it is suspending service to Cuba because of a shortage of aviation fuel on the island. Canada's largest airline said it took the decision after the Cuban Government announced aviation fuel would not be available at Cuban airports as of Tuesday. Cuba has been facing a worsening energy crisis amid a US blockade of oil to the Caribbean nation. Canadian tourism is vital to Cuba's economy. Global Affairs Canada, a Governmental office, has said Canada is Cuba's second-largest source of direct investment to the island, particularly in the mining and tourism sectors, which have never fully recovered from the pandemic slump. Air Canada said that in the coming days it will send empty flights southbound to pick up approximately 3,000 customers to bring them home.

Netanyahu to meet with Trump to push for Iran deal

MELANIE LIDMAN

■ Tel Aviv

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is heading to Washington on Tuesday to encourage President Donald Trump to expand the scope of high-stakes nuclear talks with Iran. The negotiations resumed last week against the backdrop of an American military buildup.

Israel has long called for Iran to cease all uranium enrichment, dial back its ballistic missile program and cut ties to militant groups across the region. Iran has always rejected those demands, saying it would only accept some limits on its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief. It's unclear if

Iran's bloody crackdown on mass protests last month, or the movement of major U.S. Military assets to the region, has made Iran's leaders more open to compromise, or if Trump is interested in broadening the already difficult negotiations.

Netanyahu, who will be in Washington through Wednesday, has spent his decades-long political career pushing for stronger US action toward Iran.

Those efforts succeeded last year when the US joined Israel in 12 days of strikes on Iran's military and nuclear sites, and the possibility of additional military action against Iran is likely to come up in this week's discussions. Decisions are being

made. Netanyahu's visit comes just two weeks after Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and Middle East adviser, met with the prime minister in Jerusalem.

The US Envoy held indirect talks in Oman with Iran's foreign minister on Friday.

"The Prime Minister believes that any negotiations must include limiting ballistic missiles and ending support for the Iranian axis," Netanyahu's office said over the weekend, referring to Iran-backed militant groups like the Palestinian Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Years of nuclear talks have made little progress since Trump scrapped a 2015



PM Benjamin Netanyahu meets US President Donald Trump FILE PHOTO

agreement with Iran, with strong encouragement from Israel. Iran has shown little willingness to address the other issues, even after suffering repeated setbacks.

But the meeting with Trump gives Netanyahu an opportunity to shape the process and may also bolster his standing back home.

"Clearly these are the days when decisions are being made, America is expected to complete its force buildup, and it's trying to exhaust the prospect of negotiations," said Yohanan Plesner, head of the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem-based think tank. "If you want to have influence on the process, only so much can be done via Zoom."

(AP)

Court allows lawyer of Imran Khan's party to meet him in jail

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ■ Islamabad

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed a lawyer of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party to meet incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan in prison and submit a report about his "living conditions".

Khan, 73, has been in jail since August 5, 2023, when he was arrested at his Lahore residence after his conviction in a corruption case. Currently, he has been kept at Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi. A two-member panel of the apex court, comprising Chief Justice Yahya Afridi and Justice Shahid Bilal Hassan, hearing a petition to meet Khan appointed PTI counsel Salman Saif as amicus curiae with the orders to visit the jail.

The court stated that it "considered appropriate that a report regarding the present 'living conditions of the petitioner in jail' be



submitted". Subsequently, the court appointed Saif as amicus curiae.

"Salman Saif should go to Adiala as a friend of the court," Afridi said, adding that the court has full faith in him. Justice Afridi said that Saif "should be given full access to the PTI founder so he may be able to file a written response."

Israel moves into West Bank citing sovereignty

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Ramallah

A top Israeli official said on Tuesday that measures adopted by the Government that deepen Israeli control in the occupied West Bank amounted to implementing "de facto sovereignty," using language that mirrors critics' warnings about the intent behind the moves.

The steps "actually establish a fact on the ground that there will not be a Palestinian state," Energy Minister Eli Cohen told Israel's Army Radio.



Energy Minister Eli Cohen

Palestinians, Arab countries and human rights groups have called the moves announced Sunday an annexation of the territory, home to roughly 3.4 million Palestinians who seek it for a future state. Cohen's comments followed similar remarks by other members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Government, including Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defence Minister Israel Katz.

The moves - and Israeli officials' own descriptions of them - put the country at odds with both regional allies and previous statements from US President Donald Trump. Netanyahu has travelled to Washington to meet with him later this week.

Iran's top security official in Oman for crucial nuclear talks with US

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Dubai

A top Iranian security official travelled on Tuesday to Oman, the Mideast sultanate now mediating talks between Tehran and Washington over the Islamic Republic's nuclear program aimed at halting a possible American strike.

Ali Larijani, a former Iranian parliament speaker who now serves as the secretary to the country's Supreme National Security Council, likely carried Iran's response to the initial round of indirect talks held last week in Muscat with the Americans. Larijani's entourage shared photos of him meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, the chief intermediary in the US-Iran talks, with what appeared to be a letter sheathed in plastic and sitting alongside the Omani diplomat. Iran has, in the past, communicated its positions in writing when dealing with the Americans. Iranian media had said Larijani would deliver an important message on the trip.

Larijani also met with Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for nearly three hours, the State-run IRNA news agency reported. Neither Iran nor Oman offered any details on what had been discussed in Larijani's meetings. Larijani was later to travel to Qatar, which hosts a major US military installation that Iran attacked in June after the US bombed Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day Iran-Israel war.



Iran and the US held new nuclear talks last week in Oman. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking

Sunday to diplomats at a summit in Tehran, signalled that Iran would stick to its position that it must be able to enrich uranium - a major point of contention with US President Donald Trump. That war disrupted earlier rounds of nuclear talks between Washington and Tehran. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is travelling to Washington this week, with Iran expected to be the major subject of discussion.

The United States has moved the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, ships and warplanes to the Middle East to pressure Iran into an agreement and have the firepower necessary to strike the

Islamic Republic should Trump choose to do so. Already, US forces shot down a drone they said got too close to the Lincoln and came to the aid of a US-flagged ship that Iranian forces tried to stop in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf.

The US Transportation Department's Maritime Administration issued a new warning Monday to American vessels in the strait to "remain as far as possible from Iran's territorial sea without compromising navigational safety."

The strait, through which a fifth of all oil traded passes, is in Iranian and Omani territorial waters.

Palestinians suffer as Israel limits work permits



ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Tulkarem

Hanadi Abu Zant hasn't been able to pay rent on her apartment in the occupied West Bank for nearly a year after losing her permit to work inside Israel. When her landlord calls the police on her, she hides in a mosque.

"My biggest fear is being kicked out of my home. Where will we sleep, on the street?" she said, wiping tears from her cheeks.

She is among some 100,000 Palestinians whose work permits were revoked after Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack ignited the war in the Gaza Strip. Confined to the occupied territory, where jobs are scarce and wages far lower, they face dwindling and dangerous options as the economic crisis deepens.

Some have sold their belongings or gone into debt as they try to pay for food, electricity and school expenses for their children. Others have paid steep fees for black-market permits or tried to sneak into Israel, risking arrest or worse if they are mistaken for militants.

Israel, which has controlled the West Bank for nearly six decades, says it is under no obligation to allow Palestinians to enter for work and makes such decisions based on security considerations. Thousands of Palestinians are still allowed to work in scores of Jewish settlements across the West Bank, built on land they want for a future State.

Risk of collapse. The World Bank has warned that the West Bank economy is at risk of collapse because of Israel's restrictions. By the end of last year, unemployment had surged to nearly 30% compared with around 12% before the war, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

One had any enmity with us. The criminals stole several hundred thousand taka from the store after they brutally killed my father," Sujan Sarkar, the victim's son, said.

He demanded that his father's killers be identified quickly and given exemplary punishment.

Sarkar's murder is the latest incident of violence targeting the minority community. The Hindu population in Bangladesh has been affected by a series of incidents after the killing of radical youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi in December.

Buckingham Palace backs Andrew police probe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ Dhaka

A 62-year-old Hindu trader was hacked to death by unidentified men inside his shop in Trishal upazila of Mymensingh in Bangladesh, a local media report said on Tuesday.

The incident took place on Monday night at the Bogar Bazar intersection in the Trishal upazila, Trishal Police Station chief Muhammad Firoz Hossain was quoted as saying by news portal bdnews24.com.

The victim, identified as Susen Chandra Sarkar, was

searching for him, and when they opened the shutters to the shop, he was found covered in blood. Sarkar was rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. "We have had a rice

business for a long time. No one had any enmity with us. The criminals stole several hundred thousand taka from the store after they brutally killed my father," Sujan Sarkar, the victim's son, said.

He demanded that his father's killers be identified quickly and given exemplary punishment.

Sarkar's murder is the latest incident of violence targeting the minority community. The Hindu population in Bangladesh has been affected by a series of incidents after the killing of radical youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi in December.

My Client Mahendra Kumar aged about 58 years and his Wife Asha Devi aged about 54 years R/o H.no.418, Block A-2,Sultapur,Nithari, North West Delhi,Sultapur-C Block Delhi-110086 have disowned /debarred their son Sandeep Kumar from all relations with him, if anybody deals with him at his/her own risk and consequences in future.

BITTU KUMAR (Advocate) Office - C-5/88, 1st Floor, Sec. 6, Rohini, Delhi-110086, Mobile:- 8287084613

It is to inform the public at large that Mr. Karan Chugh had acquired Plot No. 301 on Third Floor, 117 sq. mtrs. Tower 'A' in Paras Dev's Village, Deutabad Sector-106, Gurgaon, Haryana by Compravance Deed, 02/07/2021, even though the Site B.P. No. 1718, Original Allotment Letter, Possession Certificate and Payment Receipts issued by M/s Sepset Promoters Pvt. Ltd. in favour of Mr. Karan Chugh, said property is now owned by Mr. Hanuman Chugh, the undisputed owner of above said property and willing to Mortgage the said property with Cholamandalam Investment & Finance Co. Ltd.

OR
Any person / firm / institution / company having any claim or right in respect of the said Property by way of any right, title, interest, claim, demand, lease, license, gift, possession, legal heirs, partners or encumbrance, however or otherwise is hereby required to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 17 days from the date of this notice, the name and address of his/her share or claim, if any, with all supporting documents at below mentioned address for the expiration of notice period, the claim, if any, of the claimant shall be treated null and void and also treated as waived and not binding on our client.

Ajay Kumar Giri (Advocate) H.no. 26/16, Basement, Vikram Vihar, Lajpat Nagar 4, New Delhi 110024

Hindu trader stabbed to death in Bangladesh



the owner of 'Bhai Bhai Enterprise' and a resident of Southkanda village, he said. Hossain said the attackers hacked Sarkar with a sharp weapon, left him inside the shop, and closed the shutters. Sarkar's family was

searching for him, and when they opened the shutters to the shop, he was found covered in blood. Sarkar was rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. "We have had a rice

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Ajay Kumar Giri (Advocate) H.no. 26/16, Basement, Vikram Vihar, Lajpat Nagar 4, New Delhi 110024

NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE

Invitation of tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)

N.I.T. No. 32 (A,B)/ 25-26/WE

(A) Provision of Clubbing of Type-I quarters into Type-II quarters of block No. 51 & 53 in More Sarai Railway Colony in the Section of SSE/W/Tis Hazari Under ADEN/E-1.

(B) Repair to deteriorated windows, replacement of hard drawn jali with aluminum windows and jali in balconies at P.K. Road railway colony in the section of SSE/W/PG under ADEN/E-1.

Approx. cost of work (A) 9999965.95 (B) 1499990.65

EMD amount (A) 200000.00 (B) 225000.00

Completion period of work (A) 08 Months. (B) 08 Months



Drought leaves people hungry in Kenya

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Kampala



Herders collecting water from a well amid water shortage caused by prolonged drought in Lopii Village, Kenya

Drought conditions have left over 2 million people facing hunger in parts of Kenya, with cattle-keeping communities in the northeast the hardest hit, according to the United Nations and others.

In recent weeks, images of emaciated livestock in the arid area near the Somali border have shocked many in a region that reels from the effects of climate change.

In recent years, rainy seasons have become shorter for some communities, exposing them to drought. Normally, animals are the first to die. The livestock losses echo what happened between 2020 and

2023, when millions of animals died in the region that extends from Kenya into parts of Ethiopia and Somalia. At the time, a famine predicted for Somalia was averted by a surge in

international aid. Four consecutive wet seasons have failed in parts of the Horn of Africa, which juts into the Indian Ocean.

The wet season from October to December was

one of the driest ever recorded, according to the UN health agency. Because the rains were brief, parts of eastern Kenya were the driest they have been during that season since 1981.

Some 10 counties in Kenya are experiencing drought conditions, according to the National Drought Management Authority.

The northeastern county of Mandera, bordering Somalia, has reached the "alarm" classification, which means critical water shortages have led to the death of livestock and the wasting of children. The suffering extends into Somalia, Tanzania and even Uganda, where many are threatened

and water shortages, the World Health Organization said in late January.

In southern Somalia, an assessment by the Islamic Relief aid group found "shocking food shortages as families flee the region's worsening drought."

In Somalia, long vulnerable to drought conditions, over 3 million people have left their homes, seeking shelter in camps for the internally displaced.

But support is not enough, with 70 per cent of the internally displaced in the city of Baidoa surviving on one meal a day or less, Islamic Relief said in a statement, adding that children in the camps are "showing visible signs of malnutrition and

wasting." Experts say much of what's happening is due to climate change.

The Indian Ocean has become warmer, feeding some of the more destructive tropical storms in recent years. At the same time, drought conditions have become longer, more intense and more severe.

All of that is devastating for Africans whose economic mainstay is rain-fed agriculture, making them vulnerable to extreme weather.

Many farmers say increasing temperatures deny livestock pasture and kill their crops.

Africa is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events because it is less equipped to prepare for natural disasters.

Ex-staff, readers of *Apple Daily* lament the loss of freedoms in HK



ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Hong Kong

government insisted his case had nothing to do with press freedom, saying the defendants used journalism as a guise to commit acts that harmed Hong Kong and China. There's no question that things are different in Hong Kong without the Apple Daily. Since it folded, the city's once freewheeling press scene has changed drastically; its voice was one of many that have been silenced in the former British colony.

"We've lost a newspaper that spoke for the people, and there's no going back," said William Wong, 66, who had been reading Apple Daily since its founding in 1995. He liked its sharp, to-the-point reporting and critical coverage of current affairs and politics. Former Apple Daily journalists recall their work with pride.

Record snow drought, heat hit western US

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Los Angeles



A record snow drought with unprecedented heat is hitting most of the American West, depleting future water supplies, making it more vulnerable to wildfires and hurting winter tourism and recreation. Scientists say snow cover and snow depth are both at the lowest levels they've seen in decades, while at least 67 Western weather stations have measured their warmest December through early February on record.

Normal snow cover this time of year should be about 460,000 square miles—about the size of California, Utah, Idaho and Montana—but this year it's only California-sized, about 155,000 square miles, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Centre.

"I have not seen a winter like this before," said centre director Mark Serreze, who has been in Colorado for almost 40 years. "This pattern that we're in is so darned persistent." The snowpack—measured by how much water is trapped inside—is Oregon is not only record low, but 30 per cent lower than the previous record, said Jason Gerlich, regional drought early warning system coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Concerns over water supply and wildfires. Ski resorts had already been struggling through a difficult season, but the lack of snow has been persistent enough that concerns are growing about wider effects.

Oregon, Colorado and Utah have reported their lowest statewide snowpack since the early 1980s, as far back as records go.

A dry January has meant most states have received half their average precipitation or even less.

Along with sunny days and higher-than-average temperatures, that's meant little snow buildup in a month that historically gets a lot of snow accumulation across much of the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies. Because of heavy rains in December.

US lawmaker introduces bill to end H1B visa programme

YOSHITA SINGH

■ New York/Washington



A US lawmaker has introduced a bill to end the H-1B visa programme, saying corporations have repeatedly abused this system and imported cheaper foreign labour into America.

US Representative Greg Steube, a Republican from Florida, introduced the 'Ending Exploitative Imported Labour Exemptions Act or EXILE Act', a bill that would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act by ending the H-1B visa programme.

"Prioritising foreign labour over the well-being and prosperity of American citizens undermines our values

force. We cannot preserve the American dream for our children while forfeiting their share to non-citizens. That is why I am introducing the EXILE Act to put working Americans first again," he said. H-1B visas are used by a large number of Indian professionals to live and work in the US. The Trump administration has intensified its crackdown on immigration, both legal and illegal, imposing new and stringent restrictions on visas such as H-1B.

Describing abuse of the H-1B programme as a national security threat, Trump last year signed a proclamation imposing a \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visas, a move that caused widespread

panic, confusion and concern among Indian professionals.

The statement said that more than 80 per cent of recipients of H-1B visas are Indian or Chinese nationals, with priority given to younger workers.

Listing examples of how H-1Bs have "disadvantaged" American workers, it said the visa program has prevented more than 10,000 US physicians from accessing residency programmes by facilitating the arrival of more than 5,000 foreign-born doctors.

It further said that more than 16,000 Microsoft employees were displaced following the approval of more than 9,000 H-1B visas in 2025. (PTI)

Trump's immigration chiefs to testify in Congress following protester deaths

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Washington



The heads of the agencies carrying out President Donald Trump's mass deportation agenda will testify in Congress on Tuesday and face questions over how they are prosecuting immigration enforcement inside American cities.

Trump's immigration campaign has been heavily scrutinised in recent weeks, after the shooting deaths in Minneapolis of two protesters at the hands of Homeland Security officers. The agencies have also

faced criticism for a wave of policies that critics say trample on the rights of both immigrants facing arrest and Americans protesting the enforcement actions.

Todd Lyons, the acting director of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Rodney Scott, who heads US Customs and Border Protection, and Joseph Edlow, who is the director

of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, will speak in front of the House Committee on Homeland Security.

Small plane makes emergency landing on busy US road

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Gainesville

tried to glide back, did everything by the book, but realised we weren't going to make it back with how far out we were, so we came down on the road." The plane struck three cars, dislodging a fuel tank into one of them, Gainesville police Capt. Kevin Holbrook said. Two people were taken to a hospital with minor injuries, he said. "The fact that they were able to land in the middle of hundreds of vehicles and only hit three of them, no power lines, is very remarkable," Holbrook said, noting that the road is one of the main arteries through northeast Georgia.

Trump set to gut US climate change policy, environmental act: White House

Shehzad to attend inaugural session of Gaza peace board in US



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehzad Sharif is expected to attend the inaugural session of the Board of Peace on Gaza to be held next week in Washington. The key meeting is scheduled for Feb 19 at the US Institute of Peace, a leading think-tank.

Diplomatic sources said that PM Shehzad is expected to travel to the US on Feb 18 to attend the Board of Peace meeting. Pakistan is among eight Muslim-majority nations, including Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE, that are expected to attend the meeting.

The level of participation from other countries is not known. Pakistan last month formally joined the Board of Peace during an event held on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, where President Donald Trump was present. The first meeting of the board would focus on the reconstruction of Gaza. The summit will also formalise the board's mandate and structure.

Trump set to gut US climate change policy, environmental act: White House

ASSOCIATED PRESS

■ Washington



The Trump administration is expected this week to revoke a scientific finding that has long been the central basis for US action to regulate greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change, according to a White House official. The Environmental Protection Agency will issue a final rule rescinding a 2009 government declaration known as the endangerment finding. That Obama-era policy determined that

carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare.

A White House official, speaking on condition of

anonymity because they were not authorised to confirm the details ahead of an official announcement, confirmed the plans, which were first reported by the Wall Street Journal.

"This week at the White House, President Trump will be taking the most significant deregulatory actions in history to further unleash American energy dominance and drive down costs," said White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt in a statement.

The endangerment finding is the legal underpinning of nearly all climate regulations under the Clean Air Act for motor vehicles, power plants and other pollution sources that are heating the planet.

Comparing social media platforms to casinos and addictive drugs, lawyer Mark Lanier delivered opening statements in a landmark trial in Los Angeles that seeks to hold Instagram owner Meta and Google's YouTube responsible for harms to children who use their products.

Instagram's parent company, Meta and Google's YouTube face claims that their platforms addict children through deliberate design choices that keep kids glued to their screens.

TikTok and Snap, which

were originally named in the lawsuit, settled for undisclosed sums. Jurors got their first glimpse into what will be a lengthy trial characterised by duelling narratives from the plaintiffs and the two remaining defendants.

Meta lawyer Paul Schmidt spoke of the disagreement within the scientific community over social media addiction, with some researchers believing it doesn't exist or that addiction



ReNew Wind Energy (Jath) Limited

CIN No. U40101DL2012PLC236277

 Regd. Office : 138, Ansari Chambers II, Bikaner Camp Place, Delhi-110066 India
Corporate Office : ReNew Hub, Commercial Block-1, Zone-6, Golf Course Road, DLF City Phase-V, Gurugram 122009, Haryana, India Phone No. : 124 489 6670/80

Statement of Unaudited Financial Results for the quarter and nine months ended 31 December 2025 (Amounts in INR millions, except share and per share data, unless otherwise stated)

Particulars	Quarter ended 31 December 2025 (Unaudited)	Quarter ended 30 September 2025 (Unaudited)	Quarter ended 31 December 2024 (Unaudited)	Nine months ended 31 December 2025 (Unaudited)	Nine months ended 31 December 2024 (Unaudited)	Year ended 31 March 2025 (Audited)
Total income from operations	93	322	68	652	602	675
Net profit (before tax, exceptional and/or extraordinary items)	(25)	201	(66)	307	183	164
Net profit before tax (after exceptional and/or extraordinary items)	(25)	201	(66)	307	183	164
Net profit (after exceptional and/or extraordinary items)	(20)	154	(59)	229	128	118
Total comprehensive income [comprising profit (after tax) and other comprehensive income (after tax)]	(20)	154	(59)	229	128	118
Paid up equity share capital	153	153	153	153	153	153
Reserves (excluding revaluation reserve)	2,166	2,187	1,948	2,166	1,948	1,938
Securities premium	1,366	1,366	1,366	1,366	1,366	1,366
Net worth	2,319	2,340	2,101	2,319	2,101	2,090
Paid up debt capital / Outstanding debt	1,767	1,766	2,118	1,767	2,118	2,295
Debt equity ratio	1.02	1.02	1.23	1.02	1.23	1.12
Earnings Per Share (Rs. 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations)	(1.29)	10.08	(3.85)	14.96	8.35	7.71
1. Basic (In INR) :	(1.29)	10.08	(3.85)	14.96	8.35	7.71
2. Diluted (In INR) :	137	133	157	137	157	143
Debt Service Coverage Ratio*	7.24	0.73	5.56	2.19	1.35	0.98
Interest Service Coverage Ratio*	1.38	4.99	0.67	3.75	2.74	2.43
Current Ratio	0.99	2.52	2.29	0.99	2.29	2.23
Long Term Debt to Working Capital	1.02	1.02	1.28	1.02	1.28	1.30

PROSPECT

Eastern Command Investiture Ceremony 2026 held at Umroi cantt



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Meghalaya

The Eastern Command Investiture Ceremony 2026, an annual event celebrating exemplary courage, devotion to duty, and distinguished service in the Indian Army, was conducted with solemn pride on 10 February 2026 at Umroi Military Station, Meghalaya.

The prestigious ceremony was presided over by Lieutenant General Ram Chander Tiwari, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Command. A total of 37 gallantry and distinguished service awards were presented, comprising 19 Sena Medals (Gallantry), 07 Sena Medals (Distinguished), 02 Yuudh Seva Medals, 01 Bar to Vishisht Seva Medal, 07 Vishisht Seva Medals, and 01 Uttam Jeevan Raksha Padak, in recognition of outstanding acts and selfless service. In addition, 49 units and Army

Public School, Kolkata were conferred with the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Command Unit Appreciation, acknowledging their exceptional professionalism, operational excellence, and noteworthy achievements. The ceremony was attended by senior officers from the Indian Defence Forces and the proud families of the award recipients, including Veer Naris, symbolising the nation's profound respect and gratitude for its brave soldiers and their families.

Addressing the gathering, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief congratulated the awardees for their exemplary service and exhorted all ranks to continue upholding the highest traditions, values of the Indian Army. As a prelude to the investiture ceremony, a vibrant cultural programme titled "Shaurya Sandhya" was organised on 09 February 2026.

One-Day spiritual 'Gita Gyan' lecture held in Delhi

Vivek Niketan Educational Trust organised a one-day spiritual Gita Gyan lecture at the Golden Jubilee Auditorium with the aim of promoting spiritual and cultural awareness. The event was graced by the Mayor of Delhi, Raja Iqbal Singh, who highlighted the importance of such initiatives in strengthening positive thinking and spiritual awareness in society. Students, teachers, and youth participated.



Renowned Gita scholar and Vedanta acharya Shivendra Nagar addressed the audience and spoke about the relevance of the Bhagavad Gita. During the programme, new Hindi and English table calendars titled "Aaj Ka Vichar" and "Thought of the Day" were also launched.

The new age of wellness: Ayush anchors India's future-ready holistic health architecture



PRATAPRAO JADHAV

The announcement of three new All India Institutes of Ayurveda marks a defining milestone. These apex institutions will blend classical Ayurvedic knowledge with cutting-edge scientific validation, setting new benchmarks in clinical care, research and academic excellence.

India's Ayush education ecosystem continues to expand, with 932 undergraduate and 254 postgraduate colleges operational across the country. This robust network is nurturing the next generation of practitioners, researchers and innovators who will shape the future of integrative medicine.

Positioning India as a Global Hub of Health & Wellness

The proposal to establish five regional medical value tourism hubs with integrated Ayush centres represents a bold step forward. These hubs will serve as strong pillars of a future-ready, comprehensive healthcare ecosystem combining medical treatment, wellness therapies, research, education, diagnostics, and rehabilitation. This initiative will position India as a global destination for holistic wellness while generating employ-



ment and boosting allied sectors.

Quality, Research and Global Leadership

Quality assurance remains central to our global ambitions. The upgradation of Ayush pharmacies and drug-testing laboratories will strengthen regulatory standards, enhance consumer trust, and expand export potential.

This will create a positive ripple effect across the value chain—from farmers cultivating medicinal plants to MSMEs and start-ups driving herbal innovation.

The strengthening of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global

healthcare, lifestyle management and integrative approaches are becoming central to India's healthcare delivery model.

This sustained commitment is reflected in the steady rise in budgetary allocation—₹3,712.50 crore in 2024-25, ₹3,992.9 crore in 2025-26, and ₹4,408.9 crore in 2026-27. The consistent increase underscores the Government's resolve to expand infrastructure, strengthen research, enhance regulatory frameworks and widen access to Ayush services across the country.

Healthcare in the 21st century must move beyond treatment to prevention, beyond fragmentation to integration, and beyond illness to wellness. The vision articulated in this Budget ensures that India's healthcare future remains rooted in its civilisational strengths while guided by modern science and global standards.

Ayush stands prepared to play its full role in building a healthier, self-reliant and globally respected India where holistic well-being becomes the foundation of national progress.

Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Ayush

Shatak Dhwaj Yatra begins with saffron flag waved at Lal Chowk

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Marking 100 years of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the nationwide "Kashmir to Kanyakumari" Dhwaj Yatra, which is associated with the film Shatak: Sangh's 100 Years, reached Jammu. The journey commenced at Srinagar's iconic Lal Chowk where, for the first time since Independence, the Bhagwa flag was waved proudly, accompanied by chants of Vande Mataram and Bharat Mata Ki Jai, creating a powerful moment of togetherness as citizens joined the march.

In Jammu, the yatra received a warm public welcome, carrying forward the spirit of service, discipline and unity inspired by the hundred-year journey of RSS under Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar ji and Guruji Golwalkar ji.



The first leg concluded in Ludhiana with energetic celebrations, traditional dhol beats and a rally of 100 bikers symbolising 100 years of the Sangh, followed by a felicitation ceremony honouring community heroes. Speaking on the occasion, Karyakarta and producer Vir Kapur said, "Starting the Shatak Dhwaj Yatra at Lal Chowk where Bhagwa was raised again after Independence with chants

of Vande Mataram was a moment of deep pride and emotion. Through Shatak The Film, and through this Yatra across cities, we are celebrating the hundred years of RSS, its service and the unity that binds our nation together."

Produced by Vir Kapur in association with PANORAMA Studio, co-produced by Aashish Tiwari and directed by Aashish Mall, Shatak: Sangh's 100 Years releases in theatres on February 19, 2026.

Punjab Governor dedicates ICU ambulances provided by NHPC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ Jaipur

The Governor of Punjab Gulab Chand Kataria dedicated two state-of-the-art ICU ambulances to Sudarshan Sewa Sansthan, Jodhpur on under NHPC Limited's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative. During the dedication ceremony, Mahesh Kumar Sharma, Director (Finance), NHPC Limited along with senior officials were present.

The initiative involved the procurement of one Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulance equipped with a transport ventilator and one Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulance at a total project cost of ₹44.09 lakh.

Executed through Sudarshan Sewa Sansthan, Jodhpur the project aims to strengthen emergency healthcare infrastructure in



Mahesh Kumar Sharma, Director (Finance), NHPC Limited hands over the key of two state-of-the-art ICU ambulances to Sudarshan Sewa Sansthan, Jodhpur on 5 February 2026 in the presence of the Governor of Punjab

the remote and sensitive border regions of Rajasthan. Speaking on the occasion, Mahesh Kumar Sharma, Director (Finance), NHPC Limited said that beyond power generation, Corporate Social Responsibility remains an integral part of NHPC's ethos. Over the years, NHPC has remained steadfast in promoting inclusive growth in education, healthcare, skill development.

sensitive border regions of Rajasthan. Speaking on the occasion, Mahesh Kumar Sharma, Director (Finance), NHPC Limited appreciated NHPC's CSR initiatives, particularly the provision of ICU ambulances and expressed his pleasure in dedicating two modern ambulances to Sudarshan Sewa Sansthan, Jodhpur which will significantly strengthen emergency healthcare in the remote and

border regions of Rajasthan. Addressing on the occasion, the Governor of Punjab, Gulab Chand Kataria, appreciated NHPC's CSR initiatives, particularly the provision of ICU ambulances and expressed his pleasure in dedicating two modern ambulances to Sudarshan Sewa Sansthan, Jodhpur which will significantly strengthen emergency healthcare in the remote and

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Minister and viewed by nearly two billion people worldwide on social media. Chief Executive Member BTC Hagrama Mohilary, Minister Public Health Engineering etc Jayanta Mallabaruah, former Minister Pramila Rani Brahma, former BTC Deputy Chief Executive Member Khampa Borgoyary, MLAs Lawrence Islary and Jiran Basumatary, Bodo Sahitya Sabha President Surat Narzary, and a host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

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Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attends the 24th Bodoland Day celebration at Kokrajhar

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today attended the central programme of the 24th Bodoland Day held at Green Park in Kokrajhar. The programme was organised by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) where the Chief Minister announced several important schemes for the people of BTC and called upon everyone to work together for peace and prosperity in the region.

Speaking on occasion, Chief Minister Dr. Sarma extended



his heartfelt greetings to the people of BTC on the proud occasion of the 24th Bodoland Day. On this auspicious moment, he paid rich

The Chief Minister said that the historic BTC Accord was signed on 10 February 2003 under the leadership of the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Union Home Minister LK Advani, which led to the creation of BTC for the people of Bodoland. He stated that the first Executive Council of BTC was formed under the leadership of Hagrama Mohilary and that the formation of BTC comprising Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts brought positive changes to the lives of the

people of the region. He further stated that the establishment of Bodoland University, the Central Institute of Technology (CIT) and Kokrajhar Medical College marked a significant transformation in the education and healthcare sectors of the region after the BTC Accord. Sarma moreover said that the signing of the Bodo Peace Accord in 2020 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah further accelerated the pace of development. As a

result, Tamulpur was declared a new district. Kokrajhar Medical College was completed, and initiatives were taken to begin work on a mini secretariat of Bodoland and Bodoland University campus in Udalguri. Referring to the recent untoward incidents in Kokrajhar, the Chief Minister stated that the core objective of the BTC Accord is peaceful coexistence of all communities. He, therefore, mentioned that the Bagurumba dance performed by 10,000 dancers in Guwahati recently was highly praised by the Prime

Minister and viewed by nearly two billion people worldwide on social media. Chief Executive Member BTC Hagrama Mohilary, Minister Public Health Engineering etc Jayanta Mallabaruah, former Minister Pramila Rani Brahma, former BTC Deputy Chief Executive Member Khampa Borgoyary, MLAs Lawrence Islary and Jiran Basumatary, Bodo Sahitya Sabha President Surat Narzary, and a host of other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

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Karuna Gopal conferred International award

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Karuna Gopal, President Foundation for Futuristic Cities and Board Director, Engineers India Ltd under Petroleum Ministry has been conferred with an International award "Nelson Mandela Human Rights Award 2026" by National Human Rights and Crime Control Bureau (NHRCCB), in recognition of her remarkable contributions in the field of "Human Rights, Innovation, Research, Technology and Women Leadership" over several years.

The award was presented on 8th February, 2026 in New Delhi. Along with Ms. Gopal, Dr. Nirajan Kumar, Director Nobel Medical College Biratnagar, Nepal, was also awarded.

Some of the prominent people present over the event are Kristina Ananina First Secretary at Russian Embassy in India, Vijender Gupta, Speaker-Delhi Legislative Assembly, and

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

GYANVI SHARMA ■ New Delhi

A Skill Development Conclave aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat was organised by FICCI FLO on Tuesday, February 10, 2026 under the leadership of its 42nd President Poonam Sharma, with Pooja Chauhan as Initiative lead and Nidhi Goel as Co-Chair. The conclave brought together key voices including Info Edge Founder Sanjeev Bikhchandani, Atal Innovation Mission Head Deepak Bagla and Times Now

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Advertisement No.01/2026

Online applications are invited for the post of Professor (Chairperson), Namdhari Guru Ram Singh Chair in the University. Online registration of application for the post will start w.e.f. 11-02-2026 and end on 03-03-2026. Last date for submitting Hard Copy of the Online submitted application is 10-03-2026.

For further details visit University Website: <http://www.gndu.ac.in>

Amritsar Registrar

10-02-2026

2426/12/2026-26/8105

Dated CHD - 10/02/2026

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY

No. MD/DC/NCWHR-30/2025/30

Date: 06/02/2026

CORRIGENDUM

REVISED E-TENDER e-RFP No. MD/ACCTS/

WKR-20/2025/1654, dt. 31/12/2025

Name of the Work: Hiring of 607 Battery Operated Electric Fork Lifts (Pallet Truck) for Transhipment of Coal and Coal Based Products for a period of 15 years at Paradip Port Authority & Extendable by 02 more years. Estimated Total cost towards hire charges for 15 years: Rs. 345.93 13.196/- for the first year and Rs. 21.99.74.55/- for the second year. Total cost for 17 years: Rs. 367.92.70.55/- excluding GST. This is to inform that the Minutes of Pre-bid meeting and Revised Tender Document after incorporation of recommendations of the Bidding Committee and the Bid Holders. The Bid Submission has been Extended by 02 hours. Bid submission end date: 02/03/2026 at 15:00 hours. Tender documents can be obtained from the website: [https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app/](http://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app/). The Deputy Conservator, Paradip Port Authority, Mob. No. 77899-32783 PPA/PR/67/2025-2026 dt. 10.02.2026

Group Editor-in-Chief Navika Kumar to deliberate on skilling, employability and the future of women in India's rapidly evolving economy. Held in New Delhi, the event focused on building a skilled workforce with special emphasis on women and youth, particularly within the orange economy and innovation-driven sectors. The discussions explored how India can harness talent across urban and rural landscapes while creating inclusive pathways to employment by 2047.

Poonam Sharma spoke about the pivotal role women must play in shaping India's economic future. She emphasised that skilling initiatives must not only create opportunities but also confidence, resilience and leadership among women professionals. The central theme of the conclave was employment generation, with Sanjeev Bikhchandani offering key insights into why skilling initiatives often fail to translate into jobs. He emphasised that skills are built not only through knowledge but through sustained and repeated practice. Drawing from personal experience, Bikhchandani shared how

he once struggled with stage fear, which he overcame only through continuous practice, reinforcing his belief that confidence and competence develop over time. He stressed about the importance of on-the-job training and apprenticeship-style models, stating that training without real workplace exposure limits employability. According to him, Government schemes that initially appeared apprehensive have significantly strengthened the

skilling ecosystem by encouraging structured learning and industry participation. However, he cautioned that skilling must always lead to employment, calling it the responsibility of industry, institutions and policymakers alike.

Bikhchandani also raised concerns around the migration of women from small towns and villages, Bikhchandani said that mobility must be supported by safety and infrastructure. He pointed out that parents often hesitate to send their daughters to cities due to fears of insecurity. Better facilities such as secure hostels, reliable transport and broader societal support systems are essential to make migration smoother and more acceptable.

Deepak Bag



Shikhar Dhawan appointed brand ambassador for Delhi's Khel Mahakumbh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

SHIKHAR DHAWAN VOLUNTARILY DECIDED TO TAKE UP THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING THE BRAND AMBASSADOR

International cricketer Shikhar Dhawan has been appointed brand ambassador of the Delhi Government's flagship sports initiative, Delhi Khel Mahakumbh. The sports event is scheduled to begin on February 13, 2026. The announcement was made on Tuesday after a meeting between Dhawan, Delhi Education Minister Ashish Sood, and Chief Minister Rekha Gupta.

The Delhi Government said the association with Dhawan, one of the country's most recognisable sporting figures and a native of the Capital, is aimed at energising grassroots sports and motivating young athletes across the city. The Delhi Khel Mahakumbh is envisioned as a large-scale platform to identify, nurture, and showcase sporting talent among children and youth.

Education Minister Ashish Sood said the decision reflects the government's focus on building a strong sporting ecosystem in the city. "After seeing the Delhi Government's commitment towards sports, Shikhar Dhawan voluntarily decided to take up the responsibility of being the brand ambassador. We are confident that his guidance and inspiration will give new energy, self-confidence, and recognition to young players of Delhi," Sood said.

Officials said Dhawan will be actively associated with the event from the inaugural ceremony through its entire duration. His presence is expected to encourage participants and underline the importance of discipline, dedication, and perseverance in sports. The government believes that Dhawan's journey from

ICC promises few concessions to PCB: Sources

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Karachi

The ICC has promised a few concessions to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for ending its boycott of the India game but those will only be announced after the conclusion of the T20 World Cup, a source said on Tuesday.

"Whatever concessions the PCB has got from the ICC on ending their boycott will only be made public after the end of T20 World Cup," a PCB source told PTI on Tuesday.

The ICC has already announced that Bangladesh Cricket Board will not face any sanctions from the global body and will also be given

an ICC event in the 2028-2031 cycle (preferably U19 men's World Cup).

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that the national would boycott the T20 World Cup group league match against India in Colombo on February 15 in solidarity with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), who were replaced after refusing to play their matches in India citing security reasons.

After hectic parleys and back-channel talks which also included intervention from Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and the Bangladesh Cricket Board, which requested



Shahbaz Sharif to change their stance keeping broader interests in mind, the boycott did end on Monday night.

"The call from Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake played a big part in ending the boycott as did

a briefing from some top people in the Government/establishment who have been closely following the developments," another source informed. The PCB has now also been given clearance to play India

if both countries have to face off again in the latter stages of the World Cup.

Another source said that the Prime Minister who is also patron in chief of the PCB was in fact briefed on what Pakistan could achieve if the government issued a notification for not playing against India. "The ICC now has a clear understanding with Naqvi that no further details of the discussions that took place with PCB, Bangladesh Cricket Board and some other boards would be made public," the source said.

While ICC in its statement on Monday confirmed that Bangladesh would not be sanctioned for their stance, it

had no mention of what would PCB stand to gain from ending the impasse.

There have been speculations about Naqvi pushing for an increase in the share of revenues the PCB gets from the ICC but another insider confirmed this would only be after approval from the ICC board for the next financial cycle. He said during discussions Naqvi had made the point that there was no reason for Pakistan and India not to play home and away matches in the ICC World Test Championship at neutral venues as they were already playing in other ICC white ball events. However there remains a catch.

India eye strong start against Belgium, Argentina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Rourkela

The Indian men's hockey team will seek to establish early dominance in its quest to do way better than the eighth-place finish in the last edition when the side begins its FIH Pro League campaign against formidable Belgium and Argentina from Wednesday.

India will begin their campaign against Belgium on Wednesday, followed by a clash against Argentina on Thursday. The hosts will once again face Belgium on Saturday before concluding the leg against Argentina on Sunday. The Indian squad, featuring a balanced mix of experienced internationals and emerging young talent, will look to capitalise on

familiar conditions as they take on two of the world's top-ranked teams. While India are yet to open their campaign, both Argentina and Belgium arrive in Rourkela after a solid start to the season. Argentina are currently second in the standings with 11 points, having played four matches, in which they recorded three regulation-time wins and

one shootout victory. Belgium, meanwhile, are placed third with 10 points, also from four matches, having secured three regulation-time wins and one shootout defeat.

Historically, Belgium have enjoyed the upper hand in head-to-head encounters against India in recent years. Since 2013, the two sides have met 35 times, with

Belgium winning 22 matches, India winning 11, and two matches ending in draws. Against Argentina, however, India hold a stronger record, winning 10 of their 19 meetings since 2013, compared to Argentina's seven wins.

Speaking ahead of their opening match, India captain Harmanpreet Singh said, "I am very happy to see youngsters like Amandeep Lakra, Manmeet Singh and Rosan Kujur earning their opportunities in the squad. They have performed exceptionally well in the recent Hero Hockey India League and have shown great potential.

This is the right time for them to step up at the international level, and I am confident they will make the most of this opportunity.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chennai

The New Zealand opening pair of Tim Seifert and Finn Allen went on a rampage against the UAE bowling attack to make short work of the 174-run target, firing the Blacks Caps to a 10-wicket win in the T20 World Cup here on Tuesday.

The UAE did well to post 173 for six, their highest total in tournament history following fine fifties captain Muhammed Waseem (66 not out off 45) and Alishan Sharafu (55 off 4) at the top of the order.

However, the destructive duo of Allen (84 not out off 50) and Seifert (89 not out off 42) ran riot on a red soil pitch to fashion a 10-wicket victory for their team.

Their 175-run stand off 92 balls was the highest for any wicket in tournament history as New Zealand coasted to the win in 15.2 overs.

It was the first game of the tournament for UAE who would need to go back to the drawing board after the hammering at Chepauk.

New Zealand, eliminated early in the previous edition,

have fired warning shots to rival teams with two emphatic wins in as many games.

Barring left-arm spinner Haider Ali, none of the UAE bowlers were able to contain Seifert and Allen who scored boundaries at will.

The game was as good as done when New Zealand raced to 119 for no loss in 10 overs.

The standout shots of Seifert's innings were the reverse sweeps off Haider in the 11th over, fetching him a six and four.

Allen tore into medium pacer Junaid Siddique early on the innings as he shuffled across the stumps to scoop him for a six over fine leg.

UAE pacers looked clueless against the onslaught of the New Zealand openers, paying a heavy price for bowling too many length balls. Allen completed the milestone of 100 sixes in T20 Internationals during his entertaining effort.

Earlier, Waseem and Sharafu were able to get boundaries regularly in the powerplay despite Aryansh Sharma (8) falling to Jacob Duffy off a short ball in the second over.

Mbappe's scoring streak for Madrid

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Madrid



Kylian Mbappe's latest impressive scoring run with Real Madrid has brought up comparisons to Cristiano Ronaldo. After Mbappe scored his 23rd goal in 22 Spanish league games in Madrid's 2-0 win at Valencia on Sunday, coach Alvaro Arbeloa said the France striker could be well on his way to matching the success of Ronaldo at the Spanish powerhouse.

"What Cristiano achieved seemed extraterrestrial, something impossible to match and no one could come close," Arbeloa said.

"Mbappe has a long way to go because Cristiano was

in world soccer. It's an honor for me," Mbappe started this year on a roll and with even better numbers, having scored nine goals in seven matches. He needed 11 games to reach nine goals last year. He has 43 goals in 35 appearances for club and country this season.

"It's a great fortune, because right now he's the best player in the world with what he's proving day in and day out, game after game," Arbeloa said of Mbappe. Arbeloa, who took over the club's helm this year to replace Xabi Alonso, was a former Madrid defender who was a teammate of Ronaldo at Madrid, playing six seasons with him from 2009-2016.

in world soccer. It's an honor for me," Mbappe started this year on a roll and with even better numbers, having scored nine goals in seven matches. He needed 11 games to reach nine goals last year. He has 43 goals in 35 appearances for club and country this season.

"It's a great fortune, because right now he's the best player in the world with what he's proving day in and day out, game after game," Arbeloa said of Mbappe. Arbeloa, who took over the club's helm this year to replace Xabi Alonso, was a former Madrid defender who was a teammate of Ronaldo at Madrid, playing six seasons with him from 2009-2016.

Malen's double keeps Roma in touch with Serie A pack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Rome

Donyell Malen scored in each half as Roma beat Cagliari 2-0 and stayed in touch with the chasing pack at the top of Serie A.

Leader Inter Milan was

eight points clear of city rival

AC Milan and nine ahead of

reigning champion Napoli.

Roma was three points

further back along with

Juventus. Dutch centre forward Malen had scored only once in four appearances since joining on loan from Aston Villa in January and he proved his worth on Monday with two excellent finishes. He ran on to a clever through ball from Gianluca Mancini and his deft chip

over the goalkeeper was equal to the set-up pass.

His second was more of a poacher's effort as he got on the right side of a packed defense to turn in a low cross 20 minutes after the break. The result served as a confidence booster ahead of next weekend's crunch tie at Napoli. Cagliari, which was seeking a fourth consecutive Serie A win for the first

time in more than a decade, remained 12th. Atalanta beats Cremonese: Atalanta moved to within two points of the European places after beating Cremonese 2-1. Atalanta was unbeaten in its last seven league matches and in seventh spot, two points behind Como and Juventus. Nikola Krstovic put Atalanta ahead after 13

minutes when he got on the end of a nice cross from Giacomo Raspadori. Davide Zappacosta made it 2-0 minutes later with a neat individual goal.

Atalanta's Lazar Samardzic and Berat Djimsiti also came close as they bossed the first 45 minutes. Krstovic missed the best chance of the second half and Berat Djimsiti had a goal disallowed in stoppage time as Atalanta continued to dominate.

Morten Thorsby's last-minute consolation for Cremonese gave the scoreline a more respectable sheen than the action suggested. Cremonese was without a win in 10 games and sat 16th, just five points above the relegation zone.

Resuming their second innings on 64 for three on Day 5, the contest was as good as over for Andhra after they conceded a massive first-innings lead of 334 runs on the fourth and penultimate day.

Bengal will now take on Jammu and Kashmir in the semi-final from February 15, while Karnataka and Uttarakhand face off in the other last four clash. On the

final day's play, Andhra hoped to avoid an outright defeat but left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahmed struck some vital blows on a fifth day pitch to script a big win for Bengal.

Shahbaz returned impressive figures of 4/72, while Suraj Sindhu Jaiswal picked up two wickets. There was a wicket each for Akash Deep, Sumanta Gupta and Anustup

Majumdar. Out-of-favour India seamer Mohammed Shami, who sizzled with the bat in Bengal's huge first-innings total of 629, bowled only three overs when Andhra batted for the second time in the match.

Nitin Kumar Reddy was the only silver lining for Andhra as the India all-rounder batted resolutely to

make 90 off 144 balls with seven fours and two sixes.

Needing 270 runs to make Bengal bat again, Andhra required a partnership between Reddy and Ricky Bhui (30) but the skipper was dismissed by Shahbaz after he could add just 12 runs to his overnight score.

Soon Shahbaz took the wicket of Saurabh Kumar and then removed Reddy to finish with fine figures.

Triprana Vijay (46) and Kalidindi Raju (25) got some runs under their belt but all they could do was delay the inevitable before Gupta picked up the wicket of Vijay to seal the match for his team. Wicketkeeper-batter KS Bharat did not bat because of an injury.

Al-Nassr hopeful Ronaldo to return for Asian Champions League Two

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Riyad

Cristiano Ronaldo is yet to win a major trophy since arriving in Saudi Arabia, and Al-Nassr will be hoping the 41-year-old Portuguese star returns to action on Wednesday to help the Riyadh club move closer to silverware. Al-Nassr takes on Arkadag of Turkmenistan with a place in the quarterfinals of the Asian Champions League Two on the line.

Ronaldo hasn't played any part in Al-Nassr's most recent two games in the Saudi Pro League amid reports he was unhappy with the way the club is being funded, particularly after watching rival Al-Hilal sign Karim Benzema in last month's transfer

window. Al-Nassr, Al-Hilal, Al-Ittihad and Al-Ahli are all majority owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. In a statement, the SPL outlined that no player is bigger than the club or the league. "The Saudi Pro League is structured around a simple principle: every club operates independently under the same rules," the league said. "Cristiano has been fully engaged with Al-Nassr since his arrival and has played an important role in the club's growth and ambition. But no individual — however significant — determines decisions beyond their own club."

Despite the absence of the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, Al-Nassr beat reigning champion Al-Ittihad 2-0

on Friday. Ittihad is the only one of three Saudi teams in the top-tier AFC Champions League Elite not to have secured a place in the round of 16, with two group games remaining. Despite losing star striker Karim Benzema last week to Al-Hilal, which has a history of making high-profile signings, including Neymar from Paris Saint-Germain in 2023, Ittihad will advance to the next round if it defeats Al-Gharafa of Qatar on Tuesday.

The top eight in each of the tournament's two 12-team groups — divided geographically into East and West Asia — qualify for the second round. Al-Hilal leads the western zone and is the only team with a perfect record of

six wins from six, meaning coach Simone Inzaghi can choose to rest players. Al-Ahli, which won its first Champions League title in May, is also guaranteed a spot in the knockout stage.

In the eastern zone, only Vissel Kobe has clinched qualification, but Japan will have three teams in the round of 16 if both Sanfrecce Hiroshima and Machida Zelvia win this week.

The pressure is on China's

three representatives, which occupy the bottom three positions. Chinese champion Shanghai Port is in last place and on the verge of being ousted from the tournament. Wins for Chengdu Rongcheng and Shanghai Shenhua would keep both teams in contention.

Georges Mikautadze gave Villarreal the lead 10 minutes before halftime when he met Tajon Buchanan's perfectly cushioned header and fired home a spectacular scissor

kick. Jose Salinas' own goal six minutes later doubled Villarreal's lead.

Nicolas Pepe added the

third five minutes into the second half when he rifled a

low shot from outside the box after some skilful footwork. Alberto Moleiro made it 4-0 five minutes later when he finished off an incisive counterattack.

Villarreal inflicted heaviest defeat of Espanyol in La Liga this season

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Villarreal (Spain)

Villarreal scored twice in each half to hammer Espanyol 4-1 in La Liga and hand the Catalan club its heaviest defeat of the season.

The result ended a poor run which had seen Villarreal take one point from its previous three games. The win lifted it to equal on points with third-placed Atletico Madrid and seven ahead of Real Betis, although Villarreal has a game in hand on both.

Georges Mikautadze gave

Villarreal the lead 10 minutes before halftime when he met Tajon Buchanan's perfectly cushioned header and fired home a spectacular sc



Netherlands keep Super 8 hopes alive with win over Namibia

AMANPREET SINGH ■ New Delhi

Bas de Leede hit an assured 72 as the Netherlands kept their Super 8 hopes alive in the men's T20 World Cup with a confident seven-wicket win against Namibia in their Group A match here Tuesday, bouncing back from a painful defeat to Pakistan from a strong position.

The Netherlands produced a tidy, disciplined bowling performance to restrict Namibia to a modest 156 for 8 in the clash between the associate nations despite a spirited middle-overs recovery from the African side.

This is Namibia's first outing of the tournament, and it showed in patches.

Short of match time in recent weeks, with their last T20 being that last-ball win over South Africa in October 2025, they took time to find rhythm.

With the Indian team not involved, the stands were sparsely populated, but the cricket on display was of good quality.

Jan Frylinck (30) and Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton (42) revived the Namibian innings with their steady 50-run stand after an early setback while JJ Smit (22) provided fireworks down the order. However, the late flourish did not come for Namibia as they settled for a modest total on a sporty wicket.

Bas de Leede, who remained unbeaten, and



Netherlands' captain Scott Edwards, left, and teammate Bas de Leede walk off the field after Netherlands' won the cricket match against Namibia at Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi

Colin Ackermann (32) did the bulk of scoring after opener Mochale Levitt (28) provided a quick start as Netherlands overhauled the target without fuss.

Netherlands next play the USA in Chennai on Friday while Namibia have a tough test against hosts India at the same venue on Thursday.

The Dutch, who had lost to Pakistan in Colombo after dictating terms for large parts of the match, showed far greater composure this time. After losing Max O'Dowd (7) early, Levitt provided early momentum with a brisk innings before falling in the powerplay.

Ackermann steadied the innings with a fluent 32,

forging a vital stand with Bas de Leede.

De Leede anchored the chase with a measured knock off 48 balls, mixing caution with aggression. He hit nine boundaries, including four sixes.

Skipper Scott Edwards finished things off in style, scoring an unbeaten 18, as the Netherlands reached 159 for three in 18 overs. Namibia's bowlers struggled to contain the Dutch middle order once the platform was set.

Earlier, the Dutch set the tone early. Pacer Logan van Beek (2/13) hit the deck hard with the new ball, while off-spinner Aryan Dutt (1/13) bowled a probing miserly spell that choked the scoring.

Dutt provided the first breakthrough when he lured Nikolaas Davin Steenkamp (6) down the track. Steenkamp walked forward to negate the spin but missed the line and length completely, allowing Scott Edwards to complete a sharp stumping.

The Netherlands largely controlled the powerplay, conceding just 29 runs in the first five overs. Namibia managed only one maximum in that phase, Frylinck briefly breaking the shackles by pulling Klaassen for six.

Seeing the impact Dutt was making, Dutch skipper Edwards introduced Colin Ackermann, but the off-break bowler was handled confidently. (PTI)

Shaken by Nepal, England aim to step up game in T20WC clash against Windies

DEVARCHIT VARMA ■ Mumbai

Given a scare by lower-ranked Nepal in the lung-opener itself, England would eye a more assured performance when they take on the West Indies in an evenly-matched and crucial Group C clash of the T20 World Cup, here on Wednesday.

Both the teams have won the competition twice in the past and are chasing a third title win like tournament co-hosts and defending champions India. The challenge would be to remain at their best on the given day as margins can be dangerously thin in T20 cricket.

It was something which England experienced when they took on a team several rungs below them but one



that gave them a tough challenge on the field.

Nepal's four-run defeat, or a narrow win which England emerged with in their opening match here a

few nights ago, was a challenge the former champions overcame by a very close margin. But it certainly will keep the Harry Brook-led side on its toes going

forward. Sam Curran was the hero of the game for England, who had put on an at-par total of 184/7. He was relentless in his line and length in the final over to

defend 10 runs and help his side escape unscathed in a contest which Nepal had threatened to run away with.

All in all, England would feel their batting department did a better job than their bowlers collectively.

Adil Rashid went wicketless after long time and Jofra Archer, who has almost all the requisite skills for the format, was picked apart as Nepal exposed the shortcomings in this England bowling attack.

But Brook and the young Jacob Bethell hit half-centuries and the other batters also looked in rhythm, even if they could not push on after making starts.

England would also be keen to improve their standing in Group C as despite a

win, they are placed third with a Net Run Rate of 0.200 while Scotland are placed second with two points and NRR of 0.950. The West Indies, who have two points, have the best NRR of 1.750.

However, the West Indies will also know that there is very little room for a slip-up especially at a venue where the pitch has had something for the bowlers in the first two matches.

Both India and England had to show application with the bat, while the shorter boundary limits here at the Wankhede Stadium did not exactly come into play until Nepal batted, for what was the fourth innings on the same surface where India and USA played earlier. (PTI)



T20WC: Australia start as favourites against Ireland

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

able for the group stage. Considering the conditions across the sub-continent, Zampa will be critical to Australia's hopes in the tournament, which they last won in 2022. The team lost in the semifinals of the last edition to India.

While leading the spin attack, the experienced Zampa will look to form a fruitful partnership with fellow tweakers Cooper Connolly and Matt Kuhnemann with all four of the side's group stage matches to be played in Sri Lanka.

While the bowling unit no

doubt wears a depleted look compared to their attacks of the past, Australia have the requisite firepower in batting and the team also features a long list of all-rounders, who can trouble most sides on their day.

Australian chain of selectors George Bailey had said they had the luxury of focusing on a player group likely to handle the conditions in India and Sri Lanka with aplomb, even as several players came into the tournament under a fitness cloud.

Marsh backs Australia's inexperienced bowling attack to do the job

■

Colombo



improve in order to advance to the next round.

Therefore, the competition in Group D can be

expected to be intense in the coming days as

Afghanistan are among the

teams to beat in the tourna-

ment. South Africa, the last

edition's runner-up, and the

resolute Kiwis will heat up

the battle as Group D is set

to witness some tension in

the first round. Afghanistan

rode on Gulbadin Naib's 35-ball 63 and handy contributions from the other batters to put on a formidable score of 182 for six while batting first against New Zealand.

But the Afghans were left to rue their decision of leaving out Noor Ahmad, despite his experience of playing T20 cricket at Chepauk, in favour of fast bowlers who failed to execute their plans and

bowed wayward.

Afghanistan fast bowlers

collectively failed to put

pressure on the Kiwis and

even their skipper Rashid

had an off day, giving away

1/36 in his four overs. Mujeeb

Ur Rahman's 2/31 was the

only bright spot for the

Afghans with the ball, who

will be determined to make

significant improvements

as they move to the world's

biggest stadium.

Rashid's experience of

playing here in the IPL will

be crucial for Afghanistan,

who need a win to bounce

back and resurrect their

campaign. Additionally,

their bilateral record against

South Africa will also weigh

heavily on the Afghans who

have lost each of their three

matches in history.

encied guys back into our group for this part for this tournament so yeah we've certainly parked that and we move on and we look forward to the World Cup," Marsh said.

Australian batters struggled against spin during the Pakistan tour, and Marsh admitted that the team needs to adapt quickly, especially with Sri Lankan conditions expected to favour slower bowlers.

"We certainly know the conditions that we're going to be faced with and I think most teams will have, I guess, similar ideas on how they're going to go about it. So we're prepared for that and we're ready to go," he said.

"Look, I think we certainly want to be positive in the

way we go about things. I think in these conditions, it's just about being really clear on how you're going to go about it and playing what's in front of you," Marsh said ahead of Australia's T20 World Cup opener against Ireland.

"The word adaptability has been thrown around in our team meetings so far and just adapt to whatever situation is put in front of us and get the job done," he added.

Marsh confirmed that Tim David will miss Australia's tournament opener as he continues to recover from a hamstring injury.

"He's not available tomorrow, but we'll certainly see him come back into contention over the next few games," Marsh said.

My experience will help Afghan players: Rashid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

national team, it really helped the youngsters," he added.

Rashid also opined that both Afghan and South African players have equal advantage in the match because of their familiarity with Indian conditions through the IPL.

"It definitely helps, but even if you have a good idea, still you don't know how the wicket will behave. If you play in the IPL, it's different, but when you play in the ICC event, it's different.

"There is a pressure when you play for your country. So, it's a different feeling. But to be honest, no one around the world will tell you how the wicket will behave before the game. I think they know the condition here as well. So, it's not just like me playing a lot and it's going to be favourable for us, no, I think it's equal for everyone," he noted.

The 27-year-old also hoped for his pace bowlers to come up with a better effort against South Africa, after they failed to sustain the pressure created by spinner Mujeeb Rahman in the match against New Zealand at Chennai.

Afghanistan look to bounce back against South Africa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

■ Ahmedabad

With only two teams slated to make the Super Eight stage from each group, Afghanistan find themselves in a must-win situation when they take on an in-form South Africa in their Group D match of the T20 World Cup on Wednesday.

South Africa are perched at the top, head and shoulders above the rest as their 57-run victory over minnows Canada bolstered their Net Run Rate to 2.850 along with two points.

On the other hand, a five-wicket defeat to New Zealand (+1.162) saw Afghanistan slip to third with a Net Run Rate of -1.162, which they would have to

head the pace department. "Guys like Patty (Cummins) have played a lot for us over the last few years due to his hectic schedule and over the last 12 months guys like Benny Dwarshuis and Xavier Bartlett have played pretty much all of our games," Marsh said on the eve of their opening game against Ireland. "We've got great confidence that they've been able to do a role for us, and they've excelled in some games. So we're confident with the group that we've got here. And we've built that for the last 12 months."

Australia head into the tournament on the back of a historic 0-3 T20I series loss to

Pakistan, which included

their heaviest defeat in the

format - a 111-run drubbing.

"It (Pakistan tour) was some great learnings from that tour. We had some young guys that got exposed to those condi-

tions for probably the first time in their career.

"We take the lessons and

we move on and we obviously

welcome some experi-

'Cricket is a bit behind': Buttler on using walkie-talkie

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

direct drivers in real-time via radio, covering strategy, engine settings, tire management, and safety info. In football, managers are allowed to communicate with players from the sidelines. "I think so, there's (been) walkie-talkies for a while to be fair.

But then the communication from top to bottom has always been really good in the group," Buttler told reporters when asked if the motive behind using walkie-



talkie was way for McCullum to have a more hands-on approach.

"Baz can sit with his feet up and his sunglasses on and look very relaxed, but he's as sharp a coach as I've ever worked with. He doesn't miss a beat," Buttler said.

"I think also for cricket in general, actually, coaches are getting more involved in real-time in cricket, I've played in the IPL, at Gujarat (Titans), Ashish Nehra is very active on the boundary rope.

Sri Lanka President thanks Pak PM for India match boycott withdrawal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake has thanked Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for directing the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to end the boycott of their T20 World Cup match against India here on February 15. The India-Pakistan match will go ahead as sched-

uled after Pakistan's government decided to withdraw its boycott call following persuasion from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, ending an impasse that cast a shadow on the ongoing tournament.

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