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 Digvijaya exits RS race, to stay in politics



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 Consider female lawyers of SC for judgeship: CJ



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 India, China should view each other as partners: Foreign Minister Wang Yi



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 NZ woman fast bowler Lea Tahuu retires from ODI cricket

PIONEER IN SHORT

LIN DENIES LAKSHYA HISTORIC CROWN
 India's Lakshya Sen fell agonisingly short of ending the country's 25-year wait for the men's singles title at the All England Open Badminton Championships, losing 15-21, 20-22 to Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi in a gripping final on Sunday. Playing his second All England final after finishing runner-up in 2022, the 24-year-old from Almorat battled hard in a 57-minute contest packed with high-speed rallies. Lin's relentless attacking play secured him the title, making him the first player from Chinese Taipei to win the men's singles crown at the prestigious tournament. Despite the loss, Lakshya said he was pleased with his performance through the week. "The first set he was better, but in the second I could have finished better," he said. The defeat means India's only men's singles champions at the event remain Prakash Padukone (1980) and Pullela Gopichand (2001). Lakshya reached the final after defeating top players including world No.1 Shi Yu Qi and Li Shi Feng. But a gruelling campaign, including a 97-minute semifinal, left him battling cramps and fatigue in the closing stages.

Large defaulters leave PSU banks chasing ₹29 lakh crore

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ New Delhi

While the Union Government and the Reserve Bank (RBI) of India claim that Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) of Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) banks are at a decade's low, the latest data on Large Defaulters of PSU banks has reached ₹29 lakh crores.

Large defaulters are borrowers with outstanding dues of ₹1 crore or more facing civil cases by banks, involving non-repayment, while NPAs are loans overdue for over 90 days regardless of size. While NPAs may be settled by banks

through a one-time settlement or settled under the Insolvency Banking Code (IBC); NPAs are defined by time-based repayment failure, whereas large defaults focus on high-value, high-risk, or wilful negligence.

Earlier in February, the Government informed the Parliament that gross NPAs as a percentage of total loans and advances of scheduled commercial banks were at a historic low of 2.15 per cent at the end of September 2025. However, there is no clarity on how these figures were arrived at.

LARGE DEFAULTERS OF PSU BANKS	
Union Bank	₹9.96 Lakh Crores
State Bank of India	₹5.79 Lakh Crores
Punjab National Bank	₹2.59 Lakh Crores
Canara Bank	₹2.49 Lakh Crores
Bank of Baroda	₹2.21 Lakh Crores
Bank of Maharashtra	₹1.78 Lakh Crores
Central Bank of India	₹1.44 Lakh Crores
UCO Bank	₹1.11 Lakh Crores
Bank of India	₹96,512 Crores
Indian Overseas Bank	₹30,861 Crores
Punjab and Sind Bank	₹27,954 Crores
Indian Bank	Not yet filed dues list
Total	₹28.93 Lakh Crores

The Pioneer Exclusive

According to publicly available data, 11 PSU banks are contesting civil cases in courts across the country to recover ₹28.93 lakh crores from corporate clients. The biggest defaulters the list features are Anil Ambani and his companies with outstanding dues of ₹48,282 crores. Data on Large Defaulters up to January 2026 is available with rating agency TransUnion CIBIL. All

PSU banks, except Indian Bank, have uploaded their lists of Large Defaulters.

This week *The Pioneer* will analyse and publish records from TransUnion CIBIL detailing India's largest defaulters.

Details of NPAs have been made available only once by the RBI. The central banker was forced to produce the data in a sealed cover to the Supreme Court (SC) in 2021 in response to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by former BJP MP Subramanian Swamy, who sought guidelines for disbursing loans to corporations. The RBI

informed the court that accounts classified as NPAs belong to existing customers and banks must maintain privacy norms. The data was never made public.

Swamy also attached the Credit Suisse 2015 report *Debt Over Debt* to his PIL, which stated that India's top 10 corporates had crossed NPAs of more than ₹11 lakh crores. The report listed the Anil Ambani Group, Vedanta, Essar Group, Adani Group, Jaypee Group, JSW Group, GMR Group, Lanco, Videocon Group and GVK Group.

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CHAMPIONS, YET AGAIN

KUSHAN SARKAR ■ Ahmedabad

Suryakumar Yadav's team, easily India's greatest T20 outfit ever, created history on Sunday with an unprecedented third World Cup win, clinically demolishing a lacklustre New Zealand by 96 runs with an awe-inspiring batting performance and laser-precise bowling.

Suryakumar's men became the first men's international team to win successive World T20 titles and also the first to claim the trophy on home turf.

Sanju Samson (89 off 46 balls) and Abhishek Sharma (52 off 21 balls) added 92 in Powerplay and 98 for the opening stand after a tactical blunder by Black Caps skipper Mitchell Santner led to a record score of 255 for 5.

Having misread the pitch, Santner brought medium pacer Jacob Duffy dropping the useful off-spinner Cole



India team celebrates after receiving the trophy after defeating New Zealand during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 final cricket match between India and New Zealand at Narendra Modi Stadium

McConchie, which proved to be decisive in the final outcome.

In front of 86,000 fans, the chase was out of question as New Zealand huffed and puffed its way to 159 all out as Suryakumar, the man from Mumbai's Chembur, etched his name alongside Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Rohit Sharma in the record books.

"Champions! This remarkable triumph reflects exceptional skills, determination and teamwork. They have shown outstanding grit through the tournament. This victory has filled every Indian heart with pride and joy. Well done, Team India!" posted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on X within minutes of the triumph.

No credit will be enough for mostly under-fire Gautam Gambhir, who became the first coach to guide the team to two T20 World titles.

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PM Narendra Modi with Union Minister Manohar Lal and Delhi CM Rekha Gupta during the inauguration of multiple development projects

PM Modi slams Mamata over Murmu protocol row

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday slammed West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee over President Droupadi Murmu's recent displeasure regarding alleged "mismanagement" at a Santhal community event, calling it an insult to the President and the spirit of democracy.

"Today, as the nation celebrates International Women's Day, it is deeply concerning that just yesterday, the TMC Government in West Bengal demonstrated a grave insult towards the honourable President of India, Draupadi Murmu," the PM said after inaugurating two new Delhi Metro corridors and laying the foundation stone for three more metro lines.

"It is said in our country that no matter how powerful a person is, he is ultimately destroyed by ego. Today, from the nation's capital, I am appealing to all of you that the dirty politics and arrogance of power of the TMC, which insulted the dignity of a tribal President, will soon be shattered. The enlightened people of West Bengal will never forgive the TMC for insulting a woman, a tribal, the President of the country. The country will never forgive them either.

UNION GOVT HAS SOUGHT A RESPONSE FROM THE STATE OVER PROTOCOL VIOLATIONS OF RELATED TO VENUE AND ROUTE

The tribal community of the country will never forgive them. The women of the country will never forgive them," the PM said. On Sunday, the PM inaugurated projects worth ₹33,500 crore. PM Modi said the TMC Government's actions not only resulted in the mismanagement of the tribal community event but also constituted an affront to the President, the Constitution and the noble tradition of democracy in the country.

Meanwhile, the Union Government has sought a response from the West Bengal Government over suspected violations of protocol related to venue and route arrangements.

In a letter to the West Bengal chief secretary, Union home secretary Govind Mohan sought a detailed explanation regarding alleged breaches to procedures that govern protocol, venue and route arrangements.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

The Bystander



NCB busts pan-India drug network forged in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a major strike against drug trafficking, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has dismantled a sophisticated pan-India drug distribution network operating under the banner of Team Kalki. The operation, conducted in the national Capital, has exposed the deep-rooted nexus between online marketplaces and encrypted messaging platforms used to peddle synthetic drugs.

Following a three-month-long intelligence operation, NCB officials intercepted 13 domestic parcels and two international consignments from the Netherlands. The



haul included 2,338 LSD blotters, 160 MDMA pills, 73,612 grams of charas, and 3,642 grams of amphetamine. Most notably, officials also seized 3.6 kg of liquid MDMA.

According to an NCB release, the investigation revealed that the network was orchestrated by two habitual offenders, Anurag Thakur and Vikas Rathni.

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Parliament braces for Birla storm

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The second half of the Budget Session of Parliament is set for a stormy start on Monday with a resolution seeking the removal of Speaker Om Birla, the controversy over President Droupadi Murmu's protocol breach in West Bengal and hike in LPG prices and the ongoing West Asia conflict.

The outcome of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in poll-bound West Bengal, which led to the deletion of nearly 60 lakh votes, is also expected to cast its shadow on Parliamentary proceedings beginning Monday.

The resolution against the Speaker is the only item listed in the Lok Sabha business of



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla being felicitated at a private function

the day. The numbers are heavily stacked in favour of the Government, which will ensure that the resolution is defeated. In the past, three Lok Sabha speakers — GV Mavlankar (1954), Hukam Singh (1966) and Balram Jakhar (1987)—have faced no-confidence motions in the past, which were negated.

The no-confidence resolu-

tion against Birla was given by several Opposition leaders who alleged that he acted in a "blatantly partisan" manner in the House. They had also accused the speaker of making false claims against the Congress members in the row surrounding the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

PUNJAB ANNOUNCES CASH AID FOR WOMEN

The Aam Aadmi Party Government in Punjab on Sunday announced a monthly financial assistance scheme for women, nearly four years after promising the measure ahead of the 2022 Assembly polls. Presenting the 2026-27 budget in the Assembly, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said under the Mukh Mantri Mawan Dhian Satikar Yojana, eligible women will receive ₹1,000 per month, while women from Scheduled Caste communities will get ₹1,500. About 97 per cent of adult women in the State are expected to qualify, with ₹9,300 crore allocated for the scheme. Current and former Government employees, MPs, MLAs and income-tax payers will be included. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said registrations will begin on April 13, coinciding with Baisakhi.

Israel targets Iranian oil, escalating conflict

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Dubai

Israel on Sunday struck southern Lebanon, Beirut and oil storage facilities in Tehran as the war in the Middle East keeps escalating, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised "many surprises" for the next phase of the conflict.

Iran also hit a desalination plant in Bahrain. Earlier Sunday, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said a US airstrike damaged an Iranian desalination plant on Qeshm Island, warning that in doing so "the U.S. set this precedent, not Iran." Such infrastructure is critical for drinking water supplies in the parched deserts of the Gulf.

An Israeli attack on oil storage sites in Tehran sent



Iranian Red Crescent Society members standing near an oil storage facility in Tehran struck by US-Israeli strikes

up pillars of fire that could be seen in Associated Press video as a glow against the Saturday night sky. It appeared to be the first time a civil industrial facility has been targeted in the war.

But before Tehran might

even consider a ceasefire, Abbas Araghchi said "they have to explain why they started this aggression." Araghchi did not specify about whom he was speaking.

Araghchi also told NBC's "Meet the Press" that "there

should be a permanent end of the war and unless we get to that, I think we need to continue fighting for the sake of our people and our security."

He says the war "was imposed on us" by the United States and Israel, and that "what we are doing is legal acts of self-defense and we have every right to do that." Meanwhile, an Iranian official deplored the US-Israeli strikes on oil facilities in Iran, saying they pushed the war into a "dangerous phase."

"These attacks on fuel storage facilities amount to nothing less than intentional chemical warfare against the Iranian citizens," Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said in a social media post.

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JD(U) inducts Nishant Kumar as party workers cheer

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

Nishant Kumar, son of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, joined the JD(U) on Sunday. An engineering graduate who is in his 40s, Nishant was inducted at the party headquarters in the presence of top leaders, including Union minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan' and JD(U)'s national working president Sanjay Jha.

Nishant received a rousing reception at the JD(U) office on his arrival following days of resentment within the party over party's patriarch entering the Rajya Sabha. Party functionaries gathered



JD(U) National Working President Sanjay Jha, left, presents membership slip to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's son Nishant Kumar

outside the office and were seen waving party flags and beating drums. Some party workers came on decorated horses carrying the plac-

ards that read *Nishant hai to nishant hai* (If there is Nishant, then we are relieved).

CONTINUED ON >> P4

CM Rekha joins Shakti Walk at Kartavya Path on Women's Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

A "Shakti Walk" was organised at Kartavya Path on Sunday to mark International Women's Day, with the Delhi Chief Minister, Rekha Gupta, calling it a reflection of women's collective strength and their role in nation-building.

The event was also attended by Union Women and Child Development Minister Annapurna Devi, Minister of State Anupriya Patel and Savitri Thakur, and National Commission for Women chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar, along with hundreds of women. Speaking at the event, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the event reflected the spirit of women's empowerment and their role in nation-building. "Today, through this Kartavya Path, we are reminded that our responsibility is not only towards ourselves or our families but also towards society and the country," the chief minister said while



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta and others, during a 'Shakti Walk' organised by the Ministry of Women and Child Development on the occasion of International Women's Day at Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Sunday

addressing participants. Extending greetings on the occasion, she said the day was meant to honour women's strength and dignity. "Today is truly a day that honours the power of women and enhances their dignity across the world and the country," she said. The Chief Minister said women in India were achiev-

ing new milestones across sectors. "From startups to space missions, from teachers to doctors and engineers and in every major project, today India's women are leading. Today, women lead the armed forces, and they also lead society," she said. "Today is a day for all of us to think ahead, to set goals and to determine our role in nation

building. India will move forward under the leadership of women's power. The women of India will lead the country forward," she said. Union Minister Annapurna Devi said women across the country were demonstrating their capabilities in every field and encouraged them to continue moving forward and achieving new milestones.

Bishnoi among three discharged by Delhi court in extortion call case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

A Delhi court has discharged gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and two others in a case related to an alleged ₹1 crore extortion call, saying the prosecution failed to place sufficient material on record to establish the essential ingredients of the offences.

Chief Judicial Magistrate Nupur Gupta discharged Haren Sarapadhiya, Lawrence Bishnoi and Ashish Sharma in a case registered at the Sunlight Colony police station under Section 387 (putting a person in fear of death or grievous hurt to themselves or another person) and 387 read with Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the IPC. The court, however, noted that the offence of extortion under Section 386 IPC requires actual delivery of property induced by fear of death or



grievous hurt, which was absent in the case. "Neither the complainant has alleged any delivery of property under threat nor the same has been alleged in the entire charge-sheet," the court said in its order dated February 20. It further observed that even for the offence under Section 387 of the IPC, the prosecution failed to show any "overt act" indicating that the accused had put the complainant in fear of death or grievous hurt. "The complainant has merely alleged that he received calls from an unknown number demanding an amount of ₹1 crore. On perusal of the complaint itself, it can be said that nothing has been mentioned at all about the physical act, rather it has simply been said he was asked to pay a particular sum of money," the court said.

Police busts counterfeit protein supplement racket, 2 held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi Police busted a racket involved in manufacturing and supplying counterfeit protein supplements in Delhi and the National Capital Region, and arrested two men, an official said on Sunday. The police arrested Mohit Tiwari and Mohit Dixit, both residents of Brahmpuri in northeast Delhi, from the Brahmpuri area on March 6, and recovered about 100 Kg of fake nutritional supplements and over 55 Kg of raw materials from their possession. According to the police, a case was registered at the Crime Branch police station against them. During interrogation, the accused disclosed that they were involved in manufacturing counterfeit protein supplements and led the police to illegal factories operating in the locality, the officer said. Police said the accused were preparing fake protein supplements using raw materials such as maltodextrin, cocoa powder and flavouring agents, and sold them in the market under labels of reputed brands.

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From planning to safety, women take on key roles at upcoming Noida airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Noida/Lucknow

Women professionals are playing a key role in the development and operational planning of the upcoming Noida International Airport, contributing across leadership, technical and aviation safety functions as the Greenfield project prepares to begin passenger operations. The airport, which recently received its aerodrome licence from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), is expected to begin passenger services within the next one-and-a-half to two months, officials said.

Spread across more than 1,300 hectares in its first phase, it has been developed with a single runway and terminal building capable of handling around 12 million passengers annually. Airport authorities noted that the project has enabled the organisation to build a diverse workforce from the ground up, ensuring that women participate not only in leadership roles but also in technical, safety and operational functions critical to running a modern international airport.

"From leadership positions to frontline operational teams, women today contribute across a wide spectrum of airport functions including operations planning, architecture and design, finance, digital systems, regulatory functions and commercial operations," an official associated with the project said. The airport's leadership structure includes several senior positions held by women, reflecting an effort to integrate gender diversity into the project's organisational framework from its early stages.

Chief Operating Officer Kiran Jain, who leads airport operations, brings more than three decades of experience in aviation and hospitality across India and the United States.

She has been closely involved in planning operational systems, coordinating airline partnerships and preparing the airport for live operations. Financial strategy and governance are overseen by Chief Financial Officer Nitu Samra, who has more than 25 years of experience across financial services and asset management. Her role includes overseeing financial planning, regulatory coordination and long-term financial management for the airport.

Head Human Resources (HR) Mili Saxena, who handles HR strategy and workforce, has been involved in shaping recruitment processes, talent development, and diversity initiatives as the airport builds its operational workforce ahead of launch. Women also hold key positions across other functional areas such as regulatory coordination, facilities management, aviation safety, aero-commercial operations, infrastructure readiness and digital systems management, officials said.

"Women hold several critical leadership positions at the airport, including roles such as COO, CFO and Head HR, reflecting how women are helping shape both strategic decisions and operational

readiness," the official said.

They are also engaged in core technical and operational verticals essential to airport functioning. Currently, around 45 women are working across areas such as architecture and terminal design, airside compliance, operational command functions, regulatory oversight and digital systems management. Women professionals are managing responsibilities including Lead Airport Operations Control Centre (APOC), lead flight operations, senior architect, lead compliance and audit, lead airside compliance and IT service desk management. Given the nature of airport

involved in internal security functions supporting surveillance, access control and operational coordination within the airport ecosystem. Authorities said once airport operations begin, personnel from the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) will take charge of airport security.

Women also played a notable role during the airport's construction phase, particularly in engineering and safety functions. Officials said female professionals accounted for 16 out of 30 engineering staff associated with key project activities, while six women were part of the environment, health and safety (EHS) teams.



Women personnel monitor systems during operational preparations ahead of the launch of Noida International Airport in Noida, Uttar Pradesh

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client Sh. Chiman Lal owner of UGF Back Side, Without Roof Area 40 Sq. Yds., Property No. 7, Kharsa No. 266, 267 & 280, Bhagwati Garden Extn., Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059, and My Client purchase property from Sh. Himanshu Sikka vide GPA, ATS & Will dated 14.12.2025, now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 750 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile :- 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client Smt. Sunita Verma owner of Plot No. K-1/169, Area 50 Sq.Yds., Kharsa No. 59/10, Mohan Garden, In Block-I, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059, and My Client purchase property from Smt. Rama Devi vide GPA, ATS & Will dated 04.12.2024, now My Client wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 750 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile :- 9899013918

PUBLIC NOTICE

Known to all that my client Neetu alias Neetu Devi owner of Third Floor, Without roof, Property No. C-385, old No. C-13, Plot No. 7A, area 47.76 sq yds, Kharsa no. 812, West Vinod Nagar, C-Block Kumbon Square Shahdara New Delhi, and My Client has Lost Original GPA, ATS and Will in favour of Vinod Kumar. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 750 - Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
Mobile :- 9899013918

SAMARTH YUVA FOUNDATION
Redg office: 209, Second Floor, Vardhaman Janak Market CSC A2B Janakpuri, West Delhi, New Delhi, India, 110058. CIN: U93000DL2016NPL294458. Email: comar786@gmail.com | Contact Details: +02612325746

NOTICE Date: 09.03.2026
"Form No. INC-26"

[Pursuant to Rule 30 the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014] Advertisement to be published in the newspaper for change of registered office of the company from one state to another BEFORE THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR, (NORTHERN REGION) DELHI In the matter of the Companies Act, 2013, Section 12 and 13 of Companies Act, 2013 and Rule 30(6) (a) of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014

AND In the matter of SAMARTH YUVA FOUNDATION, having its registered office at 209, Second Floor, Vardhaman Janak Market CSC A2B Janakpuri, West Delhi, New Delhi, India, 110058.petitioner Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the Company proposes to make application to the Central Government under section 13 of the Companies Act, 2013 seeking confirmation of alteration of the Memorandum of Association of the Company in terms of the special resolution passed at the Extra Ordinary General Meeting of the members held on Monday the 2nd day of March 2026 to enable the Company to change its Registered office from "ROC-DELHI (DELHI)" to "ROC-PUNE (MAHARASHTRA)".

Any person, whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the Registered Office of the Company may deliver either on MCA-21 portal (www.mca.gov.in) by filing the investor compliant form or cause to be delivered or send by registered speed post of his/her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/her interest and ground of opposition to the Regional Director, northern Region, address: B-2 Wing, 2nd Floor, Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex, New Delhi-110003 within 21 days from the date of Publication of this notice, with a copy to the petitioner at the Registered Office of the Company as mentioned above.

FOR SAMARTH YUVA FOUNDATION SD/- RAJESH BABUL PANDE Director

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that I, ADITI BATRA D/O LATE J.K. BATRA R/o A-13, Retreat Apartments, Plot No.20, I. P. Extension, Patparganj, Delhi-110092, allottee/mutatee of flat No.A-13, on the first floor in Retreat Co-operative Group Housing Society Ltd. (known as Retreat Apartments), Plot No.20, I. P. Extension, Patparganj, Delhi-110092, have applied for conversion of the said flat from leasehold to freehold in my favour, vide application dated LD49715GH/CON/02072025 in DDA. The original allotment and possession letter for the aforesaid flat, issued by the Retreat CGHS Ltd. in the name of the allottee, have been misplaced/lost. An FIR to this effect has been lodged in the Police Station Crime Branch, District East, Delhi vide LR No.58150/2026 dated 27.01.2026. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of the above said original document, may write/contact with above named person at above address/phone No.9968298661 within 15 days from this public notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to the Dy. Director, (GH) or Director (RL), Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi. Aditi Batra

Fake iPhone parts racket busted, 5 arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi Police has busted a racket involved in selling counterfeit iPhone spare parts and accessories as genuine products in Rohini and arrested five shop owners. Fake items worth around ₹1.6 crore were seized during the operation. The action followed raids at five shops located in a mall and a market in Rohini Sector 3, where a large quantity of counterfeit spare parts and accessories were recovered. According to police, the accused had been selling these fake products to customers by passing them off as genuine accessories.

The arrested accused have been identified as Dinesh (owner of Dinesh Spare Parts), Shivam Singhal (owner of Singhal's Mobile Accessories), Shivam (owner of Pardhan Ji Communication), Puneet (owner of Satguru Accessories) and Ramkaran



Sharma (operator of Kansal Accessories Nxt), the police said in a statement. The police said a team received specific information on March 6 that several shops in Rohini were selling counterfeit spare parts and accessories of iPhones as genuine.

Acting on the tip-off, a team conducted raids at the identified shops. An authorised representative of Apple was also called to the spot and joined the raiding team during the operation. During the raids, the shop owners failed to produce any bills or authorisation from Apple for selling

iPhone products, a senior police officer said. Upon inspection by the company representative, a large quantity of counterfeit iPhone spare parts and accessories, including back panels, bodies, batteries, charging flexes, back covers, adapters and USB cables, were recovered from the shops and declared fake. Police seized around 1,000 back panels of various iPhone models, 180 bodies, 228 batteries, 48 camera and charging flex components, 738 back covers, 14 adapters and 109 USB cables. The estimated value of the recovered counterfeit items is around ₹1.6 crore, the officer said.

A case has been registered, and further investigation is underway. The police said the accused had been running the businesses for some time and sourced the counterfeit products from suppliers and the open market.

Nasir-Junaid murder case: Monu Manesar returns after getting bail

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Gurugram

Monu Manesar, accused in the 2023 Junaid and Nasir murder case, returned to his native village in Gurugram, after being released on bail from a Rajasthan jail, where villagers welcomed him with drum beats and garlands. A villager said that hundreds of people had travelled to Rajasthan to receive Monu. He was lodged in Central Jail Bharatpur, Sewar and was released on bail on Saturday after spending two-and-a-half years in judicial custody.

Around 7.30 pm, Monu came out of the jail wearing a bulletproof jacket and travelled to Manesar by road with his supporters.

The Rajasthan High Court granted Manesar regular bail on March 5, following which he was released on Saturday after completion of legal formalities amid heavy security, police said. The villager said that as soon as Monu arrived in the village, people welcomed him to the beats of drums, garlanded him and carried him home in their arms. Celebrations continued late into the night in Manesar.

Monu alias Mohit Yadav is accused of murdering Junaid (35) and his cousin Nasir (27) in 2023 on suspicion of cow smuggling. The bodies of the cousins were found inside a burnt vehicle in Haryana's Bhiwani district in February 16, 2023.

Sulabh hosts National conference on Women's day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Women celebrities from different walks of the life celebrated International Women's Day by stressing on a theme, "Give to Gain". Held under the theme "Give to Gain: Women & Livelihoods - Building Equitable Futures," the opening session set the tone for a day dedicated to celebrating women's leadership, dignity, and collective action. A policy report prepared by Sulabh International, released on the occasion of International Women's Day 2026, reflects the evolution of that vision in contemporary contexts. It documents how dignity-



centred interventions in sanitation, livelihoods, agriculture, skill development, and cultural enterprise have enabled women to move from invisibility to leadership within their families and communities. Nitya Pathak, Executive Convenor, Sulabh International said that theme of this year's International

Women's Day, Give to Gain, captures a principle that Sulabh has long upheld: investing in women is not an act of charity but a strategic investment in sustainable development. Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati Ji, Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Rishikesh, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

The Rajasthan High Court granted Manesar regular bail on March 5, following which he was released on Saturday after completion of legal formalities amid heavy security, police said. The villager said that as soon as Monu arrived in the village, people welcomed him to the beats of drums, garlanded him and carried him home in their arms. Celebrations continued late into the night in Manesar.

Monu alias Mohit Yadav is accused of murdering Junaid (35) and his cousin Nasir (27) in 2023 on suspicion of cow smuggling. The bodies of the cousins were found inside a burnt vehicle in Haryana's Bhiwani district in February 16, 2023.

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Letter No. - 1543/1C-9/2026 NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING Date 07.03.2026

E-tender Notice (Short term)

The Superintending Engineer 9th Circle, Public Works Department, Dehradun on behalf of "Governor of Uttarakhand" invites short term tender in two bid system for the following work. Information regarding tender shall be available on <https://www.uktenders.gov.in> from date 10.03.2026

Sl. NO.	Name of work	Earnest money (In Lacs)	Cost of Tender Document (In Rs.)	Validity of Tender (In days)	Period of Completion (In Month)	Contractor Category of Registration
1	Improvement work by BC from Km 0.00 to 5.00 of Pashulok Barrage Road under Kumbh Mela 2027 (Special Assistance Scheme).	4.30	5000.00 + 18% GST	90	06	Registered in 'C' & above category in Road works in Central Govt./State Govt/any Govt. Undertaking
2	Improvement work by Bc on the road from IDPL Canal Gate to City Gate under Kumbh Mela 2027 (Special Assistance Scheme).	3.60	5000.00 + 18% GST	90	06	Registered in 'C' & above category in Road works in Central Govt./State Govt/any Govt. Undertaking

PM Modi inaugurates two metro corridors in national Capital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated two new Delhi Metro corridors including the country's first "Ring Metro" and laid the foundation stone for three more metro lines, providing direct connectivity to several important locations in the national Capital.

The two new Delhi Metro corridors inaugurated by the prime minister were the Majlis Park-Maujpur Babarpur (Pink Line) corridor of around 12.3 km and the Deepali Chowk-Majlis Park (Magenta Line) corridor of around 9.9 km. He also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of projects worth ₹15,200 crore under the central Government's General Pool Residential Accommodation (GPRA) redevelopment plan. The total cost of all projects is around ₹33,500 crore.

Addressing a gathering at Burari ground after inaugurating and launching projects worth ₹33,500 crore, including two new Metro corridors, Modi said the pace of all-round development in

Delhi has accelerated since the BJP Government was formed a year ago and alleged that under AAP's rule, works were stalled due to excuses and projects "died in files". He said Delhi is not only the Capital of the country, but is also the identity of India and a symbol of its energy. He said that there was a time when Delhi was often criticised for its inefficient transportation system.

"Today, we have all gathered here to give a new momentum to the development of Delhi," Modi highlighted. Modi said that there was a time when Delhi was often criticised for its inefficient transportation system. "Commuting from one part of the city to another would take hours, and women frequently had to wait at bus stops for long periods, hoping to catch a bus or auto-rickshaw. However, the situation in Delhi is rapidly changing," he said.

These corridors will benefit several areas of Delhi, including Burari, Jagatpur-Wazirabad, Khajuri Khas, Bhajanpura, Yamuna Vihar, Madhuban Chowk, Haiderpur

Badli Mor, Bhalaswa and Majlis Park.

Modi laid the foundation stone for three new corridors under Phase V-A of the Delhi Metro, covering a route length of around 16.1 km.

The three new corridors are RK Ashram Marg to Indraprastha, Aerocity to Indira Gandhi Airport Terminal-1 and Tughlakabad to Kalindi Kunj. These corridors will provide direct connectivity to several important locations in the Capital and improve connectivity for those travelling between Noida, south Delhi and the airport.

Emphasising that Delhi is the global identity and energy symbol of Indian democracy, the Prime Minister noted that modernising the Capital's infrastructure and connectivity, such as the Namoo Bharat train and the historic expansion of the Metro network to 375 kilometers, is essential for showcasing India's confidence to the world.

"The more modern, convenient, and better connected Delhi becomes, the more strongly India's self-confidence will be visible to the



PM Narendra Modi with Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal and Delhi CM Rekha Gupta during the inauguration and foundation stone laying ceremony of multiple development projects in New Delhi

world," Modi remarked.

The Prime Minister emphasised that under the double-engine governance model, every transport facility in the national Capital is being systematically upgraded to ensure clean, comfortable, and modern travel for the lakhs of citizens who rely on bus services daily.

"While over four thousand electric buses provided by the Centre are already operational, an additional 1,800 new buses

have been deployed in the last year alone, including hundreds of 'Devi Buses' designed to enhance last-mile connectivity across Delhi's colonies and neighborhoods", Modi remarked.

The Prime Minister stated that the Government is currently working in mission mode to address the diverse challenges facing the national Capital, specifically highlighting how the Peripheral Expressway has successfully

diverted lakhs of vehicles that previously had to enter the city. "A massive initiative for the rejuvenation of the Yamuna River has been launched, with work already underway on projects worth crores of rupees to ensure its cleanliness," highlighted Modi.

Modi slammed the previous AAP dispensation, saying the "AAPda (disaster) Government" halted all development work in Delhi for 10

years. "Their way was to do less work and make more excuses. Today, Delhi has a model of development — excuses have stopped and work has begun.

"Earlier, projects used to die in files and today, projects are being implemented on the ground." Now, our Government is operating in mission mode to address the challenges facing Delhi," he said.

The prime minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of projects worth ₹15,200 crore under the General Pool Residential Accommodation (GPRA) redevelopment plan.

PM Modi, accompanied by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, visited GPRA Type-5 quarters in Sarojini Nagar and handed over the keys to female allottees. He also interacted with some women labourers.

He inaugurated the 12.3-km Majlis Park-Maujpur-Babarpur corridor of the Pink Line and the 9.9-km Deepali Chowk-Majlis Park corridor of the Magenta Line.

The Majlis Park-Maujpur-Babarpur stretch will benefit areas such as Burari, Jagatpur-

Wazirabad, Khajuri Khas, Bhajanpura and Yamuna Vihar, strengthening connectivity in north and east Delhi.

The Deepali Chowk-Majlis Park section is an elevated extension of the Magenta Line and will connect areas including Madhuban Chowk, Uttar Pitampura-Prashant Vihar, Haid Badli Mor and Bhalaswa.

With the addition of these stretches, the Pink Line and Magenta Line networks will expand further, improving last-mile connectivity and easing travel for daily commuters across the Capital, according to the statement.

PM Modi also laid the foundation stone for three new Delhi Metro corridors under Phase V-A of the expansion plan, covering a total route length of around 16.1 km.

These include the Ramakrishna Ashram Marg-Indraprastha corridor, the Aerocity-Indira Gandhi International Airport Terminal-1 corridor and the Tughlakabad-Kalindi Kunj corridor, which are expected to improve connectivity between central Delhi, south Delhi, Noida and the airport.

Metro expansion to ease women's travel: CM Gupta



Women passengers taking selfie inside a Delhi Metro train on the newly inaugurated corridor in New Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday said the expansion of the metro network will ensure safer and easier for daily travel women. Her remarks came as Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated two new metro corridors and laid the foundation stone for three others in the national Capital.

"With the commencement of these corridors, travel will become easier for lakhs of people across Delhi. In particular, areas in Trans-Yamuna such as Wazirabad, Khajuri

Khas, Bhajanpura, Yamuna Vihar and Karawal Nagar will receive Metro connectivity for the first time," the chief minister said.

Addressing the gathering at Burari ground, the chief minister said the Delhi Government has focused on key civic issues with a commitment to "truth and honesty". She noted that her Government worked in "mission mode" over the past year to launch welfare initiatives for the poor and the working class.

The chief minister highlighted that 70 ATal canteens now operate across Delhi, providing meals for ₹5 to around 70,000

people daily. She also mentioned that the Government has introduced a new drainage master plan — the first in 50 years — to address waterlogging and pollution.

The chief minister spoke about several digital initiatives, noting that all Delhi Government departments have been digitised. She listed initiatives such as the e-file system, digital hospital records, online OPD booking, digital asset management, project management portals and the CM Jansunwai app.

In the education sector, she said Delhi schools have been equipped with 7,000

smart classes, 275 computers and 100 digital libraries. She also said the Government used unclaimed funds to provide ₹200 crore to the daughters of Delhi.

"The three new Metro corridors for which the foundation stones were laid today include RK Ashram Marg to Indraprastha, Aerocity to Indira Gandhi Airport Terminal-1, and Tughlakabad to Kalindi Kunj.

"These corridors will further accelerate Delhi's connectivity. The commencement of trial operations on the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway is another significant development for the Capital," she said.

Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar described the metro as "lifeline" of Delhi. Recalling the first metro inauguration on December 24, 2002, by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Khattar said the project was once a dream but has now become a major part of urban transport.

He noted that while only 245 km of metro network existed in five cities until 2014, the network has expanded to over 1,100 km of metro and Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) networks under Prime Minister Modi's leadership.

MCD bulldozes property linked to Tarun Butolia murder accused

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

In a strong message that echoes the Delhi Chief Minister's uncompromising stand and her Government's zero-tolerance policy for such heinous crimes, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Sunday carried out bulldozer action against a property linked to the accused in the brutal murder of 26-year-old Tarun Butolia in the national Capital's Uttam Nagar on Holi, March 4. Heavy police and paramilitary deployment remained in place to maintain law and order in the area, which has been divided in zones, sectors and sub-sectors, a senior police officer said.

The sources said civic authorities reached the locality with bulldozers and demolished "only the illegally constructed parts" of the structure and not the entire house. The MCD officials said the action was taken as part of "removing encroachment" built upon the drains.

"Since the monsoon is approaching, we are removing illegal construction built upon the drains in the area as they disturb the water flow. The structure was built on the



Municipal Corporation of Delhi carry out a demolition drive and razed illegal portions of a house linked to one of the accused in the Uttam Nagar Holi clash case in New Delhi

drain," a senior official from the MCD west zone said.

The area was cordoned off, and police personnel were deployed during the operation as a bulldozer razed portions of the building. Debris and dust filled the street as the structure was brought down under the supervision of officials. Residents and onlookers gathered nearby as authorities continued the demolition.

This comes a day after the Chief Minister Rekha Gupta condemned the killing and said Delhi follows a zero-tolerance policy against such "heinous criminal and violent

acts". On March 4, Tarun (26) was killed in a clash that broke out between his family and their neighbours in the JJ Colony area. The violence broke out after water from a balloon thrown by a girl from Tarun's family splashed on a woman from his neighbour's family, according to police.

The two families had known each other for the past five decades and got into rows over parking and garbage disposal, among other things, police had said. Police said that they have arrested six persons and a minor has been apprehended

so far in connection with the case. Provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and murder charges have been added to the FIR.

The accused have been identified as Umardeen (49), Jummadeen (36), Kamruddin (36), Mustaque (46), Muzaffar (25), Tahir (18) and a minor.

Maan Singh, the victim's relative, had earlier called for justice. He said, "We want the Yogi (Uttar Pradesh chief minister) bulldozer model to be used. Their unauthorised houses should be demolished and all illegal extensions removed."

Admissions begin for 12 special schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi Government has initiated the admission process for 12 Government and Government-aided special schools for the current academic session. Admissions will be open for all classes — from Nursery to Class 10 and Class 12, according to the Directorate of Education.

Parents and guardians will be able to register from March 9 to March 17, 2026. They will be required to submit and verify the necessary documents at their respective schools between March 18 and March 23 during working hours.

Students will be allotted special schools on April 1, depending on the availability of seats, with the entire admission process set to be completed by April 2.



In cases where the number of applicants for a particular class exceeds the available capacity, selection will be done through a draw of lots. This draw, if required, will be conducted on March 24 at 11 am in the presence of school management committee members and parents, the DoE statement said.

After verification of documents and completion of any necessary draw, heads of schools will submit the final list

of selected candidates to the Inclusive Education Branch headquarters on March 25.

If seats remain vacant after the initial allotment, children on the waiting list will be admitted between April 3 and April 5 according to their position in the list, it said.

These 12 schools provide specialised learning support and facilities for children with disabilities, including those with visual impairment and intellectual disabilities.

Uttam Nagar shutdown after Holi clash death, 7 held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Four days after a Holi clash left a 26-year-old man dead in southwest Delhi's Uttam Nagar, shops in the area remain shuttered, markets deserted, while residents struggle to go about their routines, just days before Eid. Meanwhile, seven people have been arrested so far in this matter.

The usual bustle of the Ramzan month in the densely populated neighbourhood has now been replaced with a heavy police and paramilitary deployment, barricading and restrictions on movement keeping customers away.

Residents said the atmosphere in the area resembles a lockdown-like situation, with people hesitant to step out and business activity coming to a near standstill.

"Everything in the entire area is shut, shops and markets are closed. It is almost like a lockdown," Khalid Ali, a resident of the area and a member of the Muslim Samaj Committee, said.

"This is a very large area, yet all the shops are closed. People are unable to move around and are troubled, confined to their homes. In the last 50 years of living here, I have never seen so much police presence," he added.

On March 4, a 26-year-old man, identified as Tarun, was killed following a clash that broke out between his family and their neighbours in the JJ Colony area.

According to police, the violence started after a girl from Tarun's family threw a balloon, splashing a woman from the neighbour's family during Holi celebrations.

Police said the two fami-



lies had known each other for nearly five decades and had previous disagreements over issues such as parking and garbage disposal.

Speaking about the clash, Ali said that barring the recent incident, the area has historically witnessed peaceful coexistence among communities.

"In the last five decades, people here have lived in harmony. Those who are

trying to give it a communal colour, that is not the case here. On any festival, our communal harmony has never been disturbed," he said.

Visuals from the locality after the clash showed long stretches of markets wearing a desolate look. Temporary stalls and roadside vendors have also covered their goods with tarpaulin sheets, while narrow lanes that normally remain crowded on

Ramzan evenings appeared eerily quiet.

Shopkeepers said the timing of the disruption has worsened their losses as Eid is usually one of the busiest periods of the year.

"My shop has been closed for three days. People from outside are not coming to buy goods anymore. No one is coming because of fear," a shopkeeper in the area said.

"It's the month of Eid; usually business is very good during this time, and work is fast. But now everything is ruined," he added.

Residents said the presence of police personnel in large numbers and the tense atmosphere have discouraged visitors from nearby areas, affecting not only shop owners but also daily wage earners and small vendors who depend on the evening rush.

Delhi's Khan Market sees eight per cent rental growth of retail space last year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield data showed that Delhi's upscale Khan Market saw an 8 per cent increase in rent for retail spaces last year on better demand and tight supply.

Data showed that the monthly rent of major high street locations across Delhi-NCR rose in a range of 2-14 per cent last calendar year.

The monthly rent in Khan Market stood at ₹1,700-1,800 per sq ft during the October-December period of 2025, an increase of 8 per cent year-on-year. Khan Market

is the most expensive high-street location in India.

In Connaught Place (Inner Circle), the monthly rent rose 4 per cent to ₹1,150-1,250 per square foot.

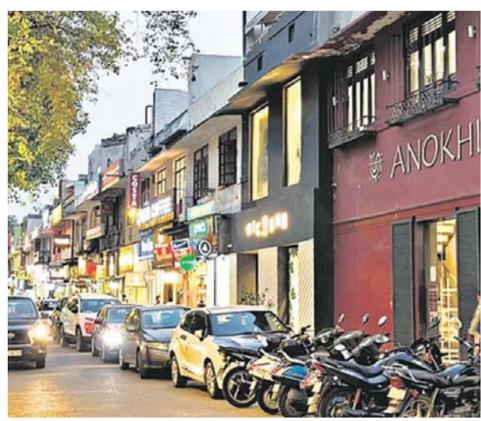
Main street rentals in Galleria Market (Gurugram) recorded highest 14 per cent growth at ₹1,150-1,250 per square foot a month. Monthly rentals in South Extension grew 3 per cent to 800-850 per sq ft.

Rents at Kamla Nagar in Delhi rose 11 per cent to ₹480-510 per square foot a month. Delhi's Greater Kailash-I, M Block, witnessed a 5 per cent increase to ₹475-500 per square foot per month.

In Karol Bagh, Delhi, the monthly rent rose to ₹395-415 per square foot. Rent in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar stood at ₹290-310 per square foot a month, up 3 per cent annually.

Rajouri Garden saw a 6 per cent increase in monthly rent to ₹255-265 per square foot. A 2 per cent increase in rent was recorded in Punjabi Bagh, Delhi to ₹260-275 per square foot a month.

Noida's Sector 18 posted monthly rental growth of 8 per cent to ₹200-220 per sq ft. In Gurugram Sector 29, the monthly rent rose 3 per cent annually to ₹180-190 per square feet during the October-December period of



last year.

Cushman & Wakefield said the asking rent is based on carpet area of ground floor vanilla stores.

Gautam Saraf, Executive Managing Director, Mumbai and New Business, Cushman & Wakefield, said, "High streets across Delhi NCR recorded firm rental appreciation in 2025, with year-on-year growth ranging between 2-14 per cent, reflecting demand that continues to outpace the availability of quality space.

"Retailers across all product categories, particularly food and beverages (F&B) and fashion, are

expanding their presence, he said.

Saraf noted that there is a growing preference among retailers for visibility-driven, high-consumption corridors with consistent footfall.

He mentioned that the rentals across key high-street locations continued to rise despite completion of few malls in the December quarter.

On the Khan Market, Saraf said it remains the country's most expensive high street and recorded around 8 per cent year-on-year rental appreciation in 2025.

"Characterised by consistently strong demand and

extremely tight vacancy, the Khan Market continues to attract premium and luxury brands seeking sustained visibility, brand positioning and deeper engagement with affluent consumer segments," Saraf said.

According to Cushman & Wakefield, the leasing of retail spaces in Delhi-NCR during 2025 stood at 2.25 million square feet the highest since 2019 registering 83 per cent growth as compared to the preceding year.

Mainstreets accounted for 55 per cent of annual leasing, while malls witnessed 45 per cent of total space take-up.



IN FOCUS



A woman carrying a banner against animal cruelty during a 'Saree Walkathon 2026' on the occasion of International Women's Day in Thane, Maharashtra, on Sunday. Participants walked in traditional sarees to promote empowerment and handloom traditions

Trump is dictator, Modi is his slave: Kharage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kalaburagi (Karnataka)

AICC President Mallikarjun Kharage on Sunday said US President Donald Trump is a "dictator" and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is his *gulam* (slave), as he targeted the BJP-led Government at the Centre over its stand on the ongoing Middle Eastern crisis, trade deal with the USA, and tariff issue.

Addressing a gathering after launching various development projects worth ₹1,069 crore in Chittapur here, he claimed that Modi is "controlled" by Trump using the Jeffrey Epstein files.

"It (Iran) is also a country, its supreme leader was murdered...if the leader of a country is killed will that country and the world be safe? Think about it. Whether it is Iran's Ayatollah Ali Khamenei or Venezuela's

leader (Nicolas Maduro Moros). If leaders of countries are threatened like this, there will be no peace in the world," Kharage said, as he accused the US for its "arrogance" and violating international laws.

Also, targeting India's trade deal with the USA, he claimed that India was forced to accept it, where it cannot impose tariffs on the import of several agricultural products, while the Americans impose tariffs on what India exports to them.

"Sixty five per cent of our farmers are dependent on agriculture, while it is 3 per cent in America. What will happen to our farmers? With friendship with such people (Trump), you (Modi) are destroying our country, pushing it to slavery. You have pledged the country for American interests. You act as America says," he added.



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharage, Karnataka Deputy CM DK Shivakumar in Chittapur of Kalaburagi district

Pointing out that India used to get oil from Russia, Iran and Venezuela, Kharage said the country used to buy from wherever it was cheap to fulfill its energy needs, but today the purchase is made based on what Modi directs and at the price he dictates. "He is destroying the country," Modi

calls Trump his friend. India used to get oil from Russia, but Trump said not to do so, or else he will impose tariffs. "This is what Modi's dost (friend) has done."

"Modi speaks so much. He does Mann Ki Baat. Why doesn't he speak now, when America is doing so much

injustice to us by asking us, not to get oil as per our choice," he said. Noting that the US has given a temporary 30-day waiver to allow Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil, Kharage said, "He (Trump) is a dictator. Modi is his *gulam* (slave)."

"Will you accept it (diktat)? The Congress party got the country's freedom from the British. Gandhiji and others sacrificed themselves for the cause by taking bullets. You abused such a Congress and came to power. Did you come to power to take the country to slavery," he asked.

Alleging that Modi's priority was election campaigning, as he is always seen campaigning in various parts of the country like Assam, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu, the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, said people gave him the mandate to administer

and address their concerns based on global events.

"Leaving that, he roams across the country, makes election speeches, and targets Congress and its leaders, despite the Congress not being in power for long. He does it to divert people's attention. While we (Congress) did nation building, Modi is destroying the country," he alleged.

Claiming that the Modi Government's foreign policy is "wrong", Kharage said the country was respected across the globe earlier. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was formed under Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership for world peace.

"What have they (Modi gov't) done? They don't have a good relationship with anyone. He (Modi) goes to every country, wears a medal on his neck and says he was honoured," he said.

India has lost its existence amid West Asia conflict, claims Sanjay Raut

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Srinagar

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday said India as a country has "completely lost its existence" amid all the developments in the war that has flared up in West Asia following the joint US-Israeli attack on Iran.



Bihar CM launches ₹542 cr tunnel project linking 2 museums

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Patna

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday launched the construction of a ₹542-crore underground tunnel that will connect the Bihar Museum and Patna Museum, officials said.

During his visit to the site, Kumar formally initiated the construction work by pressing a button to start the tunnelling machine.

The proposed museum subway is slated to be built near Hartali Mor on Nehru Path in Patna.

"Once the tunnel is com-



pleted, people will be able to easily go from one museum to the other to see the exhibits," Kumar said.

The project is expected to significantly increase tourist footfall, he added. According to a statement

issued by the CMO, officials briefed the chief minister on the construction process and the proposed time-frame for completion.

The chief minister asked officials to ensure adequate arrangements for parking and other visitor facilities in anticipation of the expected increase in footfall, it added.

Kumar toured the Bihar Museum, where Director General Anjani Kumar Singh briefed him on newly installed exhibits, visitor statistics, parking arrangements and other facilities available at the museum complex.

The CM also reviewed the redevelopment of a residential and officers' hostel complex comprising 60 housing units and a park being developed in front of the Bihar Museum.

He directed officials to speed up the work and ensure that the new facility provides improved residential arrangements along Nehru Path.

Kumar was accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha, Chief Secretary Pratyaya Amrit, Principal Secretary to the CM, Deepak Kumar, and other officials.

No breach of protocol by President's event: Mamata



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday asserted there was no breach of protocol at President Droupadi Murmu's programme in Siliguri and said that the responsibility of mismanagement at the function, if any, lay with its private organisers and the Airports Authority of India who provided the venue of the event.

While speaking from the central Kolkata sit-in platform on a day Prime Minister Narendra Modi lashed out at the TMC government "insulting" a woman tribal leader and the President of the country, Banerjee held up an enlarged photograph of the PM remaining seated at an event with veteran BJP leader LK Advani with the President standing next to them.

"The picture shows that the PM is seated when the President is standing. We never do that. It is the BJP which carries the culture of insulting the President, not us," she claimed, while displaying the photograph as "evidence".

"We have full respect for the chair of the President and the Constitution of India, which we consider our mother; do not blame us," Banerjee said.

President Droupadi Murmu had expressed her anguish at not finding either the chief minister or any of her cabinet ministers to receive her at the Bagdogra Airport on Saturday, where she reached to attend an international tribal conference.

Murmu had also expressed her displeasure over the change of venue of her programme near Siliguri.

Maintaining that the state government wasn't even aware of the details of the President's programme and that it wasn't taken into confidence by the private organisers, Banerjee said that the responsibility of the alleged garbage, green room malfunction and lack of women's toilets should be shouldered by the event managers and the AAI on whose plot the function was held. "We did not pick the venue, you did," she said.

Banerjee said that Gautam Deb, the mayor of Siliguri, honoured protocol and was present to receive her in Bagdogra.

"I am sitting in a dharna to protect people's rights. How can I leave?" she said.

"You are targeting Bengal on the eve of assembly elections by saying whatever pleases you. Why? Why? Why?" Banerjee added, without specifying exactly who she referred to.

Punjab Budget: ₹1,000/month for women, ₹1,500 for SC women under new scheme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Chandigarh

The AAP Government in Punjab announced a new scheme on Sunday under which ₹1,000 per month will be given to all women except Scheduled Caste women, who will be getting ₹1,500 monthly.

Providing monthly assistance of ₹1,000 per woman was a key poll promise of the ruling party before the 2022 Punjab Assembly polls.

Presenting the state budget for 2026-27 in the Assembly here, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema announced the implementation of 'Mukh Mantri Mawan Dhian Satikar Yojna' under which Government will transfer the money directly to the accounts of women.

The Bhagwant Mann Government launched the new scheme nearly four years after the Aam Aadmi Party came to power in Punjab. For women belonging to the SC community, the Government will transfer ₹1,500 per month directly to their accounts, Cheema said. The



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann being presented 5th Budget of the State Government by Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema

announcement coincided with International Women's Day. It is the first time that the state budget was presented on a Sunday.

Cheema said this new scheme for women will be not just India's but also the world's first universal cash transfer scheme for women.

"Every woman in Punjab above 18 years of age will be eligible to enrol under this scheme barring only few existing or past permanent Government employees, existing and past MPs/MLAs

and income tax payees," he said.

Even woman enrolled under existing social security pension schemes e.g. old-age pension or widow/destitute women pension or disability pension scheme will be eligible under this scheme, he further said.

"In all, around 97 per cent of all adult women in Punjab will be eligible under this scheme, which is the highest for any state in India," said Cheema.

This initiative seeks to promote economic independence, strengthen women's role in household decision-making, improve health and nutritional outcomes, and encourage continued education and higher aspirations among girls.

It affirms the Government's belief that empowerment must reflect in tangible financial security and greater dignity for women across Punjab, said the FM.

Targeting rival parties, Cheema said many states have started the 'jumla' of announcing similar schemes but they limit it only to a small section of women, ignoring the vast majority of women who are financially dependent on men for their most basic needs.

"For example, one of our neighbouring states announced a similar scheme but limited it only to households with annual income under Rs 1 lakh covering only 20 per cent of all adult women," he said without naming the state.

But Punjab will not do such 'jumlas', said Cheema.

COOCH BEHAR TOP LIST OF 'UNDER ADJUDICATION' VOTERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kolkata

Three border-adjacent Assembly constituencies in West Bengal's Cooch Behar -- Dinahata, Sitai and Sitalkuchi -- together account for the highest number of voters whose names are currently "under adjudication" in the district, election officials said.

According to Chief Electoral Officer statistics, across the nine Assembly segments of Cooch Behar district, a total of 2,38,107 electors are marked as "under adjudication". Of these, 1,03,548 voters come from just the three border constituencies, 35,932 in Dinahata, 36,405 in Sitai and 31,201 in Sitalkuchi, the data show.

The adjudication category includes voters whose entries were flagged during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and are now subject to further scrutiny before their voting status can be confirmed.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kolkata

Government's policy on the matter.

Sunday expressed concerns about the war in the Middle East and its "grave repercussions, including rising energy prices and disruptions to supply chains and air and maritime traffic." He warned of the dangers of the conflict expansion which he said could plunge the entire region into chaos, the Egyptian president said. He called for intensified international efforts to stop the war which was triggered by U.S. and Israeli strikes against Iran on Feb. 28. El-Sissi's comments came in a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron.

The duo reportedly forged a partnership while in Tihar Jail for separate narcotics offences. Upon their release, they utilised an online forum to establish their vendor identity, later migrating to the encrypted messaging application to evade law enforcement surveillance and facilitate order fulfilment. Officials suspect that over 1,000 consignments have been dispatched across India since January 2025. Consignments were routed to states including Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, and Karnataka. To bypass detection, the traffickers utilised a "dead drop" delivery system in parts of Delhi and leveraged various courier services for pan-India dispatches, deliberately rotating booking offices for every order.

The accused, it is alleged, exclusively accepted payments in crypto currencies such as Monero and USDT. To obfuscate the audit trail, the funds were routed through multiple layers of intermediary wallets.

PM Modi slams Mamata over Murmu protocol...

According to sources, the Union Home Secretary has flagged four points: Why the CM, the Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police were not present to receive and see off the President, why there was no water in the washroom set up for President, why the route chosen by the administration was laden with garbage and What action has been taken against the district magistrate, Darjeeling, the Commissioner of Police, Siliguri and the Additional District Magistrate.

"Mamata Banerjee is like my younger sister. I am also a daughter of Bengal. I do not know whether she is upset. Anyway, that does not matter. All of you stay well," the President had said. She also questioned the change of venue for the tribal community's annual programme from Bidhannagar to Goshapur, where the turnout was reportedly low.

Israel targets Iranian oil, escalating conflict

He said such attacks will have "devastating the environment, and endangering lives on a massive scale" because of hazardous materials and toxic substances they release into the air.

"The consequences of this environmental and humanitarian catastrophe will not be confined within Iran's borders," he said.

President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi of Egypt on

Champions, yet again

Following the demolition act with the bat, Jasprit Bumrah's artistry was good enough to dash any little hopes that New Zealand players might just have harboured at the back of their minds.

Bumrah was unreal as ever with figures of 4-0-15-4, adding to the mythical story of his career which will become folklore in years to come.

As far-fetched as it might sound, the current Indian T20 team under Gambhir's coaching has had the aura of USA's 'Dream Team' filled with the biggest of NBA stars like Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and Larry Bird that won the 1992 Barcelona Olympics gold medal. (PTI)

JD(U) inducts Nishant Kumar as party...

Clad in a kurta-pyjama and wearing a flip-flop, Nishant said, "My father decided to go to the Rajya Sabha. It was his personal decision. We all respect it. We will keep working under his guidance. I will work to strengthen the organisation." Speculation is rife that Nishant will be made deputy CM in the new Government.

The party also announced Nitish Kumar will resume his 'Sammridhi Yatra' from Monday and his son Nishant make take over the baton to continue further. The Sammridhi Yatra was launched on January 16 from West Champaran district, but had to be discontinued due to the Budget session of the Bihar Assembly.

"I thank everyone. I will honour the trust you

all have placed in me. The country, our state and I are proud of what my father has done in the last 20 years. I will take the development work done by the CM to the masses," Nishant said.

Large defaulters leave PSU banks chasing ₹29...

While the Videocon Group was later implicated in bribing ₹350 crore to Deepak Kochhar, husband of then ICICI Bank chief Chanda Kochhar, GVK Group was taken over by the Adani Group after the CBI registered a case based on a CAG report alleging theft of public money — as the biggest NPAs.

India has 12 PSU banks, which regularly publish data on Large Defaulters. For banks, these defaults are problematic as the loans were given without collateral security. Interestingly, only Indian Bank has not published any details for the past year. Among the 11 PSU banks, the highest Large Defaulters are with Union Bank of India (UBI), with ₹9.96 lakh crores in dues. Bankers argue that UBI reached the top spot after Corporation Bank and Andhra Bank were merged with it. State Bank of India (SBI) is second with ₹5.79 lakh crores in dues, followed by Punjab National Bank (PNB) with ₹2.59 lakh crores, Canara Bank with ₹2.49 lakh crores, Bank of Baroda with ₹2.21 lakh crores, Bank of Maharashtra with ₹1.78 lakh crores, Central Bank of India with ₹1.44 lakh crores, UCO Bank with ₹1.11 lakh crores, Bank of India with ₹96,512 crores, Indian Overseas Bank with ₹30,861 crores and Punjab and Sind Bank with ₹27,954 crores.

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In the coming days, *The Pioneer* will publish bank-wise details of Large Defaulters owing more than ₹500 crores to PSU banks — large corporate borrowers who allegedly secured loans without collateral through political patronage and bribery of bankers.

Parliament braces for Birla storm

Birla had recused himself from the proceedings of the House from the date of submission of the notice, with the Lok Sabha secretariat saying he would return only after the disposal of the agenda. Both the ruling BJP and the principal Opposition Congress have issued a whip to their respective Lok Sabha MPs to be present in the House when the issue comes up for consideration. The Congress has called for a debate on the notice given by 118 MPs Trinamool Congress has also said that it would support the resolution against Birla.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Modi backed Birla, saying he had taken all Parliamentarians along and was committed to the principles of the Constitution and Parliamentary democracy.

The Lok Sabha may not take up the Question Hour between 11 am and 12 noon on Monday, as it may get adjourned to pay respect to sitting member from Shillong Ricky Syngkon who passed away on February 19. Apart from the no-trust notice, the US-Israeli strikes on Iran and growing tensions in West Asia that have led to disruption in crude oil supplies and escalation in prices are also likely to come up during the session. The opposition is expected to question the



GRAPEVINE

Dy Speaker ambitions derailed

From 2019 onwards, Lok Sabha is running without Deputy Speaker, the post always given to largest Opposition party. One senior Congress MP rued, his chance to become Deputy Speaker was sabotaged by other Congress MPs from his State. According to him, in 2014 ruling party BJP asked Congress on suggesting name for Deputy Speaker post and party did not take up that offer. He says, some of his colleagues envied of him getting good bungalow and amenities and seat on front row along with Leader of Opposition. "They might not like to address me with respect, when I sit on Chair," quipped veteran Congress MP from down south.



Who will be Bihar's Sanjay!

With the imminent change of political setup in Bihar, the long-time bureaucratic associates of Nitish Kumar will see a major upheaval. All eyes are now on Chief Secretary Pratayam Amrit, the most trusted Babu of 'Susashan Kumar'. While Pratayam Amrit has 'friends' across party lines and is considered close to JDU's chief strategist Working President Sanjay Kumar Jha and would do best to secure his position, grapevine in the corridors of Seva Teerth has it that Sanjay Kumar, 1990 IAS Bihar, currently serving as Secretary of School Education in Union Ministry of Education, could be repatriated to his home cadre with a fixed tenure as CS. Before Holi in Bihar, Sanjay Kumar was being considered for appointment as the new CEO of NITI Aayog.

Uneasy Start at Seva Teerth

The first Cabinet meeting held in the newly constructed 'Seva Teerth' began on a noticeably uneasy note, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing strong displeasure over the functioning of Education Ministry's autonomous arms UGC and NCERT. Sources familiar with the meeting said PM questioned why issues relating to academic bodies were repeatedly becoming national talking points and occupying prime space in the media. Despite the serious tone of the early part of the meeting, there were lighter exchanges too once the discussion moved beyond the contentious topics. A few were heard chatting about the architectural layout and Vastu of the 'New PMO'.



Govt launches logo design contest for VB G RAM G Act

The Rural Development Ministry said a logo design competition for the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act (VB G RAM G) has been launched.

The competition is live on the Government's citizen engagement platform MyGov, the ministry said in a post on X on Saturday, inviting people to submit creative designs reflecting the vision of rural development and employment generation.



The ministry said it seeks to promote public participation in branding the programme, which is a key pillar of the Government's rural development strategy aligned with the vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047'. The last date for submitting entries is March 20, and the winner will receive a cash prize of ₹50,000.

In a post on X, the ministry said the logo should reflect the vision of a developed India. According to details shared on the MyGov portal, the selected design will be adopted by the ministry for official and promotional use related to the Act and associated programmes.

Grew up in a family where women were bosses: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

"I grew up in a family where the women were the bosses," Congress leader Rahul Gandhi told students during an interaction in Kerala recently, while asserting that women are generally more intelligent than men.

On International Women's Day, Gandhi posted a video of his interaction with the students on his YouTube channel on Sunday and said that a few days ago, he met some young women students in Kerala during a lunch interaction and had a very interesting conversation with them.

"I was deeply impressed by each student's dreams, curiosity, and confidence. Such conversations remind us that when women recognise their potential and move forward with an open



Rahul Gandhi interacting with female students while having a meal on the occasion of International Women's Day in Kerala

mind, they can bring about extraordinary change," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

"Every woman is unique. Their sensitivity, understanding, and emotional intelligence provide balance and direction to society. Women also wield power in their

own unique ways — with patience, long-term vision, and empathy," Gandhi asserted in his post in Hindi, accompanying the video.

"Therefore, they should have every right to move forward according to their identity, personality, and aspirations, rather than

being bound by society's restrictive norms," he said.

"Heartiest greetings to all women on International Women's Day. May your strength, courage, and dreams continue to propel society toward a positive future," Gandhi said.

Posting the video on X, Gandhi said interacting with some young students in Kerala was incredibly inspiring. "Their confidence and belief in their dreams demonstrate that women are the ultimate force for change," he said.

In the video, Gandhi is seen having a free-wheeling chat with the women students. "I grew up in a family where the women were the bosses. So the boss of my family was my grandmother and I have always in my family, like on this table, been outnumbered by women," Gandhi tells the students.

Need to adopt holistic approach towards women's issues: Pradhan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday asserted upon the need to adopt a holistic and inclusive approach towards women's issues rather than working in isolation.

Pradhan made the comments during a discussion on "Knowledge as Power" at the two-day "Bharati Naari to Narayani: National Convention of Women Thought Leaders" organised by Rashtriya Sevika Samiti.

"We cannot work on women's issues in isolation. There is need to adopt a holistic and inclusive approach towards them," he said. "Nari tu Narayani is a fundamental concept of our civilisation, and this conference reflects that.

A few days ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote an article on the thousand-year-old attack on the



Dharmendra Pradhan

Somnath Temple and the attempts to destroy symbols of faith and civilisation.

"He (Modi) also called for liberation from Macaulay's slave mentality by 2035.

The confusion in society caused by the Macaulay mentality has caused the greatest harm to women.

Attempts have been made to change our fundamental concepts," Pradhan added.

Farmers not getting water for irrigation, fair price for crops in Gujarat: Kejriwal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Gandhinagar

Farmers in BJP-ruled Gujarat don't get water for irrigation or fair price for their produce and are thrown into jail if they raise their voice, AAP leader and former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Sunday.

Addressing farmers at the 'Pariwartin Lao, Kisan Bachao' rally, he also claimed he was jailed despite being a sitting

CM for raising his voice against corruption. However, the court said there is no case against him, the AAP leader claimed referring to his recent discharge in the Delhi excise policy case. The BJP said he was a thief but the courts exonerated him stating there is no evidence to prosecute him in the case, the AAP leader added.

"The BJP Government committed atrocities against farmers in Gujarat by throwing them in jail at Haddad in

Botad district last year for raising their voice. The farmers of Gujarat are crying tears of blood. In some places, there's no drinking water, in others, no irrigation water. Prices are capped, and farmers don't get fair prices for their crops," he said.

The BJP has been in power for 30 years, but they've done nothing in these 30 years, and farmers must take a pledge to throw the party out of power, Kejriwal said. "In the upcom-



ing 2027 elections, do not change the party, change the system. They plead with you for votes during election, then kick you out after winning the polls. The Botad protest was about the BJP Government sending a message to farmers of Gujarat that anyone who raises his voice will face this situation," Kejriwal claimed.

Whenever AAP leaders raised their voice against corruption, they were jailed,

he alleged. "These people put me in jail for six months. Never before in 75 years of India's independence has a sitting CM been thrown into jail. They arrested five big leaders of our party. These people searched everywhere but did not find a single penny. If a sitting chief minister is picked up and thrown in jail then what is the status of common citizens," he questioned while slamming the BJP.

CPI(M) slams Centre over LPG price hike, seeks rollback



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The CPI(M) on Sunday hit out at the Government over the steep hike in LPG prices, accusing it of an "anti-people" stance by "refusing" to reduce taxes on cooking gas cylinders.

In a statement issued here, the CPI(M) Politburo expressed strong opposition to the price increase affecting both domestic as well as commercial consumers. The left party noted that the ₹60 hike for domestic cylinders would heavily impact poor beneficiaries of the Ujjwala scheme.

"The hike in the prices of commercial cylinders by ₹114.50 will also ultimately be passed on to the consumers. Together, these will impose greater burdens on middle-class and working people who are already reeling under relentless price rise and shrinking real incomes," the statement said.

"The refusal to forego revenue from taxes on cylinders exposes the anti-people nature of the Government," it said. The left party dismissed the

Government's reference to the West Asian conflict as a justification for the hike, calling it a "hypocritical attempt" to hide its own responsibility.

"In reality, it reflects the Government's capitulation before the war-mongering policies of the Trump administration and its readiness to serve US global hegemonic interests while ignoring the interests of our country and its people," it alleged. The CPI(M) has demanded an immediate withdrawal of the price hike.

Domestic LPG prices were increased by ₹60 per cylinder on Saturday, making it the second such hike in rate in less than a year.

Following the revision, a non-subsidised 14.2-kg LPG cylinder in Delhi costs ₹913, up from ₹853, according to the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC).

Over 10 crore Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries will also face the same increase. They will now pay ₹613 per cylinder, factoring in the ₹300 subsidy provided for up to 12 refills annually.

The price of a 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder has increased by ₹114.5.

Women are strong, no less than others: President

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday lauded women's strength and achievements, and exhorted them to realise their full potential, saying, "We are no lesser beings."

Addressing an event organised by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to mark the International Women's Day, the president said the occasion was not only to honour women's achievements but also to reaffirm the nation's commitment to their empowerment.

Murmu highlighted women's pioneering roles in education, administration, judiciary, armed forces,

medicine, science, technology, arts, entrepreneurship and sports.

She noted that rural women are becoming economically self-reliant through self-help groups and providing leadership in village development, while women continue to emerge as leaders in employment, start-ups, and the corporate sector.

"With opportunity and support, women can excel in every sphere," she said, adding, "Mahilao mei dam hai, hum kisi se kam nahi. Hum mei bhi dam hai (Women are powerful, we are no less than others. We, too, have strength)."

The president underscored that while many



President Droupadi Murmu addressing the gathering during the National Convention of Women Thought Leaders in New Delhi

achievements have been made, several obstacles still exist in ensuring women's equal participation in society.

"These challenges cannot be resolved by law alone. It is necessary to change our

mindset," she said.

She emphasised that parents must not discriminate between daughters and sons at home. She said mothers-in-law should not discriminate between their own daughters and daugh-

ters-in-law, and daughters-in-law should be treated as daughters. "True equality begins with recognising every woman as a daughter, irrespective of her role in the family," she added.

She congratulated the Ministry of Women and Child Development for organising the 'Shakti Walk — SheLeadsBharat' on Sunday as part of the International Women's Day celebrations. The event featured a walk from India Gate to Vijay Chowk. Murmu also lauded the dedication of women from across the country who participated in the event, highlighting their commitment to India's progress and the empowerment of women nationwide.

President living example of women's potential: WCD Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Extending greetings on International Women's Day, Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annpurna Devi on Sunday said women are the foundation of a developed India. She also praised President Droupadi Murmu as a living example of women's potential.

Highlighting a women-led walk — titled 'Shakti Walk — She Leads Bharat' — organised at Kartavya Path, the minister said women's leadership is emerging strongly in the country, which is moving from "women's development" to "women-led development". "Today is a celebration of

the resolve, dedication and achievements of India's women, who form the foundation of a developed India. President Droupadi Murmu herself is a living example that when a woman is given opportunity and respect, she can reach the top," Devi said at a Women's Day event organised by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Referring to Government initiatives, Devi said over ₹5 lakh crore was allocated in the 2026-27 gender Budget for women's empowerment. She said the Government has adopted a "life cycle-based approach" for women's development, beginning with birth and education.



Union Minister for Women and Child Development Annpurna Devi

"A life cycle-based approach has been adopted for the holistic development of women, starting from birth and education. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao cam-

paign launched by the prime minister has changed societal attitude towards girls; now the birth of daughters is celebrated as a joyous occasion," she said.

The campaign has led to a significant improvement in the sex ratio at birth; the gross enrolment ratio of girls is also steadily increasing, she said. The minister said special initiatives are being implemented to increase girls' participation at all levels of education.

"India leads globally in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) with 43 per cent participation of girls. Women scientists have played a significant role in the Mars mission," she said, adding that the government is establishing girls' hostels across districts to open new opportunities for them. Underlining that empowerment is incomplete

without safety, Devi said Mission Shakti is a flagship initiative for women's security, complemented by the 'One Women Helpline', women help desks at police stations, and Safe City projects that act as protective shields.

She said more than 750 fast-track special courts are ensuring speedy justice. The government is also committed to eradicating child marriage. "The She-Box Portal has been launched to enable women in organised and unorganised sectors to participate in the workforce with dignity and confidence. A zero-tolerance policy has been adopted against crimes violating women's dignity," the minister said.

ED to challenge interim bail granted to Al Falah chairman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate is expected to challenge the interim bail granted by a local court to Al Falah University group chairman Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui stating he can influence the probe as "more aspects" of the case are still under investigation, officials said.

A court in Delhi granted two-week interim bail to Siddiqui, 61, on Saturday in a money laundering case linked to alleged generation of illicit funds, from the fees paid by students of his Faridabad-based educational institution, by allegedly misrepresenting the accreditation and recognition of his colleges.

He was arrested by the ED in November 2025 and is lodged in jail under judicial custody. The money laundering case against Siddiqui and the varsity stems from two Delhi Police FIRs pertaining to alleged fraud with the students.

Siddiqui had applied for the interim bail in order to support and take care of his wife, who is suffering from stage 4 cancer and is slated to undergo a chemotherapy session scheduled on March 12. ED officials told media that the agency will challenge the local court's order before the Delhi High Court soon, stating that its submissions made before the local court, in order to prevent the grant of interim bail to Siddiqui, were "not considered seriously" and



Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui

that there was another FIR filed against him under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) linked to the Red Fort area blast of November 10 last year.

It is also expected to inform the HC about the charges made against him in the ED chargesheet that three doctors, two arrested by the NIA and the third an alleged suicide bomber of the Red Fort area blast, apart from other specialists were appointed to the Al Falah medical college without any police verification or scrutiny. It has said these hirings happened at the varsity which is "controlled" by Siddiqui.

The agency is expected to reiterate its arguments before the HC, which were made before the local court while seeking to stop his interim bail, that he had "substantial financial capacity and shall influence the investigation." The ED told the Delhi court that he should not be granted the relief as there are "more aspects" of investigation which are "still pending" and he may "tamper" with witnesses and influence stake holders connected with the case.



People taking part in the traditional Gair procession during Rang Panchami celebrations in Indore on Sunday. The historic procession features traditional stick dances and colourful street celebrations



States Focus

Northeast witnessing connectivity development: VP



WOMEN'S GROWTH CRUCIAL FOR COUNTRY: HIMACHAL GUV

Women are stepping forward in every field, and there is a need to further encourage them as development of half of the country's population is important for its growth, Himachal Pradesh Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla said on Sunday. Shukla, said his three-year tenure in Himachal was good and advised the State Government to stand on their own feet by adopting a better work culture. Interacting with the media, he expressed his gratitude to the State people for supporting the campaign for a drug-free Himachal.



SIKKIM CM FLAGS OFF 5TH TSONGO ULTRA MARATHON

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang flagged off the high-altitude Tsomgo Ultra 5.0 Marathon here on Sunday. The Tsomgo Ultra Marathon, known for testing both physical strength and mental endurance, featured several race categories to accommodate runners of different abilities. These included the 72 km ultra race, 21 km half marathon, 10 km run, and a 5 km fun run. The event attracted professional athletes, fitness enthusiasts, and amateur runners, many of whom were eager to experience the unique challenge of running at high altitude.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati/Agartala

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Sunday said the Northeast has been witnessing connectivity development over the past decade, boosting economic activities in the region. Addressing the convocation of Tripura Central University at Suryamaninagar in West Tripura, he said that in the past decade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has relentlessly tapped the potential of the Northeast.

"I hail from Chennai, and it was difficult to travel from Chennai to Agartala on the same day. Now, with better infrastructure in place, many long-distance trains connect Agartala. Today, we can travel from Kohima to Agartala on the same day, which is a symbol of a more connected India," he said.



Vice President CPRadhakrishnan, left, being presented a memento at Tripura University's 14th Convocation ceremony in Agartala on Sunday

Radhakrishnan said, "In the past decade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has relentlessly tapped the potential of the Northeast. The economy is also circulating at a faster pace in the Northeast."

The Vice President also exhorted the university authorities to continue producing high-quality research papers for innovation. "The Tripura Central University has emerged as a vibrant centre of teaching,

research and innovation. It has been making steady progress in high-quality research work. This should be continued with innovation, and the number of intellectual properties should increase. Participating in the national research platform is the signal of arrival on the national academic landscape," he said.

Emphasising proper time management to achieve success, he said, individuals meet several failures before becoming successful.

Highlighting the transformative role of technology, Radhakrishnan urged students to use it positively and responsibly, stating that "progress with purpose" is essential for the advancement of society and humanity. Quoting the renowned Tamil poet Subramania Bharathiyar, he said that every

citizen of India is a guardian of the nation and that collective effort and unity will propel the country towards greater achievements.

He exhorted the students to double their efforts instead of being disheartened by failure to achieve success; success will be at their doorstep. Governor N Indrasena Reddy, Chief Minister Manik Saha and Vice Chancellor Shyamal Kumar Das also addressed the event.

Radhakrishnan said the foundation stone for the Matabari tourist circuit was laid in January 2026 at Udaipur in Gomati district to boost tourism. "I was told by the Collector of Gomati that the tourist footfall has increased from 3.5 lakh to 8.50 lakh (annually) at Maa Tripurasundari temple. It will surely add local employment. A stagnant economy will never grow until we push it for circulation," he said.

Digvijaya exits RS race, to stay in politics

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

In a significant political announcement that is likely to reshape the Congress party's calculus for the upcoming Rajya Sabha election in Madhya Pradesh, senior leader and former Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh on Sunday declared that he would not seek a third consecutive term in the Upper House of Parliament. His current tenure concludes on April 9, 2026.

Speaking to reporters at his residence in Bhopal, Singh said he had already communicated his decision to the party leadership. He was, however, emphatic that his withdrawal from the Rajya Sabha race should not be misconstrued as a retreat from active politics.

"I have requested my party that after completing my second term, I do not want to go to the Rajya Sabha for a third term. But that does not mean I will stop working for the Congress. I will continue to work for the party till my last breath," he said, with the characteristic resolve that has defined six decades of his public life.

Singh has been an indomitable presence in Madhya Pradesh's political landscape for decades. He served as Chief Minister from 1993 to 2003 — a decade that left a defining imprint on the State's administrative and political character — and has remained one of the Congress party's most consequential strategists at the national level. His assertion



that he would continue working at the grassroots in Madhya Pradesh signals that his departure from Parliament will by no means dim his political engagement within the state.

In a separate but equally significant development, Singh wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding that basmati rice

cultivated across 14 districts of Madhya Pradesh be granted a Geographical Indication tag. He argued that the absence of GI recognition has long deprived farmers in the Gwalior-Chambal, Malwa and Mahakaul regions of the fair market value their produce commands.

Despite yielding aromatic basmati of exceptional quality, cultivators in districts including Sheopur, Morena, Bhind, Gwalior, Shivpuri, Datia, Guna, Vidisha, Raisen, Sehore, Harda, Hoshangabad, Narsinghpur and Jabalpur have remained economically disadvantaged — a grievance, Singh noted, that has persisted without resolution for nearly two decades.

Fadnavis inaugurates Pune's new double-decker flyover

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Pune

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday virtually inaugurated Pune's new flyover, commonly known as the double-decker bridge, which is expected to ease traffic congestion across several parts of the city.

Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar, present at the inauguration in Pune, recalled that her late husband and then Deputy CM Ajit Pawar had faced criticism for ordering the demolition of the old bridge. She expressed hope that the new structure would ease traffic woes for the people. The flyover on Ganeshkhind Road was opened to the public after CM Fadnavis inaugurated it via video conference.

The structure, constructed by the Pune Metropolitan Region Development Authority (PMRDA), features a double-decker design with a road flyover on the first level and a Metro line constructed above. It is expected to streamline traffic in areas including Baner, Pashan,

Shivajinagar and Aundh. Union minister Murlidhar Mohol and Deputy CM Sunetra Pawar were present during the inauguration.

The deputy CM recalled that Ajit Pawar, who died in a plane crash in January, had taken a "bold decision" to demolish the old bridge. He consistently took the follow-up of the construction work and even faced criticism multiple times, she noted.

"Ajit Dada (as he was fondly called) always ensured that the citizens of Pune faced the least possible inconvenience. The project has been completed due to Ajit Dada's continuous follow-up. In the recently presented state budget, allocation for infrastructure has been increased by 21 per cent. Let us try to fulfil the dreams that Ajit Dada envisioned for Pune," she said.

The new bridge will help reduce the problem of traffic congestion here, Sunetra Pawar said. She congratulated Pune's citizens for the new bridge and also extended greetings on International Women's Day being celebrated on Sunday.



CPI(M), BJP criticise Rahul Gandhi's poll guarantees in Kerala

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Thiruvananthapuram

A day after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi announced five poll guarantees for Kerala, CPI(M) and BJP leaders on Sunday criticised the promises, with some leaders claiming they would not be implemented.

Rahul had announced free travel for women in KSRTC buses, ₹1,000 per month for girls studying in colleges, an increase in welfare pension to ₹3,000 per month, a family insurance cover of ₹25 lakh, and ₹5 lakh interest-free loans for young entrepreneurs.

State Finance Minister K N Balagopal told reporters that people are well aware of the guarantees made by the



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

Congress party. "When the UDF was in power, the welfare pension was only ₹600 and payments for 18 months were pending. People also remember reports that 24 persons committed suicide after being denied retirement benefits in KSRTC," he said. He said that during the

UDF regime, many KSRTC buses were non-functional. "Now we release around ₹2 crore to KSRTC every month for paying pension alone. Apart from that, we release ₹50 crore every month for the salary of KSRTC employees. After proper management, KSRTC is now function-

ing properly," he said. Balagopal said the LDF manifesto would be released soon. "People know that promises made by Congress were never implemented.

People in Kerala will not fall for their words. On the other hand, we have implemented all the promises we made, and they were completed by November last year," he said.

He said that despite the Centre allegedly denying funds, Kerala has managed to survive, but the situation is very different in Congress-ruled Himachal Pradesh.

"Himachal Pradesh's Chief Minister recently went to Delhi, saying the state has no money to pay salaries. The announced DA and salary

revision were withdrawn," he said. Balagopal also alleged that in Telangana, where the Congress is in power, the chief minister had said salaries to employees cannot be paid on the first day of the month. He also claimed that appointments in Government departments have been suspended in these States. "They are declaring these guarantees not to implement them. It has to be taken only in that way," Balagopal said.

Industries Minister P Rajeev said the public, after hearing the guarantees announced by the Congress, had started remembering the days when the UDF Government was in power. "During the UDF regime,

KSRTC was on the verge of closure. Where will the promises of such people reach?" he asked. Rajeev said that, out of the ₹2,000 welfare pension currently given in the state, the UDF Government's contribution was just ₹100.

"Even that amount was only promised but not given. Only the LDF Government under VS Achuthanandan paid the pending amount. With such a history, these promises are being made," he said. Transport Minister KB Ganesh Kumar said that if the guarantees announced by Rahul Gandhi were implemented for even two months, KSRTC would collapse and there would be nothing left to pay employees' salaries.

Security foils jailbreak attempt at Jammu after inmate brawl



MOHIT KANDHARI
■ Jammu

A jailbreak attempt was foiled by the security personnel inside the district jail Dhangri in Rajouri late on Saturday evening after prisoners hailing from Kashmir and locals came close to exchanging fisticuffs after a verbal brawl broke out between two inmates.

Reports claimed at least eight inmates and four security personnel received injuries as chaos prevailed inside the jail premises following a clash between the two groups.

More than 250 inmates are currently lodged inside the jail. According to official sources, around 60 jail inmates hail from the Kashmir valley.

According to jail authorities, a handful of prisoners hailing from Kashmir set blankets on fire and also pelted stones targeting jail and police personnel, in a bid to escape the jail premises.

However, swift action by the district police and jail authorities prevented the sit-

uation from taking an ugly turn, and the situation was brought under control with the help of central paramilitary forces. The local police authorities have registered an FIR, and investigations have been launched to unravel the alleged jailbreak plot.

As a precautionary measure, additional troops were rushed to the spot to maintain order and restore peace inside the jail premises. According to official sources, a team of doctors from the Government Medical College Rajouri was also rushed inside the district jail premises to monitor the injured prisoners. The injured security personnel were rushed to the hospital for medical aid.

Some of the injured inmates were escorted to the medical college premises on Sunday for some mandatory investigations. According to jail authorities, the situation remained peaceful on Sunday as necessary measures were taken to restore order inside the jail premises following a violent clash.

Family of TN man allege custodial torture led to his death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chennai

High tension prevailed at the Madurai Government Rajaji Hospital on Sunday after a 26-year-old youth, arrested in connection with an assault case, died in judicial custody. The parents of the deceased have alleged brutal custodial torture and caste-based discrimination by the Manamadurai police.

The deceased, identified as Akash Delison (26), a graduate from Krishnarajapuram, was arrested alongside another youth, Guna (23), following a CCTV-recorded sickle attack on two individuals in Zion Nagar on Friday.

According to police sources, Akash sustained a fracture in his right leg after

falling while attempting to evade arrest. Following a remand order by the Manamadurai Judicial Magistrate until March 18, he was admitted to the prisoners' ward at the Madurai Government Rajaji Hospital for treatment. Authorities stated that Akash developed "breathing difficulties" early Sunday morning and passed away shortly after.

However, the youth's parents, Rajesh Kannan and Anandhi, who spoke to reporters at the hospital, levelled grave accusations against the personnel of the Manamadurai police station.

The father alleged that the police took Akash to a secluded forested area under the guise of an investigation. "They placed stones



on his legs and beat him until his bones shattered," Rajesh Kannan told reporters. The family further alleged that the police targeted Akash using casteist slurs during the assault.

The mother, Anandhi, claimed that police officials had previously threatened the family, stating, "If we get our hands on your son, we will kill him." The bereaved

family has refused to accept Akash's body, demanding the personal intervention of VCK Chief and MP Thol Thirumavalavan.

Meanwhile, human rights activist Henry Tiphagne, Executive Director of People's Watch Tamil Nadu, issued a video statement on Sunday condemning the police brutality. He claimed that Delison's death is the

26th custodial death. The incident has sparked a wave of unrest in the region, particularly as it follows the recent sensational murder of temple guard Ajit Kumar within the same police jurisdiction.

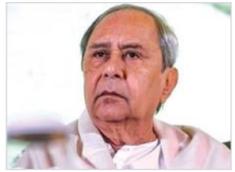
A heavy police contingent, led by Manamadurai Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Raja, has been deployed at the Madurai hospital mortuary to prevent any law-and-order flare-ups.

Senior officials are currently holding talks with the family and community leaders to pacify the protesters. The body remains at the Madurai Rajaji Hospital morgue pending further legal proceedings and a magisterial inquiry.

Patnaik slams Odisha's BJP govt over spike in crimes against women

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bhubaneswar

BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik on Sunday slammed the BJP Government in Odisha for "total failure of leadership" over the "rising" number of incidents of crimes against women.



BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik

Addressing the party's women leaders and members here on the occasion of International Women's Day, Patnaik said the BJD, which follows the ideology of former chief minister Biju Patnaik, had taken major steps for the empowerment of women when it was in power in the state.

"However, under the BJP Government, atrocities against women are on the rise, and no one is there to listen to them... (It's a) total failure of the leadership at the Government level," he said.

Stating that the BJD recognises the power of women in social development, the leader of the opposition in the state assembly said his party will continue to fight for the security, dignity and "true empowerment" of women.

Transparent governance now reality in J&K: LG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jammu

Jammu and Kashmir today stands at a pivotal juncture, with the past five to six years witnessing transformative changes that have made the governance system more transparent and firmly oriented towards public service, Lt Governor Manoj Sinha said on Sunday.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating ACB headquarters building at Sidhra in Jammu and ACB APKS branch, Awantipora, Sinha said these two buildings are not merely structures of steel, glass, and concrete



Lt Governor Manoj Sinha

but they stand as a bold declaration of transparency in public life and a corruption-free Union Territory.

"Today, J&K stands at a pivotal juncture. Over the past 5-6 years, we have ushered in transformative changes, rendering the system transparent and dedicating it to public service," the Lt Governor said.

Women entrepreneurs to drive economic empowerment in Andhra: CM Naidu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Amaravati

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday said that women entrepreneurs will play a key role in strengthening economic empowerment in the state.

Addressing International Women's Day celebrations at Amaravati Parade Grounds here, the chief minister greeted women across the country and described them as the embodiment of hard work, love and sacrifice.

The TDP supremo said



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu

that societies prosper when women are respected and empowered, affirming that he will continue making every effort, both as the chief minister and personally, to support women's upliftment.

Naidu observed that a

woman is expected to assume the position of Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court in the near future.

He noted that International Women's Day began in 1911 and is celebrated every year on March 8, adding that this year's theme focuses on rights, justice and action.

Highlighting leadership roles, the TDP supremo said India has a tribal woman as President and a woman serving as finance minister, reflecting growing recognition of women's capabilities.



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Order Order

ITAT quashes reassessment of Lalit Modi's income over credit card spending



The Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT/Tribunal) has quashed a reassessment order against former IPL commissioner Lalit Kumar Modi with respect to his taxable income for the assessment year 2010-11. The reassessment had increased his taxable income from ₹54.81 lakh to ₹20.12 crore over unexplained credit card spending of ₹4.24 crore, private jet lease rental and fuel expenses of ₹9.65 crore and liabilities of ₹5.66 crore linked to entity Golden Wings Pvt Ltd.

The ITAT held that the reassessment proceedings initiated by the Income Tax Department were without jurisdiction as they were launched while regular scrutiny assessment proceedings were still pending. "To sum up, in the first place the action of the AO in initiating reassessment proceedings u/s. 148/147 of the Act during pendency of scrutiny assessment u/s. 143(3) of the Act is without jurisdiction.

"Hence, such assessment order passed u/s. 148/147 of the Act is null and void. Further, the assessment is also liable to be quashed on the ground that the assessment order has been passed without deciding objections of the assessee in violation of the law expounded by Hon'ble Apex Court in the case of GKN Driveshafts (India) Ltd," said the ITAT order.

The Bench comprising Judicial Member Vikas Awasthy and Accountant Member Brajesh Kumar Singh also found that the Assessing Officer had completed the reassessment without deciding the taxpayer's objections to the reopening, in violation of the procedure laid down by the Supreme Court. Modi had filed his income tax return for the assessment year 2010-11 declaring income of ₹54.81 lakh. The return was selected for scrutiny and a notice under Section 143(2) of the Income Tax Act was issued in July 2011.

No bail for engineer giving information on warships to Pakistan



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Mumbai

A court in Thane in Maharashtra has refused bail to a junior service engineer accused of leaking sensitive information about warships and submarines to Pakistani nationals, saying the offence related to naval establishments was serious in nature.

In the order passed earlier this month, Additional Sessions Judge VG Mohite noted that charges against the accused carry a potential punishment of 14 years of imprisonment.

The accused, Ravi Varma, who was employed by Crasni Technology Pvt Ltd, a firm providing services to Naval Dockyard, Mazagon Dockyard, the Coast Guard and Mumbai Port Trust, was arrested on May 28, 2025. Varma, a resident of Kalwa in neighbouring Thane, is currently in judicial custody.

The prosecution alleged that between November 2024 and March 2025, Varma shared secret and sensitive information about the names and locations of Indian Navy ships and boats with two Pakistan nationals via WhatsApp in exchange

for money. He was booked under Official Secrets Act and Section 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Varma, in his bail plea, claimed he was innocent and has been falsely implicated in the crime. He cited that the investigation was over and the chargesheet had been filed.

All material electronic evidence was in the possession of the prosecution and his detention was not necessary, the accused claimed in the plea.

The prosecution contended that Varma had shared his bank details with the absconding accused, who thereafter credited money in his account for providing such sensitive and secret information.

If Varma is released on bail, he would tamper with prosecution witnesses and evidence, and could also abscond, police said. Therefore, his application should be rejected, the prosecution told court.

The court, after hearing both sides and perusal of documents on record, noted that the accused is chargesheeted for offences of "serious nature" under the Official Secrets Act.



Consider female lawyers of SC for judgeship: CJ

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Sunday batted for greater institutional reforms in the judiciary to bring more women into the legal field and said that High Court collegiums should consider meritorious women members of the Bar for judgeship as a norm and not as an exception.

Addressing an event, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) underlined that members of the Bar must acknowledge and accept a simple reality: women members are not seeking concessions.

"They are seeking fair and appropriate representation, which has long been due. Only when the profession itself internalises this truth, will the pathway to the Bench become clearer," he said to applause from women lawyers and members of the judiciary at the first national conference of Indian Women in Law on the topic "Half the Nation - Half the Bench Bridge the gap - Balance the Bench."

The CJI requested the High Court collegiums to widen the zone of their consideration and include women advocates from their States who are practising in the Supreme Court for elevation.

CJI Kant said if progress is to be meaningful, it must be institutionalised. The story should not be that one individual secured greater representation, but it should be that the Supreme Court and the High Courts across the country consciously

embedded fairness into their processes. "We must all understand that reform of this nature is not an event; it is a continuous process. The cultivation of institutional fairness requires persistence beyond individual tenures and beyond individual personalities. It may not reach full fruition within my term of office, nor within that of my sister or brother judges. That, however, cannot and should not determine the depth of our commitment," he said.

CJI Kant added that when that happens, representation will no longer depend on personalities or moments of resolve - it will stand anchored in the structure of the institution itself, and that, ultimately, is how enduring change is made.

He said that an area of reform lies within the High Court collegiums and they must recognise that the moment for measured action is not in the future, but it is now.

"Where suitable, meritorious women members of the Bar are available, their consideration should not be an exception; it should be the norm. And where, in certain High Courts or districts, suitable candidates within a particular age bracket are not immediately available, that should not become a barrier. I earnestly request the High Court collegiums to widen the zone of their consideration and include women advocates practising in the Supreme Court who belong to that State, for elevation," he said.

Senior advocates Shobha Gupta and Mahalakshmi Pavani, who are



Chief Justice of India Surya Kant

associated with the organisation, 'Indian Women in Law', welcomed the guests. Among them were former CJI NV Ramana and other serving judges of the apex court, including Justice BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan.

The CJI highlighted that multiple women are currently serving as Chief Justices of different High Courts, and the Punjab and Haryana High Court has as many as 18 sitting women judges. Similarly, the Madras and Bombay High Courts also have about a dozen female judges each, he said. CJI Kant pointed out that equally significant is the encouraging scenario in the district judiciary which offers perhaps the clearest indication of what lies ahead.

"With women comprising approx-

imately 36.3 per cent of the working strength of judicial officers at the district level, the foundation is steadily strengthening.

"Friends, this is not a simple statistic; I would argue it reflects a generational shift. If we speak of a pipeline, it is here that it is visibly widening. And when the base of the system reflects greater inclusion, it is only a matter of time before that strength finds expression in the higher judiciary," he said.

The CJI said these developments indicate that the momentum has begun and the environment has been created.

"And with steadily increasing numbers of women entering and excelling in the legal profession, it is both natural and necessary that

their presence on the Bench grows suitably. Yet we must guard against complacency. While momentum is encouraging, it is not complete," he said.

At the outset, CJI Kant lauded the journey of women in legal fields and said, "It is worth recalling that barely a century ago, under the regressive colonial regime, women in this country were not even permitted to practise law. The distance travelled since then has been substantive, but it has not been accidental."

He said women often bring distinct insights shaped by how law operates in homes, workplaces and everyday realities and consequently, their presence does not merely add diversity to the Bench, it deepens the court's engagement with the society it serves.

"The legal profession, over time, has unwittingly developed a working climate that imposes invisible costs disproportionately on women. From late-night briefings and inadequate facilities to unreported workplace bias and repeated questioning of authority. These are daily realities that, I am sure, all of you are all too familiar with."

"And yet, despite these burdens, countless brilliant women have excelled in this profession because they believe in its ethos," he said.

CJI Kant said every woman who takes her place on the Bench sends a clear message to those still facing these obstacles that your perseverance is not unseen and it is not in vain.

Court asks police to file fresh status report in UGC protest case involving Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A court here on Saturday asked the Delhi Police to submit a fresh status report in a case filed against 11 political leaders, including Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, in connection with a protest organised by the DMK on UGC draft regulations at Jantar Mantar in February 2025.

Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Ashwani Panwar said that the status report appeared to be filed "in a mechanical manner without application of mind".

Apart from Gandhi and Yadav, DMK MPs Kanimozhi and A Raja were among those booked for allegedly participating in the protest.

The court had earlier, on February 19, directed the Delhi Police to file a status report in the case seeking an explanation of why BNS Section 223(a) (disobedience to order duly) was invoked against all the accused when the protest took place at



Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav

Jantar Mantar, an area designated for protest.

After considering the status report filed by the police, the court on Saturday expressed dissatisfaction.

"The reply filed on record today does not answer the main issue as to how Section 223(a) BNS was invoked by the police, when the protest, as per the documents filed on record, allegedly took place in an exempted area at the protest site. The reply is absolutely silent on this point," the court said.

The court said that the Investigating Officer (IO) in

the case provided no timeline for completing further investigation.

"It appears that the present challan has been forwarded in a mechanical manner without application of mind. The IO has failed in his duty and filed the application seeking further investigation without disclosing or bringing into the notice of the court any new facts or evidence," it said.

The court also noted that the reply filed by the police did not mention why the accused were not sent notices to join the investigation. "The

present is not a case of oversight or inadvertence in forwarding the entire material before the court along with the challan but in the absence of clear explanations appears to be a clear-cut omission of lawful duties by the IO, SHO and the ACP concerned," the judge said. The court said the application did not disclose any new facts or evidence and did not mention a timeline for completing the proposed investigation.

"The IO has failed in his duty and filed the application seeking further investigation without disclosing or bringing into the notice of the court any new facts or evidence," the court said. The judge also noted that instead of answering the issues raised in the February 19 order, the police merely sought more time for further investigation.

The court said it would consider the request for further investigation only after the police provide clear explanations regarding the issues flagged earlier. It then listed the matter for March 19 for further proceedings.

Need out-of-box thinking in matrimonial disputes: Delhi HC Chief Justice

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Chandigarh

In many matrimonial dispute cases, the search for justice does not end within the four corners of law as they deal with more of a social problem than a legal one, and out-of-the-box thinking by lawyers and judges is required, Delhi High Court Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya said on Sunday.

He was delivering a keynote address as part of the ongoing India International Disputes Week 2026 here.

The chief justice said that the lawyers and presiding officers of the court should deal with such matrimonial dispute cases in a sensitive manner.

"It's more of a social problem than a legal one; that has to be kept in mind. Because many a time, the search for justice does not end within the four corners of law. You have to do something called out-of-the-box thinking, both on the part of



Delhi HC Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya

the lawyers representing the parties and also the judges.

"If you try to search out a solution within the defined boundaries of a statute, perhaps you will not be able to render justice to the party in such disputes," he said.

Justice Upadhyaya also delved into the challenges posed by cross-border matrimonial disputes, saying the most pressing among them are child custody cases.

To address this problem, he said, only domestic laws in India are not sufficient.

Judicial Independence At Risk



**PRASHANT
TEWARI**

In modern democracies, civil society organisations play a crucial role in shaping public debate, defending rights, and holding Governments accountable. In India, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have historically contributed to social welfare, environmental protection, and advocacy for marginalised communities. Over the decades, these organisations have worked in diverse sectors including public health, education, disaster relief, legal aid, and rural development. However, the increasing presence of foreign-funded NGOs has sparked a continuing debate about sovereignty, democratic accountability, and the potential influence that such organisations may exert on India's political and institutional framework.

India hosts thousands of NGOs that receive financial support from foreign Governments, philanthropic foundations, and international advocacy networks. These funds are often directed toward development programmes, humanitarian initiatives, research activities, and policy advocacy. Many organisations utilise such funding to address pressing social issues including poverty alleviation, environmental conservation, human rights protection, and healthcare delivery in remote regions. Nevertheless, critics argue that the flow of foreign funds can sometimes introduce external priorities that may not always align with India's democratic choices or long-term national interests.

A key concern raised by policymakers and commentators is that foreign-funded NGOs may influence public policy debates in ways that bypass the traditional mechanisms of democratic accountability. Unlike elected representatives who must ultimately answer to voters, NGOs operate outside the formal structures of electoral governance. When such

organisations participate in policy advocacy, strategic litigation, or large-scale public campaigns, critics argue that they may indirectly shape Governmental decisions without being subject to the same democratic scrutiny.

The issue becomes particularly sensitive when NGOs engage with critical institutions of the state such as regulatory authorities, legislative committees, and the judiciary. Public Interest Litigation (PIL), for instance, has been one of the most powerful instruments of judicial intervention in India, enabling citizens and civil society groups to approach courts in matters affecting public welfare. While PILs have contributed significantly to social justice and environmental protection, concerns have occasionally been raised when organisations receiving substantial foreign funding initiate litigation that affects large infrastructure projects, natural resource policies, or strategic economic decisions.

The Government of India has often expressed concerns that certain NGOs may create public campaigns or legal challenges that delay or obstruct development initiatives such as mining, nuclear energy projects, and large infrastructure programmes. According to official statements made in Parliament, some foreign-funded organisations have allegedly attempted to generate confusion through repeated legal petitions or public campaigns that stall Government projects. Critics within the Government have sometimes characterised such activities as "anti-development" or even contrary to national interests.

India's regulatory framework attempts to address these concerns through legislation such as the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA). The law requires NGOs receiving foreign funding to register with the Government and comply with strict reporting and transparency requirements. Amendments introduced in recent years have tightened restrictions on the use of foreign funds, limited administrative expenditures, prohibited sub-granting to other organisations, and required NGOs to maintain designated bank accounts for monitoring transactions.

Supporters of these regulations argue that they promote transparency and help prevent foreign funding from influencing domestic political processes.

However, critics of stricter controls warn that excessive regulation can weaken civil society and discourage legitimate humanitarian work. Many NGOs depend on international funding because domestic philanthropic resources remain limited in certain sectors. Organisations working with farmers, tribal communities, environmental activists, and human rights defenders argue that restrictions on funding may silence voices that highlight social injustices or bring attention to vulnerable communities.

Several organisations, including international advocacy groups and domestic legal collectives, have challenged regulatory decisions or FCRA amendments before courts. In some cases, licences have been suspended or cancelled due to alleged violations, while other disputes have led to judicial scrutiny of administrative actions. Courts have occasionally emphasised that receiving foreign funding does not automatically render an organisation suspect and that regulatory decisions must be based on clear evidence of misuse or violation of the law.

The debate becomes even more complex when national security and geopolitical considerations enter the discussion. In an era where funding networks, advocacy campaigns, and information flows move rapidly across borders, Governments worldwide have become cautious about potential foreign influence in domestic affairs. India, like many other democracies, has sought to balance openness with vigilance when regulating international funding for civil society organisations.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that many foreign-funded NGOs operate with transparency and pursue objectives that complement development goals. Their work often contributes valuable research, technical expertise, and grassroots engagement that can strengthen policy discussions and improve the implementation of welfare

programmes. In this wider context, concerns have also been raised within legal and judicial circles regarding the broader ecosystem in which advocacy, litigation, and public discourse intersect.

Observers have pointed to the emergence of informal networks within the legal fraternity, sometimes comprising influential retired judges and senior advocates practicing before the Supreme Court and various High Courts. Critics suggest that such networks may occasionally use media platforms, opinion columns, television debates, and digital forums to comment extensively on ongoing judicial proceedings.

While public discussion about the functioning of the judiciary is an important aspect of a democratic society, the timing and intensity of certain interventions have sometimes raised questions about whether they may indirectly place pressure on sitting judges. The rise of podcasts, live-stream discussions, and social media commentary has amplified this phenomenon, allowing opinions on sensitive cases and judicial conduct to spread instantly to large audiences.

As a result, concerns are increasingly being expressed that sustained public commentary, amplified by digital platforms and media visibility, may blur the distinction between legitimate critique and organised pressure tactics. When commentary from influential voices converges with ongoing litigation or advocacy campaigns, the cumulative effect can create an atmosphere in which the Bench appears to function under persistent scrutiny or indirect pressure.

Safeguarding the independence and dignity of the judiciary therefore requires careful balance. Transparency, accountability, and robust public debate must coexist with institutional restraint. Ultimately, preserving the credibility of democratic institutions, including civil society and the judiciary, depends on ensuring that advocacy, funding, and public discourse operate within a framework that respects constitutional principles, national sovereignty, and the rule of law.



Editor's TAKE

LPG price hike: Another blow to the common man

If the government must demonstrate that protecting household affordability is as important as managing global price fluctuations.

Whenever the price of an essential items rise, the common man has to recalibrate his life to it and adjust his budget. Such increases, even incremental, reduce the spending capacity of ordinary families. Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders, now widely used across urban and rural India – including by beneficiaries of the Ujjwala Scheme – have become a basic household energy requirement. Even a modest increase in LPG prices can trigger widespread resentment, as it forces families to readjust their already tight budgets. The price hike is not only real but also psychological. For many households, and they are in millions, a few extra rupees spent on a cylinder often means cutting down on other small but essential purchases, thereby further straining their daily lives.

The recent decision to increase the price of domestic LPG cylinders by ₹60 has once again placed the spotlight on the growing financial pressure faced by ordinary Indian households. It may like small for a middle or upper middle class person, but for daily wagers, small vendors, domestic workers and marginal farmers, it is substantial as they survive on uncertain incomes that barely cover food, rent, school fees and transport. Their monthly calculations are delicate and precise. A few hundred rupees saved on fuel may mean vegetables for a week, medicines for an elderly parent, or a notebook for a child going to school. And it is not just the LPG he has to worry about. The prices of vegetables, eatables, and commuting all are going up, and when the price of cooking gas, which is deemed fixed, goes up, he is visibly distraught. Understandably, the hike has drawn sharp criticism from opposition parties and consumer groups alike.

While the government has cited global price movements as justification, the timing and necessity of this decision is debatable. The primary reason given for the hike is the rise in the Saudi Contract Price (CP), the international benchmark that determines the cost of LPG imports for India. However, such explanations offer little comfort to the millions of households that rely on LPG as an essential daily fuel.

For the common man, the cumulative effect of repeated price increases across sectors is what truly matters. With energy stocks reportedly at comfortable levels, critics say the authorities had the fiscal space to delay the increase rather than pass the burden immediately to consumers. For now, the beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana remain exempt from increases through continued subsidy support, but a large number of middle-class and lower-middle-class families fall outside this safety net. No denying the fact that the ongoing Iran war has introduced fresh uncertainty into global energy markets and will affect India's import bill. But at the same time, let us not forget that India purchased Russian crude oil at a subsidised rate but that was never passed to the end consumer by the Government. Energy pricing is always a delicate balancing act between fiscal prudence and social responsibility. In the present circumstances, the balance has tilted away from the interests of the common citizen.

Rethinking social media for children

As concerns mount over the mental health impact of excessive screen exposure, governments and parents are beginning to confront a difficult question: in an age dominated by smartphones, who is responsible for protecting the next generation?



ARCHANA DATTA

Recently, three minor sisters ended their lives after jumping off the balcony of a ninth-floor flat in Ghaziabad, when their parents restricted their mobile phone usage. The preliminary police reports indicated that the tragic incident is linked to severe addiction to online gaming. While experts opined that it reflected 'a fatal outcome of a digital dependency'. Recent data indicate that globally about 25.89 per cent of adolescents suffer from internet addiction, with 40 per cent experiencing addictive use of social media. A WHO 2022 study of 44 countries in Europe, central Asia and Canada, found that 11 per cent of adolescents, 13% of girls and 9% of boys, exhibit signs of problematic social media use, and that 12 per cent of adolescents are at the risk of troublesome gaming, with boys significantly more affected (16 per cent) than girls (7 per cent).

While socio-psychologists maintain that a combination of factors, such as biological vulnerability, tailored platform designs with the ease of access and personalisation of algorithm-driven content, and a shifting social landscape drawing children more towards the world of social media. A Pew Research Centre study in 2025 noted that 36 per cent of the US teens use one of five platforms, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, 'almost constantly', and around 64% of use AI chatbots, with 30% doing so daily. In its 2024 poll, it was revealed that many teenagers themselves have reported becoming more uneasy about the time they spend online, with girls in particular telling that apps were affecting their self-confidence, sleep patterns and overall mental health. While Jason Nagata, an associate professor of paediatrics, University of California, has alerted that the social media exposure has a detrimental impact on sleep, future depression and weight gain in adolescents. One recent study also found that even low levels of social media use, about an hour per day in children under 13 was associated with poorer cognitive outcomes. As of 2021-25, globally, approximately 1 in 7 (or nearly 15 per cent) 10 to 19-year-olds experience mental health disorders, accounting for 13-15% of the total global burden of disease in that age group, with anxiety and depression being the most common (World Health Organisation (WHO) & UNICEF data). In India, nearly one in four adolescents reports symptoms consistent with anxiety or depression, while the NCRB has documented a steady rise in students' suicides over the past decade.

However, Tech companies claim to implement several layers of child safety measures, ranging from automated content filtering to advanced



AS PARENTS IN TODAY'S WORLD NAVIGATE A NEW FRONTIER OF RAISING CHILDREN ALONGSIDE TECHNOLOGY, CYBER PARENTING OR DIGITAL PARENTING HAS BECOME A REALITY

parental supervision and age verification tools. But, experts from Common Sense Media, a non-profit that evaluates entertainment and technology options for kids and families, and Stanford Medicine regarded the current safeguards as insufficient for minors. The European Commission recently found that TikTok's 'addictive design' features, bypass the current safety efforts. While many regulators and advocacy groups argued that the AI driven age-verification systems raise serious privacy and data security concerns for minors, as they are increasingly centred on 'Safety by Design'.

Now, an ongoing 'bellwether' trial in a Los Angeles superior court (K.G.M. v. Meta et al.), the first representative 'test case' against social media companies for their 'defective platform design products', in which the plaintiff, a 20-year old Californian woman, who started using YouTube since the age of 6 and Instagram from nine, and now suffers from anxiety, depression and body dysmorphia, makes them liable under product liability standards. Platforms, earlier, got away from accountability under section 230 of the Communications Decency Act for users' content. Her lawyer compared the social media's product designs to dopamine-seeking 'slot machines' and 'digital casinos'. Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Meta, first time before the jury, defended Meta's safety efforts, and denied that Meta maximises user time through addictive features. On the issue of user age, he underlined the need for better parental control at the device level. The case has drawn comparisons with the war against Big Tobacco companies in the 1980s, which had been accused of downplaying risks about cigarette smoking.

While a Pew Research Centre survey of US parents in 2025, revealed that a majority of the parents felt that parenting today meant making tough choices about technology. Eight-in-ten said the harms of social media outweigh the

benefits. Two-thirds of parents (67%) said tech companies should do more to set rules around what kids can do or see online, and a 55% said that lawmakers should do more. The updated screen time guidelines issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2016, impose an additional responsibility on parents and caregivers to establish rules that fit their lives and families.

Meanwhile, Australia, the world's first, has imposed a social media ban for children under 16, targeting major platforms with massive non-negotiable fines for non-compliance. Many countries like Denmark, France, and Greece, are set to follow suit. While the US federal Govt. is still at a crossroads to regulate the industry, and many state laws face First Amendment challenges.

In India, the Economic Survey of India (2025-26) has called for age-based limits for social media usage by children, and two states, Andhra Pradesh and Goa are mulling over such legislation. But, critics consider bans are technically difficult to implement, and mostly lead to a mass migration to Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), the unchecked web corners. In India, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, has also come under criticism for its 'consent gating' provisions which may result in either false declarations or exclusion. As parents in today's world navigate a new frontier of raising children alongside technology, cyber parenting or digital parenting has become a reality. In 2019, WHO issued new guidelines, restricting the screen time for children under age 5 to one hour or less daily, and those under age 1 no time at all, saying that since early childhood is a period of rapid development, family lifestyle patterns should be adapted to boost health gains. Now, there is need for a 'digital wellness plan' for every family through encouragement, engagement and empowerment to help a child maintain a healthy and balanced relationship with digital technologies that supports overall well-being.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

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PICTALK



A woman vendor sells earthen pots on the occasion of International Women's Day, in Bengaluru, Karnataka

PHOTO: PTI

Where faith glows: A spiritual sojourn in Deoghar



TANU JAIN

2ND OPINION

There are cities that glitter, and then there are cities that glow. Deoghar, home to the sacred Baidyanath Dham, belongs firmly to the latter. It does not impress with towering skyscrapers, luxury malls, or branded storefronts. Instead, it radiates something deeper - an enduring warmth of faith and simplicity that quietly shapes everyday life.

Walking through the streets of what devotees lovingly call 'Baba ki Nagri,' I encountered a pace of life that felt gentle and unhurried. Women gathered near roadside stalls, sharing laughter while enjoying plates of gol gappas. Small neighborhood shops displayed their modest goods without any attempt at grandeur. Here, luxury seemed irrelevant; what mattered was human connection. People stood outside their homes or shops engaged in long,

meaningful conversations. Time appeared to move differently here. The rush and noise of modern life had not overtaken this town. Instead, life in Deoghar seemed wrapped in a quiet sense of belonging.

As evening approached, I made my way toward the Baidyanath temple complex. The air was heavy with incense, chants, and devotion. My mind began to chant silently as my steps drew closer to the sacred abode of Lord Shiva in His healing form - Baidyanath, the Divine Physician. Among the twelve revered Jyotirlingas of India, Baidyanath Dham occupies a special place, its origins deeply rooted in the ancient narratives of the Shiva Purana.

According to the legend, the powerful king Ravana performed intense penance to please Lord Shiva. Impressed by his devotion, Shiva granted him a Jyotirlinga with one strict condition - it should not be placed on the ground until it reached Lanka. However, through divine intervention, the lingam was placed at Deoghar, sanctifying the land forever. Inside the temple complex, devotees moved with quiet dignity. Women in vibrant sarees carried the deep orange glow of sindoor across their foreheads, resembling the rising sun.

As I approached the sanctum, streams of sacred water flowed over the lingam and onto the heads of devotees pressing forward in prayer. There was pushing and crowding, yet the atmosphere felt deeply reverent rather

than chaotic. Every person seemed convinced that Shiva Himself was present before them, silently witnessing their devotion. Despite the physical jostling, a strange calm settled within me. I had not come seeking comfort or convenience; I had come seeking communion. The ancient words of the Shiva Purana echoed softly in my mind - that through the sight, touch, and worship of Shiva, the burdens of the soul dissolve. The sacred geography of Deoghar is also associated with Goddess Parvati, the eternal consort of Shiva. Nearby stands the revered Basukinath Temple, and local belief holds that a pilgrimage to Baidyanath is incomplete without visiting Basukinath. Together, the two temples represent the divine union of Shiva and Shakti - father and mother to

countless devotees. Watching pilgrims lie flat upon the temple floor in full prostration, I realised something profound. Their purpose was simple - to stand before their Lord, to feel seen, and to offer gratitude. In Deoghar, devotion is neither dramatic nor extravagant. Faith here is measured not by display but by sincerity. By the time I stepped out after completing the pooja vidhi, a quiet clarity filled my heart. Visiting Baidyanath Dham had not felt like entering a monument. It felt like stepping into a living scripture - a place where faith breathes through daily life.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

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DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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FUEL PRICE HIKE: BURDENING THE POOR WHILE PROTECTING THE POWERFUL

The Union Government rarely misses an opportunity to reveal its pro-rich and anti-poor policy orientation. Within less than a year, the price of an LPG refill has been increased by ₹110. The latest hike of ₹60 has been justified by citing the Iran war. While the international situation is indeed complex, what remains unexplained is why such prompt action was absent when India was importing cheaper crude oil from Russia. The benefits of discounted crude were largely captured by private corporations instead of being passed on to ordinary consumers. Now, however, the government has wasted no time in transferring the burden of rising global tensions directly onto the public, including beneficiaries of the Ujjwala scheme who were meant to receive relief. At the same time, the government remains

conspicuously silent on massive loan waivers and "haircuts" granted to wealthy borrowers and large corporate houses. Concessions, exemptions, and NPA-related write-offs together amount to nearly ₹30 lakh crore. Despite these enormous benefits to the corporate sector, there has been little visible improvement in employment generation or in the living standards of ordinary citizens. Yet a ₹60 hike in LPG refill is deemed unavoidable. Similar increases in other fuels may soon follow, further eroding real wages, weakening domestic demand, and worsening the economic stress faced by the poor and the middle class. At a time when the Union Budget is already tightening financial pressures, the government must adopt a more balanced approach toward the citizen.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Will Andhra go the Bihar way?

It is widely acknowledged that Nitish Kumar and N. Chandrababu Naidu have been playing supportive and constructive roles in the current dispensation led by Narendra Modi. The Centre, in turn, appears keen to keep these influential allies in good spirits. Veteran leader Nitish Kumar has reportedly decided to step aside from the chief minister's post in favour of his son, giving the young leader an opportunity to realise his long-cherished political aspirations. If this transition takes place, Bihar could set an example of introducing younger leadership into India's political system, something the country's evolving democracy increasingly requires.

Taking a cue from his long-time ally Nitish Kumar, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu might also consider paving the way for his son, Nara Lokesh. Naidu has had a long and eventful political career and has demonstrated considerable administrative and political skill.

Like many leaders, he may also hope to see his son carry forward his political legacy. While Lokesh is no longer a novice in politics, any such transition would require careful consideration of many factors. In the coming years, Andhra Pradesh politics may well revolve around leaders such as Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Nara Lokesh and Pawan Kalyan.

M SOMASEKHAR PRASAD | HYDERABAD

India upholds Geneva Conventions

India's decision to allow the Iranian naval vessel IRIS Lavana to dock at Kochi Port for repairs on humanitarian grounds reflects the country's consistent respect for the principles of the Geneva Conventions. At a time when disturbing reports have emerged of attacks on the unarmed Iranian frigate IRIS Dena and bombings of civilian institutions in Iran, India's decision underscores its commitment to compassion and adherence to international humanitarian norms. Even amid conflict and geopolitical tensions, India has chosen to uphold the spirit of humanitarian law. This approach reflects the country's long-standing civilisational ethos, which emphasises moral conduct and respect for human dignity even in times of war. By offering assistance in accordance with global conventions, India sends a powerful message that ethical responsibility must prevail over hostility. Respect for international law and humanitarian values enhances the country's credibility and reinforces its image as a nation that balances strategic interests with moral responsibility. By demonstrating compassion and lawful conduct in a difficult international environment, India proves that adherence to ethical principles is not a sign of weakness but a source of lasting respect and goodwill in the global community.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

Russia's intelligence support for Iran

Emerging intelligence reports suggest that the conflict involving Iran, the United States and Israel may be widening into a broader geopolitical contest. According to sources familiar with US intelligence briefings, Russia has reportedly provided Iran with sensitive information about American military positions. The intelligence is believed to include satellite imagery detailing the locations and movements of US troops, naval vessels and aircraft, gathered largely through Moscow's network of surveillance satellites. The report, first highlighted by The Washington Post, marks the first indication that Russia may be directly assisting Iran in the ongoing confrontation. While it remains unclear whether any specific Iranian strike can be definitively linked to the Russian data, several recent drone attacks have targeted areas where American forces were stationed. US intelligence agencies are also closely watching China's role. While Beijing has so far avoided direct involvement, officials believe it could provide Iran with limited assistance such as financial support, spare parts or missile components. Alongside Russia and China, North Korea is also suspected of offering technical or strategic support to Iran, raising fears that the conflict could gradually evolve into a wider alignment of rival global powers.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI



Beyond borders: A joint strategy for common growth

FIRST Column

The civilisational history of the Indian subcontinent bears witness to centuries of cultural exchange, trade, religious interaction and intellectual dialogue among neighbouring societies. Revisiting these shared cultural linkages can provide valuable insights into fostering a prosperous and cooperative regional future



RK PACHNANDA

In his Independence Day address from the Red Fort on 15 August 2020, the Prime Minister of India said, "Today, neighbours are not the only ones with whom we share geographical boundaries, but also those with whom we have close and harmonious relations." He further emphasised the value of regional cooperation, observing that "the world's one-fourth population lives in South Asia" and "we can create countless opportunities for the welfare of such a large population through cooperation and partnership."

Since times immemorial, Bharat has been a subcontinent with a common civilisational bond with the countries that are our neighbours which were earlier a part of Vrihadha Bharat/Akhanda Bharat, that is, the vast and expansive cultural and civilisational influence of the Indian subcontinent till South and Southeast Asia, that was under constant commercial, political and cultural interface. This shared past is not merely an inheritance of memory. It also offers a practical foundation for contemporary regional stability and cooperation, particularly in a world where economic shocks, supply chain realignments and strategic competition increasingly reward cohesive regions that can coordinate interests while respecting sovereignty.

Major urban centres such as Harappa and Mohenjo-daro are located in today's Pakistan, while sites like Rakhigarhi, Alamgirpur and Daimabad fall in Bharat. As a 218m-long brick basin, Lothal in Gujarat is deemed the world's earliest dockyard facilitating Bharat's maritime trade westward. The wide geographical spread of these settlements underscores that Harappan urbanism, craft production and exchange systems represent a common civilisational inheritance, one that transcends contemporary political boundaries and tensions reminds us that modern frontiers, while sovereign and inviolable, sit atop older layers of connectivity that once enabled integrated economic and cultural ecosystems.

Afghanistan, particularly its eastern and southern regions, maintained strong connections with the north-western Bharat through commercial networks of the Harappan civilisation.

During the early centuries spanning the late



AFGHANISTAN, PARTICULARLY ITS EASTERN AND SOUTHERN REGIONS, MAINTAINED STRONG CONNECTIONS WITH THE NORTH-WESTERN BHARAT THROUGH COMMERCIAL NETWORKS OF THE HARAPPAN CIVILISATION

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BCE and early CE periods, Afghanistan emerged as a major centre of Buddhist monastic life beyond the Gangetic plains. Geographical pockets like Gandhara, extending into present-day Pakistan, became dotted with monasteries and stupas that played a crucial role in transmitting Indian Buddhist doctrines and artistic forms into Central Asia and onward to China.

Early Chinese pilgrims, notably Fa-hsien and Hiuen Tsang, journeyed to major Buddhist centres in Bharat, returning with scriptural copies and commentarial travelogues that played a formative role in Chinese Buddhism. The scholarship within the framework of "Greater India" highlights the effective reception and adaptation of Indian Buddhist texts and ideas within the Chinese cultural sphere.

In both the ancient and medieval periods, Nepal was firmly embedded within the broader Indic religious and literary milieu, while simultaneously functioning as a connective zone linking the Indian plains with the Himalayan ranges and Tibetan plateaus. Under the ancient political powers such as the Licchavis, as early as 6th-5th centuries BCE, Sanskrit emerged as a principal language of ritual practice and royal inscriptions, while Pali entered the area through Buddhist transmission.

Contemporary Bhutanese culture is grounded in Tibetan Buddhism, yet its religious and philosophical foundations ultimately trace back to Indian Buddhist currents that travelled across the Himalayan corridors. The region that constitutes present-day Bangladesh has been closely associated with eastern and north-eastern

Bharat over thousands of years, from the late Harappan-Gangetic interaction sphere to the emergence of historic kingdoms in Bengal.

Myanmar, formerly Burma, is situated within the historical zone often described by scholars as the "Indosphere": a civilisational space profoundly influenced by Indian religious, linguistic and artistic traditions, most notably through the spread of Theravada Buddhism.

Long-distance trade links connected eastern Bharat with southern Myanmar and beyond into mainland Southeast Asia, facilitating the spread of Pali and Sanskrit languages and scripts derived from the Brahmi script, including Mon and Burmese, but also the transmission of a wide range of Buddhist and Hindu concepts alongside commercial exchange.

Sri Lanka represents one of the most compelling examples of long-standing and early civilisational connections with Bharat. Its prominent place in our Adikavya Ramayana is universally known.

Early historical Sinhalese chronicles such as the Mahavamsa and Dipavamsa, as well as modern historical accounts, record that Buddhism was introduced to the island in the third century BCE by Mahinda, traditionally identified as the son of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. Following his successful conversion of King Devanampiya Tissa, Buddhism became the state religion, establishing a lasting Theravada Buddhist connection between Bharat and Sri Lanka.

It is noteworthy that a sapling of the Mahabodhi tree was brought to Sri Lanka

from Bodhgaya in Bharat by Sanghamitra, Ashoka's daughter. In 1193, Bakhtiyar Khilji destroyed the Mahabodhi tree at Bodhgaya. Subsequently, a sapling from Anuradhapura's Jaya Sri Mahabodhi was used to replant the sacred tree at Bodhgaya.

Historical research on Maldivian origins suggests that the initial settlers were probably Dravidian-speaking groups from Southern Bharat, followed by the arrival of Indo-Aryan speakers from Sri Lanka and the Indian mainland around the 4th to 5th centuries BCE. These successive movements produced a composite ethnic and linguistic profile. The Maldives practised Buddhism as its principal religion before converting to Islam. Spanning the region from Pakistan through Myanmar, and extending to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, scholars of the "Greater India" and the wider "Indic world" point to a set of recurring cultural and historical features that bind these neighbouring nations together.

Religious and philosophical traditions: The outward transmission of Buddhism, encompassing both Theravada and Mahayana streams, from the Indian heartland to Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan-Tibet, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, alongside the spread of Hindu beliefs and ritual practices into Nepal, Bangladesh and parts of Southeast Asia.

Languages and scripts: The spread of Sanskrit and Pali as liturgical and intellectual media, the development of regional scripts in areas such as

Nepal and Myanmar derived from the Indian-Brahmi models and the trans-border presence of Indo-Aryan languages like Punjabi, Bengali, Sinhala and Dhivehi that continue to extend across modern political boundaries.

Art, architecture and urban traditions: A common legacy of Harappan urban planning shared by Bharat, Pakistan, and Afghanistan is the wide distribution of stupas and Buddhist monastic complexes from Gandhara through Sri Lanka to Myanmar, as well as temple forms and religious iconography rooted in Indian art.

Commercial and maritime networks: Extensive trade routes across the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean connected Bharat with Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, facilitating the movement not only of commodities but also of texts, craftsmen and religious practitioners who carried and embedded Indic cultural elements within local societies. These strands reveal that the region historically functioned as an organ-

ically interconnected civilisational zone. Political sovereignty today must remain absolute and respected, yet structured cooperation need not undermine independence when deeper bonds provide a foundation for trust. As we have seen, Bharat's civilisational past is deeply interconnected with that of its neighbouring regions, forged over centuries through population movements, commercial networks, imperial expansions and sustained religious and cultural interactions across the broader "Indic world" or Akhanda Bharat.

Bharat is the fastest-growing economy, with an 8.2 per cent growth rate. If all the neighbouring countries realign with our common civilisational ethos of the collective or cumulative development embedded in the highly cherished ideals such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (All world is one family) and the renowned Shanti Mantra underlining universal happiness,

"Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramayah, Sarve Bhadrani Pashyantu, Ma Kashchid Duhkha-Bhag Bhavet, Om Shantih Shantih Shantih"

The entire macro region can advance and prosper by integrating their economic story with Bharat's economic development. This is akin to the way that umpteen roots of a tree, if they blend and intertwine harmoniously under the ground, it leads to nourishment and overall health of that tree, with its branches reaching far and wide, laden with robust leaves, flowers and fruits. If these neighbouring political powers situate, position and orient themselves and their priorities with a joint endeavour on the lines of Bharat's growth vision, all can benefit enormously.

At the level of contemporary strategy, such a regional endeavour can be pursued in a manner that strengthens sovereignty rather than diluting it. Practical cooperation on trade facilitation, infrastructure corridors, energy connectivity, digital integration, disaster response, and calibrated maritime coordination in the Indian Ocean can generate collective resilience, reduce vulnerability to external shocks and deepen strategic autonomy for all participating nations. A region that once functioned as a network of intellectual exchange, commercial vitality and spiritual dialogue can again emerge as a coordinated economic and strategic community, sovereign yet aligned, diverse yet harmonious. If guided by prudence, mutual respect and long-term vision, such a compact could enable the macro region not merely to participate in a changing global order, but to help define it.

Where does the clock begin? The politics of choosing history



KAM KEDAR

For those who don't automatically take a side, or those who might be aligned but not completely onboard with the actions of its side, the war at the moment is at a stage of assessment, of ascertaining which side is ever slightly more inclined towards justice than the other. Justice is not about affiliations, ideologies, technological advancement or military might, but about actions in the backdrop of memory and interpretation. And all this boils down to one decision, and that is what one decides to be the point at which the conflict began.

For Israel, the logical starting point of its confrontation with Iran is the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Before that moment, Iran was not perceived as an adversary. Under the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Israel and Iran maintained discreet yet meaningful strategic ties. Both countries saw themselves as non-Arab actors navigating a volatile regional environment, and cooperation between them extended across multiple domains, including intelligence coordination, economic exchanges, and limited security collaboration.

The revolution, however, transformed that relationship with remarkable speed. The Islamic Republic that replaced the monarchy adopted an openly hostile posture toward Israel, refusing to recognise its legitimacy and incorporating opposition to Israel into its ideological identity. From Israel's perspective, the decades that followed appeared to confirm and deepen this threat perception. Iran expanded its missile capabilities, strengthened its regional alliances, and provided support to militant groups across the Middle East, most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon. Over time, concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions further intensified Israeli strategic anxieties. Seen from this vantage point, Israeli actions - ranging from covert intelligence operations and cyber campaigns to occasional military strikes - are framed not as acts of aggression but as measures of prevention. If the starting point of the story is 1979, Israel's policies can be interpreted as the defensive response of a relatively small state confronting a revolutionary regime that has, for decades, questioned its legitimacy and security. The timeline matters profoundly. Begin the story in 1979, and Israel appears as a state reacting to a persistent threat rather than one generating the conflict itself. Iran's narrative, however, begins earlier. In Tehran's telling, the story does not start with the Iranian Revolution but with the establishment of

the State of Israel in 1948 and the regional upheaval that followed. The creation of Israel triggered the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, an event that remains deeply embedded in the political consciousness of the Middle East. For many in the region, this moment represents the foundational grievance of modern regional politics - a historical rupture that continues to shape perceptions of justice, sovereignty, and legitimacy. Iranian leaders frequently frame their policies within this broader historical context. Their support for allied groups across the region is presented not as an act of aggression toward Israel but as an expression of solidarity with Palestinians and opposition to what they perceive as an unjust regional order shaped by Western intervention and geopolitical power structures.

Within this narrative, Israel's military actions against Iranian allies - whether in Lebanon, Syria, or elsewhere - are interpreted as part of a longer pattern of regional dominance. Iran, in turn, portrays itself as a counterbalancing force within what it describes as a broader "resistance" front. If the story begins in 1948, the conflict appears less as a bilateral rivalry between two states and more as a continuation of the unresolved tensions that have defined the Arab-Israeli struggle for decades. Once again, the starting point reshapes the moral framework. Begin the narrative in 1948, and Iran appears not as the instigator of the conflict but as a later participant in a much older regional dispute.

The Politics of Historical Memory

What emerges from these competing narratives is a simple yet powerful insight: history is rarely neutral in geopolitical argument. States consciously choose the moment at which the story begins, and that decision determines the moral architecture of the narrative that follows. Starting the timeline in 1979 emphasises ideological hostility and modern security threats. Beginning it in 1948 highlights questions of territory, displacement, and historical grievance. Both starting points contain elements of truth. Yet neither offers a complete account of the deeper historical forces that shaped the region. Long before Israel existed, and decades before the Iranian Revolution, another pivotal moment had already begun to influence the political future of the Middle East. In 1917, during the First World War, the British government issued a brief but consequential statement known as the Balfour Declaration. In a short letter, Britain expressed its support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," while simultaneously asserting that the rights of the non-Jewish communities living there should not be harmed. Within this

brief statement lies a profound and unresolved contradiction. The declaration appeared to support two aspirations simultaneously - Jewish national self-determination and the rights of the Arab population already inhabiting the land - without offering a clear political framework capable of reconciling these competing visions. At the time, Britain exercised authority over the region through the British Mandate for Palestine, established following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. The declaration effectively transformed the Zionist movement from a political aspiration into a project backed by imperial power. Jewish immigration to Palestine increased significantly in the decades that followed, driven both by Zionist ambitions and by the pressures of rising anti-Semitism in Europe. At the same time, Arab communities grew increasingly apprehensive, fearing that the declaration threatened their own political future and demographic balance.

The tensions generated by these competing national aspirations intensified during the 1920s and 1930s. By the time Britain withdrew from Palestine in 1948, the political landscape had hardened into rival national movements with fundamentally incompatible visions of sovereignty. It would be simplistic to suggest that Britain alone "caused" the conflicts that followed. History rarely unfolds in such a linear manner. Yet the Balfour Declaration serves as a powerful illustration of how decisions made by imperial powers can reverberate across generations. By endorsing the creation of a national home for one people in a territory already inhabited by another, while failing to establish a political structure capable of accommodating both, Britain helped create a structural tension that would shape the region's future. The conflicts that emerged after 1948, the alliances that developed during the Cold War, and even the modern rivalry between Israel and Iran all exist within a political landscape shaped in part by those earlier decisions. Every conflict carries with it a narrative about its origins, and the choice of that starting point often determines who appears justified and who appears responsible. Each starting point tells a different story about responsibility, legitimacy, and self-defence. Each contains elements of truth, yet each remains incomplete on its own. In geopolitics, history rarely functions simply as a record of the past; it becomes an argument about the present, and as long as the timelines themselves remain contested, the conflicts built upon them are unlikely to disappear, even in the future.

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How systems are beginning to work for women in Uttar Pradesh



SEEMA KUSHWAHA

For years, conversations around women's empowerment in India have often focused on what women lack. Safety. Opportunity. Institutional support. These concerns have shaped activism, public debate, and policymaking for decades.

But real change rarely begins with rhetoric. It begins when systems start responding to women's realities. Across Uttar Pradesh, the scale of such response has begun to expand in ways that are slowly reshaping how women experience everyday life. The impact of this shift is not best understood through policy language alone. It becomes visible in the lives of thousands of women who now have access to support that simply did not exist before.

For a woman facing violence or distress, seeking help has historically meant navigating multiple institutions, often while battling fear and social stigma. Today, across districts in the state, dedicated support centres provide medical care, legal assistance, counselling, police coordination and temporary shelter in one place. Thousands of cases have already been addressed through these centres, offering women something that activists have long demanded: accessible, coordinated support. Equally transformative has been the growing use of helpline services. Lakhs of women have reached out for assistance through a single phone call, receiving guidance, intervention and counselling. For many women in smaller towns and rural communities, where formal support systems were once distant or intimidating, such access represents a powerful shift. It signals that help is available and that seeking it is possible.

Another visible change is unfolding in the area of economic participation. Across the state, millions of women have been supported through financial assistance, digital literacy initiatives and community-based programmes aimed at strengthening their economic independence. While the amounts involved may vary, the larger impact lies in confidence.

When a woman begins earning or managing resources, even at a modest level, the balance within households often changes. Decisions about education, healthcare and family welfare begin to involve her voice. Over time, economic participation becomes a pathway to social recognition. Young girls are also growing up in a different environment. Awareness campaigns promoting the impor-

ance of educating and supporting girls have reached lakhs of families across the state. These conversations, repeated across districts and communities, gradually influence how families think about daughters and their futures.

The impact may not always appear dramatic. It is often subtle and cumulative. A girl encouraged to continue school. A young woman able to travel to a nearby city for work. A survivor of violence who receives counselling and legal support instead of silence and isolation. For those facing the harshest circumstances, rehabilitation facilities now provide shelter and support to women who are abandoned, displaced or survivors of abuse. For many of them, these centres represent not just safety but the chance to rebuild their lives with dignity.

Urban working women, too, are beginning to benefit from expanding infrastructure that offers safer accommodation options. For women who migrate from smaller towns in search of employment or education, secure housing often determines whether they can pursue opportunities at all. From an activist's perspective, the most encouraging aspect of these developments is the recognition that women's empowerment requires an ecosystem. Safety, economic opportunity, social awareness and institutional support must move together.

Uttar Pradesh's demographic scale makes this challenge particularly complex. But when systems expand to reach millions of women, the long-term impact extends beyond individual programmes. It begins to reshape expectations.

Women who once hesitated to speak out now know there are channels through which their voices can be heard. Families that once prioritised sons are gradually recognising the potential of daughters. Communities that once viewed women's independence with suspicion are slowly adapting to new realities.

The journey toward gender equality is never simple. Social attitudes take time to evolve, and policy efforts must remain consistent to sustain momentum. Yet the growing reach of these systems suggests an important shift. Women across Uttar Pradesh are not only receiving support when they face adversity. Increasingly, they are gaining the confidence to shape their own futures. And when that confidence spreads across millions of lives, the change it creates can redefine the trajectory of an entire society.



The writer is a Supreme Court advocate and a leading voice for women's rights, best known for her historic legal battle in the Nirbhaya case





According to media reports, Alphabet, Google's parent company, approved a new compensation package of nearly \$700 million (yes, \$700 million) for Sundar Pichai, its chief executive. This is the money he may earn over the next three years, and the "figure places him among the highest-paid CEOs in the global tech sector." Of course, the amount will not be paid as a traditional salary, like you and I earn at the end of the month. Most of it, maybe a majority, is made up of stocks, and linked to the company's performance over the next three years. Specific milestones, as mentioned in the contract, if achieved, will trigger allotment of a specific number of stocks. If every milestone is achieved, and given the current stock price, Pichai may earn up to \$700 million. Hence, the figure is more of an expectation rather than a given. Until stocks are given, the take-home salary will be much less.

According to HR and compensation experts, tying salaries to corporate performance may be the best way to align the CEO's interest with those of the shareholders. The stock options, triggered by milestones, may spur the CEO to work earnestly towards them. The targets, in turn, will improve the performances, and push the stock prices up. Thus, as the CEO earns more, so do the shareholders in terms of valuations, and possibly higher dividends and other payouts. In addition, since the CEO's compensation package is stretched over time, three years in Pichai's case, the corporate leader is forced to combine short-term tactics with long-term strategies. Thus, moves to front-load revenues and profits to book higher quarterly profits may not work, if there are minimal revenues to book after a year or two. Similarly, short-term stock price gains can be undone quite quickly, within weeks.

This may explain why Pichai, in the last 10 years as Google and Alphabet's CEO, focused on medium-term strategic goals, especially given the great disruptions in tech. According to a media report, "Pichai first became the chief executive of Google in 2015. Four years later, in 2019, he took on the role of CEO of Alphabet, the broader corporate structure that oversees Google and several other businesses. During his time in leadership, the company has expanded its presence in multiple areas of technology. Google's cloud computing division has grown steadily, and is now one of the largest competitors in the global cloud market. The company has also invested heavily in hardware products, including Pixel smartphones, smart home devices, and wearable technology. Perhaps, most significantly, Alphabet has increased its focus on artificial intelligence. Under Pichai's leadership, Google has developed numerous AI tools, and integrated them into products and services." The multiple-approach stems from multiple milestones.

Of course, the flip side is that the milestones linked to compensation, which is largely linked to stock price, pushes the CEO to focus on valuation rather than strategy. Since 2015, when Pichai first became the CEO, Google's share price has zoomed by more than 10 times, and now rules at nearly \$300. Yet, in January 2023, the stock price was under \$90, or around four times the price in 2015. It is only in the last three years that the stock took off, largely because of Google's dominance in cloud computing, and its inherent strength in AI. Yet for some time between 2020, the pandemic year, and 2023, Google and Alphabet's businesses were under a cloud. In the zeal to expand faster, and into new areas, the group made several mistakes. It entered some areas quite late, and it exited profitable niches quite quickly.

For example, when ChatGPT emerged as the King in AI tools, along with a Queen in the form of Claude, Google rushed to prematurely release AI products that led to quality issues. Some contended that there was a decline in the search engine quality. Indeed, search as an umbrella event has shifted from Google to ChatGPT and Claude. In the recent past, Google was criticised for giving up on products that were profitable, but smaller in terms of markets and users' bases. Pichai wanted to focus on scaled-up or scalable projects. According to Google's AI search, "Google's internal reward system favours launching new products over maintaining existing ones, which leads to a pattern of creating and abandoning projects." In addition, the group has faced several antitrust cases in America, Europe, and other parts for acting like a monopoly in several business streams. It paid billions of dollars in fines and penalties in some of these cases.

For strategists and analysts, there may not be a straight line joining these mistakes, attitudes, and blunders with CEO's compensation. But for savvy investors they do point to some links. The pressure to achieve certain milestones, either to boost compensation, or to prove oneself as an evolved leader, may push the CEO in certain directions. In the case of Google, several issues were corrected only because the group is large enough to take several hits, enact quick and expensive course corrections, including withdrawing products from the markets, and spend more to create new competitive products quickly. The time and money lost in the bargain is made up due to monopoly status.



Russia, largest beneficiary of war

While nations count their losses, Moscow stands to gain the most

For the first time since the Russia-Ukraine war, Russian crude oil commands a \$4-5 a barrel premium over the global prices. Until the Iran-Israel-US war, which engulfed most of the Gulf nations, Moscow sold the fuel at a massive discount of \$10-15 a barrel. Traders admit that India is now paying more than the market prices to take deliveries from Russia. For the Indian refiners, which are cut off from traditional and massive supplies from the Middle East through the now-closed Strait of Hormuz, Russian oil is a saviour.

While the global prices rose 25 per cent over the past few days, the hike in Russian supplies was an impressive 50 per cent. According to a Kremlin spokesperson, quoted in media reports, "We are seeing a significant increase in demand for Russian energy sources in connection with the war in Iran." He added that Russia has emerged, and "remains a reliable supplier" of oil and gas, including liquefied natural gas. According to a Russian analyst, "the conflict is creating favourable conditions for the growth of Russia's revenues from energy exports."

Some of the European Union (EU) members have initiated efforts to increase energy exports from Russia. These moves began before the Iran war, but may have intensified after it. For example, Slovakia admitted that it amended the long-term contract with Russia's Gazprom to "align it with European regulations." This will enable it to continue to import LNG despite the western sanctions against Russia. Slovakia may raise the imported volumes during the war, and before the EU's complete ban on Russian gas kicks in 2027.

Before the Ukraine war, Europe sourced 40 per cent of its gas requirements from Russia, but the combined sales of piped gas and LNG from the latter were down to 13 per cent of overall imports in 2025. The EU decided to stop the LNG imports by end-2026, and pipeline gas by September 2027. However, some members, hit by the current war, and hoping to take advantage till the ban is effective, may hike imports from Russia over the next few months. Qatar, a major supplier of LNG, declared force majeure, and shut off its plants.

Russia, however, may play a double game. It may use the war crisis as an opportunity to extract revenge from the EU, and cut off energy exports to the region. This will saddle Europe with huge shortages. Instead, Moscow may aim to please its past allies, which supported, and hike supplies to India, China, Thailand, and the Philippines. Since the Asian buyers are largely dependent on imports, with minimal domestic production, they may be willing to pay high premiums, especially after they benefited from the huge discounts before the Iran war.

"The EU's (earlier) energy strategy, premised on the idea that the Russian volumes could be permanently replaced by a combination of the US, Qatari, and other LNG, plus accelerated renewables, is now in serious question," says an analyst quoted in media reports. There are moral, political, and economic issues that the EU members will need to address to tackle the ongoing war situation. There are still pressures on them not to look at Russia because it will be

"wrong" to do so. One is not sure if global supplies from other sources can help.

Although the Russian supplies, despite now being more expensive, can aid India, there are political repercussions. The recent statement by Scott Bessent, the US treasury secretary, that America has allowed a temporary 30-day waiver to India to buy Russian oil invited huge criticism from the Indian Opposition. Critics alleged that India's sovereignty was at stake, as its moves were guided by what the US said and wished. Bessent's remarks were crucial because he added that India could buy the oil that was stranded at sea, and the measure would not help Russia with "significant financial benefit."

Indeed, instead of Russian oil, the US officials want India to ramp up purchases of American oil over the next few weeks, possibly before the 30-day waiver ends. For a year, the US has used the tariff stick to force New Delhi to stop its energy reliance on Moscow, and instead veer towards Washington. For months, despite the punitive trade tariffs, India stood its ground, but finally gave in to push through the bilateral trade deal with the US, and only when the discount on Russian crude came down drastically due to logistics and insurance costs.

Whatever the twists and turns one may see in the global energy order, some of them may be short-term, and a few may last for longer periods. For example, despite the Middle East crisis, the US President Donald Trump does not appear nervous. In interviews, he maintains that America has a lot of oil, "tremendous amounts," and it will not need to dip into the strategic petroleum reserves of more than 400 million barrels. Indeed, he believes that there is a lot of oil globally and, hence, the ongoing energy crisis "will get healed very quickly."

Trump said in interviews that he would ease the war "pressure" only if it is necessary. "If there was some (need), I would do it (take steps), just to take a little of the pressure off," Trump said in an answer to a reporter on board Air Force One. At present, the US thinks that it does not need to step back from the war. Instead, it feels that this is the time to crush Iran once and forever. What remains unsaid is that the crisis will show Europe its place vis-à-vis America, and shape up errant and rogue nations like India (a rebel ally), and China (a sworn enemy). Others like Japan, and Middle-East nations, who wished to counter America after the Supreme Court order on tariffs, may remain subdued.

The overall energy strategy seems majestic, almost grand. With the Venezuelan oil in its pockets, the sockets and valves can be opened within a few months to release additional oil. If Iran capitulates, the oil from it, which was being sold in the black market due to the western sanctions, will be under American control. The US' internal production can be pushed up instantly, especially at the current high global prices, which makes shale gas extremely lucrative. At the same time, the powerful consumers are down in the dumps. Apart from military victory, the US can emerge as the only energy victor.

OUR TAKE



The Left-Handed Economist

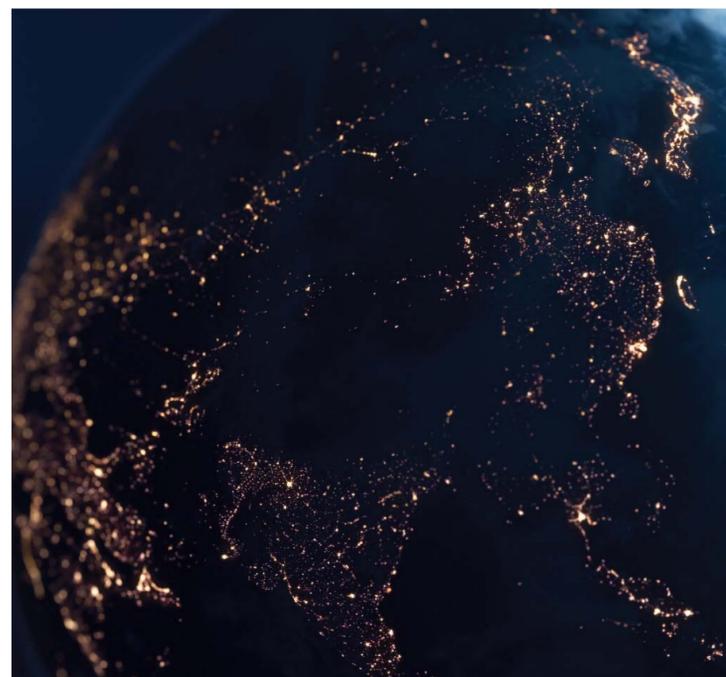
Asia to glow, even during the day

India will be world's second-largest economy by 2025

By 2050, the world will have enough evidence to prove that this is indeed the 'Asian Economic Century.' By then, according to estimates by a global think tank, the centre of "economic gravity" will truly swing towards Asia, and away from North America and Europe. The epicentre of global economic power will move East. Of the 10 largest economies in 2050, according to Goldman Sachs' predictions, three will be Asian, and two of them, China and India, will be ranked No. 1 and 3, respectively. Indonesia, surprisingly, will occupy the fourth position, above Germany, Japan, the UK, and Russia. Together, the three Asian nations, will comprise a combined GDP of more than \$70 trillion, or more than half of the top 10 collectively. Among the top 20 will be three more Asian nations, including a not-so-surprising South Korea, but shockingly, Pakistan (No. 16) and Bangladesh (No. 20).

But Goldman Sachs' focus is not on Asia per se, which includes developed and emerging nations, but on the latter, Emerging Asia. According to the think tank, "By 2050, the economies of emerging Asia could account for around 40 per cent of the world's total output, equivalent to \$90.6 trillion. In comparison, the share of the so-called developed western economies will be 36 per cent, or \$82.9 trillion. Behind them will be the nations in central and eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa with a 17 per cent share, and Latin America with seven per cent. Among the emerging Asian economies, while the GDP growth of China will "taper off significantly" by 2050, countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Philippines will "remain above three per cent annually." So, the loss of steam in China will be picked up by India, which will be a \$22-trillion-plus economy by 2050. Yet, it will still be almost half of China's size.

Goldman Sachs cites several reasons for the phenomenal growth of 'Emerging Asia' over the next two-and-a-half decades. These include demographics, urban expansion, governance, technology, and convergence. Both India and Indonesia, which will be among the top four by 2050, have large sections of youngsters, who are entering, and will enter, the workforce, which will push up productivity, growth, and overall GDP and output of the two nations. In contrast, the developed world is saddled with aging societies, and shrinking labour pools. While artificial intelligence (AI) will help the developed nations to push productivity with minimal workers, the trend will peter out as the rest of the world catches up fast. In this century, the flow of tech, and its adoption is faster than the previous one, or the ones before. The western world cannot latch on to the tech advantages for too long.



Hectic migration to urban cities, and massive expansion of the existing cities, will be a feature of 'Emerging Asia.' In the western world, the aging societies will move towards the comforts of the suburbs, which will be less-congested, and cheaper to live in. While the cities in the West may witness a wave of depopulation, as is happening with mega US cities like New York, those in the East will grow exponentially. This will fuel urban consumption, spur infrastructure, and lead to higher and additional productivity gains. The living standards may be less than desired, and cost-of-living may be higher than required, but the benefits to the economy will be phenomenal. Hence, while the West chooses comforts, the East will confront challenges and difficulties, only

with the ambitions and aspirations to beat the West. In effect, rapid urban development will attract talent from abroad too, as is the case now.

Over the past decade or so, the 'Emerging Asia' is catching up on technology. Today, China can compete with America in areas such as AI, robotics, and semiconductors. There is a fear that in some respects, China may be ahead of the US, and the former is winning this century's tech race. The same is true with India, as even the global tech giants wish to make the former the hub for future hardware and software needs. More data centres will be set up in India, and the global capability centres will rearrange the world's tech order to an extent. According to a media report,

"Technology and industrial upgrades play a crucial role. Manufacturing hubs in China, Vietnam, and Thailand have steadily moved up the value chain, producing everything from advanced electronics to electric vehicles. As income rises, these economies are also becoming major consumer markets." Tech transition may shift eastwards; it has found an alternate centre in China.

With tech adoption, and assimilation, comes economic convergence. Emerging nations grow faster because they use new-age tech, and business models pioneered in the western world. Thus, the former either reverse-engineer tech to suit their specific needs, or send people abroad to learn about new tech, and return to adopt them at home. Similarly, new firms and start-ups learn from existing and emerging overseas business and management models. The transition from elsewhere to home is faster because the world is a global village. As billions of people in 'Emerging Asia' climb the income and productivity ladder, even as the West outsources its products and services, the former grow faster, and become larger compared to the latter. Emerging nations such as Indonesia, Egypt, and Nigeria have more energy to grow, and become bigger. The erstwhile powerful nations like Germany, Japan, France, and the UK remain influential but command an increasingly smaller slice of the world's GDP and output pie.

Despite the Asian advantage, experts do not believe that the world will become a truly Asian order. In terms of economics, it will still be a multipolar globe, with powerful centres in America, Europe, Asia, and even Central Asia and Middle East. Prosperity, despite the rankings or sizes, will spread across the globe, and across continents, despite the growing inequalities between the nations. Indeed, the biggest lesson from the Goldman Sachs' extrapolation may not be the focus on 'Emerging Asia' but a realisation that the world will not depend on, or belong to, one region. It will belong to several striving populations, and communities, each with their own ambitions and aspirations. China may be No. 1 but it will consistently be pushed and nudged by America. India will be No. 3 but Europe will not allow it to relax. In 2075, India may be No. 2, just behind China, and just ahead of America.



India's lesson from the West's AI battlefield



NISHANT SAHDEV

West's conflict revealed something new about modern warfare: algorithms are now helping in battlefield decisions. Last week a curious headline appeared in several international newspapers. "The new kill chain: AI is helping plan bombing targets."

For a moment it sounded like something from a science-fiction novel. But the report was describing a real military development: AI systems helping analysts process surveillance data and prioritise legitimate targets during a conflict.

One thing to note: No robot soldiers marching into battle. No machines replacing generals.

Just software is assisting human planners. Yet that small change may mark the beginning of something historically important. Because once machines start helping wars think, even in limited ways, the nature of conflict begins to change.

War, after all, has always followed the limits of human thinking.

For centuries, commanders studied maps and reports, trying to make sense of incomplete information. Intelligence officers pieced together fragments of data — satellite photos, intercepted signals,

decisions that might have escalated catastrophically.

Artificial intelligence reduces the time available for hesitation. If military systems begin reacting faster and faster, the space for human judgement may shrink. Conflicts could evolve at a pace that political institutions struggle to manage.

That possibility represents one of the most profound strategic challenges of the coming decades. There is another transformation taking place alongside this acceleration.

For most of the twentieth century, military strength depended on large, expensive machines — fighter jets, tanks, submarines and aircraft carriers. Each platform required years of development and enormous budgets.

Artificial intelligence encourages a different model. Instead of relying solely on a handful of powerful platforms, militaries are experimenting with networks of smaller machines. Drones, robotic sensors and autonomous underwater vehicles can share information through algorithms and coordinate their movements. Individually these systems may be modest but together they can become surprisingly capable.

A single operator might supervise dozens of autonomous drones. A network of sensors could monitor vast areas continuously. Swarms of small machines might overwhelm



eyewitness accounts. Political leaders debated options before approving decisions that might alter the course of history. Even in moments of crisis, war moved at human speed.

AI is beginning to change that rhythm. Across modern battlefields, enormous streams of information are already being collected. Satellites circle the planet constantly, observing borders and infrastructure. Drones hover over conflict zones, transmitting video feeds. Sensors track aircraft, ships and electronic signals across vast regions.

For human analysts, the real challenge is not collecting information. It is keeping up with it.

AI is exceptionally good at that task. Feed an algorithm thousands of satellite images and it can highlight unusual activity along a border. Give it maritime data and it can identify ships behaving strangely — changing course unexpectedly or switching off tracking systems. In simple terms, AI does not fight wars. It notices patterns. And noticing earlier can change everything.

Military strategists often describe a sequence called the "kill chain" — the process through which a threat is detected, analysed and acted upon. For most of history, that chain moved slowly. Information had to be verified. Analysts examined evidence. Commanders debated responses.

Now instead of analysts spending hours scanning satellite imagery, algorithms can examine the same images within seconds. Instead of a few possible threats being reviewed each day, hundreds can be evaluated. The battlefield begins to move faster. Speed has always been valuable in war. But extreme speed introduces new problems.

Politics, after all, does not operate at machine speed. Diplomacy requires patience. Intelligence must be verified. Leaders must weigh consequences before acting. History has been shaped by moments of hesitation — leaders pausing long enough to reconsider

defences designed for traditional threats. In such a world, military advantage no longer comes only from building the biggest machine. It comes from building the smartest network.

This switch is already visible in recent conflicts, where relatively inexpensive drones have disrupted equipment worth millions of dollars. As autonomy improves, these asymmetries will likely grow. The strategic competition of the twenty-first century is therefore not only about missiles and aircraft. It is also about algorithms, data and computing power.

For India, these developments carry particular implications

India operates within one of the most complex security environments in the world. Its northern borders stretch across some of the most difficult terrain on Earth. Its maritime interests extend across the Indian Ocean, through which a large share of global trade flows. Monitoring such vast spaces has always been a formidable challenge. Artificial intelligence can help.

AI systems can analyse satellite imagery to detect unusual infrastructure development near contested borders. Autonomous drones can patrol remote regions where human deployment is difficult. Machine-learning systems can monitor shipping traffic across the Indian Ocean and identify suspicious patterns among thousands of vessels.

These technologies do not replace soldiers or commanders. They simply allow them to see more clearly. And clarity is one of the most valuable assets in strategic affairs.

But the challenge for India is not merely acquiring AI tools. It is building the ecosystem that makes those tools possible.

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Please read the complete article online at dailypioneer.com

MANAV: The civilisational blueprint for the age of artificial intelligence



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

In February 2026, New Delhi did not merely host a technology conference. It staged a civilisational argument. At the India AI Impact Summit, global policymakers, scientists, entrepreneurs, ethicists, and diplomats did not gather to debate artificial intelligence as a tool; they gathered to confront a question that will define the century: What kind of intelligence should shape humanity's future?

What emerged from Bharat Mandapam was not another declaration of innovation supremacy or a race for computational dominance. Instead, the world witnessed the articulation of a philosophical architecture for AI, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's MANAV doctrine, a framework that reframes artificial intelligence not as an industry, but as a moral project.

For over a decade, global AI discourse has been shaped largely by two poles: technological accelerationism and regulatory anxiety. One celebrated scale and speed; the other feared loss of control. The India AI Impact Summit reframed the conversation entirely. It proposed that the real debate is neither speed nor restraint, but purpose.

Observers across continents noted a striking shift. Delegates did not leave speaking about India's infrastructure or markets alone. They left speaking India's language of AI: ethics, inclusion, sovereignty, trust, and public good. In diplomatic corridors afterward, a quiet consensus began to form: India had introduced not a policy stance, but a vocabulary. And vocabulary is power. Whoever defines the terms of a global conversation shapes its trajectory.

The acronym MANAV, Moral systems, Accountable governance, National sovereignty, Accessible AI, Valid systems; may appear administrative at first glance. In reality, it is architectural. It reorganises how nations conceptualise intelligence systems and their place in society.

India's insistence that fairness, transparency, and human oversight be embedded into AI from the classroom upward signals a long, term strategy. Ethical literacy is being cultivated as a civic skill, not a technical afterthought. The Guinness World Record pledge campaign, nearly a quarter, million commitments in 24 hours, demonstrated that responsible AI can become a participatory movement rather than an elite debate.

Where many nations treat regulation as a brake, India treats it as a foundation. The ₹10,300 crore IndiaAI Mission embeds oversight into compute access, model deployment, and public sector usage. This signals to the world that trust is not the enemy of innovation; it is its multiplier.

In the AI age, sovereignty is measured not only in territory but in data, algorithms, and chips. India's push for domestic compute capacity, semiconductor manufacturing, and secure datasets reflects a doctrine of open collaboration with strategic independence, a model increasingly attractive to middle powers wary of technological dependency.



India's Digital Public Infrastructure, shared compute portals, dataset repositories, and supercomputing networks redefine access economics. By lowering barriers for startups, students, and researchers, India positions AI not as a luxury resource but as a public utility. The message resonated strongly across the Global South: technological progress need not deepen inequality. At a time when deepfakes threaten elections and synthetic media blurs truth, India's regulatory definition of AI, generated content and investment in auditing tools signal a decisive stance: legitimacy must be engineered, not assumed. This transforms trust from a philosophical concept into a technical specification. The summit compelled global observers to recognise three realities about India's AI trajectory:

First, India is not attempting to replicate Silicon Valley or Shenzhen. It is building a third model, civilisational AI, where technology development is aligned with democratic norms, pluralism, and public welfare.

Second, scale can be ethical. With one, sixth of humanity, India's ability to implement inclusive digital infrastructure at population scale demonstrates that mass adoption and moral safeguards are not mutually exclusive.

Third, AI leadership is no longer defined solely by patents or compute clusters. It is defined by narrative authority. By presenting a coherent moral framework, India positioned itself as a thought leader in shaping how the world thinks about intelligence itself.

Historically, nations influenced the world through culture, trade, or military power. In the 21st century, influence increasingly flows through technological norms. Just as global

finance once adopted Western regulatory standards and international diplomacy adopted UN vocabulary, AI governance is now entering a phase where conceptual frameworks will standardise globally. The Delhi summit suggested that India's vocabulary may become that standard.

Already, policymakers from multiple regions are studying India's AI governance guidelines, public compute models, and ethical frameworks as templates adaptable to their own contexts. What makes the Indian approach persuasive is not rhetoric but replicability. It is designed for countries that lack billion, dollar labs but possess human capital and ambition.

The genius of the MANAV vision lies in its universality. It is culturally rooted yet globally legible. Its principles, ethics, accountability, sovereignty, accessibility,

legitimacy, are values every society recognises, regardless of political system or technological maturity. This universality transforms MANAV from a national doctrine into a potential global charter. Much like the concept of sustainable development moved from environmental discourse into economic policy worldwide, human, centric AI may follow a similar path, originating in India but adopted internationally.

Summits often produce declarations that fade into archives. This one produced alignment. Delegates departed not with communiqués but with frameworks, datasets, partnerships, and shared language. The conversations begun in New Delhi are already extending into bilateral agreements, academic collaborations, and startup ecosystems. In diplomatic terms, the summit functioned

as a signalling event. It told the world that India is not waiting to participate in the AI future, it is helping write its operating principles. If the 2010s were defined by the question "Who builds AI?" the 2030s may be defined by "Whose principles guide AI?"

India's bet is clear: technological leadership will belong not to the fastest innovator, but to the most trusted one. Nations, companies, and citizens will gravitate toward systems they believe are fair, explainable, and accountable. By institutionalising those qualities early, India is positioning itself as the reference model for trustworthy intelligence.

The long, term implication is profound. As global standards bodies, academic institutions, and regulatory alliances begin adopting similar principles, India's framework could quietly become the grammar of global AI governance.

The deepest takeaway from the India AI Impact Summit is philosophical. Artificial intelligence is often discussed as a frontier. India framed it as a mirror. Technology reflects the values of those who build it. If that reflection is distorted, society fractures. If it is balanced, society advances.

Through MANAV, India has proposed that the future of intelligence must remain anchored in humanity. Not human versus machine, but human guiding machine. That is why the summit will likely be remembered not as an event, but as a turning point: the moment the world realised that the next chapter of artificial intelligence might not be written only in code, but in conscience.

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The tyranny of the algorithm and digital India act



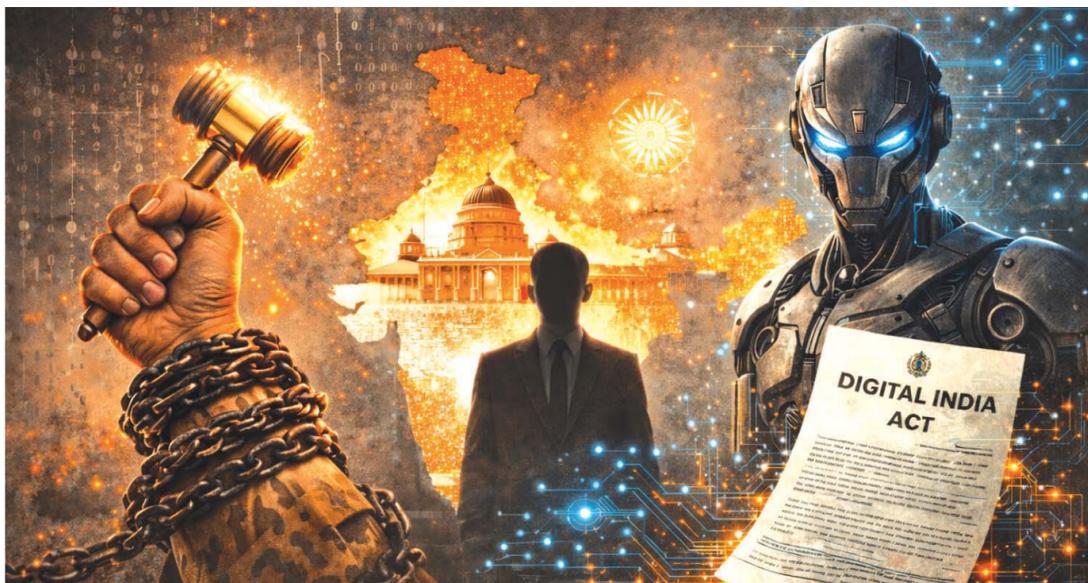
ABHISHEK PRATAP SINGH | **YUVRAJ PACHADHARI**

JS Mill who is regarded as the father of negative liberty and a staunch opponent to state interventionism, in 1859 warned that the "tyranny of the majority" was more dangerous than the "tyranny of a magistrate". Today as India prepares the Digital India Act we face a new version of this threat: "the tyranny of the algorithm".

JS Mill is a frequently quoted philosopher for his views on freedom of speech, expressions, thoughts and opinion. In this supposed "age of information" where most of the social media platforms are filled with misinformation or half truths, Mills' harm principle is highly relevant to justify state intervention in the digital sphere because "cognitive harm" is just as dangerous as physical harm. False news and narratives can cause tensions between the groups of society as we will see in the Angel Chakma case. Social media has a great impact on the lives of people of any age and with the coming up of AI deep fakes it is very easy to fool the common public and shift the narratives. Along with AI deep fakes, tyranny of the algorithm is also coming out as a very big problem.

According to a recent research from National Institute of Health (NIH), 2025 "cognitive overload" from social media leads to reliance on the "illusory truth effect" which means when a false narrative or news is presented to a person many times, it feels like the truth. We recently saw some great examples of this happening in real life as in the case of killing of a North Eastern student in Uttarakhand named Angel Chakma, where the racial discrimination narrative was pushed but in police investigations it was found that there was no angle of racial discrimination rather two of the killers were themselves from Nepal and North East.

While a lot of people talked about it on social media, the truth remains buried, most of them still think that the incident was an issue of racial discrimination. This shows how



the harm is being done to the cognitive autonomy of individuals violating the harm principle of Mill to which he allows state intervention. Another example of the spread of fake news regarding the death of India's one of the prominent actors, Dharmendra, which was a systemic failure of our digital commons. When government offices themselves are misled into posting condolences, the 'rational and political competence' of the citizenry, which Mill deemed essential for a functioning democracy, is under siege. We are witnessing the 'illusory truth effect' at a national scale, where familiar falsehoods become our reality.

The Digital India Act is our opportunity to move from a trampling digital marketplace to a stationary state of digital stability, where technology serves human flourishing rather than outrage-for-profit. Election processes occurring worldwide, be it USA or Slovakia, are facing the last minute impact of

AI generated deepfake videos or audio clips. This makes it very important for the state to intervene but in a positive way. The State must not use this intervention to try to control and shift the narratives to benefit themselves.

This can be done by introducing an element of algorithmic transparency where a sign of AI comes up attached with the post that was created using AI; just like foods have a nutritional label, information should have a "provenance label" tracing their source of origin and showing whether they were generated with AI or amplified through it, which will help

people to differentiate between original and fake content. This acts as a Millian middle path avoiding banning accounts which would violate negative liberty and instead provides the transparency needed for individuals to exercise free judgement. Another solution is to introduce an option of checking the content's truth factor using AI

itself, which will help people discriminate between true and false content, specifically news or reports. As India is hosting Global AI Summit 2026, first in the global South, these issues demands awareness, deliberation and policy intervention. Some critics might argue that State interventionism can lead to censorship but it is actually that unregulated algorithm acting as true censors burying truth with false news and narratives.

At last it is very important to note that AI and technology are modern weapons which must be utilized to empower people and not misguide them. This bill with the right propositions will make sure that India's digital renaissance will not be built on sand and age of information does not turn to an age of misinformation. It will also show to the world that a superpower like India doesn't have to choose between corporate anarchy and State censorship.

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FROM THE WORLD

UAE

16 Iranian missiles intercepted

The United Arab Emirates says Iran has launched 16 ballistic missiles and over 117 drones in new barrages on Sunday. The UAE's Defence Ministry says it intercepted all 16 missiles, while a 17th fell into the sea. It says it intercepted most of the drones, but four fell in UAE territory. The ministry said it is ready to "firmly confront" the threats. Iran's president earlier Sunday threatened to increase attacks on US targets across the region in the face of ongoing Israeli and US strikes. The Emirati statement did not specify the locations of Sunday's attacks.

LEBANON

83 children killed in Israeli offensive

Lebanon's health minister said Sunday that 83 children are among the 394 killed so far in the conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group over the past week. Israel's renewed offensive began last week after Hezbollah launched rockets toward northern Israel during opening days of the war.

SRI LANKA

Visas granted to Iranian sailors

Sri Lanka will grant free one-month visas to a group rescued from Iranian vessels, allowing them to remain in Sri Lanka under humanitarian protection, a senior minister said on Sunday. Minister of Public Security Ananda Wijepala said similar decisions could be taken in the future if necessary, stressing that such measures are not intended to support or harm any particular party. "They will be granted one month gratis visas," Wijepala said. "We will not be taking any sides but will act on a humanitarian basis in terms of international law," Wijepala stressed.

RSP heads towards historic Nepal poll win

SHIRISH B PRADHAN
Kathmandu



Balendra Shah shows a certificate at the Election Commission premises PTI

The RSP of the young musician-turned-politician Balendra Shah 'Balen' is on Sunday heading towards a spectacular victory in the general elections that saw the legacy parties face rout at the hustings.

Formed in 2022, the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) has won 120 of the 165 directly elected seats while it is leading in another six in the House of Representative elections, according to the Election Commission (EC).

The EC has announced results for 156 of the 165 seats as of 5:30 pm. Results for only nine seats remain to be declared, EC officials said, adding, it may be late Sunday night or by Monday morning

that the process will be complete. Counting started soon after voting completed on Thursday and Saturday saw start of the results being declared, a major among them being RSP's 35-year-old prime-ministerial candidate Balen defeating four-time prime minister K P Sharma Oli, the chair of Nepal's one of the largest

parties — CPN-UML — by a huge margin of about 50,000 votes in the Jhapa-5 constituency. Balen is expected to be the next prime minister of Nepal, reflecting a public mood of rejection of established parties. He will be the first Madhesi prime minister of the Himalayan nation and also the youngest to occupy the top post in the country's

parliamentary history. The Nepali Congress (NC) is a distant second, winning 17 seats while the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) — CPN-(UML) — of ousted prime minister K P Sharma Oli has won just seven seats and is leading in three. The Nepal Communist Party (NCP) has won seven seats, the Shram Sanskriti Party has won three while the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) won one seat, the EC data showed. Among the winners is one independent. Independent candidate Mahabir Pun, who had resigned as education minister in the interim government, won in Myagdi-1 constituency in remote mountain districts beating his nearest rivals from the CPN-(UML) and the NC.

Incidentally, the RSP had not fielded any candidate against him. The seats won by RSP, headed by Ravi Lamichhane, include a clean sweep in all 15 constituencies of three districts in Kathmandu Valley, the EC data showed. Legacy parties failed to convince voters for whom the major issues included fighting corruption and an end to nepotism apart from a generational change in political leadership of the country. Former deputy speaker Indira Rana Magar, of the RSP, won from Jhapa-2 by defeating the speaker of the dissolved House of Representatives and senior leader of CPN-UML Dev Raj Ghimire. Rana Magar won by a huge margin of 48,742 votes against Ghimire, who secured 11,368 votes. (PTI)

Two ex-PM lose, only Prachanda survives RSP tsunami

SHIRISH B PRADHAN
Kathmandu



Pushpakamal Dahal 'Prachanda'

Among the three former prime ministers who contested the March 5 general election in Nepal, only Pushpakamal Dahal 'Prachanda' managed to win his seat amid the RSP tsunami decimating the old guard in the Himalayan nation.

On Saturday, the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP), formed in 2022, is headed to a two-thirds victory by winning 120 of the 165 seats for which results have been declared as of 5:30 pm.

The biggest loss by a legacy party that sent shock-

waves across the Himalayan country came when RSP's prime ministerial candidate Balendra Shah 'Balen' defeated K P Oli, chair of CPN-UML and four-time prime minister, with a huge margin in Jhapa-5 constituency, which was his and his party's stronghold for years.

In a proverbial David versus Goliath fight, Balen, 35, secured 68,348 votes against 74-year-old Oli's 18,734 in the constituency in eastern Nepal's Koshi province, where the former prime minister had remained undefeated for years. The March 5 general elections were necessitat-

ed after Oli resigned on September 9 last year, following violent two-day protests by the youth-led Gen Z group against his government over corruption and a ban on social media.

Balen chose the Jhapa-5 constituency to take on Oli thus making it a direct fight between the conservative old guard versus the new face of hope.

Prachanda, 71, who is known for choosing a new constituency every election, had contested the March 5 election from Rukum East.

In 2007, Prachanda had won from Rolpa-2 and Kathmandu-10, then in 2013 he lost Kathmandu-10 but won from Siraha-5. In 2017, he won from Chitawan-3, then shifted to Gorkha-2 in 2022. "Prachanda changed his constituency time and again seeking a safer one and this

time he contested the election from remote Rukum East, one of the strongholds of the erstwhile Maoist party," said Sunil Babu Pant, a former Parliament member. "This time the former Maoist guerrilla commander has not only changed the constituency but also changed the party's name to Nepali Communist Party," he added.

But it was not just change of constituency that helped Prachanda. Months ahead of the polls, he dissolved the CPN-Maoist Centre, changed the name of the party to Nepali Communist Party (NCP) after merging two dozen fringe parties into it. (PTI)

Iran's border with Turkey offers way out, but few leaving for good

SERRA YEDIKARDES
Kapikoy (Turkey)



Canadian citizens, were reluctantly preparing to fly to Canada, although they no longer have a house there and both of them work in Iran. Asghari said they are hoping the trip will be brief.

A land crossing near eastern Turkey's Van province is one of the few routes connecting Iranians to the rest of the world amid an airspace shutdown in Iran since the US and Israel launched strikes on Tehran over a week ago, triggering war in the Middle East.

Most travellers at the border gate in recent days had connections with Turkey through work, family, and friends, and many had moved up preplanned visits because of the war. Some had residency or citizenship in a third country and were transiting through Turkey.

Only a small number of Iranians who spoke to The

Associated Press at the Kapikoy crossing said they planned to stay in Turkey to escape the war for an indefinite period.

Reza Gol, a 38-year-old plastic surgeon, said the war was not the only reason for his trip. He was travelling from Urmia in western Iran to see patients in Istanbul, where he used to live. "It's not clear whether we will leave Iran for good, but I can clear my head a little bit in the meantime," he said.

"You can see it's not that crowded at the border. Everyone is staying in their houses. For now, people are not leaving everything they have behind and running away." Pooneh Asghari and her husband, Iranian-

Canadian citizens, were reluctantly preparing to fly to Canada, although they no longer have a house there and both of them work in Iran. Asghari said they are hoping the trip will be brief.

"We've been living in Iran for over the last five years," she said. "All our life is there." Fariba, a woman who asked

to be identified only by her first name out of security concerns, was headed to Izmir in western Turkey to wait out the war with her son.

She said most of her friends and neighbours don't have the means to escape, which might explain the lack of a major exodus across the border. "People are very

poor now," she said. "So they are staying at home, and they are scared."

Iranians normally enter Turkey without visas. On Monday, Turkey's trade minister announced the mutual suspension of crossings for day-trips, while Iranian border officials have restricted the passage of some Iranian nationals, according to travellers and local media.

However, since Thursday morning, both Iranians and third-country nationals have been crossing the mountain-ringed Kapikoy border gates normally. Turkey's Interior Minister, Mustafa Ciftci, said in a statement that 2,032 travellers entered Turkey from Iran on Wednesday, while 1,966 of them departed to

Iran. More recent figures were not available. Most of those who crossed then made their way to the Van airport to continue their journey. On Friday night, about 20 passengers, mostly Iranians, were lying on rows of chairs waiting to get a flight the next morning.

Mehregan, a 26-year-old who studies in China, was visiting her family in Ahvaz for the winter holidays when the war broke out. She drove more than 15 hours across Iran to cross into Turkey.

She asked not to be identified by her full name out of fear that speaking to the media would cause her problems with Iranian authorities. The cash-strapped student decided to sleep in the airport while waiting for

the next day's flight to Istanbul, from which she would fly to China. But on Saturday, her flight was cancelled because of snowstorms, and she was preparing to look for a hotel in the city rather than sleeping in the airport for a second night. "If I can't get on a flight tomorrow from here, I will miss my flight to China" and lose the cost of the non-refundable ticket, she said.

Van, which is a 1.5-hour drive from the border, has long been a popular destination for Iranians for work, travel, and trade. The hotels and shops that normally do bustling business during Iran's Nowruz holidays in mid-March are now expecting to take a hit. (AP)

India assures assistance to its nationals in Saudi Arabia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Dubai



India's ambassador to Saudi Arabia Suhel Ajaz Khan

India's ambassador to Saudi Arabia Suhel Ajaz Khan on Sunday held a virtual interaction with representatives of the Indian community and reassured them of assistance following joint US-Israel strikes on Iran.

Khan was accompanied by Deputy Chief of Mission, Abu Mathen George, and Counsellor (Community Welfare), Y Sabir.

The Ambassador reassured the community of the Embassy's readiness to extend all necessary assistance to Indian nationals in need, India in Saudi Arabia said in a post on X.

Khan also briefed participants on the Embassy's recent initiatives, includ-

ing the establishment of a 24/7 control room to provide prompt support. Community representatives expressed appreciation for the Embassy's proactive outreach and engagement, it added.

The Indian mission in Saudi Arabia on Sunday also issued an advisory for its citizens to continue to remain vigilant and adhere to safety guidelines and follow advi-

sories issued by local authorities diligently.

The advisory has come in the wake of recent attacks between the US and Iran. On February 28, the US and Israel launched a joint attack on Iran, which came after days of build-up with US President Donald Trump ramping up the pressure on Tehran to agree to a new deal on its nuclear programme.

Trump downplays Russia intel sharing with Iran

AAMER MADHANI/SEUNG MIN KIM
Doral (US)

President Donald Trump said on Saturday that it was inconsequential if Russia has provided Iran with information to help Tehran target US military personnel and assets in the Middle East as the week-old war rages.

The president dismissed the import of such information-sharing after he attended the dignified transfer for six Army reservists who were killed in a drone strike in Kuwait the day after the US and Israel launched a war on Iran that has unsettled the global economy.

Trump stopped short of confirming reports by The Associated Press and other news outlets that US intelligence officials believe Russia has provided Iran with such targeting information. But if Moscow is passing on such

details, he said Iran was getting little out of it.

"If you take a look at what has happened to Iran in the last week, if they are getting information, it is not helping them much," Trump told reporters on Air Force One as he flew to Miami, where he is spending the rest of the weekend. The president also waved off a question about how Russia assisting Iran in such a way might affect his view of the US-Russia relationship. "They would say we do it against them," Trump responded. "Wouldn't they say that we do it against them?"

Ukraine, in the four years since it was invaded by Russia, has received US intelligence to help defend against incoming missiles from Russia as well as to help Kyiv hit certain Russian targets. Downplaying the significance of Russia handing off battlespace intel-



ligence to Iran came after the US Treasury Department announced earlier this week that it was temporarily allowing India to keep buying crude oil and petroleum products from Russia for a month, until April 4. The administration decision to grant the world's most-populous country a temporary exemption faced bipartisan blowback. Critics charge that Trump was giving Russia a break that will

provide Moscow with badly-needed revenue as it looks to keep funding its war machine. Rep. Don Bacon, R-Nebr., condemned the move, saying in a post on X that "weakness towards Russia is appalling". Rep. Ted Lieu, D-Calif., in his own X post directed at Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, also decried the administration's decision. "Reverse your decision to lift oil sanctions on Russia. It is

traitorous conduct for you to help Russia," Lieu said. "Meanwhile, Russia is assisting Iran in targeting American troops."

Trump has decided to give India leeway on oil purchases from Russia as global oil prices surge and investors across sectors worry about how long the Iran war will last. The waiver for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Government followed Trump announcing weeks ago that he was cutting tariffs on India after their officials agreed to reduce its reliance on cheap Russian crude. India has taken advantage of reduced Russian oil prices as much of the world has sought to isolate Moscow for its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The price of oil has surged higher and shows no signs of halting, a week into a war that the US and Israel launched. (AP)

MOS Kirti Vardhan calls for future-ready Commonwealth catering to needs of Global South

ADITI KHANNA
London

India's Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh on Sunday called for a reformed, future-ready Commonwealth delivering tangible benefits for members and emphasising the needs of the Global South.

Singh is leading the Indian delegation at the 26th Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting (CFAMM) in London that is bringing together foreign ministers of the 56 member nations around the theme of 'Commonwealth at a

Moment of Strategic Opportunity'.

Singh started the day's engagement with participation in the CFAMM26 Minister's Retreat at Lancaster House, which took place against the backdrop of the joint US-Israel strikes on Iran.

"Called for a reformed, future-ready Commonwealth delivering tangible benefits for members, emphasising the needs of the #GlobalSouth and highlighting cooperation in digital public infrastructure, AI for development, disaster resilience, and economic growth," Singh said in a post

on X. The meeting began with closed-door discussions in the retreat format with the dialogue expected to focus on the role of the organisation in a "fast-changing international landscape" and explore "impactful and transformative solutions to unlock opportunities in the face of a fractured global climate."

"Our family of nations gathers here in the UK at a time of great uncertainty and instability; it is so vital for us to be able to come together," said UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper in her welcome remarks. The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Shirley



Bassey, echoed the sentiment of a shared approach in her address which opened with a reference to International Women's Day and the organisation's commitment to empowering

women and girls. "The Commonwealth works not as a bloc, but as a bridge - a bridge between regions, a bridge between large states and small, a bridge between advanced

and developing economies, a bridge between principles and cultural cooperation," said Botchwey.

"At a time when global corridors are narrowing, there is great scope within our own family to deepen connectivity, to reduce barriers and better integrate small and vulnerable states into value chains. At a time when the world feels fragile and multilateralism is under pressure, trust is stretched and too often nations are tempted to turn inward," he said.

"In such a moment, the ties of the Commonwealth matter more than ever,

because when the world fractures, connection matters even more," she said. In a pre-visit statement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had highlighted that India is one of the largest contributors to the Commonwealth and has assisted the organisation with technical assistance and capacity building. The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 56 countries and serves a vital platform to deepen India's engagement with Commonwealth members, in particular the Small States and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the MEA said. During his two-day

visit to the UK, Minister Singh is expected to engage with the Commonwealth leadership and counterparts from some of the member states before attending the Commonwealth Day celebrations on Monday - to be led by King Charles III as the head of the organisation.

According to Buckingham Palace, this year in his customary Commonwealth Day message, the 77-year-old British monarch is expected to reflect upon the value of traditional alliances and international friendships at a time of "increasing pressures of conflict." (PTI)

Russia says international law dead; calls for UNSC P-5 summit

VINAY SHUKLA
■ Moscow

Russia has said international law is effectively dead amid escalating tensions in West Asia following the US-Israeli strike on Iran, and called for reviving President Vladimir Putin's proposal to convene a summit of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the current global situation underscores the need to revisit Putin's proposal, first made before the COVID-19 pandemic, for a summit of the P-5 — Russia, the US, China, France and the UK — to discuss global security and stability.

"We have all lost what we call international law... I don't even understand how



Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov

anyone can be called upon to follow the norms and principles of international law. It effectively no longer exists," Peskov said in an interview with the state-run Rossiya TV.

He said international law exists "de jure" (by law) but

no longer "de facto" (in fact). "We cannot tell anyone to follow international law, follow which law? Nobody can formulate today what it is," he said.

Referring to the sharp escalation following the US-Israeli attack on Iran, Peskov said

the situation in the region has become significantly destabilised.

"The region has become significantly destabilised, and the cumulative effect of the vast number of regional conflicts and unresolved issues is resulting in both economic and political consequences," he said.

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the US should clarify its broader plans and explain how they relate to existing international norms.

"We talk a lot about wanting to define what kind of world we live in... We believe the US should explain its plans and how this all relates to what previously defined certain norms," he said in a programme on State TV. (PTI)

22 Iranian sailors of IRIS Dena discharged from Sri Lankan hospital

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Colombo

At least 22 Iranian sailors of IRIS Dena, the Iranian ship that was torpedoed by the US, have been discharged, hospital authorities said on Sunday.

"They were dispatched in ambulances to the Sri Lanka Air Force facility at Koggala outside Galle under heavy security," officials said. Another 10 sailors remain under treatment at the National Hospital, Galle, in Karapitiya.

They were admitted on Wednesday after the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena sank after being torpedoed by a US submarine off Galle on the island's southern coast.

Sri Lanka on Wednesday said it had recovered 84 bodies of Iranian sailors killed in the attack. The ship was returning home from Visakhapatnam in India after a naval fleet review exercise.

Sri Lanka on Saturday said steps were being taken to repatriate their bodies.

The Government said that the situation had not improved yet to try sending them by air or sea.



The magisterial inquiry and the post-mortems on 84 bodies were concluded in the southern port town of Galle on March 5. Eighty of the 84 personnel were identified by the survivors.

The sailors of the second ship, IRIS Bushehr, are currently at the naval

facility at Welisara outside Colombo. Sri Lanka is yet to make a decision on their repatriation. Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath has said Sri Lanka would strictly adhere to the relevant international laws to deal with the situation.

India, China should view each other as partners: Foreign Minister Wang Yi

KJM VARMA
■ Beijing

India and China should view each other as "partners, not rivals" and "opportunity instead of threat", Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Sunday.

Wang, at his annual press conference on the sidelines of the Chinese parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC), said both countries should stick to the direction set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping to improve relations without interference.

Modi and Xi had a successful meeting in Tianjin last August, Wang said. "Building on the fresh start enabled by their Kazan meeting in 2024, the Tianjin summit brought about further improvement in China-India relations," he added.

"We are heartened to see re-energised interactions at all levels, a new record in bilateral trade, and closer people-to-people exchanges. All this has brought tangible benefits to the two peoples," he said.

On the future course of the ties, Wang said both countries "must maintain the correct strategic perception of each other as partners rather than rivals, and opportunity instead of threat".

"Both sides also must uphold good-neighbourliness and friendship, and jointly safeguard peace and stability in the border areas and focus on development," he said.

"As each other's important neighbours and members of the Global South, China and India enjoy profound civilisational ties and share extensive common interests," Wang said. (PTI)



"Mutual trust and cooperation are beneficial to the development of the two countries, while division and confrontation are detrimental to the rejuvenation of Asia," the Chinese foreign minister said.

The two sides should follow the direction set by leaders and remove interference, he said without elaborating.

He said India and China should support each other in hosting BRICS summits. While India is set to host the summit this year, China is due to host the summit in 2027.

BRICS which originally comprised Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, later expanded with the admission of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Iran.

India-China relations, which were frozen for five years due to a military standoff in eastern Ladakh, began the process of normalisation following two summits between Modi and Xi at Kazan in Russia in 2024, followed by a second meeting on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Tianjin last year.

Both sides resumed visa and flight services besides initiating a series of measures to normalise their relations. (PTI)

Device thrown at anti-Islam protest in New York; investigation on



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ New York

A counterprotester demonstrating against a "Stop the Islamic Takeover of New York City" event on Saturday lit and threw a device containing nuts, bolts and screws at the protesting crowd after someone from that group used pepper spray on the counterprotest, police said. Police are investigating the incident that started late Saturday morning when someone from the anti-Islam protest associated with conservative influencer Jake

Lang shot pepper spray into a counterprotesting group near the mayoral residence, Gracie Mansion, Commissioner Jessica Tisch said. Tensions continued to heighten, she said, when someone in the counterprotest lit and threw a device she described as smaller than a football into the protesting crowd of about 20 people. The device struck a barrier and extinguished itself "a few feet from police officers," she said. The same person then ran, and another person gave him a second device, which he then dropped.

Sudarsan Pattnaik showcases sand paintings at Venice exhibition



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ London

Internationally renowned sand artist and Padma Shri awardee Sudarsan Pattnaik is representing India at Contemporary Venice 2026, where he is showcasing his mixed-media "Jugalbandi" paintings that combine natural sand with colour on canvas. Pattnaik, from Odisha, is the only Indian artist participating in the international exhibition being held at the historic Palazzo Albrizzi-Capello in Venice,

Italy, according to a press release issued on Sunday. At the exhibition, the artist is presenting his "Jugalbandi" series, a body of work that merges natural sand with colour on canvas, marking the first time he is showcasing these paintings at an international exhibition of this scale. The works reflect themes of nature, human emotion, environmental balance and harmony between humanity and the earth, drawing from Pattnaik's artistic journey from sand sculpting to painting.

Colombians are electing new Congress, choosing presidential candidates

ASTRID SUAREZ
■ Bogota (Colombia)

Colombians head to the polls on Sunday to elect a new Congress and select candidates from three major coalitions in a primary-style contest ahead of a presidential election this May.

The election unfolds under high alert for political violence across the South American country, particularly in rural regions dominated by illegal armed groups.

At the same time, President Gustavo Petro — the nation's first left-leaning leader — has cast doubt on the country's election software, pointing to the 2022 legislative elections, when his Historic Pact movement gained over 390,000 votes following a recount. He attributed this shift to the presence of election observers.

The European Union deployed 40 election observers in early February and said it intended to increase the size of the delegation for the upcoming congressional vote.

More than 3,000 candidates are vying for 285 legislative positions — 102 in the Senate and 183 in the House of Representatives — with 41.2 million citizens eligible to



cast their ballots.

Sunday's election is set to define the political landscape for Colombia's next head of State. Petro is ineligible for reelection because the constitution bars a sitting president from running for a consecutive second term.

Colombia's current Congress approved Petro's pension and labour overhaul, but rejected his proposed reforms to the health care and tax reforms, and there were often tensions between him and lawmakers. Meanwhile, the right-wing opposition is looking to reclaim its status as a dominant political force. The Democratic Centre, the nation's primary Opposition party, continues to be guided by the influence of former President Alvaro Uribe, who is mobilising his base to secure a strong legislative presence ahead of the presidential vote. (AP)

China spurns G2 global co-governance, says world needs collective efforts

KJM VARMA
■ Beijing

China on Sunday rejected the G2 concept of global co-governance between Beijing and Washington, saying that managing international affairs requires the collective efforts of all nations.

Last year, US President Donald Trump described the meeting with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in South Korea as a "G2 meeting", saying the two countries could work together for their benefit and that of the world.

Asked whether China will accept the G2 or Group of

Two framework to address global challenges, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Beijing does not agree with the logic of co-governance by major powers.

China will not tread the old path of "seeking hegemony when one becomes strong", Wang said during his annual press conference.

His comments came ahead of Trump's planned visit to China from March 31 to April 2, which would be the first trip to the country by a sitting US president since 2017. However, the US war on Iran cast a shadow over the proposed visit. China has not officially announced the



trip, but it has acknowledged that preparations for the summit are underway.

Wang said there is no doubt that China and the US

have a significant impact on the world, "but we should not forget there are more than 190 countries on our planet".

"World history has always been written by many countries together, and the future of humanity will be forged through the collective efforts of all nations. Diversity is the inherent nature of human society, and multipolarity is what the international landscape should look like. "Looking back into history, great-power rivalry and bloc confrontation have invariably inflicted disaster and pain on humanity. Therefore, China will never take the beaten path of seeking hegemony," he said.

At the same time, Wang described the relationship between China and the US as

having far-reaching global implications.

"Turning our backs on each other would only lead to mutual misperception and miscalculation. Sliding into conflict or confrontation could drag the whole world down," he said, referring to the US war on Iran.

"China and the US are both big countries. Neither side can remodel the other, but we can choose how we want to engage, that is, to commit to a spirit of mutual respect, to hold the bottom line of peaceful coexistence, and to strive for the prospect of win-win cooperation," Wang said. (PTI)

Gen Z probe commission submits its report to Nepal Govt

SHIRISH B PRADHAN
■ Kathmandu

A high-level commission to probe the killings, arson and damages during the Gen Z protests in September last year submitted its report to Nepal's interim Government on Sunday, blaming lack of good governance and inefficiency by the then administration.

As the probe report was submitted to the interim Prime Minister Sushila Karki at the PM Office at Singhdurbar, neither the commission chief nor the Government released any



Nepal interim Prime Minister Sushila Karki

names of persons responsible for shooting at Gen Z protesters and other related issues.

A total of 76 people were killed during the two day protest - 22 youths on September 8 while 54 others

on the next day. A week after Sushila Karki took over as the interim prime minister, a decision by the cabinet on September 21 led to the formation of the judicial inquiry commission led by former Supreme Court justice

Gauri Bahadur Karki to probe into the incidents related to the September Gen Z protests. The incident occurred mainly due to lack of good governance and inefficiency shown by then Government administration, chair of the commission, Gauri Bahadur Karki, said.

People were frustrated due to politicisation of Government institutions, including bureaucracy and judicial bodies, he said.

"Those involved in shooting the Gen Z youths and issuing orders as well as those who didn't act to stop the killings, have been recommended for legal action," chairman Karki told media persons after handing over the report without giving other details.

The Commission prepared the report fulfilling their duty honestly and whatever facts they received during the investigation were included in the report without any prejudice, he said, and pointed out, "Now it is up to the Government to implement the recommendations." The county may witness another Gen Z movement if the Government failed to implement it, he added. The probe commission was initially given

a three month period by the Cabinet to investigate the human and material losses of the Gen Z movement of September 8 and 9 for completing the task. This period was later extended three times, giving an additional 75 days and was originally supposed to be submitted before the March 5 general election.

The general elections were necessitated after deposed prime minister KP Sharma Oli resigned on September 9, following the violent Gen Z protests against his Government over corruption and a ban on social media. (PTI)

Renewed hunt for missing Flight MH370 comes up empty

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kuala Lumpur

Twelve years after Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 vanished with 239 people aboard, a renewed deep-sea search in the southern Indian Ocean has so far failed to locate the missing aircraft, Malaysian authorities said Sunday, as families pressed for the effort to continue.

The Air Accident Investigation Bureau said in a statement that a seabed search conducted by marine robotics company Ocean Infinity between March 2025 and January 2026 surveyed thousands of square kilometres of ocean floor but



has not produced any confirmed findings of the aircraft wreckage.

Malaysia gave the nod to the Texas-based company last year to renew the search for Flight 370 under a "no-find, no-fee" contract at a new 15,000-square-

kilometre site in the southern Indian Ocean where it was believed to have crashed. Ocean Infinity will be paid USD 70 million only if wreckage is discovered.

The search was carried out for 28 days in two phases - March 25-28 last year and Dec 31, 2025, to Jan 23 this year, covering about 7,571 square kilometres (2,923 square miles) of seabed, the bureau said. Weather periodically disrupted operations, it said.

"The search activities undertaken have not yielded any findings that confirm the location of the aircraft wreckage," it said in a statement. It didn't give details on when the search will resume.

Police investigate explosion outside US Embassy in Oslo

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Oslo

Norwegian police are investigating an explosion outside the US Embassy in Oslo early Sunday, officials said.

No injuries were reported. Police received reports of a "loud bang" or explosion around 1 am, Oslo police said in a news release.

The explosion was caused by some sort of incendiary device, Oslo police representative Frode Larsen said during a news conference Sunday. Investigators believe the embassy was the target and are searching for the perpetrators and their motive.

Local media reported minor damage



to an entrance of the embassy, and people nearby said the street was blanketed in thick smoke following the blast. Police are seeking to talk to witnesses. PST, the Norwegian police security service, called in additional per-

sonnel following the incident but has not changed the country's terror threat level, according to communication adviser Martin Bernsen.

"This is an unacceptable incident that is being treated with the utmost seriousness," said Astri Aas-Hansen, Norway's minister of justice and public security. "The police have stated that they are investigating the case with significant resources, and that nothing indicates the situation poses any danger to the public." The US Embassy in Oslo referred media queries to the US State Department, which did not immediately return a request for comment. Nor did Oslo police. Other details were not available.



PROSPECT



Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota in a meeting with the Chief Executive Officer of Invest India, Nirvuti Rai and team to discuss opportunities for promoting investment and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Assam

Vande Mataram – Swarnim Bharat Honour conferred on Women’s Day



On the occasion of International Women’s Day, a special “Vande Mataram – Swarnim Bharat” program was organized at the Brahma Kumaris Rajyoga Centre, Gyan Vigyan Bhawan, Derawal Nagar, Delhi. Rajyogini BK Chakradhari, Chairperson of the Women’s Wing, said that in the glorious history of India, women have always held a dignified and respected position. Under the influence of modernity, material progress alone is often considered development or empowerment, but without inner development, complete empowerment is not possible. The practice of Spiritual knowledge and Rajyoga meditation helps inculcate divine virtues and builds inner strength, enabling individuals to remain balanced, tolerant, sensitive, and develop an elevated personality in every situation. With soul-consciousness, inequalities based on gender, caste, religion, language and colour naturally dissolve. BK Sudha, Director, Brahmakumaris Center Moscow in Russia who has been honoured with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, spoke about the glory of Vande Mataram and the vision of a Golden India. Local MLA Ashok Goel Devraha, Timarpur MLA Surya Prakash Khatri, and former BJP MP and women leader Sunita Duggal also expressed their views on the occasion. More than 500 women and men participated in the program.

Chhattisgarh Budget 2026-27: A visionary step toward inclusive prosperity



A N DWIVEDI

The Chhattisgarh Government’s 2026-27 budget represents a bold and visionary roadmap for the state’s future. With a total outlay of ₹1.72 lakh crore, the budget reflects a clear commitment to inclusive growth, rapid infrastructure expansion, and sustainable economic transformation. It demonstrates a governance model that seeks not only to accelerate development but to ensure that progress reaches every citizen, every region, and every sector of society.

A defining strength of the budget is its people-centric orientation. Allocating 40 per cent of total expenditure to the social sector underscores the Government’s strong commitment to welfare-driven growth. Policies aimed at empowering women, supporting youth, strengthening education, and expanding healthcare services reveal a holistic approach to development.

The Rani Durgavati Scheme, which provides financial support to girls upon attaining adulthood, is a transformative initiative that promotes dignity, financial security, and long-term social equality. Similarly, incentives encouraging property ownership among women reflect progressive policymaking designed to strengthen their economic participation. Education and skill development form another cornerstone of the Government’s strategy.

The establishment of Education Cities in previously underserved regions marks a historic intervention in expanding access to quality

learning. By investing in new medical colleges, student hostels, and competitive exam assistance programs, the state is creating pathways for youth to achieve academic and professional excellence. These initiatives reflect a forward-looking understanding that human capital is the foundation of sustainable progress.

One of the most commendable aspects of the budget is its focused attention on regions that historically faced developmental challenges. Through targeted infrastructure, digital connectivity, cultural promotion, and employment-oriented industries, the Government is transforming once-neglected areas into emerging growth centers.

By integrating economic opportunity with social stability, the state is advancing a development-first model that promotes peace, inclusion, and long-term regional balance. The economic architecture of the budget is equally robust. Significant allocations for irrigation infrastructure, industrial parks, agriculture modernisation, and rural employment programs are designed to strengthen productivity across sectors.

The substantial investment in agricultural advancement recognises the central role of farmers in the state’s economy and seeks to equip them with modern technology, improved inputs, and diversified opportunities.

Such measures promise to enhance income security while contributing to overall economic resilience. Infrastructure development receives strategic priority, reflecting the Government’s understanding that connectivity drives growth. Investments in roads, water resources, digital networks, and aviation expansion will improve mobility, facilitate trade, and enhance service delivery.

These initiatives are expected to



create multiplier effects across industries, boost private investment, and generate employment opportunities at scale. A particularly forward-thinking feature of the budget is the adoption of mission-mode governance.

By launching dedicated missions in artificial intelligence, tourism, sports excellence, infrastructure, and startup development, the Government has embraced a structured, long-term approach to transformation. These missions aim to position the State at the forefront of emerging technologies, nurture entrepreneurial talent, strengthen the tourism economy, and build world-class infrastructure.

The emphasis on innovation and skills reflects a strategic vision that prepares the state for the demands of a rapidly evolving global economy. Fiscal discipline further strengthens the credibility of the budget. Despite substantial investments in welfare and infrastructure, the Government has maintained fiscal parameters within responsible limits.

Projected economic growth, rising per capita income, and controlled deficit levels indicate prudent financial management alongside ambitious development goals. This balance between expansion and stability enhances investor confidence and ensures sustainable

progress. The budget also reinforces grassroots governance by empowering local institutions in development implementation. By enabling community-level decision-making and supporting rural infrastructure, the Government is deepening democratic participation while improving service delivery outcomes.

Such an approach ensures that development is not imposed from above but shaped by local needs and priorities. Importantly, the 2026-27 budget reflects continuity in policy vision alongside innovation in execution. Building on previous governance frameworks centered on welfare, infrastructure, and technology, the current roadmap advances these priorities through sharper focus and mission-driven implementation.

It signals a shift from incremental progress toward transformative change. Overall, the Chhattisgarh Budget 2026-27 stands as a comprehensive and progressive blueprint for the state’s future. It harmonises social welfare with economic expansion, regional equity with infrastructure development, and technological advancement with human empowerment. By prioritising both growth and inclusion, the Government has laid a strong foundation for long-term prosperity.

The true measure of any budget lies in its impact on people’s lives. With its emphasis on empowerment, opportunity, and sustainable development, this budget offers a promising pathway toward a stronger, more resilient, and more prosperous Chhattisgarh. It is not merely a financial document—it is a declaration of intent to build a future defined by equity, innovation, and shared progress.

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Wings of Shakti: Women Achievers of the IAF Group Capt Asha T Jyothirmai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Group Captain Asha T Jyothirmai was commissioned into the Indian Air Force on 20 Dec 1997 as an Accounts Officer. Hailing from the city of Hyderabad, Telangana the officer was an avid sportswoman since her schooling days, a national athlete who excelled in the event of Heptathlon (Athletics) at the National level for a period of more than 8 years before joining Indian Air Force. A thorough professional in finances of the Air Force, she chose to undertake additional duties and contributed immensely to promotion of sports and adventure.

In the year 1999, the officer during her first posting to Agra, plummeted into the sport of skydiving. The very fluttering of the parachute entered into her mind and heart and at a very young age she volunteered for Para Jumping Course in the year 1999 and since then there was no stopping her. While performing static line jumps, she was selected to perform demonstration jumps which opened up the flood gates for her and the meter of skydiving jumps started ticking and within a short span of 2 years she achieved the milestone of youngest woman in India to finish 100 jumps.

Over the 26 years spanning her Air Force career she was at the forefront of shattering records and expectations starting with the record of



being the only woman to jump out of a Microlight aircraft in the year 2001, she was also a member of the record breaking 73& 75 member IAF skydiving team. She was the Technical Official for the 34th World Military Games conducted in the year 2006 and created history by leading the first Indian Woman Skydiving team which represented India at World Military Parachuting Championship at Bouch, Switzerland in 2010 and was also instrumental in forming and leading the Women Skydiving Team which specialised in formation flying at Arizona, USA and officially launched on 8 Oct 2011 during Air Force Day Celebrations.

She also led the Women Para jumping team which performed for the first time at Aero India 2019 to symbolise Women in Aerospace. She was the only woman amongst the instructors which conducted the All-Woman Tri Services Para

jumping course in April 2021, a feat never done before in the history of Armed Forces.

She is the only woman who took part in the record breaking 75 member Tri services skydiving performance on the occasion of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav at Jaisalmer on 15 Aug 2021.

Kitted with pride and ever-ready to sign into new adventures, Group Captain Asha is the only officer who represented the Indian Armed Forces by carrying its flag on the occasion of Victory Day Parade at Dhaka, Bangladesh presided by presidents of India and Bangladesh and once again creating history by unfurling the Indian flag at a height of 10,000ft on foreign soil.

For her achievements in the field of adventure Group Captain Asha was felicitated as Women Achiever by Schools, Colleges, Air Force Units, Delhi Commission for Women, Madras Management Association

(twice), Confederation of Indian Industry (Hyderabad Chapter), Federation of Indian Chambers for Commerce and Industry (FICCI) Delhi. She has also been felicitated by the Raksha Mantri in 2019 as Women in Aviation and the President of India Droupadi Murmu in 2024.

Throughout her career she was influential in motivating men, women especially youth by performing show jumps in all parts of India. During the Indian Air Force awareness campaign in North East region the officer performed motivational jumps at Guwahati, Jorhat, Mohanbari, Itanagar and Aizawl which was appreciated by the then AOC-in-C EAC, Chief of the Air Staff and Governor of Assam and Meghalaya.

Gp Capt Asha has been the face of the IAF in promoting the spirit of adventure and encouraging men and women to don the Blue

Uniform. Her positive attitude and mindset over the years has ensured that women take up sport and adventure and always work towards bringing a noticeable change in the society. She initiated and successfully conducted large number of Sports Melas, Adventure Camps, Long distance cycling, Basic and Advanced Para jumping courses across the length and breadth of the country.

It is also notable to mention that Gp Capt Asha, is a wife of a serving officer, mother of two children and in spite of huge family commitments and performing efficiently as an Accounts Officer and in additional duties, she has been able to keep her passion alive. The officer showed her leadership and professional skills on number of occasions while conducting courses over the years, it’s worth mentioning an incident during a Basic para course at Air Force

Station Carnicobar where she obviated major emergency and avoided injuries to the jumpers, leading them to a safe landing area.

Her devotion to skydiving is inexhaustible as she is the only woman in India to continue with the sport for such a long duration even after facing two major life-threatening accidents, and coming back to the skies with in a short span of 10 months after her delivery, content statement told by many “Only pregnancy and Covid could stop her from skydiving briefly” The woman officer is an epitome of woman empowerment and has travelled the path less travelled. As a torch bearer she ignited the minds of young men and women across India including the remotest parts of the country.

Sharing her stories of hard work, resilience, inspiration, courage, leadership and displaying high level of adventure many a youth have taken her example and made a positive impact on the society. Her most recent achievement includes crossing the 1000 jump mark and jumping with her son Cdt E Renish (NCC) making them the only mother and son duo to do so.

With the maximum number of para jumps of 1016 (and still counting) by any woman in India, Gp Capt Asha stands as a paragon of adventure and motivation, emboldening the words falling from the sky and reaching new heights!!!

Army celebrates Women’s Day with health initiatives



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Guwahati

In a tribute to Nari Shakti on the occasion of International Women’s Day, the Red Shield Division of the Indian Army organised a series of health and wellness initiatives across Mizoram, Tripura and Manipur, aimed at promoting preventive healthcare and improving medical awareness among women and their families.

The outreach activities focused on addressing critical health concerns while encouraging community participation in life-saving initiatives.

At Aizawl, Mizoram, an HPV Vaccination Drive was conducted to support the prevention of Cervical Cancer. A total of seven girls received the vaccination, marking an important step towards safeguarding the health of the younger generation.

In Agartala, Tripura, a Blood Donation Camp was organised, where 35 individuals, including women, voluntarily donated blood, contributing to strengthening local healthcare

reserves and demonstrating the spirit of selfless service.

At Leimakhong, Manipur, a Medical and Dental Health Check-up Camp cum Awareness Lecture was conducted. The camp witnessed an encouraging participation of 125 women and their family members, who benefited from professional medical screening and awareness on maintaining long-term dental and physical health.

Through these initiatives, the Red Shield Healers reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the health and well-being of women in the region.

By addressing key health issues such as cervical cancer prevention and oral health awareness, the initiative aims to contribute towards building healthier communities across the North East.

The Indian Army remains steadfast in its commitment to the welfare of the people of the North East, ensuring that quality medical care and health awareness continue to reach even the remotest corners of the region.

Indian Army’ Gajraj Corps hosts mega rally for veterans in Assam

TONY DAS
■ Guwahati

In a heart-warming tribute to the nation’s unsung heroes, the Gajraj Corps of the Indian Army organised a large-scale Ex-Servicemen Rally at the Hem Barua Higher Secondary School on Sunday. The event served as a powerful testament to the Army’s enduring commitment to the dignity, welfare, and empowerment of its veteran community, Veer Naris, and their families.

The rally saw an overwhelming turnout, with approximately 4,000 ex-servicemen and their dependents from the Sonitpur and Biswanath districts participating, underscoring the

unbreakable bond between the uniformed fraternity and the retired personnel.

Major General HS Gill, General Officer Commanding, Blazing Sword Division, attended the event as the Chief Guest. In his address, he lauded the veterans and Veer Naris for their monumental contributions to the nation’s sovereignty. “Your courage and resilience remain the bedrock of our inspiration,” he remarked, as he paid solemn tributes to those who served on the frontiers.

The ceremony featured a poignant felicitation programme, where six Veer Naris and eight distinguished war veterans were honoured for their exemplary service and

sacrifice. The event featured 46 dedicated welfare stalls, functioning as a “one-stop shop” for the veteran fraternity. Recognising the complexities of post-service administration, the Army set up specialised pension assistance cells, including representatives from CDA Guwahati and PCDA (P) Prayagaj, to resolve grievances and provide hands-on support for the SPARSH digital pension platform.

Beyond pension-related matters, the stalls offered guidance on healthcare through the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), employment assistance, and documentation support. Representatives



from the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV) and various Records Offices were also present to ensure that the transition to civilian life remains seamless.

In a holistic approach to resettlement, the rally saw active participation from civil Government departments, including Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal

Husbandry, and the District Industries and Commerce Centre. Experts provided vital insights into agri-entrepreneurship, livestock farming, and MSME opportunities, encouraging veterans to explore sustainable livelihood avenues.

Financial inclusion was equally prioritised, with leading institutions like the State Bank of India, Axis Bank, and Punjab National Bank providing advisory services on financial planning, loans, and pension management. Furthermore, corporate giants and private entities, including Hero MotoCorp, Maruti Suzuki, and Sonalika Tractors, offered guidance on dealership prospects and

technical job roles.

A high-capacity medical camp offered free specialised consultations in orthopaedics, ophthalmology, dentistry, and gynaecology. Demonstrating a deep commitment to the well-being of disabled veterans, the organisers distributed wheelchairs and hearing aids. In a significant act of support for rehabilitation, a customised tri-scooter was presented to a disabled war veteran to facilitate greater mobility and independence.

The ethos of service continued throughout the day with a voluntary blood donation drive, which saw 80 units of blood collected from soldiers and participants. Meanwhile,

the Army Recruiting Office (ARO), Jorhat, provided intensive counselling for youth aspiring to join the force, ensuring the proud legacy of military service is passed down to the next generation.

The event concluded with a cultural programme where local students presented patriotic performances, leaving the veterans and their families with a profound sense of pride and gratitude.

Through this mega-rally, the Gajraj Corps once again proved that for the Indian Army, a soldier’s service does not end with retirement—it marks the beginning of a lifelong commitment to their welfare.



BRIEFLY

Como wins third straight after road victory at Cagliari



Como won 2-1 at Cagliari thanks to a screamer by midfielder Lucas de Cunha to stay in fifth place of Serie A. Cesc Fábregas' side has won three in a row in the Italian league and has only lost once in 11 games overall. Como had a scoreless draw with Inter Milan in the first game of their Italian Cup semifinal earlier this week. Martin Baturina put Como ahead at Cagliari on Saturday by scrambling in a goal in the 14th minute. Sebastian Esposito leveled for the hosts in the 56th, only for de Cunha to send a shot from well outside the top right corner of the area just inside the far post for the 76th-minute winner. The victory left Como level on points with fourth-placed Roma a week before they meet. Juventus, in sixth place, erupted with four goals in the second half to rout Pisa 4-0 at home. Andrea Cambiaso got Juventus going in the 54th before Khephren Thuram, Kenan Yildiz and Jeremie Boga ran up the score. Also, seventh-placed Atalanta was trailing by two goals before Gianluca Scamacca scored twice in the 75th and 79th minutes to earn a 2-2 draw with Udinese.

Griezmann not moving to MLS this season



Antoine Griezmann is not making an imminent move to Major League Soccer, according to the sporting director of Atletico Madrid. The 34-year-old former France star had been linked to a transfer to Orlando City. But Atletico sporting director Mateu Alemany said Saturday that "he has this season and two more years with us. I don't see any major news." "He is going to continue with us and nothing more," Alemany said before Griezmann got an assist to help beat Real Sociedad 3-2 in La Liga. Griezmann, 34, is Atletico's all-time leading scorer. He helped France win the 2018 World Cup before retiring from international soccer in 2024. He has lost his starring role with Diego Simeone's side this year with his coach managing his minutes, but even so he has scored 12 goals this campaign in all competitions. Atletico will play Sociedad in the Copa del Rey final on April 18. Atletico is also third in the Spanish league and will play Tottenham in the Champions League round of 16 next week.

Yamal's strike gives Barcelona win at Athletic Bilbao

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Barcelona

Lamine Yamal once again showed his ability to decide a game when Barcelona's teenage star broke the deadlock with a gorgeous strike to earn a 1-0 win at Athletic Bilbao. The game on Saturday was wide open with Athletic attacking in waves at its San Mames Stadium before Yamal tilted the match in the favour of the La Liga leaders.

The 18-year-old Spain forward received a pass from Pedri Gonzalez that finally left him with some room to work on the right side of the area, where he used one touch to open a shooting angle before

curling a left-footed strike off the upper edge of the far post. The 68th-minute winner kept Hansi Flick's side four points clear of second-placed Real Madrid and on course to successfully defend its domestic title. Last round, Yamal scored his first hat trick in a league victory in a 4-1 win over Villarreal.

His 19 goals this season is already one more than he scored in the entire last campaign. "We know that Lamine can do. He just put it in the corner, where the goalkeeper couldn't reach it," Pedri said. "The only thing he needs to avoid is settling for what he has already done. He just needs to keep working hard to give it his all." The



hard-fought away win at the Basque club came four days after Barcelona lost in the Copa del Rey semifinals to Atletico Madrid.

Flick rested some of his regular starters ahead of

Barcelona's trip to Newcastle on Tuesday to start their Champions League round-of-16 matchup. Pedri, Raphinha and Fermin Lopez remained on the bench until the final half hour. Marcus

Rashford, Marc Bernal and Marc Casado started in their place. Eric Garcia and Joao Cancelo also started for injured full backs Jules Kounde and Alejandro Balde. Barcelona needed goalkeeper Joan Garcia to keep the game scoreless until Yamal came through.

Atletico wins preview of Copa final: Argentina midfielder Nico Gonzalez scored twice in the second half to lead Atletico Madrid to a 3-2 win over Real Sociedad in a matchup featuring the two Copa del Rey finalists.

Sociedad also booked a place in the cup final next month in Seville after beating Athletic Bilbao earlier this week in the semifinals.

Atletico sports director Mateu Alemany said that Antoine Griezmann will finish the season with the Spanish club, squashing speculation of an imminent move by the veteran forward to Major League Soccer.

Demichelis debut: Martin Demichelis saw his new team Mallorca squander a double by striker Vedat Muriqi and draw 2-2 at Osasuna in the Argentine coach's debut at the helm. Muriqi took his scoring tally to 18 goals in La Liga this season, second only to Real Madrid star Kylian Mbappe's 23. But Osasuna got a goal from Kike Barja in the 89th before Ante Budimir netted the stoppage-time equaliser.

Sergino Dest comes off with apparent hamstring injury in PSV win

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Eindhoven (Netherlands)

United States defender Sergino Dest limped off with an apparent hamstring injury during PSV Eindhoven's 2-1 win over AZ Alkmaar in the Dutch league, putting him in doubt for the national team's upcoming friendlies against Belgium and Portugal.

Dest grabbed his left hamstring and screamed in pain while covering his eyes after tumbling in his own penalty area chasing Alkmaar's Wouter Goes in the second half on Saturday. The fullback was substituted in the 57th minute, leaving the field with the assistance of two medical



staff, unable to put weight on his left leg. "He landed on the ground after a full sprint and grabbed his hamstring. That's usually not good news," PSV coach Peter Bosz said. The US hosts Belgium on March 28 and Portugal on April 1 in warmup matches for the World Cup, which it is co-hosting with Mexico and Canada in June and July.

Dest, 25, has two goals in 37 international appearances and started all four US Cup matches at the 2022 World Cup. He joined PSV from Barcelona but was sidelined for nearly 11 months after tearing an ACL in April 2024, missing that year's Copa America. If Dest is unable to play at the World Cup, Juventus defender Tim Weah — who is on loan at Marseille — could slot in at right back. Alex Freeman and Joe Scally are also potential options.

Fellow American Ricardo Pepi scored PSV's winner from close range in the 86th. It was his 10th league goal this season and 13th over 26 games in all competitions.

Messi lifts Inter Miami past DC United

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Baltimore (US)

Lionel Messi scored in the 27th minute, and Inter Miami held on for a 2-1 victory over DC United in front of 72,026 at the home of the Baltimore Ravens. With interest in Messi obviously high, the game was held in downtown Baltimore instead of at DC United's smaller venue in Washington on Saturday.

Messi gave many fans what they came to see when he put Inter Miami (2-1-0) ahead 2-0 lead in the first half. Rodrigo De Paul also scored for the defending MLS Cup champions. Tai Baribo pulled United (1-2-0) within one in the 75th minute, but DC was unable to equalise. It was an eventful week for Messi and his team, which visited the White House



on Thursday. Inter Miami opened the scoring in the 17th minute when De Paul collected the ball about 15 yards from the goal and struck a shot into the far side of the net.

Messi then scored his third goal of the young MLS season, slipping behind the DC

defence to receive Mateo Silvestri's pass, then flicking the ball with one touch past goalkeeper Sean Johnson.

Inter Miami has won two straight since dropping its league opener 3-0 to Los Angeles FC. DC United broke through in the second half.

Wrexham leads twice, takes Chelsea to extra time before losing 4-2 in FA Cup

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Wrexham (Wales)

Against the world champion, Wrexham came agonisingly close to another spectacular plot twist.

Substitute Lewis Brunt was a matter of inches offside when he headed in what looked like an equalizing goal in a thrilling FA Cup fifth round clash against Premier League giant Chelsea on Saturday. Wrexham — in front of Hollywood owners Ryan Reynolds and Rob Mac — led twice at the Racecourse Ground and, even down to 10 men in extra time, pushed Chelsea right down to the wire before eventually losing 4-2. "Proud of the team today and every day," Mac posted on Instagram. Goals from

Alejandro Garnacho and Joao Pedro in extra time ultimately proved the difference between Club World Cup champion Chelsea and a Wrexham team that was playing non-league soccer just three years ago.

But even in defeat, Wrexham issued a statement of its potential as it aims to secure a fourth straight promotion this season and face the likes of Chelsea on a regular basis in the Premier League. "It was one of the hardest games of the season so far," Garnacho told the BBC. That was some admission, considering Chelsea has played Bayern Munich, Barcelona and Napoli in the Champions League this season. But it was a measure of just how close Wrexham



came to a famous Cup upset in front of its fans.

Reynolds and Mac — formerly known as McElhenney — were up on their feet and applauding Phil Parkinson's players when the drama was finally brought to an end.

The actors have witnessed some spectacular moments

since their \$2.5 million takeover in 2021 transformed the fortunes of the once down-on-its-luck Welsh club. And, even in defeat, this was another match that will live long in the memory of Wrexham supporters.

"It's been a great cup run. Tonight was a great spectacle

and we were competitive against a very good side. We will take a lot of positives from it," said Parkinson, the Wrexham manager. The home crowd erupted in the 18th minute when Sam Smith chased a long ball from Callum Doyle and fired low past Robert Sanchez to put Wrexham in front.

There were more chances to extend the lead, but Chelsea leveled in fortuitous circumstances before the break. George Thomason denied Garnacho an equalizer when clearing his goal-bound effort off the line. But his clearance hit the back of goalkeeper Arthur Okonkwo and rebounded into the net.

Wrexham led for the second time in the 78th when Doyle produced a clever

backheeled flick from Josh Windass' shot from distance.

Four minutes later the game was tied again — Josh Acheampong firing powerfully past Okonkwo from close range. A red card for George Dobson in added time meant Wrexham had to play out extra time with 10 men and Chelsea took advantage through Garnacho's goal in the 96th.

Brunt thought he'd leveled the game again with his header from Kieffer Moore's flick on — but VAR showed he was fractionally offside.

With time ticking down Lewis O'Brien fired narrowly wide and Chelsea could finally breathe easily when Pedro killed off the game in the fifth minute of added time.

Julian to leave Borussia Dortmund at end of season

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Cologne (Germany)

Julian Brandt is to leave Borussia Dortmund at the end of the season.

Dortmund managing director Lars Ricken told broadcaster Sky on Saturday that the club and player had agreed not to extend Brandt's contract, which expires at the end of the season.

Ricken was speaking after Brandt set up Maximilian Beier's goal in Dortmund's nervy 2-1 win at Cologne in the Bundesliga. "There have already been a few reports, and it's simply that there were open talks and everyone agreed that the expiring contract wouldn't be extended," Ricken said. "He played



a few hundred games for Borussia Dortmund. I think we can only be grateful to him for playing with us for seven years. He was sometimes criticised, but even today with his assist, I loved his style." Brandt, who joined the team from Bayer

Leverkusen in 2019, will be 30 years old on May 2. Altogether he scored 56 goals in 298 games for Dortmund.

"We can reorient ourselves a bit," Ricken said. "So, it can be an opportunity for both sides, but it was OK for both of us. We ultimately reached

an agreement, and I think we're parting with a great deal of respect. But as I said, for both of us it's another opportunity." Brandt played 48 games for Germany, but none since a Nations League encounter with Hungary in November 2024. Ricken said the decision would have no influence on whether Germany defender Nico Schlotterbeck stays with the club. Schlotterbeck's contract expires next year and it's unclear if he will stay amid reported interest from Real Madrid and Liverpool.

Ricken said Dortmund will offer team captain Emre Can a contract extension. The defender is out for the rest of the season with a torn ACL in his left knee.

Canada defeats Argentina in penalty shootout

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Harrison (US)

Goalkeeper Kailen Sheridan stopped the first two attempts she faced and Canada went on to defeat Argentina 3-2 on penalties after a scoreless draw in the SheBelieves Cup.

Jordyn Huitema had Canada's best chance of the first half on Saturday but Argentina goalkeeper Solana Pereyra got a hand on the hard shot to send it into the crossbar and out of the net. The match remained scoreless the rest of the way.

Under new rules for SheBelieves Cup, the match went straight to penalties. Sheridan blocked the first two attempts she faced and



the Canadians sealed the victory when Vanina Preininger's attempt for Argentina went over the bar.

Argentina was held scoreless across the four-team, round-robin tournament and finished last. Canada's

finish would be determined in Saturday's late game between the United States and Colombia.

Canada saw the return of captain Jessie Fleming, who missed the match against the United States because of illness. Olivia Smith, who plays for Arsenal, was ruled out of the tournament because of a concussion.

Argentina's women play next month as the CONMEBOL Women's Nations League continues. The tournament serves as the region's qualification tournament for the 2027 Women's World Cup in Brazil.

Canada will play for a place in the World Cup in the CONCACAF W Championship starting in November.

Ricky Castillo has one-shot lead in Puerto Rico

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Rio Grande (Puerto Rico)

Ricky Castillo was hoping to be in Florida this week for his first \$20 million signature event. Instead he's at the Puerto Rico Open and making it pay off, posting a bogey-free round of 4-under 68 in strong wind to take a one-shot lead into the final round.

On a day of big movements — John Daly II tied for the lead at one point and 18-year-old Blades Brown challenging again — Castillo chipped in for birdie on the 12th hole and kept a steady hand on the closing holes at Grand Reserve Golf Club on Saturday. Castillo was at 12-under 204 and will be in the final group with John Parry of England,

who earned his PGA Tour card off the European tour standings last year.

"This is the position that all of us have dreamed of and want to be in a chance to win a golf tournament," Castillo said. "I've been fortunate to have that opportunity a few times and haven't gotten it done, so hopefully we'll do it tomorrow."

Brown holed a 50-foot eagle putt on the par-5 14th, the highlight of his 3-under 69 that gives the teenager a second chance this year to become the youngest PGA Tour winner in 95 years. He was in the final group with Scottie Scheffler at The American Express until fading Sunday. "All this is just experience," said Brown, who



graduated high school in January. He didn't do a lot wrong that week. A pair of late bogeys long after Scheffler had pulled away led to a 74 and dropped him into a tie for 18th. But the kid didn't look overwhelmed playing next to the Number 1 player in the world and looks forward to Sunday.

"Just having that moment and that experience with Scottie and Si Woo (Kim) and being in the final group is going to help me tomorrow being in the hunt again," Brown said. "I'm really looking forward to it. I love to compete and it's going to be a fun day tomorrow." Matti Schmid shot 68 and was in the group one shot

behind along with Chandler Blanchet, who took a four-shot lead into the third round and lost too many shots on the green, particularly a couple of short putts. Blanchet shot 74.

Daly, the 22-year-old son of two-time major champion John Daly, also looks poised in his PGA Tour debut. He had a share of the lead when he hit 5-iron onto the green at the par-5 12 for eagle that put him at 10 under. And on the next par 5, he took driver off the deck to the front of the green, only to three-putt for par from about 75 feet.

But he missed the green left on the 18th, chipped too strongly and ended a streak of 46 consecutive holes without a bogey when he lipped out the 15-foot par putt.

Arshdeep wins 25m pistol T3 finals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Arshdeep Kaur secured the top spot in the finals of 25m pistol women event in a high-quality field of the National Selection Trials (Group A) that also featured double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker.

The Punjab marksman, who qualified in eighth position, edged out the experienced Divya T.S 37-36 to finish on top in the eight-shooter final.

Former Asian Games champion Rahi Sarnobat secured the third place with 33 hits, after Divya prevailed over her in a shoot-off.

Rhythm Sangwan finished fourth, followed by



Niveditha V. Nair, Bhaker, nationals bronze medallist Anjali Choudhary and Chinki Yadav, who completed the top eight.

Bhaker qualified for finals in top spot after two days of qualification in the precision and rapid stages with a combined score of 582-17x (Precision 287, Rapid 295).

Rahi followed with a score of 580-20x (Precision 292, Rapid 288) and Divya T.S

qualified in third place with a score of 580-13x (Precision 290, Rapid 290).

Niveditha V. Nair (577-23x, Precision 288, Rapid 289), Rhythm Sangwan (577-16x, Precision 285, Rapid 292), Anjali Choudhary (576-12x, Precision 287, Rapid 289), Chinki Yadav (575-20x, Precision 280, Rapid 290) and Arshdeep Kaur (575-19x, Precision 285, Rapid 290) completed the top eight.



Lakshya's brave run ends as Lin Chun-yi wins All England crown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Birmingham

Lakshya Sen fought with all his might but fell agonisingly short of ending India's 25-year wait for an All England crown, losing to Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-yi in a high-intensity men's singles final here on Sunday.

Playing his second All England final after finishing runner-up in 2022, the 24-year-old from Almorah fought hard before losing 15-21, 20-22 in a 57-minute contest, marked by high-speed rallies and relentless attacking play.

"Yes, I think it was a good match today. The first set was, I think he was a better player, but in the second game I could have finished off

better. But I'm happy with the way I played throughout the week," Lakshya said.

"I'm feeling emotional right now, thinking about the match. But overall, lots of positive things today," he added. The triumph made Lin Chun-yi the first player from Chinese Taipei to win the All England men's singles title. Lakshya's defeat meant that Prakash Padukone (1980) and Pullela Gopichand (2001) remain the only Indians to have won the prestigious title, while Prakash Nath (1947) and Saina Nehwal (2015) had come closest with runner-up finishes before Lakshya's two final appearances. Lakshya had arrived in the summit clash in impressive form after defeating some of the world's



best players such as world No. 1 Shi Yu Qi and World No. 6 Li Shi Feng during the week.

The Indian had endured a gruelling route to the final, including a marathon 97-minute semifinal against Canada's Victor Lai during

which he battled severe cramps and blisters on his foot. By the time he stepped on court on Sunday, Lakshya had spent five hours and 16 minutes in matches during the tournament — nearly an hour and a half more than Lin

— and the physical toll appeared to show in the final stages. "Not ideal, to be honest," Lakshya said about his physical condition.

"But when I was playing on court, I was not thinking about anything but to give my best on court. Yesterday I was struggling a bit with cramps, but I had some time to recover. I couldn't recover 100%. Towards the end of the week, all the players were tired with 4-5 matches. It could have been better, but this is what I had."

Playing with strapping on both thighs, Lakshya made a slow start and trailed 0-3 as Lin immediately asserted himself with sharp attacking play. The left-handed Taiwanese, known for his explosive offence,

repeatedly targeted the lines with stinging smashes, racing to a 6-2 lead while the Indian struggled to settle into rhythm. Lakshya gradually found his range, mixing smashes with delicate touches at the net to close the gap to 7-8 before pressing Lin with quick attacking bursts. However, the Taiwanese maintained a slender advantage at the mid-game interval and soon stretched the lead after a fortunate net cord and a series of powerful jump smashes that left Lakshya scrambling. Lin's ability to disguise both straight and cross-court smashes with the same action made reading his attack difficult as he surged ahead to 18-13. Lakshya tried to stay alive with a series of

retrieving efforts and precise pushes to the backline but Lin sealed the opening game in 24 minutes to leave the Indian facing an uphill battle.

The second game began with Lakshya still searching for rhythm and trailing 3-4 after a couple of wide tosses.

But the Indian soon turned the momentum around. Capitalising on a series of errors from Lin, Lakshya surged to a 7-4 lead and then extended it to 9-4 as the Taiwanese briefly struggled with his length.

Lakshya held a three-point cushion at the break and pushed further ahead to 13-9 with a precise return that clipped the line. However, Lin responded with a barrage of smashes to narrow the gap

and soon levelled the contest at 14-14. A thrilling exchange followed as the two traded blows in a remarkable 46-shot rally that drew loud applause from the crowd.

Lin edged ahead 16-15 with a perfectly disguised drop, but Lakshya replied with a 321 kmph smash to restore parity. The Indian briefly moved two points clear at 18-16 after producing a fine sliced smash and forcing Lin into an error.

But the Taiwanese responded with two fierce smashes on either flank to level the score at 18-18. With the tension mounting, Lin moved to championship point after punishing a weak return, only for Lakshya to produce a remarkable defensive rally to save it.



NZ woman fast bowler Lea Tahuhu retires from ODI cricket

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Wellington

Veteran New Zealand fast bowler Lea Tahuhu on Sunday announced her retirement from Women's ODI cricket.

The 35-year-old Tahuhu drew curtains on a 15-year career, finishing with 125 wickets from 103 matches, a record for the New Zealand Women's ODI team.

She made her debut against Australia in June, 2011.

Tahuhu went on to feature in four Women's ODI World Cups (2013, 2017, 2022 and 2025).

Her match against England in last year's World Cup was her final ODI for New Zealand.

In World Cups alone, Tahuhu picked up 36 wickets, a record for New Zealand, and the ninth best on the all-time charts.

"It's always been a privilege and honour to pull on

the White Ferns shirt in ODI cricket," Tahuhu said in a statement issued by New Zealand Cricket.

"To get one game was an amazing feeling. To have been able to wear the shirt and represent my country and my family over 100 times in ODI cricket is something I never could have dreamt of.

"I'll treasure every moment and walk away from the ODI game incredibly proud of what I've been able to achieve in the format."

Tahuhu, however, will continue in the T20 format and desires to defend the T20 World Cup title for New Zealand in the upcoming edition of the event to be held in England and Wales.

"Winning the T20 World Cup in 2024 was a huge achievement and I'm really motivated to be over in England later this year to help this team defend our title," she said.

Strange how different teams have more pull than others: De Kock, Miller slam ICC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Quinton de Kock and David Miller have criticised the ICC for allegedly prioritising England's travel arrangements over South Africa and West Indies, with the two teams still waiting to return home amid disruptions caused by the conflict involving the US, Israel and Iran.

England, who lost to India in the second semifinal on Thursday, departed from Mumbai on Saturday evening on a direct charter flight to London. South Africa and West Indies, however, are yet to leave the country.

West Indies were knocked out of the T20 World Cup after suffering a five-wicket

defeat to India at the Eden Gardens on Sunday, while South Africa's campaign ended following their loss to New Zealand in the first semifinal in Kolkata on Wednesday.

Both South Africa and West Indies are expected to travel together from Kolkata on another charter flight. The exact departure time is yet to be confirmed but the flight is likely to leave on Sunday.

"Funny @icc, we have heard nothing! Meanwhile, England are leaving before us somehow? @westindies and @proteasmencsa are just in the dark! Strange how different teams have more pull than others," De Kock wrote on his Instagram story.



His teammate Miller also expressed frustration. "Funny that England gets eliminated after WI & SA

and gets on a charter back home tonight. While WI & SA still wait for answers in Kolkata," he wrote in the

comments section of one of ESPNcricinfo's posts.

Two-time World Cup winning former West Indies captain and current head coach Darren Sammy also weighed in on the matter.

"@davidmillersa12 a lil louder for those in the back to hear please sir."

Former England captain Michael Vaughan too questioned the ICC's decision to send England home earlier than West Indies and South Africa. "So England got knocked out on Thurs, get a charter home today .. West Indies go out last Sunday and are still in Kolkata .. SA in the same position .. That's where the power is all wrong ..." Vaughan wrote on X.

"All teams in this situation

should be treated the same .. Just because you are more powerful at the ICC table shouldn't count .. #JustSaying."

West Indies and South Africa are likely to fly first to Johannesburg before the Caribbean side continues onward to Antigua.

A section of the South African contingent, including members of the team management along with players Keshav Maharaj, Jason Smith and George Linde, will travel to New Zealand on Sunday for a limited-overs tour beginning on March 15.

India will face New Zealand in the final of the T20 World Cup at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

ICC T20 World Cup trophy has Jaipur connection

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jaipur

While the ICC Men's T20 World Cup attracts global attention for its high-octane cricket, the tournament also has a little-known connection with Jaipur, where the iconic trophy was crafted.

Jaipur-based trophy designer Amit Pabuwal said the trophy for the tournament was made by him after the initial design concept was prepared by Australia's Minale Bryce.

Pabuwal said the design outline of the trophy was prepared in 2007, the year the inaugural edition of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup was held. Following that, the International Cricket Council entrusted him with



the task of crafting the trophy. "Once the design outline was finalised, the ICC assigned me the work of making the trophy. That is how the ICC T20 World Cup trophy was produced in

2007," he told PTI.

Pabuwal said he had earlier designed the world's largest silver "Friendship Cup" trophy for cricket, which drew attention and eventually led the ICC to

approach him for the T20 World Cup trophy.

"The ICC had initially planned to create the trophy using a combination of titanium and glass so that the design would reflect the fast and modern style of T20 cricket," he said.

"Several prototypes were prepared, but the glass components repeatedly broke when being integrated with the metal structure, making the concept technically difficult to execute. After several experiments, I advised that the combination would not work technically."

He said the final version was made of silver with platinum plating, making it durable and suitable for an international tournament.



Happy for the fight that we showed: Muzumdar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Perth

India head coach Amol Muzumdar hailed his team's character despite a crushing defeat to Australia Women in the pink-ball Test, saying the players showed commendable fight in difficult conditions here.

India lost the one-off Test by 10 wickets inside three days as only Jimimah Rodrigues and Pratika Rawal could score fifties while other big guns like Smriti Mandhana and skipper Hemanpreet Kaur struggled in bowler friendly conditions at the WACA.

"A bit disappointing with the result, but really happy for the fight that we showed for the last three days. There were tough conditions but credit to Australia, they were brilliant in this Test match," Muzumdar said at the post-match press conference.

The Mumbai stalwart lauded the effort of the debutants, highlighting the determination shown by the younger players despite the

team ending up on the losing side.

"Somebody like Pratika showing the guts and determination, getting a half century here at WACA in the second innings. Kranti bowled her heart out and also Kashvi and Sayali in the first innings picked up those wickets. It was really heartening to see all the debutants," he said.

Muzumdar said the team's packed schedule leading into the Test was challenging, though he refused to use it as an excuse for the result.

"The women's team came in after playing five T20s against Sri Lanka, then there was the WPL, and immediately we flew out to Australia and played the T20 series before the multi-format leg. It's a tough one but at the same time there are no excuses," he said.

He, however, suggested that an additional practice game before a Test would be beneficial for the side.

"If they can add another practice game, nothing like it," he added.

Australia outclass India by 10 wickets in one-off women's D/N Test

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Perth

Australia translated their overwhelming dominance over the last three days into a lop-sided 10-wicket win over India in the one-off women's day-night Test here on Sunday.

Australia earlier did the ground work for their victory, bowling out India for 149 in their second innings, and then scaled down a nominal target of 25 without any ado.

It was also a fitting farewell for skipper Alyssa Healy, who ended her career in Baggy Green with a magnificent win over a rival against whom she always excelled.

Writing was very much on the wall once India started the third day at 105 for six. Overnight India batters Pratika Rawal (63) and Sneha Rana (30) took India to 132.

Rawal showed excellent temperament during her fifty but the task was way too tall for her to manage.

Once Rana was ousted by Ash Gardener with a quick delivery taking out the batter's off-stump, India combusted quickly.

A combination of Gardner and Player of the Match Annabel Sutherland fittingly ended India's innings. Sutherland took a fine tumbling catch at the edge of the



circle when Rawal's mistimed pull off the off-spinner failed to find power or distance.

It also signalled the end of India's second innings. Australia openers Georgia Voll and Phoebe Litchfield

were never going to be challenged by a target of 25, and the pair did the job with ease in just 4.3 overs.

Bhatia two behind leader as Theegala holds on to top 10 in disrupted 3rd round

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Orlando (US)

Akshay Bhatia played 3-under par on the third day through the first 16 holes before play was called off, leaving the 24-year-old two strokes behind leader Daniel Berger at the Arnold Palmer Invitational here.

Sahith Theegala dropped down the order on the third day but is still within the top 10. Bhatia had two holes to play, while Berger had three more in the third round when play was suspended.



Theegala fell six places on the leaderboard as he was 1-over par on the third day with two holes left to be played.

Bhatia began the third round with an early bogey on the second hole. He went on to birdie the fifth and sixth before dropping strokes with bogeys on the seventh and eighth. He closed the front nine with a birdie on the ninth.

Once on the back nine Bhatia found some rhythm as he made birdie on the 12th before making consecutive birdies on the 15th and 16th holes before play was suspended. This puts him at 11 under par with two holes left to play in his third round.

Diksha shoots 71 under in brutal conditions, finishes 5th as Pranavi is 14th

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Magenta Shores (Australia)

Diksha Dagar logged her first top-5 finish of the 2026 season, finishing a creditable tied-fifth in the Australian Women's Classic after carding a 1-under 71 despite two bogeys in the middle of the round, here Saturday.

On a brutal day when conditions were very tough, Diksha was one of only three players to go under-par on Sunday as the wind and rain reared its ugly head on the Central Coast in Australia.

One of the other two was



he winner, Kelsey Bennett. Pranavi Urs, who had also been looking set for a Top-5

finish slipped in the final round as she shot 6-over 78, and finished sole 14th.

The other two Indians in the field this week, Avani Prashanth and Hitaasheh Bakshi had missed the halfway cut.

Kelsey Bennett grabbed the biggest win of her career as she secured a four-shot victory on home soil to land a maiden Ladies European Tour (LET) title.

Leading by one heading into the final day at Magenta Shores Golf & Country, the 26-year-old battled through brutally tough conditions carding a round of 71 (-1) to claim the win on 13-under par. With the victory, Bennett

booked her spot at the AIG Women's Open.

On a day when scoring was tough Diksha birdied the fourth and the fifth but dropped shots on the seventh and the ninth. She dropped a third bogey on the 13th but picked shots on the 15th and the 17th for a 71.

Pranavi struggled all day. She bogeyed three times on the front and nine three more times by the 14th. Her only birdie of the day was on the 15th, which saw her rise to Tied-10th. But she closed with another birdie on the 18th and ended 14th.