

MAHA KUMBH NUMBED

Modi, Shah monitoring situation on hourly basis

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A stampede-like situation at the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj on Wednesday claimed dozens of lives and left many more injured. A senior doctor at a hospital tending the injured told *The Pioneer* that most of the deceased were from Karnataka, and their bodies have been handed over to their families after post-mortem examinations. Despite the tragedy, the spiritual fervor remained intact as over six crore devotees took a holy dip at the Sangam on Mauni Amavasya. The Akhara Parishad, which had initially called off the Amrit Snan, later participated in the ritual, albeit without its usual grandeur.

There was, however, a variance in the statements of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath regarding the incident. PM Modi expressed his deepest condolences, calling the tragedy “extremely saddening.” In a post on X, he assured that the local administration is providing all possible help and wished a speedy recovery to the injured. “I have been speaking to Chief Minister Yogi ji and am in constant touch with the state government,” he said. In contrast, CM Yogi Adityanath avoided confirming any fatalities. His official statement only mentioned the injured, saying, “Some people have serious injuries,” sidestepping reports of deaths. The Maha Kumbh Mela control room remains operational, but no dedicated helpline has been issued yet for affected

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devotees, further adding to the frustration of those searching for missing family members. Eyewitnesses recounted the chaos that unfolded in the early hours. “We were waiting near the Sangam since last night,” said Rajesh Tiwari, a devotee from Varanasi. “People had been sleeping there to secure a good spot for the Mahurat bath at 3 am. But around 2 am, the crowd surged forward, unaware of those lying on the ground. That’s when the pushing started, and everything went out of control.”

Rekhha Devi, a devotee from Bihar, described the horror of the moment. “It all happened in seconds. Whoever fell could not get up. People were running in all directions, but some got trampled,” she said.

Continued on page 2
Detailed coverage on page 5

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President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday expressed their condolences over the stampede at the Maha Kumbh and prayed for the recovery of those injured. Chief Ministers of several states also expressed their grief over the mishap. Sources in the government said that PM and Shah have been monitoring the situation hourly basis since morning and engaged in conversation with Yogi several times during the day to take stock of the situation. Modi is scheduled to visit Mahakumbh for the holy dip on February 5.

“The stampede incident at Prayagraj Maha Kumbh is extremely sad. I express my condolences to the families of the injured devotees and pray to God that all the injured devotees recover soon,” President Murmu said in a social media post in Hindi. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar expressed grief at the stampede and prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured.

Modi spoke to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath four time in three hours following the tragic stampede at the Maha Kumbh, where over two dozen people were injured and many were feared dead. The Prime Minister reviewed the situation, called for immediate support measures,

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and assured continuous monitoring of developments. Union Home Minister Amit Shah also reached out to Adityanath and assured all possible assistance from the Central government. “The Centre stands with Uttar Pradesh in this hour of crisis and will provide all necessary support,” Shah said. Union Health Minister JP Nadda, who is also national president of Bharatiya Janata Party, spoke to the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and assured that the Centre would ensure all necessary medical aid for the injured. He also conveyed that BJP workers were prepared to assist the administration in managing the situation. In response, Adityanath informed Nadda that the district administration had brought the situation under control. Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel also enquired about the prevailing situation and spoke to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath twice. However, the administration faced sharp criticism from the Opposition parties and religious leaders over security lapses.

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Uttar Pradesh government has directed district police chiefs to temporarily halt vehicles carrying devotees to the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj following a stampede-like situation during the Second Shahi Snan on Mauni Amavasya early Wednesday. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also appealed to people to take a dip in the Ganga at their nearest ghats and not try to reach the Sangam Nose, according to an official statement. “All ghats hold equal spiritual significance and reaching the main confluence point should not be a priority,” the statement quoted the chief minister as saying. The move is aimed at preventing overcrowding at the religious gathering, where millions of pilgrims converge to take a holy dip at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers. In Rae Bareilly, Circle Officer (City) Amit Singh confirmed that around 40-50 vehicles, including 10 large buses, have been stopped from proceeding to Prayagraj.

Timeline of major stampedes at religious gatherings

JULY 2, 2024: More than 100 people, including women and children, were killed after a stampede broke out at a ‘satsang’ (prayer meeting) organised by a self-styled godman, Bhole Baba aka Narayan Saakar Hari, in Uttar Pradesh’s Hathras.

JANUARY 1, 2022: At least 12 people died and over a dozen were injured in a stampede at the famous Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu and Kashmir triggered by a heavy rush of devotees.

OCTOBER 13, 2013: 115 people were killed and over 100 injured in a stampede during the Navratri festivities near Ratangarh temple in Madhya Pradesh’s Datia district. The stampede was triggered by rumours that a river bridge the devotees were crossing was about to collapse.

FEBRUARY 10, 2013: More than 36 people lost their lives at the Prayagraj Junction, which was packed with pilgrims for the 2013 Kumbh Mela, following a panic on the foot overbridge leading to platform 6, triggering a stampede. Dozens sustained severe injuries, requiring prolonged hospitalisation. The victims were devotees from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and other states.

NOVEMBER 19, 2012: Around 20 people were killed and many others injured as a makeshift bridge caved in, triggering a stampede during the Chhath Puja at Adalat Ghat on the bank of river Ganga in Patna.

NOVEMBER 8, 2011: At least 20 people were killed in a stampede in Haridwar at Har-ki-Pauri ghat on the banks of the Ganga river.

JANUARY 14, 2011: At least 104 Sabarimala devotees were killed and over 40 were injured in a stampede when a jeep crashed into homebound pilgrims at Pulmedu in Kerala’s Idukki district.

MARCH 4, 2010: About 63 people were killed in a stampede at Ram Janki Temple of Kripalu Maharaj in Uttar Pradesh’s Pratapggarh district as people gathered to collect free clothes and food from the self-styled godman.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2008: Nearly 250 devotees were killed and over 60 injured in a stampede triggered by rumours of a bomb going off at Chamunda Devi temple in Rajasthan’s Jodhpur city.

AUGUST 3, 2008: 162 dead, 47 injured in a stampede triggered by rumours of rockslides at Naina Devi temple in Himachal Pradesh’s Bilaspur district.

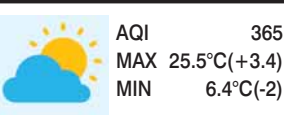
JANUARY 25, 2005: Over 340 devotees were trampled to death and hundreds injured during an annual pilgrimage at Mandhardevi temple in Maharashtra’s Satara district. The accident occurred when some people fell down on the steps made slippery by the devotees breaking coconuts.

AUGUST 27, 2003: 39 people were killed and around 140 injured in a stampede during the holy bath at the Kumbh Mela in Maharashtra’s Nashik district.

MARKETS



WEATHER



GRAP III invoked

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As air quality in the Anational capital region (NCR) deteriorated on Wednesday, Stage-III of Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) was invoked thereby banning the use of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers except for individuals with disabilities, restricting construction activities and hybrid mode be adopted by schools.

Announcing these measures, Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) said in a statement keeping in view the prevailing trend of air quality, and in an effort to prevent further deterioration of air quality in the region, its



Sub-Committee has taken the call to invoke all actions as envisaged under Stage-III of the extant schedule of GRAP, with immediate effect, in the entire NCR.

GRAP Stage-III entails a ban on non-essential construction work. Classes up to grade 5 are required to shift to hybrid mode under Stage-III. Parents and students have the option to choose online education wherever available. Under Stage-III, the use of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars (4-wheelers) is restricted in Delhi and nearby NCR districts. Persons with disabilities are exempt.

Continued on page 2

Modi slams Kejriwal's poison claims

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday slammed the AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal over his claim that the Haryana government poisoned Yamuna to disrupt Delhi's water supply, saying he is too drinking Yamuna water. Terming his allegations disgusting, the Prime Minister said he too drinks the same water from the Yamuna River and asked whether Haryana BJP will try to kill him. Speaking at a rally in Kartar Nagar, Ghonda, ahead of the Delhi assembly polls, Modi said such remarks were an insult to the country.

“AAP-DA people have committed another grave sin in their political interest which can never be forgiven. Delhi and the country cannot forget that a former Chief Minister of Delhi has made disgusting allegations against the people of Haryana,” he said, addressing a public meeting in Kartar Nagar in the run-up to the February 5 assembly polls.

He claimed that Kejriwal is making such statements due to the fear of defeat. “I myself drink the same water, so can anyone think that the Haryana BJP government will poison Modi? Forgiving mistakes is the generous character of the citizens of India, but neither Delhi nor the country ever forgives those who commit sins deliberately,” he said. “This is not just an insult to



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva and other party leaders, at Kartar Nagar
Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Haryana; it is an insult to Indians, to our values and character. This is the country where giving water to drink is considered a religion, where there is a tradition of keeping a piau (water pot). Putting such false allegations on the countrymen is just a fear of losing elections but this time Delhi will definitely teach a lesson to those who talk such cheap things,” PM Modi claimed, adding that the people of Delhi will drown the AAP in the Yamuna.

Kejriwal had alleged that the BJP is trying to keep the people of Delhi thirsty as it indulges in “dirty politics”. “BJP people in Haryana are mixing poison in the water and sending it to Delhi. If people in Delhi drink this water, many will die. Can anything be more disgusting than this,” the AAP chief had

said on X. He also likened AAP leaders to serial killer Charles Sobhraj, who gained notoriety for duping people. “Those who built ‘sheesh mahal’ and those who looted public money worth thousands of crores of rupees can never think of the welfare of the poor. That is why they are spreading lies in Delhi. These AAP-da people speak lies with such innocence that people get trapped,” Modi said.

Delhi has made it clear that now excuses, fake promises as well as “loot and lies” of the “AAP-da” government will not work, Modi said as he made a fervent appeal to voters to give him a chance to serve after 25 years of Congress and AAP governments.

Further hitting out at the AAP, Modi said that during the last two elections, the party asked

for votes on the promise of cleaning the Yamuna and now it says that the issue does not yield votes. “This is fraud and shamelessness. They want to make people struggle for water and want Purvanchalis to chhathi maiya’s puja surrounded by garbage,” he said.

“When it comes to Delhi, someone ruled for 14 years and someone for 11 years but still the same jams, the same broken streets, pollution and drinking water issues. Who can take people out of such circumstances? Not Modi but one vote of yours,” he said.

Modi urged people to give him a chance. “I will take care of you like a family member, your dream will be my dream and I will put in all efforts to fulfil your dreams. The BJP has a track record of fulfilling its promises,” he said.

He asked the people of Delhi to vote for change, emphasizing that BJP’s track record shows they fulfill their promises. He cited successful programs like the water connection scheme that delivered water to 12.9 crore families in five years. He assured that the BJP will provide clean drinking water to every household in Delhi, just as they have done in rural areas. Modi also highlighted the BJP’s work on infrastructure projects like expressways and metro connectivity, pledging to transform Delhi into a world-class city.

“If the BJP government opens a bank account, it will send the money to it. The sisters of Delhi do not trust the AAP and are asking why you are making announcements even after being in power for 11 years and not implementing them. Why has the money not come to the accounts even after announcing it three years ago in Punjab and in Delhi?” he questioned. “Rs 2,500 will be deposited in the accounts of sisters; Rs 21,000 will be given to pregnant women so that they can eat nutritious food. The AAP has realised its defeat, the public is angry with each of its MLAs, so AAP and Congress have formed an alliance with each other behind the scenes,” the PM added.



Kejriwal turns the table on EC in response to Yamuna claims

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In response to the Election Commission (EC)’s notice over his allegations that the Haryana government was mixing poison in the Yamuna river, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday clarified that Yamuna water remark was in the context of public health crisis and raw water received from the state recently has been “highly contaminated and extremely poisonous” for human health.

Kejriwal sparked a controversy earlier this week by saying that BJP-ruled Haryana was ‘mixing poison’ in Delhi water supplied through Yamuna. Both the BJP and the Congress had

complained to the EC against Kejriwal for levelling allegations of poisoning of Yamuna river. Acting on their complaint, the poll body had asked him to submit reply by 8 pm on Wednesday.

While urging to close the matter, the AAP leader also requested the commission to intervene and pass appropriate directions to the state of Haryana so that clean water is made available to the people of Delhi.

“However, the undersigned herein beseech and most humbly request your good offices to intervene on the major issue of availability of safe water and pass appropriate directions to the state of Haryana so that safe quantity of water is made available to the citizens of Delhi,” Kejriwal wrote in a letter to the commission.

Continued on page 2

Delhi Congress announces five guarantees

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Days before the Delhi polls, the Congress on Wednesday launched its manifesto, promising to conduct a caste census, a monthly grant of Rs 2,500 to women, free electricity up to 300 units, LPG cylinders at Rs 500 and set up a ministry for Purvanchalis if it is voted to power in the capital. The party, which was ousted from power by the AAP in 2013, has also pledged free ration kits, a monetary support to unemployed youth with financial assistance of Rs 8,500 per month for one year.



Senior Congress leaders releasing the Congress manifesto for the Delhi Assembly elections
Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

The manifesto, which has been divided into 22 focus areas, was unveiled by Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav. He was flanked by Congress communications incharge Jairam Ramesh. Emphasizing

the party’s commitment to addressing public needs, Congress introduced its campaign slogan, “Every need will be fulfilled, Congress is necessary.” “We will conduct a Delhi caste survey to enumerate the various deprived classes in Delhi in the first Cabinet

meeting of the state government,” the manifesto mentioned.

The party also proposed launching 100 Indira canteens across the city, offering meals at Rs 5. The manifesto, with 219 points, covers a wide range of areas such as health, education, women’s issues, minorities, Scheduled Castes, Purvanchalis and the LGBTQIA+ community. Encroachments on both sides of the Yamuna River will be removed to restore it to its original condition and flow. The manifesto also includes plans to set up green police stations to handle complaints regarding solid waste and Yamuna pollution.

Continued on page 2

GARRISON RETURNS



Tri-service band performs during the Beating Retreat ceremony, at Vijay Chowk
Photo: Rajan Dimri/The Pioneer

SC bans mannual scavenging in 6 cities including Delhi, Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday passed directions banning manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning in six metropolitan cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Hyderabad– in a writ petition seeking the eradication of manual scavenging in India. In its order, it stated that in the comprehensive affidavit filed by the Union, there is "no clarity" on the eradication of manual scavenging and sewer cleaning.

"Therefore, we hereby order manual sewer cleaning and manual scavenging shall be stopped in all top metropolitan cities as follows: Metropolitan city of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad," the order passed by Justices

Sudhanshu Dhulia and Aravind Kumar. The top court also directed the Chief executive officer (whatever name they are called in the respective cities) of each metropolitan city shall file a precise affidavit apprising as to how and when manual scavenging and sewer cleaning is stopped in the city. The affidavit shall be filed latest by February 13.

The Public Interest Litigation filed by Dr. Balram Singh raised the issues that pertinent provisions of the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 as well as the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, remain unimplemented despite the mandate of the Statutes.

The Bench expressed orally that it is "fed up" with passing

orders seeking compliance which remains "academic" in nature as there is no compliance. It said: "Can we say it today that manual scavenging from today onwards is banned?...We are fed up of order. We are directing. Either do it or face consequences."

Earlier, bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Aravind Kumar on December 11, last year, directed the Union Government to call a meeting of the Central Monitoring Committee along with the respective States' stakeholders within 2 weeks to assess to what extent the compliance has been made to the main order dated October 20, 2023. Based on the October 20 order, the Union was to file a status report. However, the Court noted the report was "not encouraging at all".

The data was presented by

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati. Amicus curiae and Senior Advocate K. Parameshar on the data contended that it presents an "erroneous" picture as in some of these districts, the Committee mandated by the law has not even been constituted. Some States have given data prior to the constitution of the Committees. He added that the Central Committee had met latest October 19, 2024, where States and UTs were advised to constitute a committee and conduct a fresh survey National Survey of Manual Scavengers. This survey is yet to be completed.

Justice Dhulia orally remarked that "if they are filing false affidavits, they are in contempt straight away". There are States especially North-eastern States, where there is no sewer system, he pointed out.

Delhi Police seize ₹1.87 Crore ahead of polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police have seized more than ₹1.87 crore in cash in three different operations ahead of the assembly polls in the national capital.

Police said that the Railway Unit, Northwest, and Southwest district police have collectively seized the money in separate operations. The cash, suspected to be linked to illicit activities, was recovered during routine patrols and election surveillance, according to a statement from the Delhi Police.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Railway) KPS Malhotra said that the railway unit team seized ₹32.61 lakh from Sabzi Mandi Railway Station.

"On January 28 at Sabzi Mandi Railway Station, the police apprehended Jaswinder Pal (48), a resident of Ropar, Punjab, who was in possession

of ₹32.61 lakh in unaccounted cash. The suspect was intercepted while carrying a black backpack containing 6,282 notes of ₹500, 601 notes of ₹200, and smaller denominations," said the DCP.

Upon questioning, Pal told police that he had traveled from Punjab to Delhi by Jan Shatabdi Express and claimed that he had been sent by his brother-in-law to collect the cash-filled bag. However, he was unable to provide any valid documentation or proof of cash ownership.

The DCP said that the Income Tax Department and the concerned Election Cell were immediately informed for further investigation into the source and purpose of the cash. The Income Tax Department took custody of the suspect and the seized cash for further proceedings.

In another operation, a team from the Northwest district seized ₹1.50 crore ahead of the

assembly polls. "Our teams seized ₹1.50 crore in unaccounted cash from six people during enforcement measures ahead of the elections. The seizure was made as part of efforts to curb electoral malpractices," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northwest) Bhisham Singh said.

He added that the police intercepted suspects carrying large sums of cash without valid proof, leading to the confiscation of the amount. The suspects were taken into custody, and the investigation is ongoing. In the third operation, the Southwest Police seized ₹3.98 lakh at a picket.

"A team from the Palam area seized ₹3.98 lakh from three people during vehicle checks at Nasirpur Road, Manglapuri. The suspects were identified as Aajam (27), Md Maroof (38), and Sakir Raja (31), all residents of Uttar Pradesh.

Delhi Police wins best marching contingent trophy

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police bagged the Best Marching Contingent Trophy in Republic Day Parade this year, making it the 17th victory for the police. The Delhi Police Women's Contingent also won in 2024.

"This remarkable back-to-back achievement underscores the unwavering commitment, hard work, and unity of the Delhi Police, further solidifying their reputation as one of the finest contingents in the Republic Day Parade. Prior to this, the contingent also won the Best Marching Contingent Trophy in 2021, with a previous win in 2006," a statement by the police said.

It added that the Delhi Police Marching Contingent, led by Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police, Rishi Kumar Singh, IPS, showcased exceptional synchronization and dedication. It comprised three Sub-Inspectors, 44 Head Constables, and 100 Constables, the contingent's iconic Red Safa-clad jawans, each standing over six feet tall, adding grandeur to the performance.

The newly raised All-Women Delhi Police Band also participated for the second time in the Republic Day Parade. Led by Band Master Ruyangunuo Kense, the Band Contingent included 04 women Sub-Inspectors and 64 women Constables, all trained to perform with precision.

New Delhi Book Fair celebrates Republic@75

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As India marks 75 years as a Republic, the New Delhi World Book Fair 2025 celebrates the diverse voices from across the nation, bringing together a rich variety of perspectives that reflect the principles and values enshrined in the Constitution.

Through a wide array of literary works, discussions,

and cultural exchanges, the fair is set to highlight the spirit of democracy, inclusivity, and unity in diversity that define the nation's journey. Scheduled from February 1 to 9, 2025, at the iconic Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

According to NBT Press statement, this flagship event of Ministry of Education organised by National Book Trust is set to be bigger and better than ever, celebrating

the nation, books, literature and culture.

"The fair is poised to be a grand spectacle celebrating not just booksand heritage but also casting its gaze toward the horizons of aspirational India and the vision that shapes its bright future. The New Delhi World Book Fair 2025 stands as a crucible where the essence of a seventy-five-year-old republic converges with the aspirations of a nation set to

command global admiration," said an official of NBT.

The New Delhi World Book Fair 2025 with its theme Republic@75, serves as a platform that unites the nation's cultural heritage with its aspirations for the future. The event brings together leading voices from diverse cultures, and fields, including literature, governance, technology, art, and cinema.

BJP CMs rally for party ahead of Delhi polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With just six days left in the run up to the Delhi assembly elections, senior BJP leaders including Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari held 35 public meetings in different areas of the national Capital.

Addressing two public meetings for Matiala candidate Sandeep Sahrawat and Vikaspuri candidate Dr. Pankaj Kumar Singh, Gadkari said, "Arvind Kejriwal government has given zero development to Delhi in ten years, most of Delhi has been made like slum area and if Prime Minister Narendra Modi government had not given schemes like road, metro, RRTS, Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhoomi worth about 1 lakh crore, then today Delhi would not have been a liveable city."

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma addressed public meetings in Manakpura in Uttam Nagar candidate Pawan Sharma and Karol Bagh candidate Dushyant Gautam. He said that the people of Delhi have made up their mind to bring Delhi back on the path of development and on February 5, they will free Delhi from the corruption of 'AAP-DA'.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis claimed that the people of Delhi are

now fed up with the corrupt government, the mistake of choosing AAP since 2013. He addressed public meetings in support of New Delhi candidate Pravesh Sahib Singh and Rohini candidate Vijendra Gupta.

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini addressed a public meeting in support of Greater Kailash Assembly candidate Shikha Rai, stating that Arvind Kejriwal is an anarchist ruler who neither respects the Constitution of the country nor the administrative system.

"The way Kejriwal accused the Haryana government and people of giving poisonous water to Delhi for a few votes is a blow to the federal structure of the country," he said.

Addressing a public meeting in support of Patel Nagar candidate Rajkumar Anand, Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma said that like the migrants from various other states, the migrants of Rajasthan who have settled in Delhi are also distressed by seeing the plight of Delhi.

"They are seeing how Rajasthan has gained momentum of development due to the double engine government and now they want a double engine government in Delhi too," he stated.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami

addressed four public meetings in support of Badarpur candidate Narayan Dutt Sharma, Kalkaji candidate Ramesh Bidhuri, Kasturba Nagar candidate Neeraj Basoya and Greater Kailash candidate Shikha Rai.

Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar addressed three public meetings for Moti Nagar candidate Harish Khurana, Mehrauli candidate Gajendra Yadav and RK Puram candidate Anil Sharma.

Kejriwal turns the table on EC in response to Yamuna claims

From page 1

In the 14-page reply to the EC, he said there is no violation of any law or any code is committed and his statements on Yamuna water were made to highlight severe toxicity, contamination of raw water received from from the BJP-ruled state.

"The statement made by him regarding the ammonia present in Yamuna River does not violate Section 196 , 197 and Section 123(4) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Additionally, it is alleged that these statements breach the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). Upon a careful examination of the facts, context, and legal provisions, it is respectfully submitted that the statement

made by undersigned are fully protected under the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and expression, and no offence or any violation of Code of Conduct is committed by him," reads the reply.

The letter further stated, "That even on the face of it, the said statement, would by no stretch of imagination promote disharmony or enmity between religious, racials, language or regional groups or castes or communities. No such statement so as to create disharmony between such groups or segment of public is made. In the present case, the statement in question neither refers to nor imputes anything against the personal character or conduct of any candidate contesting the elections.

Instead, it addresses a critical governance issue of public health and environmental safety, substantiated by official administrative records.

"The political and constitutional implications of labeling an environmental and public health crisis as an electoral offence are profound and deeply concerning. If raising genuine public grievances-particularly concerning the basic necessity of clean drinking water-is curtailed on the pretext of election law violations, it would set a dangerous precedent of silencing dissent and obstructing democratic accountability."

The AAP chief further stated that there is 7ppm ammonia in Yamuna Water and DJB CEO letter admits toxicity is 700% higher than permissible

limit. The root cause of Yamuna Water identified by DJB's letter is indiscriminate discharge of industrial waste by Haryana.

"Haryana's failure in controlling pollution has resulted in unprecedented public health crisis. Issue of toxic water supply from Haryana has been raised earlier too; DJB has even approached NGT and Supreme Court," said Kejriwal adding that Delhi Government has no role to play with such high level of toxic water being made available to Delhi by Haryana which is an upper-riparian state. Due to such high level of toxic content in the raw water supplied by Haryana, WTPs are operating below capacity and there is a shortage of treated water in Delhi.

Delhi Congress announces five guarantees

From page 1

Congress communications in-charge Jairam Ramesh highlighted the party's focus on improving public health and addressing pollution in the city. "Today, all parties are using the word 'guarantee', but this word was used by the Congress Party in the Karnataka elections in 2023. We wanted to give this message to the public that the Congress Party does what it says. This is not just a guarantee but a right of the people. That is why we came up with guarantees," Ramesh said at a press conference here where the party launched its manifesto.

"When Manmohan Singh was the prime minister, the Congress Party brought a law in the form of a guarantee, which was passed and its name was 'National Rural Employment Guarantee Act'," he added."A guarantee means it is the right of the public. Five guarantees have been announced for the people of Delhi. Right now, in Delhi, it is not about ease of doing business but ease of breathing. If you see any parameter for pollution and chemical contamination, none can match Delhi. Neither BJP nor AAP government in Delhi have taken this issue seriously," Ramesh said.

The party also stated it would restore the services of over 15,000 Civil Defence volunteers who made valuable contributions to public transport and various departments of the Delhi government. Sports will be made compulsory in all Delhi government schools, with at least three teams from each school required to participate in zonal competitions, the manifesto said.

The party has promised to build sports stadiums using available land in rural Delhi. "We will introduce a Delhi Education Policy to replace the NEP 2020," it said. A fresh pension scheme of Rs 5,000 per month for senior

citizens, widows, persons with disabilities, transgender persons, and destitute individuals will be introduced. The party further said it would improve the 2008 Ladli Scheme as envisioned by former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit. There will be 33 percent reservation in new state government jobs for women. A 'Shagan' of Rs 1.1 lakh for the marriage of disadvantaged widows, their daughters, and orphan girls has also been announced, according to the manifesto. "We will establish 100 Indira canteens, operated predominantly by women, to provide affordable and

nutritious meals to all. We will increase the number of working women's hostels and will take up the demands of Anganwadi and ASHA workers, including higher pay," the manifesto stated. Four per cent reservation will be there in state government jobs for persons with disabilities, according to the manifesto.

Giving permanent employment to the contract workers, including Safai Karamcharis, is also in the party's manifesto. The party also mentioned that they will finalise eligibility criteria to make contract workers in the government into permanent employees and will award 15

per cent of government contracts to SCs to empower them financially.

A free Char Dham Yatra will be organised for the Dalit community to the pilgrimage sites associated with Gautam Buddha, Saranath and Bodhi Gaya, the birthplace of Sant Ravidas, and the birthplace of Babasaheb Ambedkar in Mhow.

A designated area along the Yamuna River will be declared a district for celebrating Chhath Mahapary; the ghat on the Yamuna will be named after the late Sharda Sinha. A ministry will be set up to ensure the welfare of Purvanchalis, it said.

GRAP III invoked

From page 1

Stage 3 also bans non-essential diesel-operated medium goods vehicles with BS-IV or older standards in Delhi.

It also said this is in addition to the actions under Stages I & II of the extant schedule of GRAP already in-force in NCR. Various agencies responsible for implementing measures under GRAP including Pollution Control Boards (PCBs) of NCR and DPCC have also been addressed to ensure strict implementation of actions under Stage-III of the extant schedule of GRAP in addition to actions under Stages I & II of GRAP during this period.

The decision to invoke stage three was taken after Delhi's

deaths in Maharashtra has gone up to two.

A bulletin put out by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Public Health Department, Maharashtra said that of the total 127 suspected GBS cases, 72 patients have been diagnosed as "confirmed GBS cases". Of the total suspected/confirmed GBS patients, 23 are from the Pune city, while 73 patients are from the newly added villages in the areas coming under the jurisdiction of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), 13 patients are from Pimpri-Chinchwad, nine from the rural areas of Pune district and nine are from other districts of the state.

MAHA KUMBH NUMBED

From page 1

"For a moment, I thought I was dead," added Alpona Sen, a pilgrim from Kolkata. "I had just come out of the river when I was pushed. I couldn't breathe."

In the midst of the tragedy, families frantically searched for missing loved ones. "I have been looking for my nephew for hours," said Ramesh Kumar from Kanpur. "We got separated when the crowd surged. His phone is switched off, and I have no idea where he is. I just hope he is safe."

A woman from Karnataka, part of a group of nine, said that one man and one woman from their group had died, while three others were in critical condition. "We came from Kasapura," said another woman, sobbing outside the hospital. "Three children are missing. Our mobile phones and Aadhaar cards are lost. I don't know where anyone from our group is."

Authorities quickly launched

rescue operations, rushing the injured to hospitals. Government claims that to rescue those affected by the incident, a green corridor was created, allowing over 50 ambulances to reach the Sangam Nose within two to three minutes. More than 100 rounds were made by ambulances to save lives. Additionally, expert doctors arrived at the scene within minutes and took charge of the situation. The SDRF, NDRE, and police teams also worked alongside medical personnel to assist the injured.

Union Minister Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti appealed to pilgrims to remain calm. "The entire Mela Kshetra is Kumbh, and devotees may take a bath at any ghat. The entire Sangam is called Triveni Ghat. Please do not rush."

Mela Nodal Officer Vijay Anand urged people not to believe in rumors. "The situation is under control. We request everyone to remain calm and follow the guidance of the authorities. Do not believe in unverified information spreading panic."

Amrit Snaan

The stampede at 2 a.m. initially prompted the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad to cancel the Amrit Snaan, a sacred bathing ritual. "You all saw what happened in the morning, and that's why we decided to cancel the Amrit Snaan," said Mahant Ravindra Puri, president of the Akhara Parishad. "Our saints and seers were ready for the 'snaan', but then we were informed about the tragedy." However, after intervention from CM Yogi Adityanath, who

personally urged the saints to reconsider, the Akharas ultimately participated in the sacred ritual-though the celebrations were subdued. "The chief minister himself spoke to us," said Mahant Ravindra Puri. "We agreed to take part in the Amrit Snaan, but it lacked the glitter that usually accompanies the event."

The Mauni Amavasya Snaan remains one of the most significant bathing rituals of the Kumbh Mela, with Sanyasi, Bairagi, and Udaseen Akharas leading the elaborate processions into the river. On Tuesday, over five crore devotees had already arrived for the sacred bath, with government estimates projecting the number to swell to ten crore by Wednesday.

Despite the tragic incident, authorities are working to ensure

crowd management and safety measures, emphasizing that while the spiritual essence of the Maha Kumbh remains intact, public security remains the top priority.

The deadliest stampede in the history of Kumbh Mela occurred in 1954, shortly after India's independence. On Mauni Amavasya, a massive rush of devotees at Triveni Bandh led to a catastrophic stampede. Sadhus came riding elephants. Due to the noise there, two elephants went berserk and hundreds of pilgrims were crushed to death, marking one of the worst tragedies in the history of the religious congregation.

The mela administration at the time attempted to suppress details of the disaster, but a photojournalist captured the

horrific scenes, exposing the scale of the calamity. Only two photographers had images of the stampede, which later brought the tragedy to public attention.

With the ongoing Maha Kumbh 2025, authorities have repeatedly assured improved crowd control measures. However, the latest tragedy raises serious concerns about safety preparedness and crisis management at an event where millions of devotees gather. Devotees and experts alike are now demanding stricter safety protocols to prevent further loss of life.

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Rahul challenges Kejriwal to drink Yamuna water

Haryana CM drinks Yamuna water

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday challenged AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal, daring him to drink the water from the Yamuna river while harking back at his promises of taking a dip in it. Slamming AAP supremo over the issue of the Yamuna River's pollution, he said, "Arvind Kejriwal said that he will clean the Yamuna and will drink its water, today I am challenging you, go to the Yamuna and drink its water today... you make the citizens of Delhi drink the dirty water... after that, we will meet you in the hospital." He further added: "I don't claim that I will be drinking Yamuna ji's water, I will not, because that water is polluted."

"Fulfill your promises that you made about taking a bath in Yamuna and drinking from it. You haven't fulfilled it yet. Drink the water from Yamuna and then we will meet you in the hospital," he said, addressing an election rally in Bawana. He alleged that the former



Delhi chief minister is opposed to reservations and is against Dalits, backwards, minorities and the poor. Gandhi said he and his party do not fear Prime Minister Narendra Modi and on the contrary, "the PM is afraid of the Congress". He also attacked Kejriwal with the 'sheesh mahal' jibe for the

second straight day and said that though he talked about clean governance, the "biggest scam" in Delhi took place under his watch. He said both Prime Minister Modi and Kejriwal are opposed to reservations and are against Dalits, minorities, backwards and the poor.

"Kejriwal should say clearly that he would get caste surveys done and breach the wall of 50 per cent cap on reservation, but he will not do so as he is against Dalits, backwards and minorities. When riots were taking place, where was he? Did he stand with you?" Gandhi said, slamming the former chief

minister. Training his guns specifically on Kejriwal, Gandhi said he used to move around in a small car wearing a muffler and claim that he will do clean politics but the biggest scam in Delhi worth crores of rupees was done by his party and his people. "He (Kejriwal) ran a corrupt government. Modi ji lies in his speeches and just like him, Kejriwal does the same. Five years ago, he (Kejriwal) had stated that he would take a bath in the Yamuna and drink its water. Five years have gone by and he did not do so. You have to drink dirty water but Kejriwal lives in 'sheesh mahal' which is worth crores and lies to you," the former Congress chief said. Gandhi said he had told PM Modi in Parliament that the Congress will get a caste census done. The Congress leader said it is his guarantee that Kejriwal will not assure that he will breach the 50 per cent cap on reservation because he is also like Modi.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Sonipat court in Haryana on Wednesday issued notice to former Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal over a plea regarding his remarks accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of "poisoning" the Yamuna river. Chief Judicial Magistrate Neha Goyal sought a reply from Kejriwal and asked him to appear in person before the Court on February 17. The Court was hearing a complaint filed by State of Haryana through the State Disaster Management Authority against Kejriwal under Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. The complaint alleged that Kejriwal spread misinformation and caused panic among the residents of Delhi and Haryana with his "Yamuna Poisoned" remark. The complainant Ashish Kaushik, an Executive Engineer in Water Services Division, assured the crowd that the claims made in the viral video were entirely false and that no such incident



had occurred. Amidst the ongoing controversy over Yamuna river, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Wednesday drank water from Yamuna in Palla village near Delhi-Haryana border, in a sharp response to the grave allegations made by AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal regarding BJP "poisoning the Yamuna waters. Saini alongwith senior officials visited Point No. 4 of the Yamuna River near Dahisara village at the Delhi-Haryana border, performed prayers, and drank Yamuna's water to demonstrate its purity. The Haryanan CM refuted Kejriwal's allegations that the BJP-led Haryana government had poisoned the Yamuna,

calling the statement an attempt to create fear for political gain. A video of the Haryana CM taking a sip of water from the sacred river has been shared on social media. In the video, Saini stands at the riverbank as he takes a sip of water. Speaking after drinking the water, Saini said, "An unfortunate statement by Arvind Kejriwal was given to create fear in the minds of people for his political benefits. Today, I have come here to the banks of River Yamuna and took a sip of water from Yamuna" without any hesitation. Kejriwal has blatantly lied". "Even I'm having relatives in Delhi. The AAP convener should immediately tender an apology," the chief minister said. He slammed AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal for "spreading lies". Saini said that Kejriwal must apologize for his misleading statements. He accused Kejriwal of consistently blaming Haryana sometimes for stubble burning, sometimes for water pollution without any factual basis.

'Illuminating Democracy' event held at Qutab Minar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A grand celebration of democracy was witnessed at the 'Illuminating Democracy' event at the historic Qutub Minar premises on Wednesday. The Delhi Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) R Alice Vaz was the chief guest on the occasion which was organized by the District South Election Office. Speaking on the occasion, the CEO stated, "This event reflects our commitment to ensuring maximum voter participation in the Delhi Assembly elections 2025. Democracy thrives when every voice is heard, and every vote matters and urged the audience to take the message of contributing to the nation through voting and to spread this message among all to ensure a massive turnout on February 5". This SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral



Participation) initiative aimed to encourage first-time voters, empower Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), and promote transgender inclusion in the democratic process. A light show illuminated the monument, symbolising the power of democracy and the participation of every citizen. There were special recognition and motivational programs for first-time voters, encouraging pride in their electoral partici-

pation as a part of 'First-Time Voter Encouragement initiatives'. District Election Officer (DEO) Mekala Chaitanya stated, "This program underscores our commitment to an inclusive democracy where every eligible voter, irrespective of their background or ability, feels empowered to participate. Our goal is to inspire citizens, particularly the youth, to recognise their responsibility and the transformative power of voting."

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In his first such attack on his INDIA bloc ally Congress at a public meeting, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday called the party a 'vote cutter' and urged voters not to 'waste' their votes on them while claiming that party is indirectly aiding BJP ahead of the upcoming Delhi assembly elections. Addressing a 'janasabha' in the Badli constituency, Kejriwal said, "Why waste your votes on the Congress? The Congress will not win; it will just cut our votes. The Congress and the BJP are fighting this election together to defeat the AAP. Vote to make someone win, not to make someone lose." The AAP leader further emphasised his party's welfare schemes, claiming that 70 per



cent of women, according to a survey, support the AAP and urged them to convince men in their families to vote for his party, alleging that men often get "distracted" by the BJP and the Congress. He said, "I have been in poli-

tics for twelve years now, yet I still don't know how to do politics. You can ask me to fix electricity, improve water supply, build roads, construct schools, and develop hospitals—I will make them excellent. But if you ask me to engage in abuses,

dirty politics, and political maneuvering, I don't know how to do that. Politics is not my thing; you can keep it. I am not here for the AAP." Taking on the BJP over the rising ammonia levels in the Yamuna, Kejriwal once again accused the Haryana government of "poisoning" Delhi's water supply. Kejriwal's fresh attack on the Congress comes amid growing rifts within the INDIA alliance. The fissures deepened on Tuesday when he hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who had accused him of being 'afraid' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and being involved in the 'liquor scam'. Responding to Gandhi's remarks, Kejriwal said on X, "Don't preach on fear and bravery. The country knows who is a coward and who is

brave." While the AAP and the Congress had joined forces for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, their decision to contest the Delhi Assembly polls separately has exposed underlying tensions. The Congress, which once ruled Delhi for 15 years under Sheila Dikshit, is campaigning to reclaim lost ground, while the AAP is fending off both the Congress and the BJP. With polling scheduled for February 5 and results set to be declared on February 8, the political temperature in Delhi continues to rise. While key INDIA allies like Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party (SP) have backed Kejriwal, the Congress is resolute to stage a comeback.

Groom dances on ‘Choli ke peeche’ to entertain his guests. Bride’s father cancels the wedding.

The 26-year-old groom tried to entertain the crowd at his wedding and got his shaadi canceled by the bride’s father!

A surprising incident happened in New Delhi on 18th of January, when a wedding was cancelled because the groom started dancing on the iconic song ‘Choli Ke Peeche kya hai’ in front of his baraat when it reached the wedding venue.

As reported by the guests that were present at the wedding, groom’s friend were constantly asking him to dance for their entertainment and once they played the song the groom couldn’t resist and he started dancing like a carefree boy.

While many guests were cheering for the groom, the bride’s father suddenly appeared from the other festivities and cancelled the wedding after watching his soon to be son-in-law showing lack of respect towards their family tradition which he held dear. The bride was visibly upset and was seen in tears while the groom was trying to explain to the father that it was all in good fun.

Sources close to the bride’s family told us that the father was furious even after the whole event was over and specifically asked his daughter to have no further contact with their family.

An event that was supposed to be joyous and full of celebration turned out to be a disaster for both the families.

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JPC adopts amended Waqf bill as Opposition slams provisions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel examining the Waqf Amendment bill on Wednesday adopted by a majority vote its report that contained changes suggested by ruling BJP members, prompting the Opposition to dub the exercise as an attempt to destroy the Waqf boards. The Joint Committee of Parliament (JPC) on the Waqf (Amendment) bill, chaired by BJP member Jagdambika Pal, adopted the report on the draft legislation by a 15-11 majority vote. Opposition members were submitting dissent notes to the report. Opposition members objected to the proposed omission of the 'waqf by user' clause in the Waqf Amendment Bill, contending that the provision existed since time immemorial. In a dissent note to the report, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi said the last-minute inclusion of the proviso to the clause omitting 'waqf by user' was "wholly unhelpful" as the

principle will only be tested in cases where the property is placed 'in dispute', in which case the proviso will not apply. BJP members insisted that the bill, introduced in Lok Sabha in August last year, seeks to bring modernity, transparency and accountability in the management of Waqf properties, while the Opposition termed it as an attack on the constitutional rights of the Muslim community and interference in the functioning of the Waqf boards. Speaking to reporters after the 38th sitting of the committee, Pal said the report will be presented to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday and tabled in both Houses of Parliament during the Budget Session beginning Friday. A key concern of the Opposition was the appointment of non-Muslims on the Waqf Board, which they claimed was violative of Article 26 of the Constitution that granted citizens freedom to manage their religious affairs, including establishment and maintenance of institutions for religious and charitable pur-

poses. "You have violated our rights granted under Article 26 of the Constitution. You talked about Uniform Civil Code, but there are Hindu Endowment Board, Sikh Boards, Christian boards, which do not have non-Hindus, non-Sikhs, and non-Christians as members. But why does this not extend to Muslims? This is an attempt to destroy the Waqf Boards," Congress member Imran Masood told reporters. At its meeting on Monday, the committee had adopted 14 amendments to the bill, all proposed by BJP members and rejected every change suggested by the opposition members, including the Congress, the DMK, the TMC, the AAP, the Shiv Sena-UBT and the AIMIM. Trinamool leader Kalyan Banerjee claimed the observations and recommendations of the committee were "wholly perverse". BJP members contended that the amendments suggested by the Opposition were intended to uphold the 1995 law and negate the spirit of the Waqf



Amendment bill-2024. "All these amendments are not in the interest of the Waqf. These will destroy the Waqf board and increase interference of the Central government in their functioning," AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi said. He said the evacuee properties could also be taken over by the government. "This will not be acceptable to the masses, especially the Muslim community. We reject this Waqf amendment. Muslims will lose their masjids," Owaisi said. According to the amendments

accepted by the committee, the state Waqf boards will now include one member from the Muslim OBC community, ensuring broader representation. It also has provisions that allow the state government to establish separate Waqf boards for Aghakhani and Bohra communities and safeguard women's inheritance rights in Waqf Alal Aulad (family waqfs). The amendments also allow the income from Waqf Alal Aulad to support widows, divorced

women, and orphans, if specified by the waqif (creator of the waqf). Pal said many of the amendments approved by the committee have addressed several concerns of Opposition members as well, adding the Bill once enacted will help Waqf board in discharging its duties transparently and more effectively. For the first time, "pasmanda" (backward) Muslims, the poor, women and orphans have been included among beneficiaries of the Waqf, an endowment made by Muslims for charitable religious purposes, he said. The committee held 38 meetings in the national Capital since its constitution on August 8 last year and toured several state capitals to consult stake holders. "This report is a significant document that empowers the Muslim community," BJP member Tejasvi Surya said. DMK's A Raja said the draft report was circulated among the 31-member committee late Tuesday night and members got very little time to peruse the voluminous document.

While the adopted bill accepts the government's stand of removing the "Waqf by user" clause in the existing law, it has added that no cases will be reopened against such properties on a retrospective basis provided these are not in dispute or belong to the government. The report made it clear that the provisions to omit the 'Waqf by user' definition of a Waqf property will be with prospective effect. It has also endorsed the government's move to include non-Muslims in Waqf boards, saying they can be 'beneficiaries, parties to disputes, or otherwise interested in Waqf matters'. It, however, does away with the enquiry power vested with the district collector concerned in cases of disputes with the government, giving the authority to the state government to designate an officer senior to the collector to probe the matter. Seeking to allay fears that the existing waqf properties will be subject to scrutiny after the amended waqf law comes into force, the parliamentary panel

had recommended that no cases will be reopened against such properties on a retrospective basis, provided the asset is not in dispute or belongs to the government. "Any bad-faith actor can institute a litigation over any part of the properties belonging to the 'waqf by user' and consequently prevent it from seeking any protection under the amended Act," Congress member Gaurav Gogoi said in his dissent note. Gogoi, the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha, said the bill allows excessive government interference in the functioning, control and management of waqf and waqf properties in the country. "...This has a detrimental impact on the community as well as the institution of the autonomy, which are necessary to administer the institution," he said. In his dissent note, DMK member A Raja said the proviso of 'waqf by user' existed since the time of Prophet Mohammad and any move for its omission would violate the fundamental rights of the Muslim community.

SC seeks details of FIRs against men who invoked triple talaq

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to furnish data on FIRs and chargesheets against men who invoked instant triple talaq to divorce their wives in violation of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights in Marriage) Act, 2019. A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar was hearing about 12 petitions filed by various Muslim individuals and organisations challenging the constitutional validity of the 2019 Act that criminalises the practice of instant triple talaq. "The respondent (Centre) shall file the total number of FIRs and chargesheets pending under Section 3 and 4 of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Marriage) Act 2019. The parties to also file written submissions not exceeding three pages in support of their contention," the bench said. It asked the Centre and other parties to file written submissions to the pleas while the posting the matter for final



hearing in the week commencing March 17. Referring to the legal position, the bench said as triple talaq was held invalid, there was no dissolution of marriage and the point now was the criminalisation of the pronouncement. "If the divorce itself is not recognised, the relationship then continues and no separation. But now you have penalised the very act of pronouncing it....We want the list of cases all over India where FIRs are led, now in all states FIRs are centralised, just give us a list of that," the CJI said. The list was directed to include data from rural areas.

"In no civilised section, such a practice is there," said solicitor general Tushar Mehta. The bench said the petitioners were not arguing for making triple talaq valid but opposed its criminalisation. "I am sure none of the lawyers here are saying that the practice is correct, but what they are saying is whether it can be criminalised when the practice is banned and no divorce can take place by uttering talaq three times at once," the CJI said. The bench said as triple talaq was legally void, the law effectively penalised mere pronouncement of the words

"talaq" thrice - the bone of contention in the ongoing legal challenge. Mehta defended the legislation saying penalising an activity fell within the domain of legislative policy. He opposed the argument that the Act imposed disproportionate punishment, saying the maximum sentence under the law was three years, lower than penalties in other laws protecting women's rights. Petitioner's counsel Nizam Pasha said the law unjustly criminalised the mere utterance of words, talaq, equating it with punishable offenses. He said no other community faced similar legal consequences for marital abandonment. Senior advocate M R Shamshad said existing domestic violence laws sufficiently addressed issues arising out of marital disputes, making the separate criminal law unnecessary. "In matrimonial cases, even if a wife is physically assaulted, it takes months to register an FIR. Here, an FIR is lodged for mere pronouncement," he said. Mehta argued the law aligned

with the broader principles of legal accountability, citing Section 506 of IPC, which penalised certain forms of verbal threats. He said the criminalisation of triple talaq served a necessary deterrent purpose. The bench said even after pronouncing triple talaq, a Muslim husband and wife remain legally married, as the practice did not constitute a valid divorce. "If the divorce itself is not recognised, the relationship continues. But now, you have penalised the very act of pronouncing it," the CJI said as he referred to petitioners' concerns about the law's necessity. Section 3 of the Act declares triple talaq as void and illegal whereas Section 4 prescribes a punishment of up to three years' imprisonment for a Muslim husband who pronounces it. In a landmark verdict, the apex court on August 22, 2017 held as invalid the 1,400-year-old practice of "triple talaq" among Muslims while setting it aside on several grounds, including it was against the basic tenets of Quran and violated the Islamic law Shariat.

SC directs hospitals to regularise doctors' absence during RG Kar protests

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed hospitals, including AIIMS New Delhi, to regularise the unauthorised absence of doctors who were part of protests against the rape and murder of a doctor at RG Kar Hospital, Kolkata. On Wednesday, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar took note of the submissions of a doctors' body that some hospitals had regularised the absence of the doctors following its August 22, 2024 order whereas a few others, including AIIMS Delhi, decided to treat the period as leave of absence. "We deem it appropriate to clarify that if protesting workers had joined work post the Supreme Court order then their absence shall be regularised and not be treated as absence from duty. This is issued in peculiar facts and circumstances of the cases and is not laying down any precedent," the CJI said. The lawyer appearing for the body said the decision to treat the



protest period as leave could create trouble for some of the medical PG students. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, said as the case was non-adversarial, the hospitals would abide by the top court's directions. Mehta said AIIMS, Delhi, decided to treat the period as leave of absence availed by the doctors. "By an earlier order, it was stated that no coercive step would be taken against the protesting doctors for protests till the date of the order. Pursuant to this some of the AIIMS such as Kalyani and Gorakhpur and the PG

Chandigarh have regularised the absence. However some other institutes have treated the said period as if doctors were on leave," the bench said. On August 22, last year, the bench made an impassioned appeal to the protesting doctors across the country, asking them to resume work. Observing "justice and medicine" couldn't be stopped, it directed no coercive action would be taken against doctors once they resumed work. The bench was hearing the suo-motu case over the rape and murder of a trainee doctor in the Kolkata hospital.

11th edition of of SIFFCY opens in Delhi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The 11th edition of the Smile International Film Festival for Children & Youth (SIFFCY) opened in the national capital with the premiere of the acclaimed Italian film "The Tiger's Nest" starring Sunny Pawar of "Lion" fame. The three-day festival will feature over 150 films, that include feature films, animation, short films, and documentaries, created by professional filmmakers, children, and students from more than 40 countries. Ambassador of the European Union, Herve Delphin inaugurated the annual gala on Tuesday at the Siri Fort Auditorium where he was accompanied by festival chairman Santanu Mishra and festival director Jitendra Mishra. Organised in partnership with the European Union (Delegation of the European Union to India), SIFFCY will conclude on Thursday. The annual festival is also being held over 100 locations across India in a hybrid mode. Cinema is a universal language, Delphin said at the event. "Europe and India stand as two incredible hubs of cinematographic creativity and

culture! The European Union is happy to partner with SIFFCY again this year with films from over 15 EU countries. Starting from Delhi this show will go around cities in India with top movies for youth that will leave a trail of Smiles in its wake," added the ambassador of the European Union. Pawar, who stars in Brando Quilici's film "The Tiger's Nest", said he was excited to be part of the festival. "Films made for children and made by children make SIFFCY a unique international festival. I am hopeful that more films and content will be created especially for children across the world. This is much needed," the young actor said. According to a press release, Poland is the country of honour, whereas Italy is the country of focus in SIFFCY 2025. A curated selection of some of the finest Polish and Italian films for the young audience is going to be presented during the festival. "Lampo" from Poland, "Doubles Match" from Taiwan, "Bigman" from The Netherlands, "Winners" from Germany, "Soaring Wings" from India, "Greetings from Mars" from Germany, "7600" from Iran, "A Butterfly's Heart" from Lithuania will also be screened.

Tahir Hussain launches campaign in Mustafabad

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) AAP councillor and 2020 Delhi riots accused Tahir Hussain on Wednesday launched his campaign in Mustafabad for the February 5 Delhi Assembly polls, seeking people's votes which he said can save his life. Hussain is out on a six-day custody parole granted by the Supreme Court on Tuesday. He is contesting on an All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) ticket. He addressed his supporters with a couplet, "deke vote tum apna mujhe, zindagi de dena" (by giving me your vote, give

me life). He was welcomed outside his office with rose petals and chants of "Tahir Bhai zindabad" while being escorted by armed security personnel. Accompanied by nearly 300 supporters, Hussain conducted a door-to-door campaign in the narrow lanes of Mustafabad, specifically in Gali Number 6, 7 and 8, holding his party's election symbol, a kite. Before starting his campaign, Hussain said, "I have a lot to say but there is no time. So, I won't be able to say much. "Just understand the weight of my tears... Deke vote tum apna mujhe, zindagi de dena," he said.



Hussain stepped out of Tihar Jail at 6 am and arrived at his

election office on 25, Foota Road in Mustafabad. There,

he interacted with supporters and greeted local residents with security personnel around. According to the Supreme Court's directives, he is prohibited from visiting his Karawal Nagar home allegedly linked to the 2020 riots. He is also restricted from making any public statements regarding the ongoing cases against him. The Supreme Court granted Hussain custody parole from January 29 to February 3, allowing him to campaign under police supervision for 12 hours daily, from 6 am to 6 pm. The court also ruled that Hussain must deposit ₹2.47

lakh per day to cover security expenses, including the police escort. The Mustafabad constituency has 2,88,902 registered voters, including 1,55,706 male voters, 1,33,193 female voters and three third-gender voters. In the Mustafabad Assembly race, major political parties have fielded prominent candidates. The BJP has nominated Mohan Singh Bisht, a sitting MLA from neighbouring Karawal Nagar, while AAP is represented by Adil Ahmad Khan, who has been associated with the party since the Anna Hazare movement. The Congress has fielded Ali Mehdi, son of former MLA Hasan Mehdi.

BJP candidate Parvesh Verma lodges complaint against Kejriwal with ACB

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi BJP candidate Parvesh Verma on Wednesday filed a formal complaint with the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) against former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and other officials for alleged corruption in the installation of CCTV cameras in the New Delhi Assembly constituency. According to the complaint, Verma, who is contesting against the AAP supremo, stated, "Kejriwal, in collaboration with his ministers and officials from the Public Works Department (PWD), Delhi Jal Board (DJB), and other relevant departments, sanctioned the installation of CCTV cameras under the MLA-LAD and GNCTD funds." He claimed that the project was presented as a development initiative but was instead a cover for corruption. He alleged that despite an estimated ₹12 crores being spent, most of the CCTV



cameras were either not installed or were of substandard quality. "The works were awarded to loot the public money which itself is a cognizable offence," he said, asserting that the actual installations were far below the funds allocated. Claiming that fabricated documents were created to conceal the misuse of public funds, he noted that these actions led to significant financial loss for the government. "Forged fabricated documents were created to cheat the exchequer's hard-earned

money against public interest," he said. He requested the ACB to take appropriate action, including registering a First Information Report (FIR) against Kejriwal and other Ministers and officials from PWD, DJB, and other departments under the Prevention of Corruption (PoC) Act, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), and other laws. He urged that the accused officials be subjected to custodial interrogation to ensure a thorough investigation and accountability.

CM Atishi accuses LG Saxena of bowing to political interests

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Wednesday lashed out at Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and accused him of "bowing to political interests", amid AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal's allegations of "poisoning" of Yamuna by the BJP government in Haryana and attempting "genocide" in Delhi. Saxena in a letter to Atishi on Tuesday registered his objection to the 'false, misleading' statement of Kejriwal and her defence of it, saying it has the potential to create animosity with neighbouring Haryana and endanger national security. "It is deeply disappointing but hardly surprising that instead of addressing the pressing issue of dangerously high ammonia levels in Delhi's water, you have placed baseless accusations and peddled a false narrative to deflect from your utter failure in fulfilling your responsibilities," the chief minister said in her letter to Saxena.



Kejriwal earlier on Monday alleged that BJP ruled Haryana mixed "poison" in the Yamuna water supplied to Delhi and attempting "genocide" in the city. As his remark snowballed into a major political controversy, the AAP chief named the "poison" mixed in water as "ammonia". Atishi in her letter said that as the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, Saxena's constitutional responsibility is towards the people of Delhi and not towards his "political masters, the BJP". Defending Kejriwal, the chief minister said he raised the issue

that the water in the Yamuna has a highly poisonous level of ammonia. The letter from the CEO of the Delhi Jal Board "outrageously confirms" this, she asserted while listing the harmful effects of the chemical on human health. Even your letter acknowledges that the current ammonia level in the water is 7.2 ppm-a figure that is 700 per cent above the permissible limit, Atishi said. "At this critical juncture, you had two choices: to prioritise public interest or to bow to political interest. Unfortunately, you have chosen the latter," she charged. The chief minister accused Saxena of attempting to brand Kejriwal's statements as "objectionable, unfortunate, and unacceptable" and added "what is truly objectionable and unacceptable is your apathy toward this water crisis". Asserting this crisis is not about politics, Atishi said it is about the lives of millions.

Stampede at Kumbh: Akharas resume Amrit snan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Amrit snan, the traditional bathing ritual of akharas that was deferred due to the stampede at Maha Kumbh, resumed Wednesday afternoon. Led by Mahant Ravindra Puri, head of the Akhil Bhartiya Akhara Parishad, the procession of akharas made its way on foot towards the Sangam for the snan. The procession, notably less grand than usual, began around 2:30 PM. "All saints, seers and nagas took holy dip on the occasion. I congratulate Chief Minister (Yogi Adityanath) and the administration for making such arrangements," said Puri. On the stampede, he added "It's a conspiracy by the opposition. This must be investigated." "It will be written in golden words that the country's saint stands with Indian Sanatan cultures... I prayed to God for

peace and prosperity to Sanatan Dharma followers..." Niranjani Akhara chief Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Kailashanand Giri Mahraj told PTI Videos. Helicopter showered flower petals on seers as they headed towards the Sangam. Jagadguru Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Maharaj said, "All the three Shankaracharyas of the country are going to take a holy bath here today. The incident that happened late last night is unfortunate and everyone is sad but we should be cautious so that no such incident happens in future. I appeal to the devotees to be patient and take a holy bath anywhere in the Kumbh area. There is no particular place where devotees gather to take a dip." Sringeri Peethadheeshwar Jagatguru Swami Vidushekar Bharati said, "On this sacred occasion of Mauni Amavasya, we have come here to take a holy dip



Sadhus of Shri Panchayati Akhara Mahanirvani return without doing their 'snan' (holy dip) after a stampede on 'Mauni Amavasya' during the ongoing Maha Kumbh, Prayagraj

in Triveni Sangam. This is the largest spiritual gathering in the world, with around 40-50 crore devotees expected to take the holy dip." The Amrit snan was originally scheduled in the early hours of the day but was postponed following the stampede. Multiple people were killed and many injured in the stampede at the Sangam area of the Maha Kumbh early Wednesday as crores of pilgrims jostled for space to take a holy dip on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said a consensus was reached with the akharas that they would take the holy dip only after the crowd pressure decreased at the ghats. According to tradition, akharas belonging to the three sects 'Sanyasi, Bairagi, and Udaseen' take the holy dip in a set sequence following a majestic, awe-inspiring procession to the Sangam Ghat. Meanwhile, the situation at other

ghats was normal by afternoon with pilgrims going in for a dip and coming out quickly. Manu, who works as a doctor in Colchester in the UK, flew down especially for the once-in-a-144-year Mauni Amavasya and said she was impressed by the arrangements. Accompanied by her sister from Shimla and friends from Gurugram, Manu took a dip at one of ghats along the Ganges, some distance from the Sangam where the stampede broke out earlier in the day. "I am impressed with facilities at Kumbh but concerned about behaviour of common citizen who expects a lot but doesn't believe in behaving properly towards their own duty towards other citizens," Manu told PTI. Brothers Rama and Krishna Pandey, both local residents, found it tough to go to Sangam. "We had a dip a ghat near Pontoon bridge 13 and it was smooth. We came back in just 10 minutes," Rama told.

Opposition slams UP government over Maha Kumbh stampede



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

The Opposition parties have launched a scathing attack on the Uttar Pradesh government following a stampede at the Maha Kumbh, which left at least 10 people feared dead and several others injured. They blamed the incident on administrative mismanagement and demanded immediate corrective measures. Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav expressed his grief over the tragedy and held the Yogi Adityanath-led government responsible for the chaos. "The news of casualties of devotees in an accident caused by mismanagement at the Maha Kumbh is extremely

sad. We appeal to the devotees to exercise restraint and patience in this difficult time and complete their pilgrimage peacefully," Yadav posted on social media. He urged the state administration to enhance arrangements for accommodation, food, water, and other essential facilities for pilgrims. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati also extended her condolences to the victims' families, calling the incident "extremely sad and worrisome." She said, "At such a time, the party wishes that nature gives the victims the strength to bear this sorrow." Meanwhile, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Saurabh

Bhardwaj criticized Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for prioritizing political campaigns over governance. "Instead of political campaigning in Delhi, the CM of UP @myogiadityanath should be in his state to oversee Kumbh arrangements. This is so sad to see pilgrims have to undergo a stampede-like situation," he tweeted. The Maha Kumbh, one of the world's largest religious gatherings, attracts millions of devotees from across the country and abroad. The stampede has raised concerns over crowd management and safety measures at the event, putting the state administration under intense scrutiny.

Devotees flood Ayodhya for Mauni Amavasya

PTI ■ AYODHYA

On the occasion of Mauni Amavasya, Ayodhya witnessed an overwhelming surge of devotees who took a holy dip in the Saryu River. Experts estimate that over 50 lakh devotees have arrived in Ayodhya in the past 72 hours and the influx is expected to continue until Vasant Panchami, an official statement issued here said. The temple town remained packed with worshippers throughout the day, with long queues outside Ram Mandir and Hanumangarhi temple extending late into the night. Anticipating a surge as pilgrims are now travelling from the Maha Kumbh to Ayodhya, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has instructed officials to ensure seamless crowd management, it said. Adityanath is personally monitoring the situation to ensure efficient management of the influx, the statement said. On Mauni Amavasya, thousands of devotees thronged the Saryu ghats for a holy dip, with Chaudhary Charan Singh Ghat seeing the largest influx, it said. After their ritual bath, many proceeded to Hanumangarhi and then the Ram mandir.

A massive crowd stretched from Shringar Haat to the temple premises. Similar scenes were observed at the Ram Temple, where devotees queued up in large numbers for darshan. The statement said the influx of pilgrims has boosted local businesses like 'prasad' sellers, hotels and homestays. Entry of all types of vehicles into the fair area has been completely restricted, with heavy police deployment at key locations to maintain order. The health department is also on high alert, with all doctors' leaves cancelled until Vasant Panchami. Emergency services will remain operational 24x7 to handle any medical needs, the statement said. Chief Medical Officer Dr Pushpendra Kumar confirmed that 13 temporary health camps will continue to function until February 26 to provide immediate medical assistance to pilgrims. IG Praveen Kumar stated that traffic has been rerouted to manage the massive footfall. Large vehicles have been stopped on the highways, and alternative routes have been designated to prevent congestion in and around Ayodhya.

Sirens pierce the night, chaos unfolds at hospital



An injured being brought to hospital after stampede occurred on 'Mauni Amavasya' in Prayagraj

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The first ambulance siren sliced through the quiet night. Then another. And another. Within minutes, the wails of sirens filled the air, signaling something catastrophic. Something big had happened. Reports of a stampede at Sangam Nose during the Mauni Amavasya 'Amrit Snan' started trickling in. Without wasting a moment, we rushed to Central Hospital in Sector 2, where ambulances were arriving one after another. The sight that awaited us confirmed our worst fears. Outside the emergency ward, a wave of panic and despair had already taken over. Stretchers with bloodied bodies were being rushed in, relatives clung to the gates pleading for updates, and police had sealed off the area, preventing the

public and media from entering. Determined to find out what was happening, I posed as a relative searching for someone and managed to slip inside. The moment I stepped through the doors, the scale of the disaster became clear. Over ten lifeless bodies lay lined up on the floor, waiting to be identified. The injured-some unconscious, others moaning in pain-were scattered across stretchers and makeshift beds, as doctors and nurses worked frantically to save them. "We are doing our best, but there are too many injured," a doctor said, barely looking up as he bandaged a man's bloodied forehead. Women, elderly, and even children lay on stretchers, some with fractured limbs, others gasping for breath after being crushed in the suffocating

crowd. Whenever a patient stabilized, they were quickly moved to make space for more critical cases. As the chaos unfolded inside, bodies were quietly being moved out through the emergency exit. Some covered in sheets, others still waiting for identification. Ambulances continued to ferry in more injured and lifeless bodies for over three hours. With beds filling up, several critical patients were transferred to Swaroopnari Hospital, where more facilities were available. Outside, grief and confusion gripped the families waiting for news. Many had lost their loved ones in the crush; others were desperately searching for missing relatives. Back at Sangam Ghat, where the stampede occurred, police cordoned off the area, but survivors were still seen searching through heaps of abandoned belongings-chappals without their pairs, torn bags, scattered blankets, and even packets of food left behind in the panic. "I lost everything-our money, train tickets, even my husband's shawl," sobbed Shanti Devi, a pilgrim from Bihar, rummaging through the pile of discarded items. As dawn broke over Prayagraj, the sirens began to fade, but the city remained haunted by one of the darkest nights of the Maha Kumbh.

Three Shankaracharyas unite at Maha Kumbh, issue joint Dharmadesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

In a historic first at the Maha Kumbh, three Shankaracharyas from major Hindu sects shared the stage and issued a joint religious directive for the protection of 'Sanatan Dharma'. Central to the Dharmadesh (religious directive) is the proposal to ban cow slaughter and declare the cow as the "Mother of the Nation." The 'Dharmadesh' emphasised the unity and integrity of the nation, social harmony, and the preservation of the Sanatan culture, according to a statement issued by the Uttar Pradesh government. The Shankaracharyas also urged all followers of Sanatan Dharma to visit Prayagraj during the Maha Kumbh, and extended blessings to the Yogi Adityanath-led government and administration for organising the grand event, it stated. At the Maha Kumbh, Shankaracharyas from three prominent 'Peeths' (seats of spiritual learning) of India came together for the first time and released a collective 'Dharmadesh' at the 'Param Dharam Sansad' (Supreme Religious Council). The event was graced by Vidhu Shekhar Bharati Ji of Sringeri Sharada Peeth, Sadanand Saraswati Ji of Dwarka Sharada Peeth, and Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Ji of Jyotirmath. Together, they issued a 27-point directive focusing on the preservation and growth of

Sanatan culture, according to the statement. Shankaracharya Sadanand Saraswati highlighted the importance of the Sanskrit language, while Sringeri's Shankaracharya Vidhu Shekhar Bharati called for recognising the cow as the "Mother of the Nation" and ensuring its protection. Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati emphasised allocating government budgets to promote Sanskrit education. The 27-point Dharmadesh prioritises national unity, integrity, social harmony, and the expansion of Sanatan culture and the Sanskrit language. It calls for collective efforts to save rivers and the institution of family, according to the statement. It also stresses the need for religious education to be recognised as a fundamental right of Hindus, it added. The directive urges Hindus to protect their religious symbols and establish temples in every school. The Dharmadesh asserts that India, a land where the cow is revered as a mother, must eliminate cow slaughter. The directive demands legal recognition of the cow as "Rashtrmatata" (Mother of the Nation) and making cow slaughter a punishable offense, according to the statement. It further declares that any individual associated with cow slaughter directly or indirectly cannot be considered a Hindu and should be excommunicated from the faith, it added.

Eyewitness account: "For a moment, I thought I was dead"

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The chaos erupted suddenly-one moment, devotees were waiting patiently for their sacred dip; the next, screams filled the air as bodies collapsed under the crushing weight of the surging crowd. "For a moment, I thought I was dead," said Alpona Sen, a devotee from Kolkata, recounting the harrowing stampede that unfolded near pillar number 157 in the Kumbh area. The stampede began around 2 a.m. when lakhs of devotees surged toward Sangam Nose, unaware that many had been



sleeping overnight at the site to secure a prime spot for the Mahurat bath at 3 a.m. "We had been waiting since last night," said Rajesh Tiwari from Varanasi. "Some of us were resting, while others were changing clothes after an early dip. Suddenly, people started pushing forward, not realizing there were people lying down. That's when the chaos started." The sudden movement triggered panic, and within moments, barricades collapsed as people tripped and fell. "It all happened so fast. Whoever fell down couldn't get up," said Rekha Devi from Bihar. "People were screaming,

running, pushing. Some got trampled. It was terrifying." At the emergency ward of Central Hospital, distraught families searched for missing loved ones. Ramesh Kumar, a resident of Kanpur, moved frantically between wards. "I have been looking for my nephew for hours. We got separated when the crowd surged. His phone is switched off, and I have no idea where he is. I just hope he is safe," he said, his voice trembling. A woman cradling her injured child outside the hospital described the mercilessness of the stampede. "There was nowhere to go.

Some people who pushed us were laughing while we begged them for kindness toward the children," she said, tears streaming down her face. "We Were Trapped"-Survivors Speak The stampede occurred amid a sea of tightly packed pilgrims along the 12-km stretch of riverbanks designated for Maha Kumbh bathing. Sarojini from Karnataka, still in shock, wept outside the hospital. "We came in a batch of 60 people in two buses. In our group of nine, we suddenly found ourselves trapped. There was pushing, and we fell down. The crowd was uncontrollable."

Chaos at Sangam as devotees search for lost items



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

A heap of colourful clothes, alone slippers without their pairs, torn bags, and hastily abandoned blankets lay strewn across the ground at Sangam Nose, a grim reminder of the chaos that unfolded in the early hours of the morning. Among the debris, a packet of roti-left untouched-spoke of pilgrims who had arrived with hope and devotion but left in panic. A stampede broke out around 1 am, as millions of devotees surged forward for the 'Amrit Snan' on Mauni Amavasya, one of the holiest days of the six-week-long Maha Kumbh. More than 30 people were injured, and several others are feared dead in the crush near the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers. Even as the police cordoned

off the area, anxious devotees could still be seen searching through the abandoned belongings. Sunita Devi, a pilgrim from Chhattisgarh, frantically sifted through the pile of clothes. "My husband's shawl was here... we lost our bag in the rush. It had our money, our train tickets. What will we do now?" she said, her voice breaking. Nearby, Bipal Bhattacharya, who had traveled from Kolkata, looked around helplessly. "My sister had a small bundle with her-a warm blanket and some food. I do not know where she is, and I can't even find her things," he said. Eyewitnesses described scenes of panic and desperation, with devotees stepping over scattered belongings as they tried to escape. Some even climbed barriers and pontoons in the chaos.

"People were screaming, running. I saw slippers flying, bags being trampled. Someone fell right in front of me, and there was no space to pick them up," said Mohan Yadav, a devotee from Varanasi. The stampede occurred between 1 am and 2 am when some devotees attempted to cross barricades at Akhara Marg, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath confirmed. "At the Akhara route, where arrangements were made for the Amrit Snan, some devotees broke through the barricades. Several were critically injured and were rushed to hospitals," he said after a high-level meeting in Lucknow. The Significance of Sangam Nose Sangam Nose, named for its distinctive shape, is considered the most sacred

bathing spot at the Kumbh. Saints, sages, and thousands of devotees prioritize bathing here, believing it grants spiritual liberation. According to initial reports, the stampede occurred as thousands surged forward to reach this particular spot. The pressure of the crowd became unmanageable, leading to a sudden crush. The administration quickly launched relief and rescue operations, diverting crowds and opening additional routes to bring the situation under control. Despite warnings, some devotees still attempted to re-enter the area, searching for missing relatives and belongings. Rescue teams remain at the site, and authorities have urged devotees to remain calm and follow security protocols to prevent further incidents.

FIRST COLUMN

CULTIVATING PURE FEELINGS

By nurturing empathy, mindfulness and gratitude, we can create stronger relationships



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Since our childhood, we have been taught to be polite and to be nice to others. In a way, it's important because you get what you give, and if we want others to be nice to us, our behaviour towards them should be similar, shouldn't it? But! if our so-called nice behaviour is superficial, acting as a mask over not-so-nice feelings, it will not win us any goodwill in return, because the law of karma operates even at the most subtle level, which states: "As you sow, so shall you reap." Hence, it is very important to have genuinely good feelings towards others, because when our feelings are pure, good wishes and nice behaviour come naturally. We don't have to tell ourselves to be nice to someone or, at a more subtle level, suppress or dismiss negative thoughts that arise upon seeing someone. Because if the feelings are pure, such negativity would never arise from within us. We tend to have pure feelings and love towards our near and dear ones. We wish them well from the core of our hearts and celebrate their successes. Even when they fail, we give them hope and encourage them to do better. Why? Because we love them. But what about those out-



side the circle of our family and friends? Our feelings towards them keep changing according to how we perceive them. It is not that anyone is inherently bad, but it's our perception that makes us react differently when the same mistake is made by a loved one or by someone else. To one, we show sympathy and understanding, and to the other, we may show irritation and anger. We are quick to affix negative labels to others viz: selfish, lazy, stupid, egoistic, etc. Our thoughts, words, and behaviour towards that person are shaped by that label. Thus, we find ourselves unable to be nice to some people. However, it's important to understand that our perception can often be clouded by our own biases and prejudices. We may not always be aware of the reasons behind our judgments, and these judgments can lead us to act in ways that are not truly reflective of our values. By acknowledging this, we can start to challenge our assumptions and work towards a more empathetic approach. For instance, if we encounter someone who initially seems unapproachable or difficult, instead of allowing our initial impression to dictate our interactions, we should take a moment to consider the possibility of underlying factors that might be influencing their behaviour. Mindfulness encourages us to be present in the moment and to approach each interaction with an open mind and heart. When we are mindful, we are less likely to react impulsively or allow our judgments to cloud our interactions. It helps us to listen more deeply and to respond with greater empathy. This appreciation naturally extends to others, helping us to see the good in them even when it might be obscured by their actions or behaviour. Furthermore, building strong, authentic relationships requires effort and intentionality. It involves not just being kind in moments of ease but also extending understanding and support during challenging times. It means being willing to engage in open and honest communication and being receptive to feedback. In essence, the habit of looking at every person with mercy and compassion can lead to profound transformations—not just in them, but in us as well. When we consistently choose to see the good in others and extend our support, we create an environment where healing and growth are possible. By cultivating these attitudes and practices, we contribute to a more compassionate and understanding world. Remember! Each of us has the power to influence our surroundings through our actions and attitudes, and by choosing to engage with others in a meaningful and supportive way, we help build a community characterized by genuine goodwill and harmony. *(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)*

Beyond the 70-hour workweek: Redefining productivity



A S MITTAL

Fostering efficacy, accountability and a strong sense of ownership plays a big role in cultivating a productive and innovative workforce

Recent statements by prominent Indian business leaders advocating for extended work hours have sparked significant debate across the industries and political sphere. Infosys founder Narayana Murthy suggested a 70-hour workweek for the younger generation, while Larsen & Toubro chairperson S N Subrahmanyan pushed the idea further, proposing a 90-hour workweek, including Sundays. While their intent—to encourage competitiveness and efficiency—is commendable, the emphasis on extended work hours misses a crucial point: the number of hours worked is not the primary determinant of success. Efficacy, accountability, trust and a spirit of ownership are far more vital in creating a productive and competitive workforce.

The Fallacy of "More Hours Equals More Productivity" Globally, data and research have consistently shown that longer working hours do not directly correlate with increased productivity. According to a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), countries with shorter average work hours often rank higher in productivity. For instance, Germany—known for its robust industrial base—averages 34.6 hours of work per week and boasts one of the highest productivity levels in the world. In contrast, countries like Mexico, where workweeks stretch beyond 42 hours, report significantly lower productivity rates. The human brain has a finite capacity for sustained focus and creative thinking. Prolonged hours often lead to diminishing returns, increased burnout, and higher rates of errors. Studies by the World Health Organization (WHO) have also highlighted the adverse health effects of excessive work hours, linking them to cardiovascular diseases and mental health disorders.

Moreover, the concept of presenteeism—being physically present but mentally disengaged—is an often-overlooked consequence of extended work hours. Overworked employees may appear productive but are less likely to deliver high-quality output. This underscores the importance of optimising work hours for maximum efficacy rather than simply extending them. What Truly Drives Productivity? Instead of focusing on quantity, business leaders should shift the discourse to quality. Productivity is not about the time spent at a desk or shop floor but what is achieved during that time. Three key factors contribute to this:

1. Efficacy: Efficacy emphasises doing things right rather than simply doing more. This involves leveraging technology, optimising workflows, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Organisations like Toyota have championed this principle through methodologies such as Lean and Kaizen, which focus on reducing waste and enhancing efficiency.

2. Accountability: Empowering employees to take ownership of their work fosters accountability. When individuals feel responsible for outcomes, they naturally align their efforts toward achieving goals. Google's OKR (Objectives and Key Results) framework exemplifies how clearly defined goals and transparent accountability can drive exceptional results. A sense of accountability ensures that time is used effectively and results are prioritised over mere activity.



WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS NOT A "LUXURY" BUT A NECESSITY FOR SUSTAINED PERFORMANCE. THE HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW NOTES THAT EMPLOYEES WITH BALANCED LIVES DEMONSTRATE 21 PER CENT GREATER PRODUCTIVITY AND ARE 57 PER CENT LESS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE BURNOUT

3. Ownership Spirit: A sense of ownership transforms employees from passive participants to proactive contributors. This requires building a culture where employees feel their work has a purpose and their contributions are valued. Startups often exemplify this culture, with employees going above and beyond not because of long hours but because they believe in the company's mission. When employees feel emotionally invested, their creativity and commitment naturally increase, making the organisation more competitive.

The Role of Work-Life Balance Work-life balance is not a "luxury" but a necessity for sustained performance. The Harvard Business Review notes that employees with balanced lives demonstrate 21 per cent greater productivity and are 57 per cent less likely to experience burnout. Moreover, a healthy work-life balance fosters creativity, problem-solving, and emotional resilience—all essential traits in today's dynamic business environment. Countries and companies that respect the need for work-life balance are reaping the rewards. For example, Scandinavian nations, with their strong emphasis on work-life balance, consistently outperform others on innovation and competitiveness indices. Similarly, companies like Microsoft Japan, which experimented with a four-day workweek, reported a 40 per cent increase in productivity while reducing electricity costs and boosting employee satisfaction. Flexible working arrangements are becoming increasingly prevalent worldwide. The rise of hybrid work models in the post-pandemic world has shown that flexibility and accountability coexist and thrive. This shift highlights that the hours worked and the autonomy, trust, and resources provided to employees drive results. Leaders must

embrace these new paradigms rather than revert to outdated notions of success linked solely to time spent at work.

Lessons from History Historical evidence further undermines the argument for excessively long work hours. During the Industrial Revolution, labour movements fought for the eight-hour workday, recognising that overworking led to physical exhaustion and declining efficiency. The founder of Ford Motor Company, Henry Ford's decision to implement a five-day, 40-hour workweek in the 1920s was driven not by altruism but by a realisation that well-rested employees were more productive and innovative. His approach improved productivity and set a precedent for modern labour practices. In the 21st century, technology has amplified this principle. Automation, artificial intelligence, and digital tools enable employees to accomplish in hours what once took days. Instead of relying on human endurance, organisations should not focus on integrating these tools to enhance productivity and free up employees for strategic, high-value tasks.

Reimagining Competitiveness India's demographic dividend presents a unique opportunity to shape the future of work. With one of the world's youngest workforces, the focus should be on enhancing skills, fostering creativity, and nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset—not on extending work hours. By investing in upskilling programs, digital tools, and robust processes, Indian businesses can boost productivity without exhausting their workforce. Additionally, introducing flexible work arrangements can help tap into employees' diverse needs while improving engagement and output.

Addressing the Challenges While advocating for shorter or

optimised work hours, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges. Industries with high operational demands, such as manufacturing and healthcare, may find it challenging to reduce work hours without compromising service delivery. In such cases, solutions like staggered shifts, better workforce planning, and investment in automation can help balance operational needs with employee well-being. Similarly, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with limited resources may perceive shorter work hours as a risk to productivity. However, even these organisations can benefit from adopting efficiency-focused strategies like process optimisation and targeted skill development. The Way Forward As a moderate business leader, I firmly believe that success stems from striking the right balance between ambition and sustainability. While hard work and dedication are indispensable, they must be guided by innovative strategies, supportive cultures, and a focus on outcomes. Asking employees to clock 70 or 90 hours a week may yield short-term results, but it risks long-term consequences in the form of burnout, disengagement, and declining health. Let's redirect the conversation from "hours worked" to "value created." By fostering efficacy, accountability, trust and an ownership spirit, Indian businesses can achieve competitiveness and efficiency while respecting the well-being of their greatest asset—their workforce. After all, it's not the hours you put in but what you put into the hours that truly counts.

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Budget 2025: Paving the way for a sustainable, inclusive and innovative agriculture

From increased investments in rural infrastructure to empowering farmers with technology, the policy decisions can redefine the future of Indian agriculture

As we come closer to the announcement of Budget 2025, the agriculture industry, considered the backbone of the Indian economy, at this point brings us to the crossroads. Agriculture is not just an economic sector, but a way of life for the millions who do it, accounting for nearly half of the country's workforce and a major chunk of the GDP. This has offered a unique pathway of change to tackle the pressing challenges as well as unlock the tremendous scope of Indian agriculture ecosystem in the budget.

A Call for Increased Investments in Agriculture The agricultural sector in India calls for a drastic increase in its budgetary allocation, with a heavy focus on rural infrastructure, irrigation systems, as well as agricultural research and development (R&D). Such investments will, therefore, not only improve productivity but also ensure that farmers particularly small holders have equitable access to modern farming techniques. Projects to complete irrigation systems



AMIT BK KHARE

under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) and investment in micro-irrigation systems – such as drip and sprinkler technologies – should be the first priorities.

Empowering Farmers through Technology Farmers are increasingly looking for smart and precision farming tools and technologies, ranging from drones to IoT, artificial intelligence, etc, promising competitive thinking towards Indian agriculture. Budget 2025 should encourage adoption of these technologies by providing subsidies, training and affordable digital tools. By equipping farmers with technological innovations, not only will resources be utilised efficiently, but it will also enable higher yields and prof-

its.

Improving Crop Insurance and Financial Security Agriculture is still highly vulnerable to climate risks and market volatility. To protect farmers, there is an urgent need to expand the coverage of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), make the premiums affordable and provide simple and instant delivery of claims. Besides, direct targeting of small and marginal farmers' access to credit for investment in agriculture as well as affordable risk coverage can remove uncertainties and promote investment in agriculture.

Promoting Sustainable Farming Practices Climate change is an increasingly urgent threat to agricultural productivity. It should be



able to focus on better and climate-smart farming practices. It is essential to provide incentives for organic farming, crop diversification and development of drought- and flood-resistant crop varieties to make agriculture resilient to climate challenges.

Encouraging Value Addition and Agro-Processing

India has tremendous potential in agro-processing and value addition. Budgetary support for food processing units, supply chain modernisation, and cold storage facilities will help reduce post-harvest losses and increase farmers' incomes. Tax incentives for startups in this sector can attract private investment and create rural employment opportunities.

Focus on Women Farmers and Youth in Agriculture Key to the future of Indian agriculture, therefore, are the women farmers and rural youth. Customised programmes for financial support, even during the plantation phase, skill development, and entrepreneurial support for women would instil them as agricultural leaders. Likewise,

youth participation can be restructured and enhanced through innovation grants, incubation centers and awareness campaigns to revitalise this sector.

Pursuance of Export Booster and Market Access In this context, India is immensely capable and has the potential to set itself up as a global agri-exporter. The government should create dedicated export portals, cut regulation, and develop a policy that supports traders dealing in high-demand crops. Strengthening integration of rural connectivity & e-NAM (National Agricultural Market) platforms will provide the farmers with access to markets and fair pricing.

The Role of Allied Sectors Allied sectors such as dairy,

fisheries, poultry, etc., have enormous potential to help bolster rural incomes and employment. Feed, vaccines, and infrastructure budgetary allowances for these sectors will also promote diversification and give farmers added revenue streams.

Towards a Prosperous Agricultural Ecosystem Budget 2025 can afford to be a gamechanger for India's agricultural ecosystem- when we bring sustainability, inclusivity and innovation in farming at the core of agriculture policy. Which, if met, will provide the farmers community to timely tackle the pitfalls and excel on the worldwide map. *(The writer is the Founder & Managing Partner at Snail Integral Pvt. Ltd. Views expressed are personal)*

Trump’s power grab sparks crisis

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Just a little over a week into his second term, President Donald Trump is taking steps to maximise his power, sparking chaos and what critics contend is a constitutional crisis as he challenges the separation of powers that have defined American government for more than 200 years.

The new administration's most provocative move came this week, as it announced it would temporarily halt federal payments to ensure they complied with Trump's orders barring diversity programmes.

The technical-sounding directive had enormous immediate impact before it was blocked by a federal judge, potentially pulling trillions of dollars from police departments, domestic violence shelters, nutrition services and disaster relief programmes that rely on federal grants. Though the Republican administration denied Medicaid was affected, it acknowledged the online portal allowing states to file for reimbursement from the program was shut down for part of Tuesday in what it insisted was an error. Legal experts noted the president is explicitly forbidden from cutting off spending for programs that Congress has approved. The US Constitution grants Congress the power to appropriate money and requires the executive to pay it out. A 50-year-old law known as the Impoundment Control Act makes that explicit by prohibiting the president from halting payments on grants or other programs approved by Congress.

“The thing that prevents the president from being an absolute monarch is Congress controls the power of the purse strings,” said Josh Chafetz, a law professor at Georgetown University, adding that even a temporary freeze violates the law. “It’s what guarantees there’s a check on the presidency.”

Democrats and other critics said the move was blatantly unconstitutional.

“What happened last night is the most direct assault on the authority of Congress, I believe, in the history of the United States,” Sen. Angus King, an independent from Maine, said Tuesday. While some Republicans were critical, most

Trump eases up on China after tough campaign rhetoric

Washington (PTI): On the campaign trail last year, President Donald Trump talked tough about imposing tariffs as high as 60 per cent on Chinese goods and threatened to renew the trade war with China that he launched during his first term.

But now that he’s back in the White House, Trump appears to be seeking a more nuanced relationship with the country that both Republicans and Democrats have come to see as the gravest foreign policy challenge to the US.

China is also a major trading partner and an economic powerhouse, and it has one of the world’s largest military forces. “We look forward to doing very well with China and getting along with China,” Trump said on Thursday at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in comments that suggested Beijing could help

end the war in Ukraine and reduce nuclear arms.

As he moves forward with plans to impose 25 per cent tariffs on Canada and Mexico on February 1, Trump has not set a firm date for China. He’s only repeated his plan for a much lower 10 per cent tax on Chinese imports in retaliation for China’s production of chemicals used in fantasy.

On Tuesday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump was “very much still considering” raising tariffs on China on February 1.

Trump, who spoke with Chinese President Xi Jinping days before taking office, seems to be showing restraint and bowing to a more complicated reality than he described while running for office. Speaking of potential tariffs on China in a recent Fox News interview, he said: “They don’t want them, and I’d rather not have to use

it”

Liu Yawei, senior adviser on China at the Carter Centre in Atlanta, said Trump has become “more pragmatic.”

“The signalling, at least from the election to the inauguration, seems to be more positive than has been expected before,” Liu said. “Hopefully, this positive dynamic can be preserved and continued. Being more pragmatic, less ideological will be good for everyone.”

A Chinese expert on American foreign policy acknowledged that there are many “uncertainties and unknowns about the future” of US-China relations. But Da Wei, director of the Centre for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University in Beijing, also said Trump’s recent change in tone offers “encouraging signals.”

In his first term, warm relations were followed by a trade war

When Trump first became president in 2017, Xi and Trump got off to a good start. Xi was invited to Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. A few months later, he treated Trump to a personal tour of the Palace Museum in the heart of Beijing, only to see Trump launch the trade war the following year.

The US-China relationship soured further over the COVID-19 pandemic, and it hardly improved during President Joe Biden’s administration, which saw a controversial visit to the self-governing island of Taiwan by then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and a Chinese spy balloon aloft over US territory.

Biden kept Trump’s tariffs on Chinese goods and intensified the economic and technological rivalry with export controls, investment curbs and alliance building.

Bold steps required to prepare for future: Saudi minister

PTI ■ RIYADH

The world has been witnessing rapid technological advancement, fundamental demographic changes and various emerging issues, and these developments require “proactive and bold steps” to prepare humanity for the future, a Saudi minister said on Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia is “proud to host this conference” as part of its continuous efforts to play an “active role” in global change, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Eng. Ahmed bin Sulaiman AlRajhi said in his address at the second edition of the Global Labour Market Conference (GLMC) here.

“We all united in our efforts to discuss current challenges, draw the future roadmap for the labour market,” said AlRajhi, who delivered the opening remarks on behalf of the King of Saudi Arabia at the global conference being hosted at King Abdulaziz International Conference Centre (KAICC).

A group of participants from over 100 countries, including government leaders, experts, innovators, and policymakers are attending the conference.

“The world is witnessing rapid technological advancement, fundamental demographic changes and emerging issues such as climate adaptation. These developments require us to take proactive and bold steps to prepare humanity for the future,” the Saudi minister said.

The GLMC, he said, is a crucial hub for collaboration and a global think-tank supporting labour market research and studies.

He asserted that “together we will continue to work to provide positive transformation in the global market”.

Recalling the first edition of the conference held in December 2023, AlRajhi said this year “we continue our journey and join efforts to deal with contemporary challenges facing labour markets and explore ways to address them”.

“Our vision remains clear and our goals steadfast to work

together to build a flexible and inclusive labour market that can adapt to future challenges and changes efficiently and effectively,” he added.

The Saudi minister said: “We aim to work together to harness our vast and shared experiences and expertise to address global challenges.”

Transforming them into opportunities, “we can all work together” to ensure prosperity for our economy, communities and workforces, he underlined.

Citing case studies from countries like Germany, Singapore and Kenya, the minister said that on a global scale, “we are witnessing the emergence of various models that contribute to the positive transformation of the labour markets”.

“These models demonstrate that novel solutions can be developed and worked to create an optimistic future for the labour market”

“In this context, the Kingdom is taking pioneering steps under Vision 2030, to empower the workforce and stimulate transformation in the labour market,” the Saudi minister said.

Brazil to set up deportee centre after controversial US flight

Rio de Janeiro (PTI): The Brazilian government Tuesday said it will create a reception centre for deported migrants from the United States following controversy over conditions on a recent deportation flight. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva gave the green light to establish a humanitarian reception post at Confins, a municipality in Minas Gerais state, Brazil’s Minister of Human Rights and Citizenship Macacé Evaristo told journalists in the capital Brasilia.

That decision was made because of the possibility that more flights will follow the arrival of an initial flight to Brazil under the new Trump administration with 88 deportees on board this weekend.

That followed dozens of flights during the Biden administration. Local media reported that government officials were

disturbed by the fact that Brazilians were kept handcuffed after an unscheduled stop in the Amazon’s biggest city, Manaus, prompted by technical problems with the plane. A Brazilian military plane brought them to their destination, the city of Belo Horizonte in Minas Gerais, on Saturday afternoon. The next day, Brazil’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it was seeking answers from Washington regarding the “degrading treatment” of nationals during the recent flight. It cited “the use of handcuffs and chains, the poor condition of the aircraft, with a broken air conditioning system, among other problems.”

The US Embassy declined to comment and the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency didn’t respond to an email request for comment.

rupt them and held talks with the American charge d’affaires on Monday, according to a government source with knowledge of the matter. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren’t authorised to speak publicly.

Brazil has permitted the use of handcuffs in exceptional circumstances, but not indiscriminately and there must be an evaluation of risk, the person said.

Authorities are looking into how many were handcuffed. There have been passenger reports that the plane’s air conditioning suffered problems, causing intense heat in the cabin, and they exited through the emergency door upon landing in Manaus. Commenting on the humanitarian centre, Evaristo said the objective was to “ensure that these passengers have good conditions for water, food and even temperature, which I think was the most damaging aspect” in the first flight.

“We don’t want to provoke the American government, but it’s essential that deported Brazilians are treated with dignity,” Justice Minister Ricardo Lewandowski said on Monday.

It was unclear whether the 88 Brazilian deportees were taken into custody during the tenure of President Donald Trump, who took office January 20, or former President Joe Biden.

There have been almost four dozen deportation flights from the US to Brazil over the past three years.

Brazil has no desire to inter-

Kim inspects N- facility as Pyongyang pressures Trump administration

Seoul (pti): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspected a facility that produces nuclear material and called for bolstering the country’s nuclear fighting capability, state media reported on Wednesday, as the North looks to increase pressure on the United States following the inauguration of President Donald Trump.

Kim’s visit suggests a continued emphasis on an expansion of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal, though Trump has said he’s willing to talk to Kim again to revive diplomacy. Many analysts view North Korean weapons moves as part of a strategy to win sanctions relief and political concessions from the United States.

The official Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim visited the nuclear-material production base and the Nuclear Weapons Institute. It didn’t say where those facilities are located, but North Korean photos of Kim’s visit indicated that he likely visited a uranium-enrichment facility that he went to last September.

That visit was North Korea’s first disclosure of a uranium-enrichment facility since it showed one to visiting American scholars in 2010.

During the latest visit, Kim said North Korea reported “amazing” results in its production of nuclear material last year and underlined the need to exceed this year’s production goal to strengthen “the nuclear shield of the country,” according to KCNA. Kim said that further boosting the country’s nuclear counteraction posture is “our invariable noble task” to cope

with intensifying challenges posed by “hostile forces”, an apparent reference to the US and South Korea.

The start of Trump’s second term raises prospects for the resumption of diplomacy between the United States and North Korea, as Trump met Kim three times during his first term. The Trump-Kim diplomacy in 2018-19 fell apart due to wrangling over US-led economic sanctions on North Korea, and Kim has since significantly dialled up weapons testing activities.

During a Fox News interview broadcast on Thursday, Trump called Kim “a smart guy” and “not a religious zealot”.

Asked whether he will reach out to Kim again, Trump replied, “I will, yeah.”

North Korea hasn’t yet directly responded to Trump’s overture as it continues its belligerent rhetoric against the US along with weapons testing activities. Many experts say Kim could eventually sit down for talks with Trump and would likely think he now has greater leverage than before because of his enlarged nuclear arsenal and deepening military ties with Russia.

On Sunday, North Korea said it tested a cruise missile system, its third known weapons display this year, and vowed “the toughest” response to what it called the escalation of US-South Korean military drills.

North Korea views US military training with South Korea as invasion rehearsals, though Washington and Seoul have repeatedly said their drills are defensive in nature.

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NOTICE
Locker Hired by **ANIL SHARMA & NEERJA SHARMA** having address at 111 GHS ANTRIKSH VIKASPURI NEW DELHI-110018 DELHI INDIA with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3,BLOCK-C,VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR,GURGAON,12200 2 remains un-operated from last 7 years,9 months.

All the 3 letters earlier sent to **ANIL SHARMA & NEERJA SHARMA** calling upon them to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and they are not contactable.


It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by **ANIL SHARMA & NEERJA SHARMA** within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

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NOTICE
Locker Hired by **HEMCHAND** having address at **NO 903 BLOCK-LAWHO SISPTAL VIHAR SECTOR-49 SOHNA ROAD GURGAON-122103 HARYANA INDIA** with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3,BLOCK-C,VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR, GURGAON, 122002 remains un-operated from last 7 years, 9 months.

All the 3 letters earlier sent to **HEMCHAND** calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.


It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by **HEMCHAND** within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

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NOTICE
Locker Hired by **AMIT KUMAR & NEHA CHOPRA KUMAR** having address at **LH17-3202, LANCO HILLS, MANIKO, MANIKONDA, HYDERABAD** with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3,BLOCK-C,VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR,GURGAON,12200 2 remains un-operated from last 5 years.

All the 3 letters earlier sent to **AMIT KUMAR & NEHA CHOPRA KUMAR** calling upon them to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and they are not contactable.


It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by **AMIT KUMAR & NEHA CHOPRA KUMAR** within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

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NOTICE
Locker Hired by **PARUL UPADHYAY** having address at **S 172 FF UPPAL SOUTH END SOHNA ROAD GURGAON-122018 HARYANA INDIA** with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2 &3, BLOCK-C, VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR, GURGAON, 122002 remains un-operated from last 7 years, 9 months.

All the 3 letters earlier sent to **PARUL UPADHYAY** calling upon her to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and she is not contactable.


It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by **PARUL UPADHYAY** within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

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NOTICE
Locker Hired by **SHANTANU SINGH & TANUSHREE SINGH** having address at **B-602 AWHO SISPAL VIHAR SOUTH CITY II SOHNA ROAD SECTOR 49 GURGAON** with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3,BLOCK-C,VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR,GURGAON,122002 remains un-operated from last 5 years.

All the 3 letters earlier sent to **SHANTANU SINGH & TANUSHREE SINGH** calling upon them to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and they are not contactable.


It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by **SHANTANU SINGH & TANUSHREE SINGH** within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

kotak
Kotak Mahindra Bank

NOTICE
Locker Hired by **VIKASH KUMAR** having address at **H NO 69-1 VILL JONIYAWAS, TEHSIL FARUKHNAGAR, SONIPAT, HARYANA , 131001** with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3, BLOCK-C , VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR, GURGAON, 122002 remains un-operated from last 8 years, 9 months.

All the 3 letters earlier sent to **VIKASH KUMAR** calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.

It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by **VIKASH KUMAR** within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.



HDFC Bank Limited

E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE

Branch Address: HDFC House, Trident Complex, Race Course Vadodara 390007. **CIN** L70100MH1977PLC019916 **Website:** www.hdfc.com

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 9 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
The Authorised Officer of HDFC Bank Limited (erstwhile HDFC Limited having amalgamated with HDFC Bank Limited by virtue of a Scheme of Amalgamation approved by Hon'ble NCLT-Mumbai vide order dated 17th March 2023) (HDFC) issues Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) indicated in Column (A) that the below described immovable property(ies) described in Column (C) mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive / physical possession of which has been taken as described in column (D) by the Authorised Officer of HDFC Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" as per the details mentioned below :
Notice is hereby given to Borrower / Mortgagor(s) / legal heirs, legal representatives (whether known or unknown), executor(s), administrator(s), successor(s) and assign(s) of the respective Borrower(s) / Mortgagor(s)(since deceased), as the case may be, indicated in Column (A) under Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.
For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in HDFC Secured Creditor's website i.e. www.HDFCBANK.Com

SR NO	Name/s of Borrower(s)/ Mortgager(s)/ Guarantor(s)/ Legal Heirs and Legal Representatives (whether known or unknown) Executor(s), Administrator(s), Successor(s) and Assign(s) of the respective Borrower(s) / Mortgagor(s) / Guarantor(s) (since deceased), as the case may be.	Outstanding dues to be recovered (Secured Debt) (Rs.)*	Description of the Immovable Property / Secured Asset (1 Sq. mtr. is equivalent to 10.76 Sq.ft)	Type of Possession	Reserve Price (Rs.)	Earnest money deposit (Rs.)	Date of Auction and time
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	MR CHAVAN PUSHPAKSINGH DIPAKSINGH (BORROWER) SINGH UPENDRA VIRENDRA (CO BORROWER)	Rs. 85,53,481/- as on 30-4-2017	FLAT-DPT243, FLOOR-2 DLF PRIME TOWERS OKHLA PHASE I NEW DELHI 110020	Physical Possession	Rs. 74,50,000/-	Rs. 7,45,000/-	3-3-2025 11:00 am to 12:30 pm

* together with further interest as applicable, incidental expenses, costs, charges etc. incurred up to the date of payment and/or realisation thereof.

The Authorized Officer shall not be responsible for any error, misstatement or omission on the said particulars. The bidders are therefore requested in their own interest, to satisfy themselves with regard to the above and all other relevant details/material facts and information pertaining to the above mentioned immovable properties/secured assets before submitting bids. Statutory dues like property taxes/cess and transfer charges, arrears of electricity dues, arrears of water charges, sundry creditors, vendors, suppliers and other charges known and unknown, shall be ascertained by the bidder beforehand and the payment of the same be the responsibility of the buyer of Property/Secured Asset. Wherever applicable, it is the responsibility of buyer of Secured Assets to deduct tax at source (TDS) @ of 1% of the total sell consideration on behalf of the resident owner (seller) on the transfer of immovable property having consideration equal to Rs.50 Lacs and above and deposit the same with appropriate authority u/s 194 I/A of Income Tax Act.

Disclosure of Encumbrances

- To the best of the knowledge and information of the Auhorised Officer of HDFC Bank Limited, there are no encumbrances in respect of the above immovable properties/ secured assets.

Most Important Terms and Conditions

- Bid incremental Amount for the Properties/Secured Assets mentioned would be Rs. 1,00,000/- (Rupees One lakh Only).
- Inspection of all the above mentioned Properties/Secured Assets would from 10 AM till 4 PM, date for inspection of Properties/Secured Assets 13-Feb-2025 (Thursday).
- For any further visits or assistance related to obtaining bid documents and for any other query, please keep in touch our Authorised Partner i.e. M/s. Nexxen India Pvt. Ltd., Through its concern person Miss Priyanka Gautam through their cralized Mobile No. 7428369933. Website <https://disposahub.com/>, Email id: enquiry@nexxen.in OR Official of Mr. Hardik Shah Mobile. No. 89806-65665,Hardik pandya- 7228971677 and Mr Dhaivat vyas – 6358788055.
- The last date if submission of bids in the prescribed e-auction Bid documents and EMD in stipulated manner is 1-Mar-2025.

Detailed Terms And Conditions

- For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in HDFC's(HDFC Bank Ltd) Secured Creditor's website i.e. www.hdfcbank.com

Date : 29.01.2025
Place : New Delhi

For HDFC Bank Ltd.
Sd/-
Authorised Officer,

Regd Office: Housing Development Finance Corporation Ltd, Ramon House, H.T. Parekh Marg, 169, Backbay Reclamation, Churchgate, Mumbai

Western officials warn Ukraine over weapons dispute

PTI ■ KYIV

Western officials have warned Ukraine that an escalating rift between the defence minister and procurement chief may jeopardise trust in the country and urged the government to resolve the situation quickly so as not to disrupt weapons supplies. The conflict began last week when the Defence Procurement Agency's board unanimously voted to extend director Maryna Bezrukova's contract for another year. However, Defence Minister Rustem Umerov overruled the decision, refusing to renew her contract. He accused her of poor performance and failing to deliver weapons and ammunition to front-line troops. The decision provoked an outcry from lawmakers and anti-corruption watchdogs who said the minister's move was illegal because Bezrukova had her contract extended by the agency's supervisory board in January. They also came to Bezrukova's defence, saying she has been instrumental in creating greater transparency and reforms within the DPA, which has long faced corruption allegations. Under Ukrainian law, Umerov's decision to go ahead with her dismissal is illegal. The incident comes at a politically sensitive



A view shows a site of a Russian drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Odesa, Ukraine on Tuesday

time for Ukraine as the country's leadership is eagerly watching the Trump administration's next moves, and as Ukrainian troops continue to face challenges in holding the line in the east amid fierce Russian attacks. In a statement posted Monday on social media platform X, the ambassadors representing Group of Seven nations urged the government to resolve the situation "expeditiously and focus on keeping defense procurement going."

"Consistency with good governance principles and NATO recommendations is important to maintain the trust of the public and international partners,"

they said. Following Umerov's decision, the Anti-Corruption Action Centre filed a complaint urging the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) to investigate him for alleged abuse of power. Local media reported that NABU opened proceedings against Umerov at the Anti-Corruption Action Centre's request. Anastasia Radina, a lawmaker and head of the Committee on Anti-Corruption Policy, called for Umerov's dismissal, a decision that ultimately will fall to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. "What I see as a parliamentar-

ian and as an observer is that his actions do not strengthen the agency and its independence. And that is just unacceptable for a country at war," she told The Associated Press. Meanwhile, Russia and Ukraine exchanged drone barrages overnight in an attempt to strike deeper into their enemy's territory. The Russian military said Wednesday it intercepted and destroyed 104 Ukrainian drones over nine Russian regions in one of the biggest drone attacks on Russia this year. No casualties or significant damage was reported. Moscow also attacked with missiles overnight. In southern Mykolaiv, a Russian ballistic missile struck a food enterprise Tuesday night, killing two female workers, regional head Vitalii Kim said. Odesa authorities said Russian drones attacked port infrastructure in the Ismail district of the region that borders NATO member Romania.Romania's Ministry of National Defense said two F-16 fighter jets were dispatched at 3:20 a.m. to monitor airspace for about two hours, and emergency authorities issued text alerts to some residents living in Tulcea county, which is across the Danube river near Ukrainian ports.

Scholz's challenger presents tough migration plans, faces backlash

PTI ■ BERLIN

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's main challenger in Germany's upcoming election plans to put proposals for a tougher migration policy to parliament on Wednesday, a maneuver aimed at piling pressure on the governing parties that has brought accusations that he's breaking commitments to shun the far right. Opposition leader Friedrich Merz put migration in the focus of the campaign following a knife attack a week ago in the Bavarian city of Aschaffenburg by a rejected asylum-seeker, which left a man and a 2-year-old boy dead. Germans will vote for a new parliament on February 23 after Scholz's three-party governing coalition collapsed. Polls show Merz's mainstream centre-right Union bloc in the lead with around 30 per cent support, the far-right Alternative for Germany second with about 20 per cent, and Scholz's center-left Social Democrats and the environmentalist Greens further back. Migration was already a significant election issue alongside Germany's struggling economy. Merz's aim appears to be to make the Union lock decisive in seeking a tougher approach, which also has been a central call of Alternative for Germany,



Opposition leader Friedrich Merz

or AfD, while making Scholz and the Greens look weak. It's uncertain whether the move will bolster his position. Merz said last week that if he becomes chancellor, he would order the Interior Ministry immediately to control all Germany's borders permanently and "turn back all attempts at illegal entry without exception", including by asylum-seekers. He said that people who are supposed to leave the country must no longer be let go if picked up by police. The conservative leader, who may well have to form a coalition with

centre-left parties to become chancellor, insisted that "commitments are no longer possible". He then announced that he would bring motions including those pledges to parliament this week, "independently of who approves them" — in other words, regardless of whether they need AfD's support to gain a majority. Wednesday's expected votes are on non-binding motions, which would send a political signal, but not change German law. On Friday, proposed legislation from the Union on less drastic changes to migration rules is set to go to a vote. The Social Democrats and Greens, the parties in the remaining minority government, argue that Merz's calls to turn back people at the border on a large scale are incompatible with German and European Union law.They plan to oppose his motions Wednesday, but they could pass with support from a combination of opposition parties, including AfD. They accuse Merz of breaking long-standing promises not to work directly or indirectly with AfD, which has long urged other parties to abandon their "firewall" against it. Merz insists that his position remains unchanged — his party won't approve any AfD motion, go into government or work with it, or nego-

tiate on any motions with it. And he argues that his aim is to gain support in the political center. The Aschaffenburg attack followed knife attacks in Mannheim and in Solingen last year in which the suspects were immigrants from Afghanistan and Syria, respectively — in the latter case, also a rejected asylum-seeker who was supposed to have been sent to Bulgaria, where he first entered the EU.In last month's Christmas market attack in Magdeburg, the suspect is a Saudi doctor who had come to various regional authorities' attention in the past.Merz says Germany has had a "misguided asylum and immigration policy" for a decade since Angela Merkel, a chancellor from his own party, allowed large numbers of migrants into the country.The outgoing government says much changed already. It instituted temporary controls on all of Germany's borders. It says it has tightened many laws, for instance to ease deportations, and points to a yet-to-be-implemented agreement on revamped EU migration rules. Authorities say 229,751 people applied for asylum in Germany last year, a 30 per cent decrease from the previous year. There were 18,384 deportations in the year's first 11 months, compared with 16,430 in all of 2023.

Taliban govt relocates family members of banned TTP

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Afghanistan's interim Taliban government has relocated some family members of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from border regions to other parts of the country, in an effort to placate Pakistan's growing anger. A senior Pakistani official confirmed the development on Tuesday but emphasised the move was too little to address the country's long-standing concerns, the Express Tribune newspaper reported. It is believed that the latest move by the Afghan Taliban came after the United Arab Emirates (UAE) nudged the Kabul administration to address Pakistan's concerns over the terrorist hideouts, the paper said. Taliban's acting interior minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani, along with the Taliban intelligence chief recently travelled to the UAE and held talks with the Gulf country's leadership. Ahead of their visit, a Pakistani delegation also visited the Gulf country as part of efforts to address the issue of TTP, the paper said. There was no official confirmation from either side about the development and potential role being played

by the UAE to ease tensions between the two countries. However, the Pakistani official acknowledged the role of UAE and Qatar to broker some kind of path forward on the issue of TTP, the paper said. The official said certain family members of the TTP, mostly women and children, were relocated from border areas of Pakistan to other areas of Afghanistan. However, the official made it clear that the Taliban government made similar arrangements in the past with little impact. Given the fact that only members of the TTP were relocated and not the fighters, this would have little impact on the ground.Moreover, the official said that the process of relocation of TTP from border areas was to be completed a long time ago, but it was painstakingly slow.According to some estimates, there are between 6,000 to 8,000 terrorists of TTP operating from Afghanistan. Besides, another 20,000 family members have taken refugees across the border.In view of this large number, the relocation of a few hundred family members of the TTP was not the answer to Pakistan's demand, according to another official.

PARIJAT PAPER MILLS LIMITED				
CIN: L21012UP1989PLC010589				
Reg. Off: 10.6 Km Stone Bhopa Road, Vill-Jat Muihera, Muzaffarnagar - 251308, (U.P)				
Website: www.parijatpapermills.com, Email: parijatpapermills@yahoo.com				
EXTRACT OF STANDALONE ANNUAL AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER & YEAR ENDED 31ST DEC. 2024				(Rs. in Lacs)
Sr. No.	PARTICULARS	Current Quarter Year ending	Year Ended Figures	Corresponding 3 months ended in the previous year
		31.12.2024 (Unaudited)	31.12.2024 (Unaudited)	31.12.2023 (Unaudited)
1.	Total income from operations (Net)	2924.69	8757.62	2525.27
2.	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extra ordinary items)	63.70	187.85	-27.83
3.	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	63.70	187.85	-27.83
4.	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	53.77	158.55	-30.98
5.	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after Tax)]	53.77	158.55	-30.98
6.	Equity share capital (Face value Rs. 10/- each)	329.00	329.00	329
7.	[Reserves (excluding Retention Reserve) as shown in the Audited Balance Sheet of the previous year]	950.67	950.67	836.94
8.	Earnings per share (of Rs. 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations)	1.64	4.82	-0.94
	a) Basic			
	b) Diluted			
Notes:				
1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of quarterly/annual financial results filed with the stock exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the quarterly & year to date financial results are available on the Stock Exchange website (www.mseil.in) and the company's website (www.parijatpapermills.com).				
2. The above results were reviewed by an Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors at their meeting held on 28th January 2025				
For and on behalf of Parijat Paper Mills Limited				
Sd/-				
Amit Mittal				
Whole Time Director				
DIN:00754471				
Date: 28.01.2025				
Place: Muzaffarnagar				

DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NANDANKANAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK
P.O-BARANG, DIST-KHURDA, PIN-754005
PHONE-(M) 9437022023
Email: deputydirector.kanan@gmail.com

NANDANKANAN
Web: www.nandankanan.org

e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
Bid Identification No. DD-NKN- 56 /PMJ/NKZP-2024-25 Dt:28.01.2025

1	Name of the work	- Re- Tender for construction of Himalayan Griffon Enclosure inside Nandankanan Zoological Park for the year 2024-2025
2	No. of works	- 1(one) no.
3	Date of availability of bid document in the portal	- 29.01.2025
4	Class of Contractor	- 'A' and 'B' Class contractor.
5	Last date for receipt of bids in the portal	- 04.02.2025 up to 5.00 P.M.
6	Date of pre-Bid meeting	- 31.01.2025 at 11.30 A.M.
7	Date of opening of Technical Bid (Cover-I)	- 05.02.2025 at 10.00 A.M.
8	Name & Address of Officer Inviting Tender (OIT)	- Deputy Director, Nandankanan Zoological Park, P.O-Barang, Dist- Khorda, Pin-754005.

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <https://tenderodisha.gov.in>.
CIPR-0807011/0040/2425

PUBLIC NOTICE
To be known to all that, Puspashat Kapoor wife of Late Shri Prem Nath Kapoor resident of A-7, MEA Residential Complex, Dr. Radha Krishnan Marg, Chanakya Puri, New Delhi-110021 is owner/mutatee and in physical possession of Flat No.8-5/74, on Ground Floor,Cat.MIG, Naraina, New Delhi, which has been allotted by DDA vide File No. M14 (231) 971/HB and applied for conversion from lease hold into free hold of said flat in D.D.A.The original allotment cum Demand Letter, Possession Slip, and other related documents of said flat have been lost. An F.I.R. to this effect has been lodged. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents may write/contact with above named person at above address/Phone No. 9811091270 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this flat can personally inform or write to Dy. Director(LAB) H Block 3d Floor,Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110017

CONSTRUCTION OF RBG ROOM AT MANNED ENGINEERING LC GATE
Tender Notice No.: SCL-Engg-13 of 2025. Date: 23-01-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work; **Brief Description of Item :** Construction of RBG Room at manned Engineering LC gate no. 6LK, 7LK, 1KD, 2BK, 13BK, 33-BA, 34-BA & KD-7 in Badapur-Agartala section of Lumding Division under the jurisdiction of DENV/ Silchar. **Tender Value:** ₹1,23,66,245-19/- **Earnest Money:** ₹2,11,800/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 20-02-2025 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 21-02-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in the website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with A Smile

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Sh. Vikram Chhibbar S/o Late Sh. Ravinder Chhibbar is the owner of HOUSE NO. 169 (SINGLE STORY) AREA MEASURING 50.17 SQ. MTRS. SITUATED IN THE RAKSHI MARG GHAZIABAD ESTATE & DISTT. GHAZIABAD, by virtue of registered Will Dated 21.09.2015, as Doc. No. 471, executed by Smt. Gulshan Chhibbar, and as per the Will, there is one and only authentic owner is Sh. Vikram Chhibbar, and same to be finance by SMFG India Credit Company Limited (formerly Fullerton India Credit Company Limited). General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest/titile in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present. **Rahul Raj Putrak, Advocate is Sh. SG Associates (Law Firm)** 67/1K, Lotus Pond Plaza Vahisar Khand,Indirapuram, Ghaziabad, U.P. Email: sgassociatesgurgaon@gmail.com, Ph: 7011172764, 01204443901

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Kailash Kamal S/o Sh. Kamal Singh R/o Village Palvaly, P.O. Putrali, Tehsil Naudaun, Distt. Hamirpur, H.P. declare that my bag containing one Laptop along with documents i.e. Passport, CDC, COC, GMDSS Booklet, GMDSS Endorsement Certificate, All STCW Certificates, Medical First Aid, Advanced Fire Fighting Certificate, PSCRB, Referser of all STCW Certificates, Diploma in Nautical Science certificate, 10th Certificate, 10+2 certificate, Yellow fever certificate, Liberia CDC and Liberia CDC endorsement have been lost somewhere in Old Delhi Railway Station and the same is not traceable FIR No. 80008484 dated 23-01-2025 in this regard has been lodged in Old Delhi Railway Station Police Station.

PUBLIC NOTICE
"It is to inform to the public at large Mr. Mahesh Chand Sehgal had acquired Entire Second floor Built on Part of Property bearing no. 38/4 area 125 sq. yards., Kharsa No. 54 and 46, Gali No. 3, situated at Village Neem Ka Gharonia Bangar, Janai garden, Pandey Nagar, Near Durgam Chaudhary, New Delhi, East Delhi vide GPR Dt. 10.06.1974 executed by Mr. Faqira and Now Mr. Mr. Mahesh Chand Sehgal is the undisputed owner of the said property, OR
Any person / firm / institution / company having any claim or right in respect of the said Property by way of inheritance, share, sale, agreement, lease, license, gift, possession, legal rights, partners or encumbrance howsoever or otherwise is hereby required to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice of his/her/his share or claim, if any, with all supporting documents at below mentioned address. After expiration of notice period, the claims, if any, of such person shall be treated null and void and also treated as waived and not binding on our client.
Ajay Kumar Gini (Advocate) H. No. 25/161, Basement, Vikram Vihar, Lajpat Nagar 4, New Delhi-110024

NOTICE
Locker Hired by RAJESH KHANNA having address at MF-29 ELDECO MANSION, SOHNA ROAD, GURGAON with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3, BLOCK-C, VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR, GURGAON, 122002 remains un-operated from last 7 years, 3 months.
All the 3 letters earlier sent to RAJESH KHANNA calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.
It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if does not cleared and locker is not operated by RAJESH KHANNA within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

PUBLIC NOTICE
General public is hereby informed that Mr. Anish Kumar Maggo is the owner of First Floor, without roof rights, Built on Property No. W2-15, Plot No. 15, area measuring 92.5 Sq. Yds., situated in the area of Village Chakraborty, Delhi State Delhi, in Colony known as Ram Nagar, New Delhi by virtue of Sale Deed dated 18.06.2015. Vide Doc. No. 4724 to be financed & mortgaged by M/s. Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd. The Original Sale Deed dated 22.05.2007, vide doc. No. 5862, Original Sale Deed dated 01.04.2010, vide doc. No. 7238, Original Sale Deed dated 18.06.2016, vide doc. No. 4724 pertaining to the aforesaid property, has been lost and L/R No.2540683/2025 has been registered on 18.01.2025 with Delhi Police. Any person(s) found in possession of aforesaid original sale deed, then kindly contact the undersigned along with original property document, within 7 days from date of this notice on below address, failing which, the claim as per aforesaid sale deeds shall be treated as null and void in respect of the subject property.
Raghav Tiwari, Advocate
Ch. 830, Patiala House Courts, Delhi-110001
Mob.: +91 9826768808

NOTICE
Locker Hired by RINKOO AGGARWAL having address at S-191 A UPPAL SOUTH END SOHNA ROAD, GURGAON with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3, BLOCK-C, VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR, GURGAON, 122002 remains un-operated from last 7 years, 9 months.
All the 3 letters earlier sent to RINKOO AGGARWAL calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.
It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if does not cleared and locker is not operated by RINKOO AGGARWAL within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is publicly notified that the MIG Flat No 57B, Block-H, First Floor, Sector-22, Noida, has been allotted in the name of R. CHINNA DURAI S/O V.M. RAMAKRISHNAN R/O 582, SECTOR-12, R K PURAM, NEW DELHI, had sold the said flat, on the basis of GPR registered sub Registrar Noida, to the following persons:-
A GPA was executed in favour of P. PADMANABHAN S/O SHRI M.P. SUBRAMANIAN, AYER R/O H-57-B, SECTOR-22, NOIDA, at Noida Vide Book No IV Volume No 84 on pages 689-694 at Document No. 419 dated 03/03/1997 and the Agreement to Sell was not registered. So with the help of the notice it is informed the transfer of the above flat given in favour of JAPAL SINGH S/O LATE SHRI JAMAN SINGH & KHUSH BISHT D/O SHRI JAPAL SINGH BOTH R/O A-11, KRISHI VIHAR NEAR GK-I, JB TITO MARG, New Delhi-110048 if any one has /have any objection he/she may submit his/her, objection in the Housing Department of Noida Authority along-with sufficient proofs within 15 days of the publication this notice.
P. PADMANABHAN

NOTICE
Locker Hired by RAJESH KHANNA having address at MF-29 ELDECO MANSION, SOHNA ROAD, GURGAON with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3, BLOCK-C, VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR, GURGAON, 122002 remains un-operated from last 7 years, 3 months.
All the 3 letters earlier sent to RAJESH KHANNA calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.
It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if does not cleared and locker is not operated by RAJESH KHANNA within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

SUPPLYING, INSTALLATION AND COMMISSIONING WORKS
Tender Notice No.: GMMV-012025-MLG. Date: 17-01-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work; **Tender No.: GMMV-012025-MLG. Name of Work :** Supplying, installation and commissioning of Train Protective Warning System (RAKSHAK) including maintenance for a period of four years after free maintenance of one year of N.F. Railway. **Approximate Tender Value:** ₹2,86,40,000/-; **Bid Security:** ₹2,93,200/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hours and opening of tender at 15:15 hrs. on 03-02-2025.** For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in the website www.ireps.gov.in

General Manager (W), Maligaon
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

PROVISION OF SMART PREPAID CUM POST PAID METER AT RLY STAFF QTRS
E-Tender Notice No. AP/EL/30/24-25 Dated: 27-01-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Tender No. AP/EL/30/24-25. Name of work:** Provision of smart prepaid cum post paid meter at Rly staff qtrs of Alipurduar Jn. division (Phase-II). **Tender Value:** ₹2,85,84,484.56/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹2,92,900/-; **Date & Time of Closing of Tender:** 15.00 hrs. of 21-02-2025 **& will be opened at 15.30 hrs. of 21-02-2025.** The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in

Asstt. DEE/G & Chg./Alipurduar Jn.
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS
CHANGE OF NAME
I, DEEPAK DHIMAN S/o Sh. RAVI DHIMAN R/o 310, Second Floor, AGCR Enclave Delhi-110092, hereby declare that my daughter name has been mentioned as ANAYA DHIMAN in her school records, instead of her actual and correct name as ANAYAA DHIMAN, henceforth she shall be known as ANAYAA DHIMAN for all future purpose.
PD(1349)A
I, Arti W/o- No.16030774A L/Nk Yadav Ganesh Krushnat, R/o-At Post- Pal, Dist- Satara, Maharashtra- 415014, have changed my name from Arti to Yadav Arti Ganesh, vide affidavit dated 29/01/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(1350)C
I, L/Nk Harish Kumar, R/o-Vill- Parsodi, PO- Toranwada, Teh- Amla, Dist- Betul, M.P.- 460551, declare that in my Army records, my Father's Name Gajraj & DOB 02 Feb 1969 are wrongly mentioned, his correct name Gajraj Bedre & DOB is 09 Feb 1969.
PD(1351)C
I, L/Nk Harish Kumar, R/o-Vill- Parsodi, PO- Toranwada, Teh- Amla, Dist- Betul, M.P.- 460551, declare that in my Army records, my Mother's Name Malti & DOB 12 Mar 1971 are wrongly mentioned, her correct name Malti Bedre & DOB is 01 Jan 1972.
PD(1352)C
I, hitherto known as MANJU KUMARI D/o Sh. GURUDEB SHARMA, House No H-48, Seelampur Delhi 110053 have changed my name, and shall hereafter be known as MANJU SHARMA. It is also declare that MANJU KUMARI and MANJU SHARMA both are one and the same person.
PD(1353)C

CONSTRUCTION OF RBG ROOM AT MANNED ENGINEERING LC GATE
Tender Notice No.: SCL-Engg-13 of 2025. Date: 23-01-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work; **Brief Description of Item :** Construction of RBG Room at manned Engineering LC gate no. 6LK, 7LK, 1KD, 2BK, 13BK, 33-BA, 34-BA & KD-7 in Badapur-Agartala section of Lumding Division under the jurisdiction of DENV/ Silchar. **Tender Value:** ₹1,23,66,245-19/- **Earnest Money:** ₹2,11,800/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 20-02-2025 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 21-02-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in the website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with A Smile

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Kailash Kamal S/o Sh. Kamal Singh R/o Village Palvaly, P.O. Putrali, Tehsil Naudaun, Distt. Hamirpur, H.P. declare that my bag containing one Laptop along with documents i.e. Passport, CDC, COC, GMDSS Booklet, GMDSS Endorsement Certificate, All STCW Certificates, Medical First Aid, Advanced Fire Fighting Certificate, PSCRB, Referser of all STCW Certificates, Diploma in Nautical Science certificate, 10th Certificate, 10+2 certificate, Yellow fever certificate, Liberia CDC and Liberia CDC endorsement have been lost somewhere in Old Delhi Railway Station and the same is not traceable FIR No. 80008484 dated 23-01-2025 in this regard has been lodged in Old Delhi Railway Station Police Station.

NOTICE
Locker Hired by RAJESH KHANNA having address at MF-29 ELDECO MANSION, SOHNA ROAD, GURGAON with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3, BLOCK-C, VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR, GURGAON, 122002 remains un-operated from last 7 years, 3 months.
All the 3 letters earlier sent to RAJESH KHANNA calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.
It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if does not cleared and locker is not operated by RAJESH KHANNA within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

NOTICE
Locker Hired by RINKOO AGGARWAL having address at S-191 A UPPAL SOUTH END SOHNA ROAD, GURGAON with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK UNIT-2&3, BLOCK-C, VATIKA BUSINESS PARK SOHNA ROAD BADSHAHPUR, GURGAON, 122002 remains un-operated from last 7 years, 9 months.
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kotak
Kotak Mahindra Bank

NOTICE
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It is hereby informed that despite this notice, if does not cleared and locker is not operated by RINKOO AGGARWAL within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on **April 30, 2025** at around 12p.m.

MAINTENANCE OF BG TRACK AND OTHER ANCILLARY WORKS
E-Tender Notice No. SCL-Engg-10 -2025; Dated: 23-01-2025. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN. 1. Brief Description of Item:** Maintenance of BG track including lifting and packing, Boxing and profiling, Pulling back of rails /panels, Anti-corrosive painting, De-stressing, Slewling and realigning of curves, Overhauling, Removing weeds & bushes, cleaning of side drains, carrying out pre-tamping during tamping and post tamping works (Excluding Agartala yard) in between Agartala-Sabroom section under the jurisdiction of ADEN/Agartala for a period of 2 years. **Tender Value:** ₹3,10,24,554.60; **Earnest Money:** ₹3,05,100.00. E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 17-02-2025 and opened at 15:00 hrs. on 18-02-2025. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 17-02-2025 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

DRM/Works, Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

REPAIRS AND PLACEMENT OF WOODEN ROOF TRUSS AND DAMAGED STEEL ROOF TRUSS
E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/01 of 2025 Dated: 27-01-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **Brief Description of work:** Repairs and placement of wooden roof truss and damaged steel roof truss including with replacement of heavily damaged worn out CGI/AC sheet roofing by aluminium roofing sheets and treatment of leaky roofs of staff quarters including brick works, column repairing, distemping & painting under the jurisdiction of SSEW/North/Lumding (185 Units). **Tender Value:** ₹3,50,87,710.66/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹3,25,400/-; **Date & Time of Closing of Tender:** 15.00 hrs. of 19-02-2025 **& will be opened at 15.00 hrs. of 20-02-2025.** The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 19-02-2025 in website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Centre greenlights ₹34,300 Crore National Critical Minerals Mission

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday approved Rs 16,300-crore National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM), envisaging a total outlay of ₹34,300 crore spread over seven years, with an aim to achieve self-reliance and accelerate India's journey towards green energy transition.

According to a release by the mines ministry, public sector enterprises are expected to contribute ₹18,000 crore to the mission, which aims at promoting exploration of critical minerals within the country and at offshore locations. Critical minerals such as copper, lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earth are essential raw materials required to fuel the growth of rapidly-growing



clean energy technologies and their expanding uses ranging from wind turbines and electricity networks to electric vehicles and battery manufacturing. Demand for these minerals is

growing with clean energy transitions gathering momentum worldwide. Briefing the media after the Cabinet meeting, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that the

mission aims to reduce the dependence on import of critical minerals and ensure self-reliance. "This mission is of ₹16,300 crore," he said, adding that 24 critical minerals have been

identified. Stating that the critical minerals are essential for the economy, the minister said that major objectives of this mission are to increase exploration, reduce import dependence, acquire mineral blocks overseas, develop technologies for processing of critical minerals and recycle the minerals. A comprehensive plan, he said, is made in this mission. "The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the launch of the NCMM with an expenditure of ₹16,300 crore and expected investment of ₹18,000 crore by PSUs, etc," the ministry said. The NCMM will encompass all stages of the value chain, including mineral exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing, and recovery from end-of-life products.

Cabinet raises procurement price of C-heavy molasses ethanol

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a three per cent increase in the procurement price for ethanol made from C-heavy molasses to ₹57.97 per litre for the 2024-25 supply year, while keeping rates unchanged for other feedstocks.

The price increase, aimed at boosting ethanol production from sugar industry by-products, comes as India pushes to meet its accelerated target of 20 per cent ethanol blending in petrol by 2025-26. Prices for ethanol produced from B-heavy molasses and sugarcane juice/ sugar/ sugar syrup remain unchanged at ₹60.73 and ₹65.61 per litre, respectively.

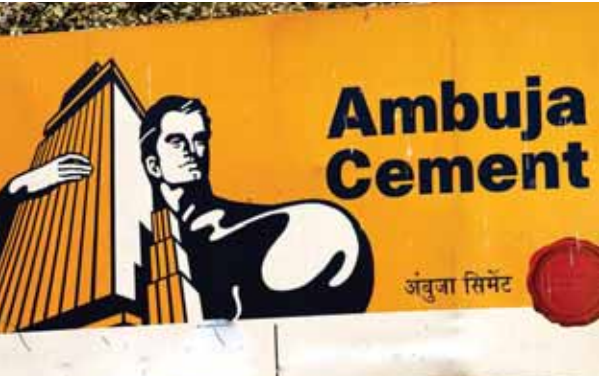
The decision was taken at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.



Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters that C-heavy molasses contains very little sugar content compared to other sugarcane feedstock. "The more we encourage C-heavy molasses for ethanol production, it will be beneficial for both farmers and environment," he said. Public sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) will

procure ethanol at the revised rates during the ongoing 2024-25 supply year (November-October) under the government's Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme. The government said in a statement that the three per cent price increase for C-heavy molasses ethanol aims to ensure sufficient availability to meet increased blending targets.

Ambuja Cements reports Q3 net profit of ₹2,620 Crore



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A dani Group firm Ambuja Cements Ltd (ACL) on Wednesday reported a consolidated net profit of ₹2,620.09 crore for the third quarter ended December 2024.

The company had reported a net profit of ₹1,090.73 crore a year ago, according to a regulatory filing by ACL. Its consolidated revenue from operations was ₹8,415.31 crore during the December 2024 quarter. It was ₹8,052.42 crore in the year-ago period. The country's second-largest cement manufacturer's consolidated sales volume stood at 16.5 million tonnes during the quarter.

This is the "highest-ever cement sales volume in a quarter," Ambuja Cements said in its earnings statement. The consolidated financial results of Ambuja Cements for the December quarter are not comparable due to the acquisition of several companies, including Gujarat-based Sanghi Industries, Hyderabad-based Penna Industries, and Tamil Nadu-based MY Home Industries, whose results are included in it. Besides, its subsidiary ACC acquired Asian Concretes and Cements Ltd. "Accordingly, the results for the current quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2024, are not comparable with quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2023, to that extent," it said. ACL's total expenses in the December quarter were ₹8,347.68 crore. The total Income of ACL, which includes other income,

was ₹10,680.80 crore in the third quarter. The consolidated results of Ambuja Cements include the financial performance of its step-down firm ACC Ltd, in which, it owns around 51 per cent stake, along with Sanghi Industries and Penna Industries.

On a standalone basis, Ambuja Cements reported a profit after tax of ₹1,758.03 crore in the December quarter. It was ₹513.68 crore in the year-ago quarter. Its standalone revenue from operations was ₹4,850.02 crore in the third quarter of FY25. On a standalone basis, its sales volume of Cement and Clinker was 10.1 MT. Its Whole Time Director and CEO Ajay Kapur said ACL is entering into new territories with a focus on innovation, digitisation, customer satisfaction, and ESG.

"Our strategic acquisitions have significantly increased our capacity and market presence. This will be dovetailed with our ongoing expansion projects, delivering exceptional value for our stakeholders and propelling us towards achieving over 104 MTPA capacity by Q4 FY25 and 118 MTPA by FY26," he said. With the expansion of Sindri, Farakka and Sankrail grinding units in the advanced stage and completion of the Orient Cements transaction, operational capacities will reach 104 MTPA by Q4 FY25, the company said. It has added 631 million metric tonnes of new limestone reserves in Q3 FY25.

Tata Power-DDL secures 17 convictions in electricity theft cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In its quest to curb power theft, the leading power utility Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL) supplying electricity to a populace of around nine million in North and North West Delhi, has secured convictions in 17 electricity theft cases from April 2024 till Jan 2025. Since 2007 till date Special electricity courts have convicted total 78 accused in electricity theft and imposed heavy fine under section 135 of Electricity Act 2003. "To combat the issue of power theft, Tata Power-DDL filed criminal cases against offenders in the Special Electricity Court Rohini. Noticing the severity and merit of these cases, the Court has passed convictions and Tata Power-DDL embraces the judgement reiterating its

unwavering commitment to curb electricity theft. The company urges all citizens to refrain from engaging in illegal activities and encourages them to report any instances of electricity theft for safeguarding interest of general public", Tata Power said in a statement. Commenting on the development, Tata Power emphasised upon team's dedication towards eradicating electricity theft, bringing the perpetrators to justice and upholding the integrity for customer services, thereby reinforcing the vision for a sustainable energy future. "These actions not only ensure a stable power supply, but also reflect Tata Power-DDL's dedication to providing a sustainable and affordable electricity to our customers and supporting the overall community development.

ITC Hotels lists on bourses

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ITC Hotels, the new entity after the demerger of the hotels business of diversified conglomerate ITC Ltd that listed on the stock exchanges on Wednesday -said it plans to expand its portfolio to over 200 hotels over the next five years.

At present, ITC Hotels operates a bouquet of over 140 properties with over 13,000 keys in more than 90 locations.

The new pure play hospitality company said it will continue to pursue its asset-right strategy to expand its footprint across India and in proximal markets. "Debuting with a zero-debt balance sheet and a cash/cash equivalents of ₹1,500 crore to cater to planned growth and contingency requirements, ITCHL is now listed for trading on the stock exchanges," ITC Hotels said. ITC Ltd retains a 40 per cent stake in ITCHL, while the remaining 60 per cent is distributed among existing shareholders. "This strategic share-holding structure positions ITCHL to



deliver long-term value to all stakeholders while accelerating its independent growth trajectory," ITC Hotels said. Speaking at the listing programme at the NSE, ITC Hotels Ltd Managing Director Anil Chadha said, "We aim to be a global leader in Indian hospitality driven by our core ethos of customer centricity, high performance and steadfast commitment to sustainability." ITC Hotels Ltd has a portfolio through six brands -ITC Hotels and Mementos in the luxury space, Welcomhotel in upper upscale, Stori in

boutique premium experiential segment, Fortune in midscale, and WelcomHeritage in heritage leisure. "Today, ITC Hotels operates a bouquet of over 140 properties with over 13,000 keys in over 90 locations. It plans to expand its portfolio to over 200 hotels with over 18,000 keys over the next five years, with approximately 2/3rds salience of managed properties," it stated. It has launched 30 hotels within 24 months recently (as on December 31, 2024), and has a robust target of adding at least one hotel a month on an average over the next 24 months, it added. The stock listed at ₹188 on the BSE, while on the NSE it began the trade at ₹180. Later the stock declined five per cent to ₹178.60 on the BSE. At the NSE, it went lower by three per cent to ₹172. The firm's market valuation stood at ₹39,126.02 crore.

Demerger of ITC's hotel business came into effect on January 1, 2025, with January 6 fixed as the record date. The move separated ITC Hotels from the parent entity.

Sensex, Nifty jump nearly one per cent driven by IT stocks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock market benchmark Sindices - Sensex and Nifty -surged nearly one per cent on Wednesday, buoyed by a rally in IT, capital goods and industrial stocks amid a firm trend in global markets. However, unabated selling by foreign investors ahead of the Union Budget kept market sentiment extremely cautious, traders said. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 631.55 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 76,532.96. During the day, it jumped 698.32 points or 0.92 per cent to 76,599.73. As many as 2,978 stocks advanced while 1,011 declined and 93 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty soared 205.85 points or 0.90 per cent to 23,163.10. "The Indian market has demonstrated resilience in anticipation of the upcoming Union Budget, with expectations of measures, aimed at stimulating consumption and job creation.

Investors are now focusing on the upcoming Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting, with general expectations that the Fed will maintain its current hawkish stance," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Zomato jumped nearly seven per cent. Tata Motors, Infosys, UltraTech Cement, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finance were the other major gainers. In contrast, ITC Hotels, Bharti Airtel, Maruti, Asian Paints and ITC were among the laggards. The BSE smallcap gauge surged 3.28 per cent and the midcap index rallied 2.54 per cent. "Most key sectors contributed to the recovery. However, the highlight of the session was the strong rebound in broader indices. Looking ahead, market participants will react to the US Fed meeting outcome in early Thursday trades, followed by the focus shifting to the January

derivatives expiry," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. Among BSE sectoral indices, realty jumped 3.10 per cent, industrials (2.94 per cent), capital goods (2.70 per cent), IT (2.65 per cent), BSE Focused IT (2.63 per cent), commodities (2.30 per cent) and healthcare (2.20 per cent). FMCG emerged as the only laggard. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the positive territory. Markets in Shanghai and Hong Kong were closed due to holidays. European markets were trading mostly in the green. US markets ended higher on Tuesday. "India VIX has seen a surge from 13 to 19 levels in the last five weeks and rising volatility created swings with negative bias in the market. "Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) Long Short Ratio is now at around 20 per cent, which is near the lower part of the range, but selling from FIIs in the cash market is the real cause of concern to get the market stability. Overall

lower FIIs Index Long Short ratio indicates light position by foreign market players," Motilal Oswal Financial Services said in a note. FIIs offloaded equities worth ₹4,920.69 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.93 per cent to USD 76.77 a barrel. "Having lost around three per cent of its value so far in the month, Nifty looks on track to end January on a negative note to mark the fourth consecutive month of correction - an exceptionally rare occurrence that hasn't been reported in the last 23 years. "US Fed action, a slew of reforms in the budget and liquidity easing by the central bank will set the tone for the markets in the coming 2-3 months. The FII's have been sellers almost to the tune of USD one billion even in January," Jaykrishna Gandhi, Head - Business Development, Institutional Equities, Emkay Global Financial Services, said.

Rupee rises one paisa against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee pared its initial losses and settled for the day on a positive note, higher by one paisa to close at 86.56 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, supported by positive domestic markets, while a strong US dollar and a recovery in crude oil prices capped sharp gains. Forex traders said the US dollar gained on expectations of a no rate cut by the Fed in its Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) decision. Besides, global risk sentiments were dampened amid tariff threats by the US President Donald Trump, they said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.58, and during the day touched a high of 86.49 and a low of 86.61 against the American currency.



The local unit settled on a positive note at 86.56 (provisional), registering a rise of one paisa over its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee depreciated 26 paise to close at 86.57 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias on underlying strength in the US dollar and persistent foreign

fund outflows. Importer demand for dollars towards the end of the month and uncertainty over tariffs by the US administration may further pressure the rupee," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan said. "However, any central bank intervention may support the rupee. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the FOMC

meeting outcome. RBI's announcement of the OMO may also support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.23 per cent higher at 108.11. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.98 per cent to USD 76.73 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 631.55 points, or 0.83 per cent, at 76,532.96 points, while the Nifty rose 205.85 points, or 0.9 per cent, to close at 23,163.10 points. In the domestic institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹4,920.69 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

SEBI cancels registration of four stock brokers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), on Wednesday cancelled the registration of four stock brokers - Single Window Securities, Sunness Capital India, GACM Technologies and Infotech Portfolio - after they failed to meet the registration requirements. The main reason for cancelling the registration certificate of these entities is to prevent them from misusing their SEBI registration without being a member of a recognised stock exchange, on unaware investors, the regulator said in four separate orders. Despite the cancellation of their registration, these

entities remain liable for any actions they took or failed to take as stock brokers. They are also responsible for paying any outstanding fees, dues, and interest owed to SEBI, it added. In its orders, SEBI said that four stock brokers were granted registrations subject to certain conditions, including the condition that they continue to be members of a recognised stock exchange. Considering these entities are no longer members of any stock exchange, SEBI noted that these entities no longer meet the conditions required for holding a stock broker registration under the Broker Regulations 1992, which stipulates that stock brokers must be members of recognised stock exchanges.

INBRIEF

NTPC ROLLS OUT STATE-OF-ART CO2 BATTERY AT NTPC KUDGI

NEW DELHI: NTPC Ltd, India's largest integrated power utility, announces the launch of CO2 battery energy storage technology, a significant milestone in its journey towards sustainable and innovative energy solutions.

SRM INSTITUTE OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THAI CULINARY EXPERIENCE

KATTANKULATHUR: The SRM Institute of Hotel Management (SRM IHM) hosted a curated Thai culinary experience in collaboration with the Thai Consulate. The event was a vibrant celebration of Thailand's rich culinary heritage.



COAL INDIA RANKED AMONG INDIA'S TOP 50 BEST WORKPLACES

RAIPUR: Coal India Limited (CIL) has been recognised as one of India's Top 50 Best Workplaces in Manufacturing 2025 by Great Place to Work. This prestigious recognition underscores CIL's commitment to cultivating a culture of trust, pride, and camaraderie, while providing a supportive and empowering environment for its workforce.

SECL'S OBR CROSSES 246 MCUM, SETS PACE FOR FUTURE GROWTH

BILASPUR: South Eastern Coalfields Limited (SECL)'s overburden removal (OBR) has crossed 246 million cubic meters (MCuM), achieving 103 per cent of its pro-rata target and recording a 4.2 per cent increase compared to the same period last year.



GNDU PROFESSOR SELECTED AS EDITOR OF INDIAN JOURNAL OF TEACHER EDUCATION

AMRITSAR: Vice chancellor Prof Karamjeet Singh congratulated Prof Amit Kauts, Department of Education, Guru Nanak Dev University for being selected as Editor of Indian Journal of Teacher Education.



COURSES AND INTERNSHIPS NEEDED TO BOOST EMPLOYABILITY

AMRITSAR: Prof Karamjeet Singh, Vice Chancellor, expressed pride in the achievements of student-athletes and encouraged them to continue striving for excellence during Sports Trophies Award Function of Guru Nanak Dev University.



Manchester City, PSG face early exit from Champions League

PTI ■ GENEVA

Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain each faces a shocking early exit from the Champions League for the first time in more than a decade when the final round of games Wednesday decide the new 36-team standings. When the 18 games kick off at the same time, 9 pm Central European Time (2000 GMT), to complete the inaugural league-phase format, Man City is outside the top-24 places that advance to the knockout stage and 22nd-place PSG risks dropping out. Man City must beat Club Brugge at home to rise safely from 25th place. A draw for PSG at 24th-place Stuttgart should be enough for both teams — barring a freakish big win for Dinamo Zagreb over AC Milan to take the tiebreaker on goal difference among teams that end on 11 points.

A PSG loss in Germany risks ending a run of 12 straight years playing in the knockout stage. The final-day jeopardy also was unexpected for Man City, the Champions League winner two years ago, which let a two-goal lead slip in a 4-2 loss at PSG last week. The English Premier League champion advanced 11 years in a row from the old group stage since going winless in the 2012-13 edition. It is the kind of scenario Champions League organiser UEFA hoped for when approving the new format under severe pressure from storied clubs who demanded more lucrative games and more of them against high-end opponents. Those same influential clubs -- including the super-wealthy state-backed pair of Man City and PSG - hardly imagined they would miss out on the knockout phase that brings global brand-building attention and tens of



millions of euros in extra prize money from UEFA. Real Madrid had to play just

13 games to win the Champions League last season, and now faces playing

17 to retain the title. Madrid is 16th in the standings before going to play

unheralded Brest after losing three of its seven games, including on its previous trip

to France against Lille. The record 15-time European champion can still rise to a top-8 finish — earning direct entry to the round of 16 in March — by beating 13th-place Brest, though needs other results to go its way. Teams that finish from ninth to 24th enter Friday's draw for the two-leg knockout playoffs played on back-to-back midweeks in February. That shapes as an unwanted burden in the congested calendar for teams also chasing domestic titles, rather than bonus games to earn more revenue. Bundesliga leader Bayern Munich is in 15th place, also on 12 points with Madrid, before hosting Slovan Bratislava, which has been overmatched losing seven straight games. A 15-point tally, with a strong goal difference, could be enough to take eighth place currently held by Bayer Leverkusen, which heads a group of six teams on 13

points. Leverkusen hosts already eliminated Sparta Prague. Bayern and Madrid can be helped by the tough schedule for teams ahead in the standings: Atalanta in seventh goes to Barcelona, 10th-place Monaco is at Inter Milan, while Lille and Feyenoord — 12th vs 11th — cannot both reach 15 points. League-leading Liverpool has let most star players skip the trip to 19th-place PSV Eindhoven because it is one of the few teams with certainty. Seven wins guaranteed Liverpool a top-two seeding in the tennis-like bracket for the knockout rounds. That draw will be made Feb. 21 after the playoffs round, setting up pairings through to the May 31 final in Munich. Only Liverpool and Barcelona have already sealed their top-8 places, though Arsenal and Inter — both on 16 points — likely will join them.



Rashid is the most important player for us: Jos Buttler

PTI ■ RAJKOT

England skipper Jos Buttler sees veteran leg-spinner Adil Rashid as the team's most important player in the T20 setup after his special skills were on display in the third match against India here. Rashid put up a masterclass of leg-spin to help England pull one back in the five-match series. He varied his pace beautifully and got the ball to turn a lot more than all other spinners in operation on Tuesday night. The India batters were not even looking for boundaries against Rashid who ended up with figures of one for 15 in four overs. He applied the choke in the middle overs alongside Jamie Overton and got rid of in-form Tilak Varma with a peach of a delivery. Even in Chennai during the second T20, Rashid conceded less than four runs per over. Following the 26-run win, Buttler couldn't gush enough about the 36-year-old, who has been playing T20 Internationals since 2009. "He's the most important player for us, and he always just seems to keep getting better. He's got so many different styles of bowling, he's got so much variety. "One of his great skills is that the first couple of balls he bowls, he seems to work out exactly how he needs to bowl on that wicket, and yeah, he's an absolute trump card to have as a captain, so yeah, he's been brilliant the last couple of games," said Buttler in his post-match press conference. England had the Indian batters under the pump even in the previous game but Varma's individual brilliance got the home team over the

line. The visitors were even sharper with the ball on Tuesday and were able to defend 171 comfortably. Besides Rashid, pacer Overton also kept the batters quiet with his variations. Yeah, it's the beauty of being an all-rounder, isn't it? He (Overton) missed out tonight with the bat, but still impacts the game so much with the ball, so yeah, we know he'll come good, he's been playing great for a while now, and he's a really dangerous hitter with the ball. "...So the more he's out here as well, exposed to these conditions, he's just going to improve all the time, and as I say, guys who can affect the game in all three facets are gold dust," Buttler, who also praised another all-rounder Brydon Carse. Still trailing 1-2 in the five-match series, Buttler thinks his team is moving in the right direction. "I just love the way the guys played there, and Livy (Liam Livingstone) with his five sixes) really taking it on in sixes, and credit to Rash (Rashid) and Woody (Mark Wood) as well, putting on 20-odd for the last wicket, got us up to a really good score. "So, I think from the first ball of the match, the wicket probably looked a bit different than everyone thought it might play, so to have 170 on the board was a really good score." Buttler added that his men will continue to be aggressive with both bat and ball. "Really happy with the sort of style that we're trying to play, and continuing to be aggressive, and taking our shots on with the bat, and then absolutely with the ball," he said.

Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh to battle for Ranji Trophy QF spot

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh are set for a high-stakes clash as they battle for the final quarterfinal spot from Elite Group B during their final Ranji Trophy league game, starting here on Thursday. Group B leaders Vidarbha (34 points) have already sealed their place in the knockouts after a stunning 221-run comeback win against Rajasthan in the previous round. Now, all eyes are on Gujarat (26 points) and Himachal Pradesh (21 points). They are the two teams that remain in contention to join Vidarbha in the last eight. Meanwhile, Hyderabad (16 points), Rajasthan (16), Uttarakhand (10), Andhra (7), and Puducherry (3) are out of the reckoning. Himachal Pradesh have struggled with consistency all



season and must regroup after a crushing innings-and-43-run defeat to lowly-placed Hyderabad, which dented their knockout hopes. The Rishi Dhawan-led side paid the price for an overtly aggressive approach. Left-handed batter Ankit Kalsi, who struck an unbeaten double century earlier in the season, has been Himachal's standout performer with 549 runs in six matches. The onus will be on him and the top

order to deliver in this must-win clash. Gujarat, on the other hand, will enter the match brimming with confidence after a dominant innings-and-28-run victory over Uttarakhand. Left-arm spinner Siddharth Desai was the star of Gujarat's win, registering sensational figures of 9 for 36 -- the best by any Gujarat player in first-class cricket. He was well-supported by

Smith scores his 10,000th test run

PTI ■ GALLE

Steve Smith scored his 10,000th test run to put him in elite cricket company and Australia was 145-2 after winning the toss and battering Wednesday in the first test against Sri Lanka. Smith needed only one run Wednesday to achieve the milestone, and he was 2 not out at lunch along with opener Usman Khawaja, who was unbeaten on 65. Smith was on 9,999 career test runs when he was dismissed in the fifth Australia-India test in Sydney earlier this month. Smith became the 15th player in test cricket, and fourth Australian, to score 10,000 runs in a career. He brought up the milestone on his first delivery, skipping down the wicket and punching a single to mid-on. Ricky Ponting (13,378), Allan Border (11,174), and Steve Waugh (10,927) are the other Australian batters to have scored 10,000 runs in a test career. Sachin Tendulkar is the leading all-time test scorer with 15,921 runs.



Earlier Khawaja and Travis Head made the most of spin-friendly conditions in Galle, crafting half-centuries. On a surface expected to favor the spinners, Australia's batters countered with positive intent, regularly finding the boundary and forcing Sri Lanka to spread the field. Head, in particular, was in a punishing mood, reaching his half-century in just 35 balls, leaving Sri Lanka scrambling for answers. Khawaja, in contrast, adopted a more measured approach, playing with patience while rotating the strike. The duo stitched together a commanding 92-run opening

stand before Head fell for 57, caught at long-on off Prabath Jayasuriya. Sri Lanka struck again when Marnus Labuschagne departed for 20, courtesy of a sharp catch at slip by Dhananjaya de Silva, handing leg-spinner Jeffrey Vandersay his first wicket of the match. Smith is captaining the Australian side in the absence of Pat Cummins, who is on paternity leave. Australia recently won a five-test series against India in Australia which qualified it for the World Test Championship final against South Africa at Lord's in June.

Chennaiyin FC target for first win in seven games

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennaiyin FC will aim to notch up their first win in seven games when they host Kerala Blasters in their Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Thursday. Chennaiyin are currently 10th in the points table with 18 points from as many matches, having won four games and drawn six. Kerala Blasters, on the other hand, are placed eighth with 21 points from 18 matches, with six wins and three draws. The Kochi-based side are aiming to enter the top-six in the table. TG Purushothaman's side are looking to complete a league double over Chennaiyin for the second time in ISL history (also in 2021-22), having won the reverse fixture 3-0 on November 24 last. However, Chennaiyin FC have never lost a home game against Kerala Blasters in ISL history, including a 1-0 victory in their



most recent meeting in Chennai (February 16, 2024). Chennaiyin have not tasted victory in their last five matches, drawing thrice and losing twice. Kerala Blasters, on the other hand, have emerged victorious in two games, lost an equal number of encounters, and been defeated once in the preceding five matches heading into Thursday's game. Both the sides have six games left to produce positive results that could potentially take them into the playoffs positions, and their current situations are such that they cannot afford to concede an

inch in this neck-to-neck battle for the top-six. Chennaiyin FC head coach Owen Coyle said that his team needs to maximise points from home matches. "We have to capitalise on our home games. We have got some good results against some good teams, but it is about working hard together, which the boys are doing," he said. Kerala Blasters FC interim head coach TG Purushothaman hoped that his team will create more goal-scoring opportunities. "In the last match, we didn't create enough scoring chances. We have to overcome everything as a team and I hope to rectify this in the next match," he said. The two teams have faced each other 23 times in the ISL, with Chennaiyin FC and Kerala Blasters FC winning seven games each. Nine matches have produced draws.

Afghanistan women cricketers reunite for a match after three years

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Cricketer Firooza Amiri says her team will "represent millions of women in Afghanistan who are denied their rights" when the side reunites after more than three years for an exhibition game in Australia on Thursday. An Afghanistan Women's XI will play a Cricket Without Borders XI in the match at Melbourne's Junction Oval. It will bring together 21 female players who were formerly contracted by the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) before the Taliban regime re-took control in August 2021. Since fleeing Afghanistan, the women cricketers. Banned from playing in their home country, have been based in Canberra and Melbourne and

playing for various club teams in local competitions. Amiri and Nahida Sapan, who will captain the Afghanistan Women's XI, thanked the Australian government and Cricket Australia for their support in promoting women's sport. "It's very special for all of us to get back together after three years, leaving everything and losing everything back home in Afghanistan and come together again," Amiri said this week. Amiri was forced to flee her home country when the Taliban took control. She and her family first traveled to Pakistan and then were evacuated to Australia. "I also want to express deepest gratitude for everyone who support us. Your support means the world to us," Sapan

said. "Together we are building not just a team. We are building a movement for change and improvement. "This is a very historic moment for all of Afghan women. This match can open doors for Afghan women for education, sport and our future." Sapan told the BBC in 2023 that her family received death threats from government officials after the Taliban re-took power. The threatening messages included: "If we find you, we will not let you live." Cricket Australia chief executive Nick Hockley praised the resilience of the players. He said it was a powerful moment when they were presented with their team shirts for the exhibition match. "To see their playing shirts for



the first time with their names and numbers on the back, you can see how much it means to them," Hockley said. "I'm just inspired by their resilience, their love for the game." Hockley said CA would continue to "advocate" for

change at a global level through discussions with the International Cricket Council (ICC). He said Thursday's game represented an important first step. "This match shines the light on the fact that in places

around the world, not every woman and girl has the chance to play," Hockley said. "We continue to advocate at the ICC and continue to engage with the ACB (Afghanistan Cricket Board). "It's such a complex situation. It's bigger than cricket." Under Taliban rule, the Afghanistan Cricket Board cannot field a national women's team because the country's laws forbid women from playing sport, studying and medical education, moves that have been criticized by world groups including the International Criminal Court. Afghanistan is a full member of the ICC and a condition of that status should require it to have a women's side. England and Australia are refusing to participate in direct series against

Afghanistan in protest, but continue to play against it in ICC events, such as next month's Champions Trophy global event in Pakistan. England cricket captain Jos Buttler said last week that his side should not boycott a match against the Afghanistan men's team when they are scheduled to play in the Champions Trophy on Feb. 26 in Lahore. South Africa's sport minister, however, has urged the Proteas to boycott their match against Afghanistan in the same tournament. Asked why Australia was prepared to play a men's game against Afghanistan in an ICC event, but not in a bilateral series, Hockley said CA was "duty-bound" to play all its scheduled fixtures at ICC events. "We're really trying to do everything we can in our

power to make a difference," Hockley said. "We've played Afghanistan in other ICC events. You have to draw a line somewhere and I think we've made our stance pretty clear." Mohammad Nabi and Rashid Khan from Afghanistan's men's national cricket team have posted support of women's education on social media after the Taliban closed training institutes for nursing and midwives. Hockley said he hoped Thursday's match, the format for which was not announced, would become an annual one and that it would "promote lots of conversations." "You need moments like this to prompt real change. The first piece is awareness," Hockley said. "Hopefully this game just raises awareness."

Tilak Varma rises to second spot in ICC T20I Rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

Talented India batter Tilak Varma climbed one spot to second, while mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy made a massive leap of 25 places to break into the top five in the latest ICC men's T20I rankings released on Wednesday.

Varma now sits just behind Travis Head in the batters' list, with the Australian maintaining a 23-point lead at the top.

The young Indian left-hander has been in sublime form, posting scores of 19 not out, 72 not out, and 18 in India's ongoing T20I series against England.

With two matches remaining in the series, Varma has a chance to overtake Head and become the youngest-ever player to top the rankings -- a record currently held by Babar Azam, who reached No. 1 at the age of 23 years and 105 days.

Varma's current rating of 832 points is the fourth-highest ever achieved by an Indian batter in T20I history, behind only Suryakumar Yadav, Virat Kohli, and KL Rahul.

India's Abhishek Sharma also made



significant strides, jumping 59 places to 40th, while England's Liam Livingstone (up five spots to 32nd

and Ben Duckett (up 28 places to 68th) were the biggest gainers from the visiting team.

Chakravarthy's rise
Chakravarthy's magical 5/24 in India's 26-run loss in the third T20I

propelled him to top five in the T20I bowling rankings.

Meanwhile, fellow spinner Axar Patel moved up five places to 11th, just outside the top 10.

England's Adil Rashid has reclaimed the No. 1 spot among T20I bowlers.

Rashid first claimed the top position at the end of 2023 and held it for much of last year until West Indies' Akeal Hosein briefly surpassed him before Christmas.

Bumrah continues to dominate Test rankings

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah remains the top-ranked Test bowler following his sensational performances in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia.

His dominance across formats also earned him the prestigious Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy for ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year 2024.

Among Test all-rounders, West Indies' Jomel Warrican has climbed to 24th, while Pakistan's Mohammad Rizwan moved up two places to 15th in the Test batters' rankings, which continue to be led by England's Joe Root.



We will be ready: PCB on Champions Trophy readiness

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) insists that the National Stadium here will be ready to host matches of the upcoming Champions Trophy despite mounting concerns around the venue's preparedness for the marquee event starting February 19.

Pakistan's respected leading english daily 'Dawn' on Wednesday carried a story which stated that "it seems absolutely impossible to contemplate the renovation work being completed within the deadline, but the personnel handed the responsibility are beaming with confidence."

"The board would either be hero or zero for taking up such a mammoth task," the newspaper commented.

Although PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi inspected the Rawalpindi stadium on Tuesday and assured that the Champions Trophy would be held as planned, it seems unlikely that the Board would get control of the renovated venues in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi by the January 31 deadline.

The other upcoming major international matches at these venues include the four-match tri-series with New Zealand and South Africa from February 8 to 14 with the first two games in Lahore and then two matches, including the final, in Karachi.

"Look, the stadiums will be in a shape to host matches but

the question is the PCB has promised everyone a world-class experience at these renovated venues for the Tri-series and Champions Trophy and whether they can deliver on that promise remains to be seen," a source, who is following the construction work, said.

Bilal Chohan, the man responsible for the renovation work, is reportedly complaining about not getting required equipment and clearances on time to complete the work in Karachi.

The panels to be installed on the new building were to be released from the Karachi Port only on Sunday night, with its installation scheduled for the next morning.

"These are the kind of things we are dealing with, but sometimes it's sad to see people bashing us," Chohan complained.

The PCB has spent around PKR 12 billion on renovation, constructions and installation of equipment at all three venues in Lahore and Karachi.

Tickets have already gone on sale but until the PCB announces they have possession of the new-look stadiums, concerns will remain.

On Tuesday, ICC CEO Geoff Allardice resigned with a board member of the world body indicating that his failure to give a clear picture of Pakistan's preparedness was among the reasons for his departure.



Jerry Holness joins as Indian women's 400m relay coach

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Renowned Jamaican Athletics coach Jerry Lee Holness, who has mentored the likes of multiple Olympics and World Championships gold medallist sprinters Elaine Thompson and Nesta Carter, has taken charge of the Indian women's 400m team ahead of some high-profile events coming up this year.

Holness, a highly-experienced and much travelled coach, joined the National Centre of Excellence (NCoE) at the Lakshmi Bai National College of Physical Education in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, on Monday.

"Holness has joined at NCoE Thiruvananthapuram. He is a highly experienced World Athletics Level 5 coach. He has coached some of the best in Jamaica including Olympic and World Championships medallists," Indian athletics chief coach Radhakrishnan Nair told PTI.

"He will take charge of the Indian women's 400m and 400m hurdles team which is currently based in Thiruvananthapuram," he added.

Holness' tenure will be up to 2026 initially and can be extended after an evaluation of his performance.

He will be coaching the likes of Hima Das, Subha Venkatesan Rupal, Kiran Pahal and Vithya Ramraj at

L N C P E Thiruvananthapuram.

The 65-year-old Jamaican replaced Stashuk Valerii who was Indian women's 400m and 400m hurdles coach till the Paris Olympics.

"Since the Indian women's 400 team did not do well in the Paris Olympics, SAI did not want to renew his contract. Valerii has left after the Paris Olympics, so SAI wanted a new coach," Nair said from Thiruvananthapuram.

"We have important assignments this year like the Asian Championships, World Relays and World Championships, so Holness coming in will be a big boost," he added.

Holness joining the Indian athletics set-up came just days after the hiring of Russian legend Sergey Makarov Aleksandrovich as javelin coach. It is, however, learnt that double Olympic medallist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will primarily train with his own coach Jan Železný, a three-time Olympic gold medallist and world record holder in javelin throw.

Holness was part of the coaching staff of his country during the Paris Olympics. As track and field head coach at the famous Manchester High School at Mandeville in Jamaica, Holness has guided top athletes like Elaine Thompson, Nesta Carter, Sherone Simpson and Natoya Goule.

Presence of Shreyas Iyer will make it easier, says Suryansh Shedge

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Young Mumbai all-rounder Suryansh Shedge, who was picked by Punjab Kings in the IPL mega auction, is eager to carry forward his chemistry with skipper Shreyas Iyer as he gears up for his maiden IPL season.

The 22-year-old has already shown his finishing prowess in domestic cricket, playing a crucial role in Mumbai's Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy triumph under Iyer's captaincy.

In the final, he smashed an unbeaten 36 off just 15 balls and also contributed with the ball, taking 1/32, earning the Player of the Match award in their five-wicket win over Madhya Pradesh.

Shedge, who made his senior Mumbai debut this season, believes Iyer's presence will help him settle in quickly at Punjab Kings.

"If you track the record of Punjab Kings over the past



few years, they always invest in new talent, and they scout the domestic circuit closely," he stated in a release.

"I am really excited to be a part of the franchise. Shreyas bhaiya being the Captain makes it easier because he is a familiar face."

He is particularly excited about working under legendary Australian cricketer Ricky Ponting.

"Ricky Ponting is a legend. He

is beyond words. After retirement, he gave back to cricket and has been constantly involved with the community.

"He has been a part of IPL for many years -- so he knows ins and outs. Aussies are known for their fearless attitude and that's what he personifies. We are hopeful that under his guidance, we will lift the trophy this year," Shedge will also reunite with

his Mumbai teammate Musheer Khan at Punjab Kings as both were picked by their base price of Rs 30 lakh.

On the second day of the IPL mega auction, the all-rounder was on a bus to the team hotel after a training session when he began streaming the auctions on his phone.

"I saw Musheer Khan's name and knew I would be coming up shortly. Punjab Kings bought him, so I was really excited," he said.

"I was just about to call him, but my name appeared, so I stopped. Punjab Kings raised the paddle, and we all celebrated on the bus. The first call I received was from Musheer, as we both will play for the same team."

After a call with his parents, Shedge was congratulated by his Mumbai teammates, including Iyer, at the dining table, and he was dubbed 'Punjab da Munda' by his Mumbai teammates.

KL Rahul perfects cuts and drives in Karnataka nets

PTI ■ BENGALURU

KL Rahul's net session is all about meticulousness. Right from picking his gears out of a nattily packed kitbag to facing bowlers, his every movement is measured.

There was no exception at the KSCA (B) grounds here on Wednesday as he readied himself for Karnataka's crucial Ranji Trophy match against Haryana.

During the 40-minute nets, Rahul never looked hurried against throw-downs, pace or spin, and even found time to sign some autographs and pose for a couple of selfies with the waiting fans.

But the zero theatrics masked the enormity the next month holds in his career that has entered its second decade.

The cycle starts from Wednesday at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, as

big runs from his willow will make the job easier for Karnataka in their last league match of Elite Group C.

Despite the difference in formats and quality, a critical role in guiding Karnataka to the knockouts will give a fillip to him ahead of the three-match ODI series against England, beginning on February 6 before leaving for Dubai for the ICC Champions Trophy.

While Rahul is set to bat at No. 3 for Karnataka in his first competitive outing post the tour to Australia, the right-hander might occupy the No. 5 slot for India in the one-dayers.

It's the position that mandates batting in the middle passage to the business end of the innings. Overall, he has brilliant numbers at No. 5 -- 1259 runs from 30 innings at an average of 57.2 with two



hundreds and nine fifties, his best figures across the batting positions.

Now, batting at that position in India and in Dubai will require him to negate spinners and Cricket 21 metrics show favourable stats.

Rahul averages 47.6 at a strike-rate of 89 against leg-arm spinners (381 runs in 31 innings), while he makes

runs at 53.9 against off-spinners at an average of 47.6 -- 377 runs from 35 innings.

In the Champions Trophy, Rahul will come up against a plethora of quality left-arm spinners from Bangladesh and New Zealand such as Mitchell Santner.

The 32-year-old has excellent figures against the orthodox variety -- 342

from 29 innings at an average of 68.4 and made runs at a strike-rate of 95.

It also means that Rahul will have to play late, opposite to what he had done in Australia while standing a bit outside the crease to negate the swing.

The Karnataka man will have to bring out his cuts and drives more often during those upcoming assignments.

Coming from the city of GR Viswanath and Rahul Dravid, it's not quite surprising then that Rahul has immense success with square cuts against spin -- 12.1 per cent of his 2851 runs have come through that shot.

The drives -- cover and off -- have accounted for 10.7 per cent runs each while runs through the on-drive is a close fourth on the list with 10.2 per cent.

It was then of little wonder

that Rahul asked the Karnataka throw down specialist and spinner Hardik Raj to keep the line outside the off-stump, as he played a few withering cuts and flowing drives off them.

However, if the ongoing T20Is can be taken as a portent, the England bowlers will not shy away from using a few snorters against him.

But pull is his most productive shot against pace as 15.9 per cent of his runs have come through it while getting out seven times, and he strikes at 164 while playing that particular shot.

So, there was some focus on it too during the nets.

Now, the Ranji Trophy match here will give Rahul a chance to further perfect those shots against a relatively less intense opponent and atmosphere before travelling into a tough summer.

Virat Kohli boost for Ranji Trophy as Delhi aim to end on high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Virat Kohli's magnetic presence has not only lifted the profile of Ranji Trophy but also the Delhi team's sagging spirits as it eyes a winning end to an otherwise listless campaign in the final group D game against Railways starting here on Thursday.

Interestingly, Railways (17 points from six games) have more than a fair shot at making the knock-out stages if they beat Delhi with bonus points and take their tally to 24.

Delhi (14 from six games) only have mathematical impossibility to rely upon but the 10,000 odd crowd expected to watch isn't bothered about the results.

Tamil Nadu (25 points from six

games), Chandigarh (19 from six games) and Saurashtra (18 from six games) are in a better position compared to these two teams in terms of probability of qualification.

If Delhi bowl first, the turnout is not going to exceed 3000 but in case Delhi is batting first, the crowd would prefer a Sanat Sangwan or Arpit Rana to get out quickly and make way for Kohli.

But what would happen if the 'King' gets out early? For starters, Ranji Trophy will go back to being 'Ranji Trophy' with four-five journalists and 200 odd spectators taking interest in the proceedings.

Such has been the interest level in Kohli's comeback that the Feroz Shah Kotla ground will have broadcasters joining the



festivities gearing up for the live stream of the match, which is the star batter's first Ranji outing in

12 years and three months.

"I have played against Virat bhaiyya in the IPL. It is an

honour that in back to back matches I have now led Rishabh and Virat bhaiyya," Delhi skipper Ayush Badoni told reporters on the eve of the game.

It is expected that Kohli will come in place of left-hander Jonty Sidhu, whose form has tapered off in past few games as he didn't get enough chances.

The skipper would be vacating his own batting slot so that Kohli can bat at his usual position.

"He will bat at No. 4. He has told us to be positive and express ourselves confidently," Badoni said.

Kohli wouldn't mind getting a big one before the Champions Trophy which actually solves his purpose of playing this particular game.

While the BCCI has made it

mandatory for all players to turn up in Ranji Trophy, the result of this particular game will have no bearing on whether Kohli will be picked in the Indian team after the Champions Trophy.

The Kotla track has a greenish tinge to it and Badoni indicated that they will play an extra pacer looking at the conditions.

Money Grewal looks set for a comeback in the playing XI as he provides extra pace. One of the two left-arm spinners among Sumit Mathur and Harsh Tyagi will be cooling his heels.

The Railways team has always been a banana peel for Delhi with their battle-hardened domestic pros always bringing their A game to the fore.

Karn Sharma had made his Test debut at Adelaide under Kohli 11

years back, incidentally the same game where the legend led India in red ball cricket for the first time.

There is keeper-batter Upendra Yadav, who till a year back was in India A scheme of things and is considered more than a decent batter.

There is B Vivek Singh, an attacking left-handed opener and handy medium pace bowler.

In the pace department, Himanshu Sangwan is their strike bowler and if he can get that outside edge of Kohli's bat, it will be one for posterity.

Even the Railways team seemed to be smitten by Kohli as some of their players were seen taking selfies on the first day of training with the megastar of Indian cricket.